

Estonia

Although the smallest of the Baltic countries, Estonia (Eesti) makes its presence felt in the region.

Lovely seaside towns, quaint country villages and verdant forests and marshlands set the scene for discovering many cultural and natural gems. Yet Estonia is also known for magnificent castles, pristine islands and a cosmopolitan capital amid medieval splendour. It's no wonder Estonia is no longer Europe's best-kept secret.

Tallinn, Estonia's crown jewel, boasts cobbled streets and rejuvenated 14th-century dwellings. Dozens of cafés and restaurants make for an atmospheric retreat after exploring historic churches and scenic ruins, as well as its galleries and boutiques. By night, stylish lounges and youthful nightclubs offer a glimpse of the city's sexier side.

Some visitors have a hard time escaping Tallinn's undeniable allure, but outside the capital, the bucolic landscape hides numerous attractions. Handsome beach towns, spa resorts and medieval ruins lie scattered about the western shores of the country. Further west lie Estonia's biggest islands, where iconic windmills, 19th-century lighthouses, unspoilt beaches and yet more medieval ruins transport visitors to another time.

Covering vast swaths of Estonia, forests, wooded meadows and under-appreciated bog form the backdrop to numerous activities. Hiking over wooded trails, horse riding along coastline and canoeing over flooded forests can link you to the ancient wilderness. There's also great bird-watching, cross-country skiing in winter and swimming in crystal-clear lakes and rivers in summer. This all makes a nice prelude to a sauna, one of the national pastimes.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 45,227 sq km
- **Birthplace of** Carmen Kass, supermodel; Kalevipoeg, mythological hero
- **Capital** Tallinn
- **Country code** ☎ 372
- **Departure tax** none
- **Famous for** song festivals, lush woodlands and resplendent coastlines
- **Money** Estonian Kroon; €1 = 15.64Kr; US\$1 = 13.07Kr; UK£1 = 15.64Kr
- **Population** 1.3 million
- **Visas** not needed for most nationalities. See p391 for details.



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Tallinn** (p64) Wander the medieval streets, and drink in lovely cafés, eclectic restaurants and steamy nightclubs.
- **Pärnu** (p155) Join this party town, home to sandy beaches, spa resorts and plenty of night-time distractions.
- **Saaremaa** (p142) Escape to Estonia's largest island, with lovely, long stretches of empty coastline and medieval ruins, and abundant opportunities for outdoor adventure.
- **Tartu** (p106) Discover the magic of this splendid town, gateway to the beautiful land of the mystical Setu community, with myriad lakes and forests.
- **Lahemaa National Park** (p95) Relish the natural beauty of this area's lush landscape and immaculate coastline.

ITINERARIES

- **Three Days** Spend your first 48 hours drinking in the splendour of Tallinn's Old Town. On the third day, head to leafy Kadriorg, the Botanical Gardens and TV Tower, or take a daytrip west to nearby beaches.
- **One Week** After Tallinn, go to the island of Saaremaa, where spa resorts, windswept beaches and a castle await. Alternatively, aim eastward for magnificent Lahemaa National Park.
- **Two Weeks** To the above, add Tartu, a vibrant university town and gateway to the lushly landscaped southeast, and/or Pärnu, a youthful seaside town near vast Soomaa National Park and charming Viljandi.

CURRENT EVENTS

To some degree Estonia has found it hard to escape its past, notably when Arnold Rüütel, the former head of Estonia's Soviet parliament, won the 2001 presidential election. Viewed by many as a politically inept communist dinosaur, 73-year-old Rüütel won on his dedication to social problems (such as unemployment) – an issue given short shrift as EU hysteria swept the country. His communist credentials and agricultural background were particularly deficient compared with the skills of his predecessor, the brilliant and charismatic Lennart Meri.

Still Rüütel had no intention of leading Estonia astray – and had little opportunity to

HOW MUCH?

- **Coffee** 30Kr
- **Taxi fare (10 minutes)** 50Kr
- **Bus ticket (Tallinn to Tartu)** 80Kr
- **Bicycle hire (daily)** 150Kr
- **Sauna** 65Kr

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **Litre of petrol** 14Kr
- **Litre of bottled water** 15Kr
- **Half-litre of Saku beer in a store/bar** 15/28Kr
- **Souvenir T-shirt** 150Kr
- **packet of roasted nuts** 25Kr

do so, since the president has little involvement in the day-to-day running of the country (the domain of the prime minister).

Rüütel's administration, which ended in 2005, was marked by a few scandals. Some classified documents went missing on two occasions, leading to the resignation or firing of two high-ranking ministers. There were also the usual parliamentary shake-ups, which have become fairly commonplace in Estonian politics. Yet more important than the setbacks were the enormous twin achievements. Following a referendum in September 2003, approximately 60% of Estonians voted in favour of joining the EU. The following spring, the country officially joined NATO and the EU.

At last count in 2005, 65% of Estonians still believed EU membership had positive results. Assuming Estonia keeps its inflation down, it has a good chance of adopting the euro as its currency in 2007.

In many ways, Estonia is the outstanding economic success story of the Baltic region, having made a remarkable transition to capitalism. Its large-scale privatisation, free-trade agreements and low corporate taxes have brought in enormous foreign investment, mainly in the finance, manufacturing and transport sectors. The effect on economic growth has been pronounced: from 2000 to 2005, real GDP growth averaged 6.1% per year, a remarkable achievement for such a tiny newcomer.

Meanwhile, Estonia's ongoing disputes with Russia have continued apace. These stem largely from the unresolved border treaty, first put forth in 1996. Estonia had to give up its claim to two frontier areas: a slice of land east of the Narva River and a larger area in Setumaa, around Pechory, across Estonia's existing southeastern border. These pieces of land, totalling 2300 sq km, had been in Estonia's possession only between the wars, after the signing of the 1920 Tartu Peace Treaty. The Estonian parliament finally ratified the border treaty in June 2005, but added a few oblique references to the 1920 Tartu treaty. Russia resisted the comments and withdrew from negotiations in September 2005.

The tensions extend to other areas as well: in 2005, during the 60th anniversary of the Allied victory in WWII, Rütüel declined an invitation to attend the celebrations in Moscow, which the Russians found insulting.

HISTORY Beginnings

Estonia's oldest human settlements date back 10,000 years, with Stone Age tools found around Pulli near present-day Pärnu. Finno-Ugric tribes from the east (probably around the Urals) came centuries later – probably around 3500 BC – mingling with Neolithic peoples and settling in present-day Estonia, Finland and Hungary. They took a liking to their homeland and stayed put, spurning nomadic ways that characterised most other European peoples over the next six millennia.

The Christian Invasion

By the 9th and 10th centuries AD, Estonians were well aware of the Vikings, who seemed more interested in trade routes to Kiev and Istanbul than in conquering the land. The first real threat came from Christian invaders from the west.

Following papal calls for a crusade against the northern heathens, Danish troops and German knights invaded Estonia, conquering the Southern Estonian castle of Otepää in 1208. The locals put up fierce resistance, and it took well over 30 years before the entire territory was conquered. By the mid-13th century Estonia was carved up between the Danish in the north and the German Teutonic Order in the south. The Order,

THE SOURCE OF EESTI

In the 1st century AD the Roman historian Tacitus described a people known as the 'Aestii'. In rather crude fashion he depicted them as worshipping goddess statues and chasing wild boars with wooden clubs and iron weaponry. These peoples collected and traded amber. Although Tacitus was describing the forerunners to the Lithuanians and Latvians, the name 'Aestii' was eventually applied specifically to Estonians.

hungry to move eastward, was powerfully repelled by Alexander Nevsky of Novgorod on frozen Lake Peipsi (marvellously imagined in Eisenstein's film *Alexander Nevsky*).

The conquerors settled in at various newly established towns, handing over much power to the bishops. By the end of the 13th century cathedrals rose over Tallinn and Dorpat (Tartu), around the time that Cistercian and Dominican religious orders set up monasteries to preach to the locals and (try to) baptise them. Meanwhile, the Estonians continued to rebel.

The most significant uprising began on St George's night (23 April) in 1343. It started in Danish-controlled Northern Estonia when Estonians pillaged the Padise Cistercian monastery and killed all of the monks. They subsequently laid siege to Tallinn and the Bishop's Castle in Haapsalu, and called for Swedish assistance to help them finish the job. The Swedes did indeed send naval reinforcements across the gulf, but they came too late and were forced to turn back. Despite Estonian resolve, by 1345 the rebellion was crushed. The Danes, however, decided they'd had enough and sold Estonia to the Livonian Order.

The first guilds and merchant associations emerged in the 14th century, and many towns – Tallinn, Tartu, Viljandi and Pärnu – prospered as trade members of the Hanseatic League (a medieval merchant guild). Tartu's St John's Church (Jaani Kirik) with its terracotta sculpture is testament to its wealth and western trade links.

Estonians continued practising pagan rites for weddings, funerals and nature worship, though by the 15th century these rites became interlinked with Catholicism, and



they began using Christian names. Peasants' rights disappeared during the 15th century, so much so that by the early 16th century a peasant became a serf.

The Reformation & the Russian Threat

The Reformation, which originated in Germany, reached Estonia in the 1520s, with Lutheran preachers representing the initial wave. By the mid-16th century the church had been reorganised, with monasteries and churches now under Lutheran authority. In Tallinn authorities closed the Dominican monastery (of which some impressive ruins remain); in Tartu both the Dominican and Cistercian monasteries were shut.

The Livonian War

During the 16th century the greatest threat to Livonia (now northern Latvia and southern Estonia) came from the east. Ivan the Terrible, who crowned himself the first Russian tsar in 1547, had his sights clearly set on westward expansion. Russian troops, led by ferocious Tatar cavalry, attacked in 1558, around the region of Tartu. The fighting was extremely cruel, with the invaders leaving a trail of destruction in their wake. Poland, Denmark and Sweden joined the fray, and intermittent fighting raged throughout the 17th century. Sweden emerged the victor.

Like most wars, this one took a heavy toll on the inhabitants. During the two generations of warfare (roughly 1552 to 1629) half of the rural population perished, about three-quarters of all farms were deserted, with disease (such as plague), crop failure and the ensuing famine adding to the war casualties. Except for Tallinn, every castle and fortified centre in the country was ransacked or destroyed – including Viljandi Castle, once among northern Europe's mightiest forts. Some towns were completely obliterated.

The Swedish Era

Following the war Estonia entered a period of peace and prosperity under Swedish rule. Although the lot of the Estonian peasantry didn't improve much, cities, boosted by trade, grew and prospered, helping the economy speedily recover from the ravages of war. Under Swedish rule, Estonia was united for the first time in history under a single ruler. This period is often referred to as 'the good old Swedish time'.

The Swedish king granted the Baltic-German aristocracy a certain degree of self-government and even generously gave lands that were deserted during the war. Although the first printed Estonian-language book dates from 1535, the publication of books didn't get underway until the 1630s, when Swedish clergy founded village schools and taught the peasants to read and write. Education received an enormous boost with the founding of Tartu University.

By the mid-17th century, however, things were going steadily downhill. An outbreak of plague, and later the Great Famine (1695–97) killed off 80,000 people – almost 20% of the population. Peasants, who for a time enjoyed more freedom of movement, soon lost their gains and entered the harder lot of serfdom. The Swedish king, Charles XI, for his part wanted to abolish serfdom in Estonian crown manors (peasants enjoyed freedom in Sweden), but the local Baltic-German aristocracy fought bitterly to preserve the legacy of enforced servitude.

The Great Northern War

Soon Sweden faced serious threats from an anti-Swedish alliance of Poland, Denmark and Russia – countries seeking to regain lands lost in the Livonian War: war began in 1700. After a few successes – including the defeat of the Russians at Narva – the Swedes began to fold under the assaults on multiple fronts. By 1708 Tartu had been destroyed and all of its survivors shipped back to Russia. By 1710 Tallinn capitulated, and Sweden had been routed.

The Enlightenment

Russian domination of Estonia was bad news for the peasants. War (and the 1710 plague) left tens of thousands dead. Swedish reforms were rolled back by Peter I, destroying any hope of freedom for the surviving serfs. Conservative attitudes towards Estonia's lower class didn't change until the Enlightenment, in the late 18th century.

Among those influenced by the Enlightenment was Catherine the Great (1762–96), who curbed the privileges of the elite while instituting quasi-democratic reforms. It wasn't until 1816, however, that the peasants were finally liberated from serfdom. They also gained surnames, a greater freedom of movement and even limited access

to self-government. By the second half of the 19th century, the peasants started buying farmsteads from the estates, and earning an income from crops such as potatoes and flax (the latter commanding particularly high prices during the US Civil War and the subsequent drop in American cotton export to Europe).

National Awakening

The late 19th century was the dawn of the national awakening. Led by a new Estonian elite, the country marched towards nationhood. The first Estonian-language newspaper, *Perno Postimees*, appeared in 1857. It was published by Johann Voldemar Jannsen, one of the first to use the term 'Estonians' rather than *maarahvas* (country people). Other influential thinkers included Carl Robert Jakobson, who fought for equal political rights for Estonians; he also founded *Sakala*, Estonia's first political newspaper. (Jakobson's house and farm, p161, provide insight into this unique man).

Numerous Estonian societies emerged, and in 1869 the first song festival was held, a major event foregrounding Estonia's unique choral traditions. Estonia's rich folklore also emerged from obscurity, particularly with the publication of *Kalevipoeg*, Friedrich Kreutzwald's poetic epic that melded together hundreds of Estonian legends and folk tales. Other poems, particularly works by Lydia Koidula, also helped shape the national consciousness – one imprinted with the memory of 700 years of slavery.

Rebellion & WWI

The late 19th century was also a period of rampant industrialisation, marked by the rise of large factories and an extensive railway network that linked Estonia with Russia. Socialism and discontent accompanied those grim workplaces, with demonstrations and strikes led by newly formed worker parties. Events in Estonia mimicked those in Russia, and in January 1905 as armed insurrection flared across the border, Estonia's workers joined the fray. Tension mounted until autumn that year, when 20,000 workers went on strike. Tsarist troops brutally responded by killing and wounding 200.

Tsar Nicholas II's response incited the Estonian rebels, who continued to destroy

THE EARLIEST HERALD OF NATIONHOOD

One particularly insightful thinker of the Enlightenment was the German Garlieb Merkel, who in 1796 postulated the idea that serfdom was bad economics. He also referred to the Estonians (and Latvians) not as suppressed peasants, but as distinct nations forced into servitude. Revolutionary for the time, Merkel's thinking became highly influential in the national awakening a century later.

the property of the old guard. Subsequently, thousands of soldiers arrived from Russia, quelling the rebellions and then executed 600 Estonians and sent hundreds off to Siberia. Trade unions and progressive newspapers and organisations were closed down, and political leaders fled the country.

More radical plans to bring Estonia to heel – such as sending thousands of Russian peasants to colonise the country – were never realised. Instead, Russia's bumbling tsar had another priority: WWI. Estonia paid a high price for Russia's involvement – 100,000 men were drafted, 10,000 of whom were killed in action. Many Estonians went off to fight under the notion that if they helped defeat Germany, Russia would grant them nationhood. Russia, of course, had no intention of doing so. But by 1917 the matter was no longer the tsar's to decide. In St Petersburg Nicholas II was forced to abdicate, and the Bolsheviks seized power. As chaos swept across Russia, Estonia seized the initiative and on 24 February 1918, effectively declared its independence.

The War of Independence

Estonia faced threats from both Russia and Baltic-German reactionaries. War erupted as the Red Army quickly advanced, overrunning half the country by January 1919. Estonia fought back tenaciously, and with the help of British warships and Finnish, Danish and Swedish troops, it defeated its long-time enemy. In December Russia agreed to a truce and on 2 February 1920 it signed the Tartu Peace Treaty, which renounced forever Russia's rights of sovereignty over Estonian territory. For the first time in its history, Estonia was completely independent.

Days of Wine, Roses & Dictatorship

In many ways, the independence period was a golden era. The economy developed rapidly, with Estonia utilising its natural resources and attracting investments from abroad. Tartu University became a university for Estonians, and the Estonian language became the lingua franca for all aspects of public life, creating new opportunities in professional and academic spheres. Secondary education also improved (per capita the number of students surpassed most European nations), and an enormous book industry arose, with 25,000 titles published between 1918 and 1940 (again surpassing most European nations in books per capita).

On other fronts – notably the political one – independence was not so rosy. Fear of communist subversion (such as the failed 1924 coup d'état supported by the Bolsheviks) drove the government to the right. In 1934 Konstantin Päts, leader of the transitional government, along with Johan Laidoner, commander-in-chief of the Estonian army, violated the constitution and seized power, under the pretext of protecting democracy from extremist factions. Thus began the 'era of silence', a period of gross authoritarian rule that dogged the fledgling republic until WWII.

The Soviet Invasion & WWII

Estonia's fate was sealed when Nazi Germany and the USSR negotiated a secret pact in 1939, essentially handing Estonia over to Stalin. Thousands of Russian soldiers arrived, along with military, naval and air bases, between 1939 and 1941. Apparatchiks (Communist Party members) orchestrated a sham rebellion whereby 'the people' demanded to be part of the USSR. President Päts, General Laidoner and other leaders were sacked and sent off to Russian prison camps, a puppet government was installed, and on 6 August 1940 the Supreme Soviet accepted Estonia's 'request' to join the USSR.

Deportations and WWII devastated the country. Tens of thousands were conscripted and sent not to fight but to work (and usually die) in labour camps in northern Russia. Thousands of women and children were also sent to gulags.

When Russia fled the German advance, Estonia welcomed the Nazis as libera-

tors. Fifty-five thousand Estonians joined home-defence units and Wehrmacht Ost battalions. The Nazis, however, would not grant statehood to Estonia and viewed it merely as occupied territory of the Soviet Union. Hope was crushed when the Germans began executing communist collaborators. Seventy-five thousand people were shot (5000 of whom were ethnic Estonians). Thousands fled to Finland, while those who remained faced conscription into the German army (nearly 40,000 were conscripted).

In early 1944 the Soviet army bombed Tallinn, Narva, Tartu and other cities. Narva's baroque Old Town was almost completely destroyed as Russia exacted revenge upon 'Estonian traitors'.

The Nazis retreated in September 1944. Fearing the advance of the Red Army, many Estonians also fled and around 70,000 reached the West. By the end of the war one in 10 Estonians lived abroad. All in all, Estonia lost over 280,000 people: in addition to those who emigrated, 30,000 were killed in action; others were executed, sent to gulags or exterminated in concentration camps.

The Soviet Era

After the war Estonia was immediately annexed by the Soviet Union. This began the grim epoch of repression, with many thousands tortured or sent to prison camps and 19,000 Estonians executed. Farmers were brutally forced into collectivisation, and thousands of immigrants flooded the country from different regions of the Soviet Union. Between 1939 and 1989 the percentage of native Estonians fell from 97% to 62%.

As a result of the repression, beginning in 1944, Estonians formed a large guerrilla movement. Calling themselves the 'Forest Brothers', 14,000 Estonians armed themselves and went into hiding, operating in small groups throughout the country. Unfortunately, the guerrillas had little success against the Soviet army, and by 1956 the movement had been effectively destroyed.

Although there were a few optimistic periods during the tyranny (notably the 'thaw' under Khrushchev), Estonia didn't see much hope until the mid '80s. With the ravaging war in Afghanistan and years of disastrous state planning under its belt,

the Soviet Union teetered on the brink of economic catastrophe.

The dissident movement in Estonia gained momentum, and on the 50th anniversary of the Stalin-Hitler pact, a major rally took place in Tallinn. Over the next few months, more and more protests were held, with Estonians demanding the restoration of statehood. The song festival was one of Estonia's most powerful vehicles for protest. The biggest took place in 1988 when 250,000 Estonians gathered on Tallinn's Song Festival grounds. This brought much international attention to the Baltic plight.

In November 1989 the Estonian Supreme Soviet declared the events of 1940 an act of military aggression and therefore illegal. Disobeying Moscow's orders, Estonia held free elections in 1990. Despite Russia's attempts to stop it, Estonia regained its independence in 1991.

Postindependence

In 1992 the first general election under the new constitution took place, with a proliferation of newly formed parties. The Pro Patria (Fatherland) Union won a narrow majority after campaigning under the slogan 'Cleaning House', which meant removing from power those associated with communist rule. Pro Patria's leader, 32-year-old historian Mart Laar, became prime minister.

Laar set to work transforming Estonia into a free-market economy, introducing the very solid Estonian kroon and negotiating the complete Russian troop withdrawal. (The latter was a source of particular anxiety for Estonians, and the whole country breathed a collective sigh of relief when the last garrisons departed in 1994. Unfortunately, the Russians left a few things behind: ecologically devastated lands in the northeast, polluted ground water around air bases and nuclear waste in naval bases.)

Despite Laar's successes, he was considered a hothead, and in 1994, he was dismissed when his government received a vote of no confidence by the Riigikogu (National Council). Laar returned to the political arena in 1999, when he was elected prime minister a second time. During this time in office, he helped correct the Estonian financial crisis brought on by Russia's financial collapse in 1998. Laar cut business taxes and reduced social benefits, and continued the march to

TALLINN'S CHECHEN HERO

In January 1991 Soviet troops seized strategic buildings in Vilnius and Riga, and soldiers were ordered to do the same in Tallinn. The commander of the troops at the time, however, disobeyed Moscow's orders, and refused to open fire upon the crowd. He even threatened to turn the artillery under his command against any attempted invasion from Russia. That leader was Dzkhokhar Dudayev, who would go on to become the president of Chechnya and lead its independence movement. He was brutally assassinated by the Russian military in 1995. In Estonia he is fondly remembered for his role in bringing about Estonian independence.

privatisation. His remedies worked, pulling Estonia out of its negative growth in 1999, which allowed it to begin accession talks with the EU. There was much political wrangling, however, among the coalition government, and in 2002 Laar resigned.

THE CULTURE

The National Psyche

Despite centuries of occupation by Danes, Swedes, Germans and Russians, Estonians have tenaciously held onto their national identity. Estonians are deeply connected to their history, folklore and national song tradition. The Estonian Literary Museum (p111) in Tartu holds over 1.3 million pages of folk songs, the world's second-largest collection (Ireland has the largest), and Estonia produces films for one of the world's smallest audiences (only Iceland produces for a smaller audience). Despite this inward-focus, Estonians are equally interested in what's happening in the outside world, particularly now that they're part of the EU and feel like they have a stake in things.

In person, Estonians tend to be reserved and standoffish. Some believe it has much to do with the weather – those long dark nights breeding endless introspection, as the stereotype goes. This reserve also extends to gross displays of public affection, brash behaviour and intoxication – all frowned upon. This is assuming that there isn't a festival underway, such as Jaanipäev, when friends, family and acquaintances gather in the countryside for drinking, dancing and revelry.

Despite the self-composure, Estonians try not to take themselves too seriously, and are known for their wit and good humour. Being rooted for so long in one place, it's no surprise that Estonians have a deep, some might say spiritual, connection to the land.

Lifestyle

The long, grey days of Soviet rule are well behind Estonia. Today first-time visitors are astonished to find a thriving society, with urban streetscapes awash in colourful design, and a savvy populace setting its own fashions and trends.

The new economy has created previously unimagined possibilities. Entrepreneurship is widespread (the developers of Kazaa, the peer-to-peer, file-sharing software, and Skype, which allows free telephone calling over the Internet, are both Estonian), and the economy has diversified considerably since 1991.

Estonians are known for their strong work ethic, but when they're not toiling in the fields, or putting long hours in at the office, they head to the countryside. Ideal weekends are spent at the family cottage, picking berries or mushrooms, walking through the woods, or sitting with friends soaking up the quiet beauty. Having a countryside sauna is one of the national pastimes.

In the realm of education, Estonia is making enormous steps in ensuring students are prepared for the future, and today its schools and towns are among the most wired-up in the world. Internet and mobile-phone usage per capita is higher here than it is in France. Estonians pay for parking using their mobile phones, and in 2005 even began voting online.

Yet despite the ongoing IT revolution, the country has some nagging social problems. Although the number of people living below the poverty line has fallen in recent years, wage disparities continue to grow, and the cost of goods continues to rise faster than salaries. Pensioners have been the hardest hit, as Estonia's social-welfare infrastructure doesn't quite meet the demands. Many Russians also feel alienated from the new Estonia, facing what they feel are enormous obstacles – one of the most daunting being the requirement to learn Estonian – in order to succeed in the new economy.

On a positive note, Estonia continues to experience huge economic growth (over 7% in 2005 compared with under 2% elsewhere in Europe), with unemployment around 9%; less than France and Germany. Earnings per capita in 2005 stood at €13,700, placing it below the EU average of €23,480, but well up from its Soviet days. Perhaps most discouraging for blue-collar Estonians is that the average worker earns only 20% of what their Finnish counterpart earns.

Population

Estonia ranks near the bottom of the world scale in terms of population (with slightly fewer residents than the Gaza Strip, but a fraction more than Mauritius). The country also has a low population density, with only 32 people per sq km, compared with 380 people per sq km in the Netherlands – good news for those sick of wading through crowds.

Only 68% of the people living in Estonia are ethnic Estonians. Russians make up 26% of the population, with 2% Ukrainian, 1% Belarusian, 1% Finnish and 2% other. Ethnic Russians are concentrated in the industrial cities of the northeast, where in some places (such as Narva) they make up 96% of the population. Russians also have a sizable presence in Tallinn (40%).

Seventy percent of Estonians reside in cities; 40% of the national population lives in the capital. Literacy is almost universal in Estonia (99.8%).

Multiculturalism

The ethnic make-up of present-day Estonia differs markedly from that of 70 years ago. In 1934 native Estonians comprised over 90% of the population. This changed a few years later with the Soviet takeover. Migration from other parts of the USSR occurred on a mass scale from 1945 to 1955, with many of the immigrants arriving with military troops. Over the course of the next three decades, Estonia had the highest rate of migration of any of the Soviet republics.

While much was made of the strife between ethnic Russians and Estonians in the '90s, today the two communities live together in relative harmony. While older Russians and Estonians in general have little to do with one another, the younger generation mix quite freely. This isn't to say

CITIZENSHIP

When Estonia regained independence, not every resident received citizenship. People who were citizens of the pre-1940 Estonian Republic and their descendants automatically became citizens. Other people had to be naturalised, an ongoing process that includes a language test (with questions about the constitution); so far, 133,000 people made up of Russians and other nationalities have become citizens in this way. Anyone living in Estonia before 1 July 1990 can apply for citizenship automatically; anyone who arrived after that date must hold a residency permit for five years before applying. However, anyone born in the country after 26 February 1992 is automatically a citizen. Only citizens may vote in parliamentary elections. Noncitizens can vote in local government elections providing they have legal residency.

In 2005 there were still 245,000 people classified as 'foreigners' living in Estonia: 103,000 held foreign passports (most of them Russian), and the remainder held a so-called 'alien's passport' (dubbed 'grey passport'). The latter gives legal residency in Estonia and freedom to travel to most countries but essentially renders the holders stateless – unless they choose to become naturalised or take up Russian or other citizenship.

One reason Russians do not apply for citizenship is their easier, visa-free travel to Russia to visit relatives (Estonian passport holders need visas). Another deterrent for young Russian men is that they avoid Estonian army service if they are not citizens until after the age of 27.

One deterrent to Russian speakers learning enough Estonian to pass a language test has been a perceived lack of goodwill on the part of the government to encourage them to learn. The Estonian government has spent relatively little on language immersion and integration programmes, the funding for which has come largely from foreign sources. Instead, efforts have concentrated on discouraging the 'illegal' use of Russian. The Language Department enforces laws forbidding the display of foreign-language words (excluding trademarks) in public places such as on billboards and in store windows (inside a store is allowed in certain cases). Another law regulates the minimum Estonian language requirements in all public and private enterprises (even including a Russian cultural centre in Narva, which is 92% Russian). As the majority of Russians are far from proficient in Estonian, this has prompted concern from the UN over limitations on freedom of speech and reduced opportunities for advancement and representation for many of Estonia's Russian speakers. Perhaps in response to international criticism, in recent years the Estonian government has begun addressing the problems – albeit slowly. In 2004 the government passed an amendment shortening the time required for obtaining citizenship, and the costs of language courses will be reimbursed to those who pass the exams. It has also committed to an extension of the time frame for phasing out Russian language tuition, and has requested assistance both politically and financially from organisations such as the EU to implement larger-scale language and integration programmes.

that life is smooth. Russians have a higher unemployment rate (20%) and make up a disproportionate share of prisoners (58%). A drive through some of the crumbling towns of the northeast, where work and hope are both in short supply, gives some clue to the Russian plight. To make matters worse, the higher social problems in the Russian community in turn feeds the negative stereotypes that some Estonians have of them.

One of the most overlooked ethnic groups in Estonia is the Setu people, a native group of mixed Russian-Estonian ancestry who live in southeastern Estonia and in neighbouring Russia. They are a Finno-Ugric people with rich cultural traditions, and they speak

their own language (Võru Seto). There are about 4000 in Estonia (and 3000 in Russia), though their numbers continue to dwindle. Worst of all is the border that separates the two countries, cutting whole communities in half. For now, the Setus are destined to remain a divided people.

SPORT

For years, basketball was considered Estonia's national sport, but recently football mania has been sweeping the nation. Estonia's victory over Russia in 2002 certainly added more football fans to the pile. Abroad, meanwhile, Estonians are following the successes of Mart Poom, nicknamed

the Estonian Giant, who is a goalkeeper for Arsenal, in the English Premier League.

Estonia has 10 football teams in its masters league, four of which are based in Tallinn. FC Flora is the long-standing favourite of many local fans. Those who want to catch a live match can do so in Tallinn at the A Le Coq Arena (p88).

Basketball aficionados will find courts large and small scattered around the country. Tallinn's Kalev Stadium (p88) is your best bet for seeing a game.

Once the summer arrives, locals take advantage of Estonia's 3700km of coastline, where avid windsurfers, kayakers, swimmers and mere beach spectators all fill the shoreline. There are some fantastic places to sail, and even a remote spot on the islands where you can surf some waves (see p139).

Estonia's flat landscape attracts loads of cyclists. Major bike marathons take place in Tartu (p112) and Otepää, which is also the country's cross-country ski capital. Skiing through snowy forests followed by a refreshing sauna is a much-vaunted combo in Estonia. Another well-known name in the sports world is Erki Nool, the decathlon gold-medal winner at the 2000 Olympics in Sydney.

A sport that you're unlikely to encounter elsewhere in the world is kiiking, where the gentle pleasure of riding a swing becomes an extreme sport. Devised in Pärnu in 1997, contestants attempt to complete a 360-degree loop around the top bar. For more information on kiiking, and info on upcoming events check out www.kiiking.ee.

RELIGION

Historically, Estonia was Lutheran from the early 17th century, though today only a minority of Estonians profess religious beliefs. From 1987 to 1990 there was a surge of interest in religion as the state Lutheran Church allied itself to the independence cause. Since then, enthusiasm has tapered off. More visible are the numerous sects and religious organisations that have recently set up shop in Estonia, including the Church of Latter Day Saints (the well-dressed and clean-cut representatives of which can be seen daily on the streets of Tallinn), Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Hare Krishnas and even the Children of God. These groups have made inroads primarily in the Russian-speaking

population. There are several thousand Muslims in Estonia and 260 Jews.

The Russian community is largely Orthodox, with beautiful brightly domed churches sprinkled around eastern Estonia.

One of Estonia's most intriguing religious groups arrived in Estonia over 300 years ago. In 1652 in Russia, Patriarch Nikon introduced reforms to consolidate his power and bring Russian Orthodox doctrine into line with the Greek Orthodox church. Those who rejected his reforms suffered torture or were executed, and many homes and churches were destroyed. Over the next few centuries, thousands fled to the western shores of Lake Peipsi, where they erected new villages and worship houses. Although they escaped persecution, they were still governed by tsarist Russia and weren't allowed to openly practise their religion until Estonia gained its independence in 1918. Sadly, the Soviet occupation led to the destruction of more churches, and religious persecution. Since 1991 they've been left alone to live a peaceful existence along the bucolic shoreline.

Today there are 15,000 Russian Old Believers living in 11 congregations along the shore of Lake Peipsi. Tiny villages such as Raja, Kasepää and Kolkja have some fascinating architecture and comprise one of the least visited corners of the country. Raja is also known for its icons, as this is where the famed icon painter Gavril Frolov founded his painting school.

ARTS Music

Estonia is widely known for its serious classical music tradition, and most notably its choirs. The Estonian Boys Choir has been acclaimed worldwide. Hortus Musicus, formed in 1972, is probably Estonia's best known ensemble, performing mainly medieval and Renaissance music.

The main Estonian composers of the 20th century all wrote music dear to the heart of the people, and remain popular today. Rudolf Tobias (1873–1918) wrote influential symphonic, choral and concerto works as well as fantasies on folk song melodies. Mart Saar (1882–1963) studied under Rimsky-Korsakov in St Petersburg but his music shows none of this influence. His songs and piano suites were among the most performed pieces of music in

between-war concerts in Estonia. Eduard Tubin (1905–82) is another great Estonian composer whose body of work includes 10 symphonies. Contemporary composer Erkki-Sven TÜR (1959–) takes inspiration from nature and the elements as experienced on his native Hiiumaa.

Estonia's most celebrated composer is Arvo Pärt (1935–), the intense and reclusive master of hauntingly austere music many have misleadingly termed minimalist. Pärt emigrated to Germany during Soviet rule, and his *Miserere Litany*, *Te Deum* and *Tabula Rasa* are among an internationally acclaimed body of work characterised by dramatic bleakness, piercing majesty and nuanced silence. His music draws inspiration from prayers or Bible passages and corresponds with a time in the Middle Ages when performers and composers were not celebrated as individuals for their creations but driven to find expression for collective aspirations. Pärt himself refers to his music as the tintinnabular style, a sparse method of creating tension and beauty with outwardly simple but actually complex, even mathematical, structures. Many believe his musical structures are like none other before.

Internationally renowned Tõnu Kaljuste, director of the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra, has frequently recorded the music of Arvo Pärt. Neeme Järvi, Estonia's most lauded conductor, recently stepped down as director of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra after a heralded 15-year run. His son Paavo Järvi, also a conductor, is already making a name for himself in the world of music. In 2003 he, along with the Estonian Male Choir, the Ellerhein Girls' Choir and the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra, won the Grammy Award for best choral performance for *Sibelius: Cantatas*. Today he is the conductor and music director of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra.

Bridging the gap between old and new is one of Estonia's more clever groups. Rondellus, an ensemble that has played in a number of early music festivals, performs on medieval period instruments and isn't afraid of experimentation. Its well-received album *Sabbatum* is a tribute album of sorts to Black Sabbath – the only difference being the music is played on medieval instruments, and the songs are sung in Latin.

In jazz, the duo of saxophonist Villu Veski and piano-accordionist Tiit Kalluste incorporate Nordic elements into their work. Violinist Camille fuses classical with pop. In the world of New Age, Kirilo Loo, who mixes sparse folk music with incantations and harp music, might be described as Estonia's Enya. Peeter Vähi's music has been influenced by Tibetan, Siberian, Turkish and Asian themes. Veljo Tormis, a leading Estonian choral composer, writes striking music based on old runic chants. His best-known works include the difficult-to-perform *Curse Upon Iron* and *The Ingrian Evenings*.

Hard rock thrives in Estonia with groups such as Venaskond, Tuberkuloised and the U2-style Mr Lawrence. The more approachable Ultima Thule and Compromise Bule are two of the country's most beloved bands. Jäääär is also at the top, with the album *Tartu – Small Wooden Town* (Tartu – Väike Puust Linn) ranking among the best Estonian albums. Excellent folk bands include Untsakond and Väikeste Löötspillide Ühing. Linnu Tee and Echosilence are highlights of the progressive rock scene.

The pop and dance-music scene is strong in Estonia, with sleeky girl bands being the latest rage in the country: Vanilla Ninja, a group which formed in 2002, has been topping charts not only in Estonia but abroad for their catchy dance tunes (sung in English and Estonian). Their popularity seems to have no bounds: they've even had an ice cream named after them. Another all-girl band favourite is Nexus, whose 'hingetuna' was on every dance club's playlist in 2005.

Other singers with a following include Maarja, Liisi Koikson and Hedvig Hanson, primarily a jazz singer who moves seamlessly between genres with her captivating voice.

Literature

Although records indicate that there was an Estonian text from the 16th century, the history of written Estonian is little more than 150 years old. A New Testament had been published in Southern Estonian in 1686, and a complete Bible in Northern Estonian (the 'dialect' that became the standard Estonian of today) by 1739, but texts until the mid-19th century were mainly pious tracts read only by the clergy. Baltic-Germans published an Estonian grammar

book and a dictionary, but it wasn't until the national awakening movement that the publication of books, poetry and newspapers began. This elevated Estonian from a mere 'peasants' language' to one with full literary potential.

Estonian literature grew from the poems and diaries of a young graduate of Tartu University, Kristjan Jaak Peterson. Also a gifted linguist, he died when he was only 21 years old in 1822.

Until the mid-19th century Estonian culture was preserved only by way of an oral folk tradition among peasants. The national epic poem *Kalevipoeg* (Son of Kalev), written between 1857 and 1861 by Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald (1803–82), made brilliant use of Estonia's rich oral traditions; it was also inspired by Finland's *Kalevala*, a similar epic created several decades earlier. Fusing hundreds of Estonian legends and folk tales, *Son of Kalev* relates the adventures of the mythical hero, which ends with his death and his land's conquest by foreigners, but also a promise to restore freedom:

But one day an age will dawn when
A bright flame bursts forth to free
His hand from the vise of stone
Then Kalev's son will return home
To bring happiness to his children
And build Estonia's life anew.

Lydia Koidula (1843–86), the face of the 100Kr note, was the poet of Estonia's national awakening and first lady of literature.

Anton Hansen Tammsaare is considered the greatest Estonian novelist for *Truth and Justice* (Tõde ja Õigus), written between 1926 and 1933. A five-volume saga of village and town life, it explores Estonian social, political and philosophical issues.

Eduard Vilde (1865–1933) was an influential early-20th-century novelist and playwright who wrote *Unattainable Wonder* (Tabamata Ime). *Unattainable Wonder* was to be the first play performed at the opening of the Estonia Theatre in 1913 but was substituted with *Hamlet*, as his scathing critique of the then intelligentsia was deemed too controversial. In most of his novels and plays, Vilde looked with great irony at what he saw as Estonia's mad, blind rush to become part of Europe. For Vilde, self-reliance was the truest form of independence.

Oskar Luts is often revered as Estonia's Mark Twain for his childhood tales including *Spring* (Kevade), written between 1912 and 1913. Paul-Eerik Rummo (1942–) is one of Estonia's leading poets and playwrights, dubbed the 'Estonian Dylan Thomas' for his patriotic pieces, which deal with contemporary problems of cultural identity.

More recently, Mati Unt has played an important role in cementing the place of Estonian intellectuals in the modern world, and has written, from the 1960s onwards, quite cynical novels (notably *Autumn Ball* or *Sügisball*), plays and articles about contemporary life in Estonia. The novelist Jaan Kross has won great acclaim for his historical novels in which he manages to tackle Soviet-era subjects. His work has been translated into 23 languages, making him Estonia's most internationally acclaimed author. His most renowned book, *The Czar's Madman* relates the story of a 19th-century Estonian baron who falls in love with a peasant girl and later ends up in prison. It's loosely based on a true story, though the critique of past- and present-day authoritarianism is the crux of his work.

Another leading novelist is Arvo Valton, who, like Kross, spent some time as an exile in Siberia. His work *Depression and Hope* (Masendus ja Lootus) deals with that experience.

Estonia also has a number of outstanding contemporary poets. Jaan Kaplinski has had two collections, *The Same Sea in Us All* and *The Wandering Border*, published in English. His work expresses the feel of Estonian life superbly. Kross and Kaplinski have both been nominated for the Nobel prize for Literature.

Tõnu Õnnepalu's *Borderland* (Piiri Riik, published under the pseudonym Emil Tode), is about a young homosexual Estonian who travels to Europe and becomes a kept boy for an older, rich gentleman. This leads him down a tortuous road of self-discovery. Not a mere confessional, *Borderland* is a clever and absorbing critique of modern Estonian values. In popular fiction, Kaur Kender's *Independence Day* tells the misadventures of young and ambitious entrepreneurs in postindependence Estonia.

Theatre

Many of the country's theatres were built solely from donations by private citizens,

which gives an indication of the role theatre has played in Estonian cultural life. The Estonian Drama Theatre (p88) in Tallinn, the Vanemuine Theatre (p114) in Tartu and the Drama Theatre in Rakvere, the last civic building erected in Estonia before WWII, were all built on proceeds from door-to-door collections.

The popularity of theatre is also evidenced in the high attendance of theatre-goers. Estonians visit the theatre almost as often as they go to the cinema, with 800,000 tickets sold annually. Per capita, Estonians attend theatrical performances more often than any other country in Europe.

Modern Estonian theatre is considered to have begun in Tartu, where Lydia Koidula's *The Cousin from Saaremaa* became the first Estonian play to be performed in public. The Vanemuine Theatre (an outgrowth of the Vanemuine Society, an amateur troupe) launched professional theatre in 1906. Quickly thereafter the Estonia Theatre (p87) opened its doors in Tallinn, and the Endla Theatre (p159) in Pärnu followed suit in 1911. Within the first decade, theatre took off with talented directors and actors performing the works of August Kitzberg and Eduard Wilde.

During the country's independence days (1918–40), Estonian theatre thrived, displaying a number of styles: experimentation, which flourished in the other arts of the '20s, slowly made its way into drama, with symbolist and later expressionist works fed into the repertoire. However, by the 1930s there was a noticeable retreat from experimentation. (Some attribute this to a wealthier, more conservative populace now filling the theatre seats.) The number of native Estonian plays being produced also grew during this time. Playwrights such as Hugo Raudsepp and the novelist Tammsaare wrote widely acclaimed pieces for the stage.

Theatre, like the other arts, suffered heavily during Soviet rule, with heavy-handed censorship and a dumping of lifeless Soviet drama onto the stage. Things began to change after Stalin's death in 1953, as theatres gained more poetic freedom in stage productions. Although the '60s were still a time of repression in other spheres of life, on the stage the avant-garde emerged once again, with the staging of plays wild in sub-

ject matter and rich in symbolism. Anger, aggression and downright hysteria – fuelled perhaps by political frustration – were the characteristics of late '60s drama. At that time, some of the leading playwrights were better known as poets.

Paul-Eerik Rummo, perhaps Estonia's most famous poet of the time, wrote *The Cinderella Game* (*Tuhkatriinümäng*), a brilliant satire of Soviet-era repression that was performed in 1969. It was later performed at New York's La Mama theatre and in playhouses throughout Europe.

With the return to independence in 1991 and the disappearance of censorship, the stage once again held wide-open possibilities. Yet some critics contend that along with Estonia's new-found freedom, radicalism died in the theatre – for the very reason that the object of satire (Big Brother) had also died. Whatever the case, stage life continues to flourish, and today the halls are rarely empty. The most original people currently on the theatre scene are Jaanus Rohumaa, Katri Kaasik-Aaslav and Elmo Nüganen, all particularly sensitive directors who often work out of Tallinn's City Theatre (Linnateater; p88).

Cinema

The first 'moving pictures' were screened in Tallinn in 1896, and the first theatre opened in 1908. Johannes Päsuke (1892–1918), although primarily a photographer, is considered the first Estonian film maker. Estonia's cinematographic output has not been prolific, but there are a few standouts. The most beloved film of Estonians is Arvo Kruusement's *Spring* (Kevade, 1969), an adaptation of Oskar Luts' country saga. Its sequel, *Summer* (Suvi, 1976), was also popular though regarded as inferior. Kaljo Kiisk's *Happy-Go-Lucky* (Nipernaadi, 1983) is a much adored film, about an itinerant bohemian (an Estonian Peer Gynt) who wanders around Estonia, and the relationships he establishes with people he meets along the way.

Grigori Kromanov's *Last Relic* (Viimne Reliikvia, 1969) was a brave and unabashedly anti-Soviet film that has been screened in 60 countries. Some excellent Estonian documentaries include Andres Sõt's *Midsummer's Day* (Jaanipäev, 1978), Mark Soosaar's *Miss Saaremaa* (1988) and Peeter Tooming's *Moments* (Hetked, 1976).

THE ANIMATED ART

Although Estonian feature film making has seen better days, the country continues to dazzle audiences around the globe with its brilliantly inventive animated films. For over half a century, Estonian film makers have been garnering awards at international film festivals and attracting critical acclaim with a brand of animation often described as witty, absurd, political, surreal and provocative.

Estonian animation essentially began in 1957 when Elbert Tuganov, an Azerbaijan transplant, created *Little Peter's Dream*. This marked the launch of Nukufilm, which would later become the largest animation studios in northern Europe, producing well over 200 animations and cartoons over the years. At press time Nukufilm was nearing its 50th year – an astonishing achievement given the tumultuous times it has lived through.

Following his initial success, Tuganov went on to make dozens of films, taking aim at Soviet bureaucracy while making artfully produced films. *Inspiration* (1975) is widely hailed as his greatest work. Although it's a simply told story – showing the preparation on the day of the song festival – the film ends with young singers filling the theatre with song, a powerful Estonian overture with enormous political implications.

Humorous, self-reflective, complex, even philosophical – these are just some of the adjectives appended to the films of Priit Pärn over the years. Estonia's most famous animator, he was the successor to early efforts, and led a new wave of film makers into the international spotlight. Some of his most important works are *Luncheon on the Grass* (1987), *Hotel E* (1991) and *Night of the Carrots* (1998). He continues to produce films (*Frank and Wendy*, 2005, is one of his most recent), though he also teaches at film schools around Europe and hosts solo exhibitions worldwide.

Other great Estonian animations worth watching include the *Cabbagehead Trilogy* (1993–2000), Riho Unt's thinly veiled critique of Estonia's transition to independence. Mati Kütt's incisive *Smoked Sprat Baked in the Sun* (1992) addresses environmental destruction, while the films of Ülo Pikkov, Priit Tender and Kaper Jancis have all won critical acclaim.

Sulev Keedus' unforgettably lyrical *Georgia* (1998), about childhood, war and life on the western islands, and *Crossing the Highway* (Ristumine Peataga, 1999), a comedy by Arko Okk, have done the rounds of the international film festivals.

Estonia's most popular locally made film is *Names in Marble* (2002), which tells the story of a group of young friends in the late 1930s and their decision to fight against the Soviet army in WWII. It was directed by acclaimed Estonian stage director Elmo Nüganen and it's based on the book of the same name that was banned during Soviet times.

More recent productions include *Revolution of Pigs* (Sigade Revolutsioon, 2004), about an anti-Soviet uprising at a teenage summer camp.

Visual Arts

The undisputed national treasure here is eclectic graphic artist Eduard Wiiralt, an Estonian born near St Petersburg in 1898 who later studied art in Tallinn and Tartu. He is considered not only a superb local artist, but a truly international talent based

on the diverse themes embodied in his progressive style, inspired by extensive travels and studies abroad. His subjects range from cabaret dancers and North African villagers to boxers and the majestic landscapes of Sami Land. He emigrated to Paris in 1925, where he lived until his death in 1954.

Kristjan Raud (1865–1943), who illustrated *Son of Kalev*, was the leading national idealist figure of the 19th century in Estonia. Ants Laikmaa (1866–1942), known for his sensitive landscape paintings, was so dedicated to his craft that he walked from Estonia to Düsseldorf in Germany to study art, and later opened an art school in Tallinn. Contemporary Estonian art from the 1970s has leaned towards geometrical abstraction, and leading exponents include Raul Meel and Siim-Tanel Annus.

The artist with the most recognisable style is Navitrolla. His bright, fanciful landscapes populated by wildly imagined clouds, trees and giraffes represent a world in which humans play no part. Although he is the most popular contemporary artist in Estonia, his style owes much to another great artist, Jüri

Arrak. Navitrolla's work is also rooted in hyper-reality, with portraits of fantastically imagined creatures, though Arrak's work seems weightier and more introspective.

Mark Kalev Kostabi is one of the most famous foreign-born Estonian artists. A diversely talented New York transplant, Kostabi in 1988 created Kostabi World, a studio, gallery and office complex that churns out 1500 paintings a year. His work has been shown in the Guggenheim and in other museums worldwide; he also composes music, designs album covers (including Guns N' Roses and the Ramones), produces a weekly cable TV show, and has written seven books.

Jaani Toomik is a modern, young Estonian artist emerging on the international scene. A long-time Tallinn resident, Toomik experiments with new artistic forms in his paintings and video installations, often bringing the viewer deep into his work.

ENVIRONMENT

The Land

Slightly larger than Switzerland, Estonia is the smallest Baltic country at 45,227 sq km. It is part of the East-European plain, extremely flat though marked by extensive bogs and marshes. At 318m, Suur Munamägi (Great Egg Hill; p122) is the highest point in the country – and in the Baltics. It lies in the southeast near Võru. Along with swamps and wetlands, forests make up about half of Estonia's territory.

Although it is smaller than the other Baltic countries, Estonia gets the lion's share of coastland. Along with Hiiumaa and Saaremaa – Estonia's biggest islands – the country boasts over 1500 islands (to Latvia and Lithuania's none), making up 10% of the landmass and 2500km out of its 3800km of coastline.

The coast is also where one of Estonia's most outstanding geographical features, the Baltic Glint, lies; a long stretch of raised limestone banks, the glint extends 1200km, from Sweden to Lake Ladoga in Russia. Although 500km of this lies underwater, there are some stretches of impressive cliffs along Estonia's north coast – at Ontika the cliffs rise over 50m above the coast.

Estonia has the biggest lakes in the Baltic region; Lake Peipsi, which straddles the Estonian-Russian border, is the fifth largest in Europe, at 3555 sq km (though its

maximum depth is only 15m). Võrtsjärv, in southern Estonia, is the biggest lake lying entirely within Estonia, covering 266 sq km (but just six metres deep). The deepest lake, believed by some to emit magical energy, is the 38m-deep Suurjärv in Rõuge.

Some of the country's landforms owe their existence to the ice age. Immediately following the last glacial period, 9000 to 12,000 years ago, much of Estonia was flooded by ice-dammed lakes and the Baltic Sea. Later the western mainland and islands emerged as the earth's crust gradually rose – a process that is still underway (northwestern Estonia rises at a rate of 2.5mm annually). One of the more fascinating effects of the last ice age can be seen in various places; the march of glaciers and continental ice across the country deposited some truly gigantic rocks (called 'erratic' boulders), some of which were large enough to warrant a name – Kabelikivi (Chapel Boulder) east of Tallinn, for instance, stretches 19m long and 7m tall and hails originally from Scandinavia.

Perhaps proof of its powers of attraction, Estonia has one of the world's highest concentrations of documented meteor craters. At Kaali, in Saaremaa, lies the country's most famous meteor crater. It is now filled with water forming a lake 16m deep and 100m wide.

Wildlife

ANIMALS

Estonia has abundant bird life, with 335 recorded species. It holds the European record for the most species seen in one day, at 191. Owing to the harsh winters, most birds here are migratory. They typically arrive at the end of April (some arrive as early as March) and begin the return migration as early as August (though some birds stay until December). Long-tailed ducks are among the most numerous migrants (more than 1 million a year pass through). You're also likely to see whooper swans, Bewick's swans and other duck species that thrive in shallow coastal waters and seaside wetlands.

About half of Estonia's bird population inhabits the forest. Chaffinches and willow warblers are the most numerous, though you're also likely to see robins, thrushes and pippits. Bogs are also a rich source of avian life, with the swamplands in particular supporting some of the large raptors,

such as the osprey, spotted eagle, golden eagle, eagle owl and white-tailed eagle.

Although it's found throughout much of the world, the barn swallow in Estonia receives an almost regal status, and became the national bird over 50 years ago. The swallow appears in April or late May following its winter retreat. Another bird with pride of place in Estonia is the stork. While their numbers are declining elsewhere in Europe, here in Estonia they are on the increase. You can see stork nests on telephone poles and chimneys; and storks can also be seen when they're out hunting through freshly mown fields all over the country. If you see the rare black stork, consider yourself lucky indeed.

Estonia also has its share of mammals, with 64 recorded species. Some animals, which have been declining elsewhere, are doing well in Estonia. The brown bear, Estonia's largest mammal, faced extinction at the turn of the 20th century (when the killing of large carnivores was all the rage). Today Estonia has around 500 bears, making it one of Europe's highest populations. The European beaver, which was hunted to near extinction, was successfully reintroduced in the 1950s, and today the population is well over 10,000. Other introduced species include the racoon dog, the North American muskrat and the American mink. These exotic species, introduced for their fur, have all posed potential threats to the native wildlife. The American mink, for example, has completely wiped out the previous population of European mink.

Other animals have also fared poorly. Roe deer and wild boar are dwindling, which some chalk up to predators – though these animals, along with elks, are commonly hunted and may appear on the menu in more expensive restaurants. Estonia still has wolves (around 100 to 150), though our favourite animal is the lynx (around 600 to 800), a handsome furry creature with an almost formal appearance and large, impressive feet that act as snowshoes.

Sadly, lynxes, bears, wolves and beavers are just a few of the animals that are hunted each year. Wolves, which numbered 700 in 1994, are in particular danger of disappearing from Estonia.

Protected species include grey seals and ringed seals, which you can see along the western coast of Saaremaa and in several islets in the Väinameri. Although there are

several thousand in Estonian waters, worldwide their numbers are declining.

The **Estonian Green Movement** (Eesti Roheline Liikumine; ☎ 742 2084; www.roheline.ee), founded in 1988, was one of the country's first environmental organisations and continues to play an active role in addressing the ecological problems facing Estonia.

Another admirable environmental non-profit organisation is the **Estonian Fund for Nature** (☎ 742 8443; www.elfond.ee; Magasini tänav 2, Tartu), the mission of which is to help preserve Estonia's rich natural diversity.

PLANTS

Estonia's rich flora includes 1470 varieties of indigenous plants. Pine trees represent the dominant species in forests, making up 41% of the woodlands. Silver and downy birch are also common (28%), followed by Norway spruce (23%), adlers and aspen. Oak, willow, linden and maple are also found. Juniper groves are most common on the western islands. Many species of rare northern orchids can be found in western Estonia's wooded meadows. Arctic lichen can be found in the Hiiumaa Islets Reserve.

Fungi are found throughout Estonia's forests, meadows and bogs. The quest for some of the 400 edible species, particularly prominent in the north and southeast, is a widely enjoyed pursuit. For more information on Estonian plant life, visit the **Estonian Institute** (www.inst.ee)

National Parks & Reserves

Some of Europe's few remaining original landscapes have been preserved within Estonia, much of this inadvertently through isolation under the Soviet regime. Almost 20% of Estonia's lands are protected to some degree, which is more than double the European average. Estonia has four national parks, three of them established since independence, and a number of nature reserves. National parks are administered by **RMK** (☎ 372-628 1500; www.rm.ee; Viljandi maantee 18B, Tallinn), the Estonian State Forest Management Centre. The most popular national parks to visit are Lahemaa and Haanja.

The following provide some information on Estonia's national parks.

RMK (www.rm.ee) Manages all the forests and protected areas of Estonia, including its hiking trails, camp sites, forest huts and nature centres.

Union of Protected Areas of Estonia (www.ekal.org.ee) Information on Estonia's national parks and reserves.

Environmental Issues

While relatively few environment-friendly programmes are in place yet in Estonia, the Soviet regime's disregard for ecology was staggering; it left a populace traditionally bound to nature with a heightened sensitivity to the dangers of pollution. Large-scale clean-up programmes, often foreign-funded, greatly reduced pollution as well as the concentration of dangerous emissions in industrial areas throughout the 1990s.

Estonia is a signatory to the UN's 1997 Kyoto Protocol targeting reductions in greenhouse gas. Legislation enacted between

2000 and 2001 brought tougher restrictions on industrial pollution with offenders liable to penalties for improper handling and cleanup of waste; unfortunately this doesn't extend to the burning of oil shale, the country's biggest environmental problem. Although Estonia produces its own energy, it does so by burning a fuel that pollutes the air, soil and water. Ida Virumaa county (near the power plants of Narva) reveals the ecological damage: rivers are polluted (no swimming or fishing), with artificial hills made of ash from the oil-shale power plants, and barren trees silhouetted against the sky. The European Commission (the executive body of the EU) has given Estonia until 2009 to modernise its power plants, and

NATIONAL PARKS & RESERVES

National parks or reserves	Area	Features	Activities	Best time to visit
Elva Vitipalu (p115)	9 sq km	pine forest, lakes & river	hiking, biking	May-Sep
Endla Nature Reserve (p105)	101 sq km	wetlands, nature trails	hiking	May-Sep
Käina Bay Bird Reserve (p140)	35 sq km	protected coastal reserve	bird-watching (70 species)	May-Sep
Hiiumaa Islets Landscape Reserve (p142)	27 sq km	small, protected islands, rare grey & ringed seals, boar, lynxes	bird-watching (110 species)	May-Sep
Lahemaa National Park (p95)	725 sq km	striking Estonian coast & hinterland with beaches, rivers, lakes & waterfalls	hiking, wildlife-watching, swimming	May-Sep
Matsalu Nature Reserve (p135)	486 sq km	wetlands & major bird habitat	bird-watching	Apr-Oct
Nigula Nature Reserve (p161)	28 sq km	treeless peat bog with bog islands	hiking, bird-watching (144 species)	May-Sep
Soomaa National Park (p165)	367 sq km	swampland & flat meadow	hiking, canoeing, wildlife-watching (46 mammal species, 172 bird species)	Jun-Sep
Viidumäe Nature Reserve (p150)	19 sq km	forest with rare plant species	walking along nature trails, bird-watching	May-Sep
Vilsandi National Park (p152) near Saaremaa	182 sq km	small islands & bird sanctuary (ringed seals, rare orchids 247 bird species)	wildlife-watching	May-Sep

although it's clear that Estonia must invest in a cleaner technology to save the ecology of the northeastern region, the government claims it hasn't the financial resources to do so.

In 2004 the UN's International Maritime Organisation designated the heavily polluted Baltic Sea one of the planet's five particularly sensitive areas (despite Russia's protests), which opens the way for greater protection and stricter standards. Toxic emissions in the industrialised northeast of Estonia have been reduced sharply and new environmental-impact legislation aims to minimise the effects of future development.

The purest air in the country is found on the western islands, and in the southeast, areas barely touched by industry.

FOOD & DRINK

Although Tallinn has a fantastically diverse dining scene, many parts of Estonia offer visitors little variety beyond what type of meat they'd like with their potatoes. This owes much to Estonia's roots. For centuries Estonia was largely a farming country. In fact, until the 20th century, 65% of the population was involved in agriculture. Country folk who worked the fields (serfs prior to emancipation in the 1800s) sought heavy nourishment to fuel their long days. Food preparation was simple and practical, using whatever could be raised, grown or gathered from the land. Daily fare was barley porridge, cheese curd and boiled potatoes. On feast days and special occasions, meat made its appearance. Coastal dwellers also garnered sustenance from the sea, mainly cod and herring. To make foods last through the winter, people dried, smoked and salted their fish. They also ate canned and preserved foods.

Traditionally the seasons played a large role in the Estonian diet. When spring arrived, wild leek, rhubarb, fresh sorrel and goat's cheese appeared, and the spring lambs were slaughtered. During the summer, there were fresh vegetables and herbs along with berries, nuts and mushrooms gathered from the forests – still a popular pastime for some Estonians. Autumn was the season of the traditional goose; it was also the prime hunting season – elk, pheasant, boar and even wild goat. To sustain themselves through the long harsh win-

ters, Estonians would eat hearty roasts and stews, soups and plenty of sauerkraut.

Despite its simple culinary roots, or perhaps because of them, Estonia has a growing world dining scene. In Tallinn, and to a lesser extent Pärnu, Tartu and Kuressaare, you'll find French, Italian, Japanese, Thai, Indian and even Russian cuisine. (After 1991, Russian restaurants quickly disappeared from the capital and re-emerged only recently – long after the first Mexican restaurant opened.)

The hunger for innovation has led to an ever-changing scene in the capital. At last count, Middle Eastern cuisine was the latest rage, but this probably had more to do with the after-dinner practice of smoking from hookahs than the craving for *baba ganoush* (pureed eggplant) or *kibbe* (ground lamb).

Staples & Specialities

Although it was a rarity in the diet of 19th-century peasants, meat is an integral part of most meals. Beefing out most menus are red meat (particularly pork), chicken and sausage, alongside which you'll see cabbage and the beloved potato, a staple of Estonian cooking.

Although Estonia has an extensive coastline, fish doesn't take pride of place, as one might expect. Smoked-fish-lovers, however, have much to celebrate. Lake Peipsi is a particularly good place for tracking down *suitsukala* (smoked fish, usually trout or salmon); look for roadside stands along the shore road. You'll also find it on the islands; Kuressaare has one of the best fish shops, (p150), in the country.

In summer fresh fruits and vegetables are particularly plentiful. Be sure to take

FOR THE LOVE OF SPRATS

For such a tiny fish, sprats have been a large part of the Estonian diet. They've been a local favourite since at least the Middle Ages; many Russians who've never crossed the border picture 'sprats' when they think of Estonia. This is because of the ubiquity of Tallinn Sprats, a can of spicy sprats with the silhouette of Tallinn's skyline. Owing to this sprat tin, the capital is sometimes joshingly called 'Spratsville'.

EAT YOUR WORDS

Don't know your *kana* from your *kala*? Your *maasikas* from your *räim*? Get a head start on the cuisine scene by learning the words that make the dish. For pronunciation guidelines, see the Language chapter.

Useful Phrases

May I have a menu?

I'd like ...

The bill, please.

I'm a vegetarian.

Bon appetit!

To your health! (when toasting)

breakfast

lunch

dinner

kas mah saahk-sin menüü

ma saw-vik-sin ...

pah-lun ahr-ve

mah o-len tai-me-toyt-lah-ne

head i-su

ter-vi-seks

hom-mi-ku-serrk

lyu-na

er-tu-serrk

Kas ma saaksin menüü?

Ma sooviksin ...

Palun arve.

Ma olen taimetoitlane.

Head isu!

Terviseks!

hommikusöök

lõuna

õhtusöök

Food Glossary

biifsteek

eelroad

juust

kalamari

kapsas

kartul

köögivilja

liha

lõhe

maasikas

puuvili

sai

šaslikk

sealiha

supp

steak

starters

cheese

caviar

cabbage

potato

vegetables

meat (red)

salmon

strawberry

fruit

white bread

kebab

pork

soup

biifstrogonoff/

böfstrooganov

kala

kana

karbonaad

kilud

leib

liharoad

maarijad

pannkook

räim

salat

seen

suitsukala

vorst

beef stroganof

fish

chicken

grilled 'chop'

sprats

rye bread

meat/main dishes

berries

pancake

herring

salad

mushroom

smoked fish

sausage

advantage of the local *turg* (market) and load up on strawberries.

Given Estonia's rustic origins, it's not surprising that bread is a major staple in the diet, and that Estonians make a pretty good loaf. Rye is by far the top choice. Unlike other ryes you may have eaten, here it's moist, dense and, yes, delicious (assuming it's fresh).

Kama, a powdery meal made from different grains, is similar to bread in nutritional value, but quite different in consistency. This high-fibre food mixes well with *kefir* (a drink made from fermented cow's milk), yogurt and fruit juices; it may be served for breakfast or dessert.

Kalev chocolate is yet another iconic Estonian product. The candies and chocolates first appeared in Tallinn when its first

factory opened in 1806; look for them in supermarkets.

Drinks

Beer is the favourite alcohol in Estonia, and the local product is very much in evidence. The best brands are Saku and A Le Coq, which come in a range of brews. On Saaremaa and Hiiumaa, you'll also find home-made beer, which is flatter than traditional beer, but still the perfect refreshment on a hot day. In winter Estonians drink mulled wine, the antidote to cold wintry nights.

Estonia's ties to Russia have led to vodka's long-time popularity. Viru Valge is the best brand, and it comes in a range of flavours, which some Estonians mix with fruit juices (try the vanilla-flavoured vodka mixed with apple juice).

Vana Tallinn is in a class of its own. No-one quite knows what the syrupy liqueur is made from, but it's sweet and strong and has a pleasant aftertaste. It's best served in coffee, over ice with milk, over ice cream, or in champagne or dry white wine. If you need a quick fix, go ahead and chug it straight from the bottle. There are several other locally made liqueurs, including the unbearably sweet, strawberry-flavoured Metsa Maasika and an egg-based liqueur, Kiiu Torn, named after the smallest fortress in Estonia.

Eesti Kali, a sweet dark beverage, is Estonia's answer to Coca-Cola. It's made of fermented bread but contains no alcohol.

Even without vineyards, Estonia is beginning to develop a wine culture. Wine bars are quite fashionable in Tallinn. The capital also boasts the largest wine cellars in the Baltics and plenty of medieval settings in which to imbibe (see p86).

Celebrations

At Christmas, sausages are made from fresh blood and wrapped in pig's intestine – joy to the world indeed! These *verivorst* (blood sausages), which locals insist are delicious and healthy, are served in most traditional Estonian restaurants, and sold in shops all year round. For the bloodthirsty, *verileib* (blood bread) and *verikäkk* (balls of blood rolled in flour and eggs with bits of pig fat thrown in for taste) will surely satisfy.

Where to Eat & Drink

For a meal, you can eat in a *restoran* (restaurant) or *kohvik* (café); pubs also serve meals. Nearly every town has a *turg*, where you can buy fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as meats and fish. For standard opening times, see the Regional Directory.

Habits & Customs

Estonian eating habits are similar to other parts of northern Europe. Lunch or dinner may be the biggest meal of the day. Tipping is fairly commonplace, with 10% the norm.

If invited over to an Estonian's house, you can expect abundant hospitality and generous portions. It's fairly common to bring flowers to the host. Just be sure to give an odd number (even-numbered flowers are reserved for the dead).

TALLINN

pop 412,000

One of Europe's most enchanting cities, Tallinn is a heady blend of medieval and modern, with narrow, cobbled streets set beneath the spires of 14th-century churches, and a wild mix of restaurants, cafés, boutiques and nightclubs hidden in the carved stone walls.

The World Heritage-listed Old Town has plenty of distractions for even the most ambitious itinerary. Although large art museums are nonexistent, you'll find some historic gems that illuminate both Tallinn's medieval past and its long grey days under the Soviet yoke. Meanwhile, its growing gallery scene showcases Estonia's most creative 21st-century artists.

Colour isn't limited to the art world. The flare of the streets is decidedly fashion-forward, with Tallinn's boutiques bearing the imprint of rising Estonian designers. This contrasts with the centuries-old artisan traditions of glassblowing, weaving and pottery, all of which make Tallinn such a shoppers' paradise.

Tallinn's café culture is hard to match. Art-Deco patisseries, cosy, candlelit anterooms and breezy, sunlit patios are the settings for strong coffee and people-watching – a fine prelude to the city's alluring restaurants and bars. Decadent old-world dining rooms, charming wine cellars and super-stylish bistros provide the backdrop to exquisite dishes from every savoury corner of the globe.

Tallinn's nightlife rages until the morning, with steamy nightclubs, slinky lounges, expat bars and colourful gay clubs, all hidden inside the Old Town walls. Culture seekers can sate themselves with choral concerts, classical recitals, theatre (human or puppet) and plenty of pop, rock and jazz.

Outside the medieval quarters, there's lots to see. Delve into the past at Peter the Great's Kadriorg Palace, a baroque masterpiece surrounded by idyllic woodlands. Or when the summer sun arrives, make like a local and head to Pirita or Väna-Jõesuu for a slice of beach action. There are also coastal islands and a bizarre old cliff-top military base. But don't stop there; you'll find plenty more to discover in this vibrant city.

HISTORY

The site of Tallinn is thought to have been settled by Finno-Ugric people around 2500 BC. There was probably an Estonian trading settlement here from around the 9th century AD, and a wooden stronghold was built on Toompea (*tom-pe-ah*; the hill dominating Tallinn) in the 11th century. The Danes under King Waldemar II (who conquered Northern Estonia in 1219) met tough resistance at Tallinn and were on the verge of retreat when a red flag with a white cross fell from the sky into their bishop's hands. Taking this as a sign of God's support, they went on to win the battle; the flag became their national flag. The Danes set their own castle on Toompea. The origin of the name Tallinn is thought to be from *Taani linn*, Estonian for 'Danish town'.

The Knights of the Sword took Tallinn from the Danes in 1227 and built the first stone fort on Toompea. German traders arrived from Visby on the Baltic island of Gotland and founded a colony of about 200 beneath the fortress. In 1238 Tallinn returned to Danish control, but in 1285 it joined the German-dominated Hanseatic League as a channel for trade between Novgorod, Pihkva (Russian: Pskov) and the west. Furs, honey, leather and seal fat moved west; salt, cloth, herring and wine went east.

By the mid-14th century, when the Danes sold Northern Estonia to the Teutonic Order, Tallinn was a major Hanseatic town with about 4000 people. A conflict of interest with the knights and bishop on Toompea led the mainly German artisans and merchants in the Lower Town to build a fortified wall to separate themselves from Toompea. However, Tallinn still prospered and became one of northern Europe's biggest towns. Tallinn's German name, Reval, coexisted with the local name until 1918.

Prosperity faded in the 16th century. The Hanseatic League had weakened, and Russians, Swedes, Danes, Poles and Lithuanians fought over the Baltic region. Tallinn survived a 29-week siege by Russia's Ivan the Terrible between 1570 and 1571. It was held by Sweden from 1561 to 1710, when, decimated by plague, Tallinn surrendered to Russia's Peter the Great.

In 1870 a railway was completed from St Petersburg, and Tallinn became a chief port of the Russian Empire. Freed peasants

converged on the city from the countryside, increasing the percentage of Estonians in its population from 52% in 1867 to 89% in 1897. By WWI Tallinn had big shipyards and a large working class of over 100,000.

Tallinn suffered badly in WWII, with thousands of buildings destroyed during Soviet bombing in 1944. After the war, under Soviet control, large-scale industry was developed in Tallinn – including the USSR's biggest grain-handling port – and the city expanded, its population growing to nearly 500,000 from a 1937 level of 175,000. Much of the new population came from Russia, and new high-rise suburbs were built on the outskirts to house the workers.

Not surprisingly, the days of Soviet occupation (1940–91) were hard on the capital. The explosion of Soviet-style settlements in the suburbs meant a loss of cultural life in the centre. Old Town by the 1980s was run-down, with most people preferring to live in the suburbs rather than the centre. Old Town began to be renovated in the late '80s, with independence largely playing out on the streets of Tallinn.

The 1990s saw the city transformed into a contemporary midsize city, with a beautifully restored Old Town and a modern business district. Today a look around the centre indicates that the city is booming. Cranes all around town show that building is underway. Some of the more recent projects include the shiny glass Viru Centre mall, which opened in 2004. Tallinn shows a taste for all things new, extending to IT-driven business at the fore of the new economy, and an Internet-savvy populace that makes other parts of the world seem outmoded. Internet banking and paying parking tickets online are just a few of the conveniences Tallinnese wouldn't do without.

In addition to increasing arrivals by ferry – and close ties to Finland – there's a newly renovated airport, wiping out gloomy vestiges of the Soviet past. Discount airlines carry passengers from Western Europe, which has contributed to Tallinn's reputation as a weekend party getaway.

Meanwhile, the outskirts of the city have yet to get the face-lift that the centre has received. In these parts of the city that few tourists see, you'll find poverty, unemployment and less infrastructure.

TALLINN

Category	Item	Page	Grid	
INFORMATION	Australian Consulate	1	A4	
	British Embassy	2	C3	
	Estonian Marine Tourism Association	(see 23)		
	Estonian Rural Tourism	3	D3	
	French Embassy	4	C4	
	German Embassy	5	C4	
	Latvian Embassy	6	C3	
	Port Tourist Office	7	D2	
	Tallinn Central Hospital	8	C4	
	US Embassy	9	C3	
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	Art Museum of Estonia	10	E3	
	Body Zone	11	F1	
	City Concert Hall	12	C2	
	Club 26	(see 30)		
	Convent of St Brigitta	13	F1	
	Estonian National Library	14	C3	
	Kadriorg Palace	15	E3	
	Kalev Stadium	16	D4	
	Maarjamae Palace	17	E2	
	Mikkel Museum	18	E3	
Museum of Foreign Art	(see 15)			
SLEEPING	Olympic Yachting Centre	(see 23)		
	Pelguranna Beach	19	A2	
	Peter the Great Home Museum	20	E3	
	Pirita Beach	21	F1	
	Pirita Rowboat Rental	22	F1	
	Pirita Yacht Club	23	F1	
	Tallinn Song Bowl	24	E2	
	Tallinn Sports Hall	25	D4	
	Tammsaare Museum	26	D3	
	Top Spa	(see 29)		
EATING	Café Boulevard	(see 30)		
	Cantina Carramba	33	E3	
	Charital	34	F1	
	Villa Thai	35	D3	
	ENTERTAINMENT	A Le Coq Arena	36	C4

ORIENTATION

Tallinn spreads south from the edge of Tallinn Bay (Tallinna Laht) on the Gulf of Finland. Just south of the bay is Old Town (Vanalinn), the city's heart. It divides neatly into Upper Town and Lower Town. Upper Town on Toompea was the medieval seat of power, and it still features the parliament buildings. Lower Town spreads around the eastern foot of Toompea, and a 2.5km defensive wall still encircles much of it. The centre of Lower Town is Raekoja plats.

Around Old Town a belt of green parks follows the line of the city's original moat defences. Radiating from this old core is New Town, dating from the 19th and early

20th centuries. Vabaduse väljak (Freedom Sq) is today's city centre on the southern edge of Old Town.

The airport lies 3km southeast of the centre on the Tartu road. It's best reached by bus 2. The passenger-ferry terminal lies just 350m from the edge of Old Town, reachable on foot or by tram or bus. For more details on getting into town, see p91.

Maps

EO Map (www.eomap.ee) produces a good map of Tallinn (50Kr), with detailed coverage of Old Town and the modern centre. Many sights are marked, as are public transport routes, and it includes a useful street index. Walking tour and basic orientation maps are available

Category	Item	Page	Grid
TRANSPORT	Avis	37	C4
	Central Bus Station	38	D4
	City Bike	39	E2
	Copterline Terminal	40	C2
	Eckerö Line	(see 45)	
	Eurolines	(see 38)	
	Linnahall Terminal	41	C2
	Nordic Jet	(see 46)	
	Pirita Harbour	42	F1
	R-Rent	(see 48)	
Other	Sea-Passenger Terminal	43	D2
	Silja Line	(see 47)	
	Statoli Petrol Station	44	C2
	Terminal A	(see 43)	
	Terminal B	45	D3
	Terminal C	46	D3
	Terminal D	47	D3
	Tullika Rent	48	B4
	Viking Terminal	(see 43)	

from the tourist office and throughout Old Town, some free of charge.

INFORMATION Bookshops

Central bookshops stock city and regional maps covering most destinations in Estonia. **Allecto** (Map pp70–1; ☎ 681 8731; Väike-Karja tänav 5) Excellent selection of English-language books. **Apollo** (Map pp70–1; ☎ 654 8485; Viru tänav 23) Loads of Lonely Planet and other travel titles as well as foreign-language novels and periodicals, plus a comfy café on the 2nd floor.

Euro Publications (Map pp70–1; ☎ 661 2210; Tartu maantee 1) Art and design books are the speciality. It's opposite the Kaubamaja and connected to the Tallinna Academy of Art.

Felix & Fabian (Map pp70–1; ☎ 683 0758; Harju tänav 1) Small collection of books on Tallinn and Estonia.

Lõmatult Raamat (Map pp70–1; ☎ 683 7710; Viru väljak 21) Stocks used books in English and other languages. Don't miss the selection of vinyl records on the 2nd floor.

Rahva Raamat Pärnu maantee (Map pp70–1; ☎ 644 3682; Pärnu maantee 10); Viru väljak (Map pp70–1; ☎ 644 6655; Viru väljak 4) Guidebooks, maps, Lonely Planet titles and Estonian-language books. The Viru väljak branch stocks English-language titles.

Cultural Centres

British Council (Map pp70–1; ☎ 631 4010; www.britishcouncil.ee; Vana-Posti tänav 7)

French Cultural Centre (Map pp70–1; ☎ 644 9505; www.france.ee; Kuninga tänav 4) Sponsors cultural events.

Goethe Institute (Map pp70–1; ☎ 627 2960; www.goethe.de/tallinn; Suurtüki tänav 4b)

Emergency

Central police station (Map pp70–1; ☎ 612 4200; Pärnu maantee 11)

First-Aid Hotline (☎ 110) English-language advice on treatment, hospitals, pharmacies.

Internet Access

There are over 500 wireless Internet (wifi) areas throughout Estonia, with 225 in Tallinn alone. Visit www.wifi.ee for a complete list of locations. If you're not packing a laptop, try the following places:

Central post office (Map pp70–1; ☎ 661 6616; 2nd fl, Narva maantee 1; per hr 60Kr; ☎ 9am–8pm Mon–Fri, to 6pm Sat)

Estonian National Library (Map pp66–7; ☎ 630 7381; room C-2118, Tõnismägi 2; per hr 40Kr; ☎ 10am–8pm Mon–Fri, noon–7pm Sat Sep–Jun, noon–7pm Mon–Fri Jul–Aug)

Internet café (Map pp70–1; ☎ 667 3100; Tallinna Kaubamaja, Gonsiori 2; per hr 40Kr; ☎ 9am–9pm)

Matrix Club (Map pp70–1; ☎ 641 9442; Tartu maantee 31; per hr 20Kr; ☎ 24hr)

Reval Café (Map pp70–1; Aia tänav 3; per hr 40Kr; ☎ 9am–9pm)

Libraries

Central Library (Map pp70–1; ☎ 661 4202; www.keskraamatukogu.ee; Estonia puistee 8; ☎ 10am–7pm Mon–Fri, to 5pm Sat)

Estonian National Library (Map pp66–7; ☎ 630 7381; Tõnismägi 2; ☎ 10am–8pm Mon–Fri, noon–7pm Sat Sep–Jun, noon–7pm Mon–Fri Jul–Aug)

Media

In Your Pocket (www.inyourpocket.com) Tallinn's best listings guide, this quarterly publication contains up-to-date

info on hotels, restaurants, clubs and what's on in the city. Buy it at bookshops or the tourist information office (35Kr).

Medical Services

You'll find English-speaking staff at all of the following places.

Aia Apteek (Map pp70–1; ☎ 627 3607; Aia tänav 10; ☹ 8.30am–midnight) One of many well-stocked pharmacies in town.

Tallinn Central Hospital (Map pp66–7; ☎ 620 7015; Ravi tänav 18) Just south of Liivalaia, some 300m west of the Reval Hotel Olümpia, this hospital has a full range of services, a polyclinic and a 24-hour emergency room, and is used to foreigners dropping in.

Tallinna Linnaapteek (Map pp70–1; ☎ 644 0244; Pärnu maantee 10) A good 24-hour pharmacy.

Money

Currency exchange is available at all transport terminals, exchange bureaus, the post office and inside all banks and major hotels. ATMs are widespread. You can also receive wire transfers through the central post office, a Western Union agent.

Estravel (Map pp70–1; ☎ 626 6266; www.estravel.ee; Suur-Karja tänav 15; ☹ 9am–6pm Mon–Fri, 10am–4pm Sat) Travel agency and official Amex agent.

Hansapank (☎ 631 0310; Liivalaia tänav 8) This bank will cash travellers cheques and give cash advances on credit cards.

Tavid (Map pp70–1; ☎ 627 9900; Aia tänav 5; ☹ 24hr) Reliably good rates.

Post

Central post office (Map pp70–1; ☎ 625 7300; www.tallpost.ee; Narva maantee 1; ☹ 7.30am–8pm Mon–Fri, 8am–6pm Sat) Northern side of Viru väljak. Full postal services, including express mail, faxes and telegrams. You can receive a fax at 661 6054 (12Kr per page). Poste restante is kept for one month.

Telephone

If you don't have a mobile phone, you can buy 30Kr, 50Kr and 100Kr cards for use at any one of the blue phone boxes scattered about town. Cards are sold at most hotels, kiosks, and the Tallinn Tourist Office.

Tourist Information

Ekspress Hotline (☎ 1182; www.1182.ee; per min 2.60Kr) This English-speaking service has telephone numbers, transport schedules, theatre listings, etc. The website is also useful – and free. It's accessible only from mobile phones.

Infoline (☎ 626 1111) This service provides free, useful information in English, 24 hours a day.

Port Tourist Office (Map pp66–7; ☎ /fax 631 8321; Terminal A, Tallinn harbour; ☹ 8am–4.30pm)

Tallinn Tourist Office (Map pp70–1; ☎ 645 7777; www.tourism.tallinn.ee; Niguliste tänav 2; ☹ 9am–8pm Mon–Fri, 10am–6pm Sat & Sun May–Aug, 9am–6pm

Mon–Fri, 10am–6pm Sat & Sun Sep, 9am–5pm Mon–Fri, 10am–3pm Sat & Sun Oct–Apr) Near Raekoja plats, this office has a full range of services and loads of brochures covering every corner of Estonia. This office also sells the Tallinn Card (see p386).

Travel Agencies

City tours, guided trips to provincial Estonia and accommodation in other towns are most travel agencies' stock in trade. Most have branches throughout Estonia.

Estonian Holidays (Map pp70–1; ☎ 627 0500; www.holidays.ee; Rüütli tänav 28)

Estravel (Map pp66–7; ☎ 626 6266; www.estravel.ee; Suur-Karja tänav 15)

Leon Travel (Map pp70–1; ☎ 641 1106; www.leontravel.ee; Lai 7) Good agency for help with Russian visas.

SIGHTS

Tallinn's major sights are found in and around Old Town. Only a fraction of visitors make it outside the medieval walls to see other attractions east of there, including Kadriorg Park, Piritaa beach, the Botanical Gardens and the looming TV Tower. West of Old Town, the biggest draw is the Open Air Museum, where you can see some of Estonia's old wooden architecture.

Old Town

The medieval jewel of Estonia, Old Town (Vanalinn) is a wanderer's paradise. Picking your way along the narrow, cobbled streets is like strolling back to the dawn of the 14th century. You'll pass old merchant houses, hidden medieval courtyards, looming spires and winding staircases leading to sweeping views over the city. No matter which direction you head, you'll see plenty of cafés, restaurants and bars along the way.

If it's your first day in town, here's a tip: read the following section, then put your book away and head into town. One of the best ways to approach this fantastic old city is simply to lose yourself among its enchanting old lanes. If you happen to get lost (which is also recommended), a useful landmark is the 64m-high Town Hall tower.

RAEKOJA PLATS & AROUND

Raekoja plats (Town Hall Sq) has been the centre of Tallinn life since markets began here in the 11th century (the last was in 1896). Today it's a vibrant place ringed with cafés and restaurants, and during the sum-

mer hosts Tallinn's liveliest street scene. Rising over the square is the **Town Hall** (Raekoda; Map pp70–1; ☎ 645 7900; tower admission adult/concession 25/15Kr; ☹ 11am–6pm Tue–Sun Jun–Aug), the only surviving Gothic town hall in northern Europe. Built between 1371 and 1404, it was the seat of power in the medieval Lower Town. According to legend, its minaretlike tower was modelled on a sketch made by an explorer following his visit to the Orient. Tallinn's symbol, the pike-bearing guardsman named **Old Thomas** (Vana Toomas), stands atop the tower (and serves double duty as a weather vane), a post he's held since 1530. The teeming market from the Middle Ages was held beneath the ground-level arches on the north side.

Inside the Town Hall, the **Citizens' Hall** (☎ 645 7900; adult/concession 35/20Kr; ☹ 10am–4pm Tue–Sun Jul–Aug, by appt Sep–Jun) has an impressive vaulted roof, while the fine bench-ends (built in 1374) in the **Council Hall** are Estonia's oldest woodcarvings. There is a **tower** you can climb, and occasional exhibitions are held in the Citizens' Hall.

The former **Town Jail** (Linnavangla), in a lane behind the Town Hall, is now home to the **Museum of Estonian Photography** (Raevangla Fotomuseum; Map pp70–1; ☎ 644 8767; Raekoja tänav 4/6; adult/concession 15/7Kr; ☹ 10.30am–6pm Thu–Tue Mar–Oct, 10.30am–5pm Thu–Mon Nov–Feb), which has a small exhibition spanning photography's earliest days in Estonia up to the present (don't miss the changing contemporary exhibits). Those travelling with finicky children can point out the irons still hanging outside the Town Hall. This is where lesser offenders were shackled in olden times.

On the northern side of the square, the **Town Council Pharmacy** (Raeapteek; Map pp70–1; ☎ 631 4860; Raekoja plats 11; ☹ 9am–7pm Mon–Fri, to 5pm Sat) is one of the world's oldest continuously running pharmacies. The building has served as a pharmacy or apothecary shop since at least 1422, once passing through 10 generations of the same family. Its present façade dates from the 17th century. An arch beside the pharmacy on Raekoja plats leads into the charming, narrow **White Bread Passage** (Saiakang), once filled with the aromas of a popular bakery. At its end is the striking 13th-century Gothic **Holy Spirit Church** (Pühavaimu Kirik; Map pp70–1; ☎ 644 1487; Pühavaimu 2; admission 10Kr; ☹ 9am–5pm Mon–Sat May–Aug, 10am–4pm Mon–Sat Sep, 10am–3pm Mon–Fri Oct–Apr), used by

TALLINN IN...

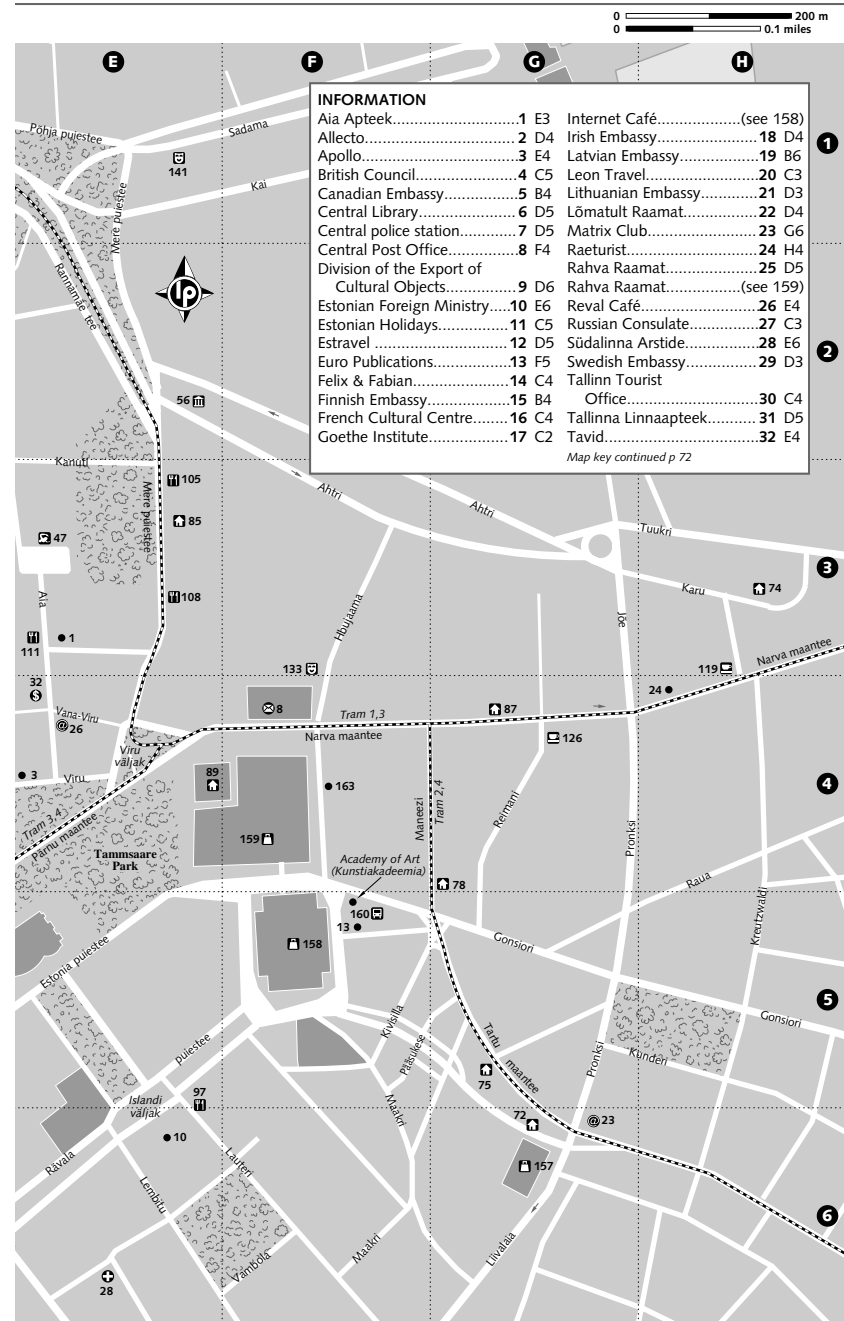
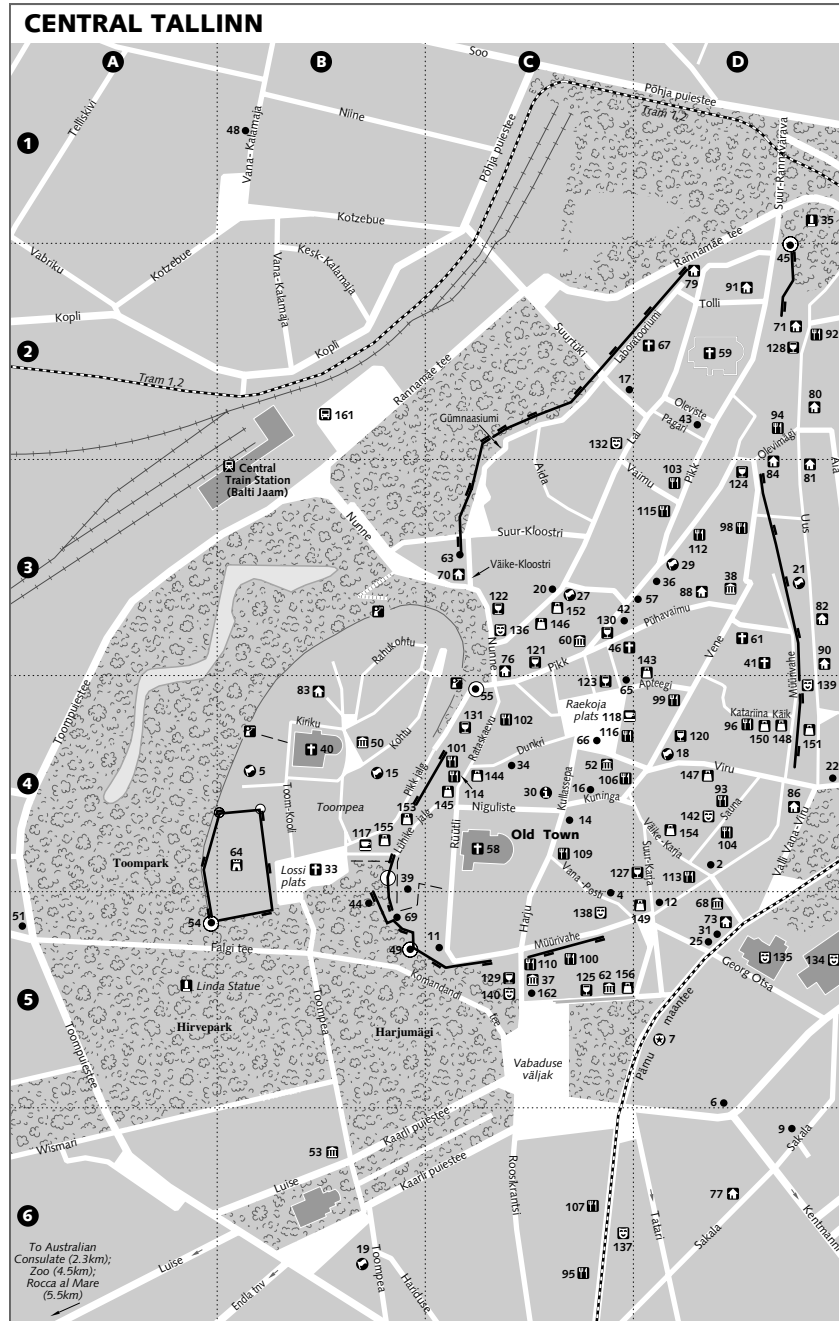
Two Days

Start your day with breakfast at **Pegasus** (p83) or grab pastries and coffee at atmospheric **Kehrwieder** (p85). Get your bearings over the city by climbing up the Town Hall tower on splendid **Raekoja plats** (opposite). Follow this by an in-depth exploration of the streets down below. After getting your fill of **handicrafts shops** (p88), pay a visit to the **City Museum** (p73), a fine introduction to 700 years of city history. Grab a light lunch at **Café Anglais** (p85) before heading to Upper Town, where you can pay a visit to the jewel box of a church, **Alexander Nevsky Cathedral** (p75). You won't want to miss the view nearby at the **Danish King's Courtyard** (p75). That night treat yourself to dinner at the candlelit **Olde Hansa** (p82), a medieval restaurant, or the aptly named **Grandma's Place** (Vanaema Juures; p83).

On your second day, head to **Kadriorg Park** (p75), where Peter the Great's baroque **palace** (p76) stands. Afterwards, stroll through the surrounding streets – once home to Tallinn's elite.

Four Days

Follow the two-day itinerary, then on your third day add a trip to **Pirita beach** (p77), rent a **rowboat** (p78) on the Piritaa River or have a picnic in the **Botanical Gardens** (p77). On your fourth day, get out of town: visit the surreal old Soviet base of **Paldiski** (p93) or if the weather's lovely, take in more beach action at **Väna-Jõesuu** (p92). Back in the city, be sure to get your fill of café culture, wine bars and the city's heady nightlife scene.



Map key continued from p 71

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Alexander Nevsky Cathedral.....	33 B4	Dorel.....	74 H3	Levist Väljas.....	124 D3
Beer House.....	34 C4	Erol International.....	75 G5	Moskva.....	125 C5
Broken Line Monument.....	35 D1	Euro Hostel.....	76 C3	Narva Kohvik.....	126 C4
Brotherhood of the Blackheads.....	36 D3	Gloria Guesthouse.....	(see 100)	St Patrick's.....	127 D4
Chapel of Our Lady.....	(see 59)	Helke.....	77 D6	Scottish Club.....	128 D2
Children's Gallery.....	(see 52)	Hottell G9.....	78 G4	Spirit.....	(see 105)
Citizens' Hall.....	(see 66)	Meriton Old Town Hotel.....	79 D2	Stereo.....	129 C5
City Gallery.....	37 C5	Old House.....	80 D2	Sweet Tooth.....	130 C3
City Museum.....	38 D3	Old House Guesthouse.....	81 D3	Tristan ja Isolde.....	(see 66)
Danish King's Courtyard.....	39 B4	Old Town Backpackers Hostel.....	82 D3	Vinoteek V & S.....	(see 105)
Dome Church.....	40 B4	Olematu Rüütel.....	83 B4	Von Krahli Teater Baar.....	131 C4
Dominican Monastery.....	41 D3	Olevi Residents.....	84 D3		
Draakoni Gallery.....	42 C3	Rasastra.....	85 E3	ENTERTAINMENT	
Estonian Museum of Architecture.....	(see 56)	Red Group.....	86 D4	Bon Bon.....	(see 105)
Fat Margaret.....	(see 45)	Reval Hotel Central.....	87 G4	City Theatre.....	132 C2
Former KGB headquarters.....	43 D2	Schlösse Hotel.....	88 D3	Club Hollywood.....	(see 138)
Gate Tower.....	44 B5	Sokos Hotel Viru.....	89 E4	Coca-Cola Plaza.....	133 F3
Great Coast Gate.....	45 D2	Taanlinna Hotell.....	90 D3	Estonia Theatre & Concert Hall.....	134 D5
Great Guild.....	(see 60)	Three Sisters Hotel.....	91 D2	Estonia Theatre Café.....	(see 134)
Holy Spirit Church.....	46 C3			Estonian Drama Theatre.....	135 D5
Kalev Swimming Pool.....	47 E3	EATING		Estonian Puppet Theatre.....	136 C3
Kalma Saun.....	48 B1	African Kitchen.....	92 D2	G-punkt.....	137 C6
Kiek-in-de-Kök.....	49 B5	Angel.....	93 D4	Kino Söprus.....	138 C5
Knighthood House.....	50 B4	Bocca.....	94 D2	Kinomaja.....	139 D4
Maritime Museum.....	(see 45)	Café VS.....	95 C6	Privé.....	140 C5
Meriton Grand Hotel.....	51 A5	Controvento.....	96 D4	Terrarium.....	141 E1
Museum of Estonian Photography.....	52 C4	Eesti Maja.....	97 E5	Von Krahli Theatre.....	(see 131)
Museum of Occupation & Fight for Freedom.....	53 B6	Egoist.....	98 D3	X-Baar.....	142 D4
Observation deck.....	(see 59)	Elevant.....	99 D4		
Pikk Herman.....	54 A5	Gloria.....	100 C5	SHOPPING	
Pikk Jalg Gate Tower.....	55 C4	Grandma's Place.....	101 C4	Antiiik.....	143 D3
Riigikogu.....	(see 64)	Kompressor.....	102 C4	Antiiik & Kunst.....	144 C4
Rotterman Salt Storage.....	56 E2	Le Bonaparte.....	103 D3	Antikvaar.....	145 C4
St Canutus Guild Hall.....	57 D3	Must Lammast.....	104 D4	Antique, Military & Collections.....	146 C3
St Nicholas's Church.....	58 C4	Olde Hansa.....	106 C4	Bastion.....	147 D4
St Olaf's Church.....	59 D2	Peetri Pizza.....	107 C6	Boutiques BT (Hoochi Mama).....	(see 159)
St Olaus' Guild.....	(see 36)	Peetri Pizza.....	108 E3	Boutiques BT (Monton).....	(see 159)
State History Museum.....	60 C3	Pegasus.....	109 C4	Domini Canes.....	148 D4
Sts Peter & Paul's Catholic Church.....	61 D3	Pizza Americana.....	110 C5	Ivo Nikkolo.....	149 D5
Tallinn Art Hall.....	62 C5	Rimi.....	111 E3	Katarina Gild.....	150 D4
Tallinn Town Wall.....	63 C3	St Michael Cheese Restaurant.....	(see 70)	Knit Market.....	151 D4
Toompea Castle.....	64 B4	Sisalik.....	112 D3	Lai.....	152 C3
Town Council Pharmacy.....	65 C4	Stockmann Kaubamaja.....	(see 157)	Lühikese Jala Galerii.....	153 B4
Town Hall.....	66 C4	Sultan.....	113 D4	Madell Käsitöö.....	154 D4
Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church.....	67 D2	Sushi House.....	114 C4	Navitrolla Galerii.....	155 B4
Vaal.....	68 D5	Tallinna Kaubamaja.....	(see 158)	Nu Nordik.....	156 C5
Virgin's Tower.....	69 B5	Texas Honky Tonk.....	115 D3	Stockmann Kaubamaja.....	157 G6
		Troika.....	116 C4	Tallinna Kaubamaja Viru Keskus.....	158 F5 159 F4
SLEEPING				TRANSPORT	
Baltic Hotel Imperial.....	70 C3	DRINKING		Airport-bus Station.....	160 F5
Beata Hostel.....	71 D2	Bogapott.....	117 B4	Bus Platform.....	161 B2
Cassandra Apartments.....	72 G6	Café Anglais.....	118 C4	Ecolines.....	(see 159)
City Guesthouse.....	73 D5	Café Peterson.....	119 H3	Estonian Air.....	162 C5
		Café-Chocolaterie.....	120 D4	Silja Lines.....	(see 157)
		Club Havana.....	121 C3	Tallink Office.....	163 F4
		Depeche Mode.....	122 C3		
		Gloria Wine Cellar.....	(see 100)		
		Kehrwieder.....	123 C4		

Lutherans. Its luminous blue and gold clock is the oldest in Tallinn, with carvings dating from 1684, and the tower bell, made in 1433, is the oldest in Estonia. The exquisite wood-carved interior features a wooden altarpiece dating back to 1483, 16th-century carved

bench-backs and a 17th-century baroque wooden pulpit. Johann Koell, a former pastor here, is considered the author of the first Estonian book, a catechism published in 1535. Classical music concerts are held here on Mondays at 6pm.

AROUND VENE

Several 15th-century warehouses and merchant residences surround Raekoja plats, notably when heading towards Vene (the Estonian word for Russian, named for the Russian merchants who traded here centuries ago). Vene is now one of Old Town's favourite restaurant precincts. Set in a medieval merchant's house, the **City Museum** (Linnauseum; Map pp70-1; ☎ 644 6553; Vene tänav 17; adult/concession 35/10Kr; ☹ 10.30am-6pm Wed-Mon Mar-Oct, to 5pm Wed-Mon Nov-Feb) traces the city's development from its earliest days, and its displays of clothing, furnishings and curios help take you back in time. The 3rd floor presents a politicised (but quite accurate we imagine) portrait of life under the Soviet yoke, and there's a fascinating video of the events surrounding the collapse of the regime. In addition to permanent displays, curators host temporary shows, and you never know what's in store – on a recent visit, we caught a baffling exhibition on women's undergarments from the 1930s.

Further down on Vene stands one of Tallinn's oldest buildings: the **Dominican Monastery** (Dominiiklaste klooster; Map pp70-1; ☎ 644 4606; www.kloostri.ee; Vene tänav 16; adult/concession 45/25Kr; ☹ 9.30am-6pm mid-May–mid-Sep, visits other times by appt), founded in 1246, once housed Scandinavian monks who aimed to convert Estonians to Christianity and educate the local population. In its glory days the coffers were full, and the monastery had its own brewery and hospital. Once the reformation began, however, its days were numbered. A mob of angry Lutherans torched the place in 1524, and the monks fled town. The monastery languished for the next 400 years until its restoration in 1954. Today it houses Estonia's largest collection of stone carvings (dating from the 15th to the 17th centuries), and the inner garden is a peaceful refuge from the summertime crowds.

Next door to the monastery is **Sts Peter & Paul's Church** (Peeter-Paul Kirik; Map pp70-1; ☎ 644 6367; Vene tänav 16; ☹ 10am-6pm mid-May–mid-Sep, visits outside season by appt), which dates back to 1844. A handsome whitewashed church, it was designed by the famed architect Carlo Rossi, who left his mark on the neoclassical shape of St Petersburg. It still functions as one of Tallinn's only Catholic churches, largely for the Polish and Lithuanian community.

PIKK

Pikk (Long St) runs north from Raekoja plats towards Tallinn port and is lined with the houses of medieval German merchants and gentry. Many of these were built in the 15th century, and contained three or four storeys, with the lower two used as living and reception quarters and the upper ones for storage.

Also on Pikk are the buildings of several old Tallinn guilds (associations of traders or artisans, nearly all German dominated). The **Great Guild** (Map pp70-1; Pikk tänav 17), to which the most eminent merchants belonged, is set in a striking building dating from 1410. Its vaulted halls now contain the **State History Museum** (Ajaloomuseum; Map pp70-1; ☎ 641 1630; www.eam.ee; Pikk tänav 17; adult/concession 15/10Kr; ☹ 11am-6pm Thu-Tue), with a rather dry permanent exhibition of Estonian historical artefacts dating from the 14th to the 19th centuries. (Coin-collectors, don't miss this place.) Changing temporary shows, however, are often quite interesting; check the website to see what's on.

Another old artisans guild on this street is the 1860 **St Canutus Guild Hall** (Kanuti Gildi Saal; Map pp70-1; Pikk tänav 20), with its black statues of Martin Luther and St Canute looking down from their second-storey perch. The adjoining buildings of the **Brotherhood of the Blackheads** (Mustpeade Maja; Map pp70-1; ☎ 631 3199; www.mustpeademaja.ee; Pikk tänav 24) and **St Olaus' Guild** (Olevi Gildi Hoone; Map pp70-1; Pikk tänav 26) are closed to the public except for regular concerts. The Blackheads were unmarried merchants who took their name not from poor hygiene, but from their patron saint, Mauritius, a legendary African warrior whose likeness is found between two lions on the building façade (dating from 1597). Concerts are held here most nights during the summer and less frequently the rest of the year. St Olaus' Guild – probably the first guild in Tallinn – began in the 13th century, and developed a membership of more humble non-German artisans and traders.

At the northern end of Pikk stands **St Olaf's Church** (Oleviste Kirik; Map pp70-1; Pikk 48), its 124m spire being yet another of Tallinn's icons (formerly used as a surveillance centre by the KGB). The entrance is on Lai. Tallinn's best view awaits at the top of the **observation deck** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 621 4421; www.oleviste.ee; adult/concession 20/10Kr; ☹ 10am-6pm Jun-Aug). Although

dedicated to the 11th-century King Olaf II of Norway, the church is linked in local lore with another Olaf – its architect who ignored the prophecies of doom to befall the one who completed the church's construction. Accordingly, Olaf fell to his death from the tower, and it's said that a toad and snake then crawled out of his mouth. The incident is shown in one of the carvings on the eastern wall of the 16th-century **Chapel of Our Lady**, adjoining the church.

Just south of the church is the former **KGB headquarters** (Map pp70-1; Pikk tänav 46/48), the basement windows of which were bricked up to prevent the sounds of violent 'interrogations' from being heard by those passing by on the street.

The **Great Coast Gate** (Map pp70-1), the medieval exit to Tallinn port, lies just north of the church. It's joined to **Fat Margaret** (Paks Margareeta), a rotund 16th-century bastion that protected this entrance to the town. Fat Margaret's walls are more than 4m thick at the base. Inside is the **Maritime Museum** (Meremuuseum; ☎ 641 1408; Pikk tänav 70; adult/concession 25/10Kr; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Sun), with displays of old charts, model ships, antiquated diving equipment and other artefacts from Estonia's seafaring history. There are good views from the platform on the roof. Just outside the bastion stretch two strands of a long sculpture entitled *Broken Line*, which is dedicated to the victims of the *Estonia* ferry-sinking, Europe's worst peacetime maritime tragedy. Nearby, a 3m-long granite tablet lists the 852 people who died the night of 28 September 1994, travelling from Stockholm to Tallinn.

LOWER-TOWN WALLS & ST NICHOLAS' CHURCH

The longest-standing stretch of the Old Town wall, with nine towers, spans from Väike-Kloostri tänav, along Laboratooriumi to the northern end of Lai.

At the northern end of Aida tänav is a tiny passageway through the town wall; on the other side there's a picturesque spot to photograph a line-up of four **towers** (another can be found along Kooli). To access the walkway atop the walls, visit the **Tallinn Town Wall** (Map pp70-1; adult/concession 10/7Kr; ☎ 11am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat & Sun). Three empty towers are connected here and visitors can explore their nooks and crannies for

themselves. There are good views from the tower windows.

Nearby, the **Ukrainian-Greek Catholic Church** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 5668 2369; Laboratooriumi 22; ☎ 1-2.30pm Sun & by appt) is a fascinating monastery with a 14th-century wooden church full of old relics. Visits include a free guided tour, where you'll learn all about the history and legends of the place. Donations accepted (and go towards the recently opened school and cultural centre).

The Gothic **St Nicholas' Church** (Niguliste Kirik; Map pp70-1; ☎ 644 9903; Niguliste tänav 3; adult/concession 35/20Kr; ☎ 10am-5pm Wed-Sun) is another of the city's medieval treasures. Dating from the 13th century, St Nicholas' now houses artworks from medieval Estonian churches. Its most famous work is the eerie *Dance Macabre*, Berndt Notke's 15th-century masterpiece. Other artefacts here include baroque chandeliers, a 15th-century altar and a silver chamber. The church was badly damaged by Soviet bombers in 1944 and a fire in the 1980s, but today stands fully restored. The acoustics are first-rate, with organ recitals held most weekends (beginning at 4pm on Saturday and Sunday).

At the foot of the slope below St Nicholas' Church, along Harju tänav, you can see more ruins wrought by Soviet bombers on the night of 9 March 1944. A sign in English facing Harju details the damage inflicted on the city that night.

Also near the church in front of Rataskaevu No 16 is a well where many stray cats perished. In medieval times animals were sacrificed to appeal for prosperity in the year ahead. Some believe the house that stands near the well is haunted. The devil apparently hosted a wild party there some time ago, and if you happen to pass late one night, some say you can still hear sounds of the party.

TOOMPEA

A winding stairway connects Lühike jalg, off Rataskaevu, to Toompea. According to Estonian legend, Toompea is the burial mound of Kalev, the heroic first leader of the Estonians, built by his widow Linda. In German times this was the preserve of the feudal nobility and bishop, looking down on the traders and lesser beings of the Lower Town.

Although the most impressive – and until the 17th century the only – approach to

Toompea is through the red-roofed **Long Leg Gate Tower** (Pikk jalg; Map pp70-1), which dates from 1380, **Short Leg** (Lühike jalg), at the western end of Pikk, is not without character. A number of ghostly apparitions have been reported inside the **Gate Tower** (Lühike jalg 9), including a crucified monk and a black dog with burning eyes. It's thought to be the most haunted house in Tallinn.

At the top of Lühike jalg is Estonia's parliament building, the **Riigikogu**, which meets in the photogenic **Toompea Castle** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 631 6537; Lossi plats 1; by appt only ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri). Nothing remains of the Danish castle built here in 1219, but three of the four corner towers of its successor, founded between 1227 and 1229, still stand. The pink baroque façade dates from the 18th century when, under Catherine the Great, it was rebuilt and the moat was filled.

The finest of the castle towers is the 1371 **Pikk Hermann** at the southwest corner, topped by the national flag. The two other surviving towers, plus most of the northern wall of the old castle, can be seen from the yard of Toom-Kooli 13.

Toompea is named after the magnificent Lutheran **Dome Church** (Toomkirik; Map pp70-1; ☎ 644 4140; Toomkooli tänav 6; admission free; ☎ 9am-4pm Tue-Sun) founded in 1233. The edifice dates from the 15th and 17th centuries, with the tower added in 1779. The church was a burial ground for the rich and noble. The finest of the **carved tombs** inside are those on the right as you approach the altar, including the 16th-century Swedish commander Pontus de la Gardie and his wife. The Swedish siege of Narva, where de la Gardie died, is depicted on the side of their sarcophagus. The Greek temple-style sarcophagus belongs to Admiral Samuel Greigh, an 18th-century Scot who joined the Russian navy and became a hero of Russo-Turkish sea battles. Admiral Adam Johann von Krusenstern, a German-Estonian who was the first Russian citizen to sail around the world, has another elaborate tomb. From the Dome Church, follow Kohtu tänav to the city's favourite lookout over the lower town.

The location of the Russian Orthodox **Alexander Nevsky Cathedral** (Map pp70-1; Lossi plats), opposite the parliament buildings, was no accident: the church was one of many Orthodox cathedrals built between 1894 and 1900 as part of a general wave of Russifica-

tion in the Russian Baltic provinces in the last quarter of the 19th century. Orthodox believers still come here in droves.

A path leads down from Lossi plats to the **Danish King's Courtyard** (Map pp70-1), which offers sweeping views over the lower town. In the summer artists set up their easels. One of the towers here, the **Virgin's Tower** (Neitsitorn; Lühike jalg 9a), is said to have been a prison for medieval prostitutes.

One of Tallinn's most formidable cannon towers is the tall, stout **Kiek-in-de-Kök** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 644 6686; Komandandi 2; adult/concession 25/8Kr; ☎ 10.30am-6pm Tue-Sun Mar-Oct, 10.30am-5pm Nov-Feb). Its name is Low German for 'Peep into the Kitchen'; from the upper floors lonely soldiers could peer into the houses of Lower Town. Built around 1475, it was badly damaged during the Livonian war, but it never collapsed (nine of Ivan the Terrible's cannon balls remain embedded in the walls). Today it houses a museum tracing the birth and development of Tallinn.

From Kiek-in-de-Kök, a pleasant downhill stroll southwest leads to the grassy **Hirvepark** (Map pp70-1) with a **statue** of Linda grieving. This has come to symbolise the tragic fate of those deported from Estonia during and after WWII.

Nearby, you can get a more in-depth look at the Estonian struggle at the fairly new **Museum of Occupation & Fight for Freedom** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 668 0250; Toompea 8; adult/concession 10/5Kr; ☎ 11am-6pm Tue-Sun). Photos and multimedia displays illustrate five decades of oppressive rule.

East of the Centre Getting There & Away

Trams 1 and 3 go to the Kadriorg stop right by Kadriorg Park. Buses 1, 8, 34 and 38 all run between the city centre and Pirita, stopping on Narva maantee near Kadriorg Park, and at Maarjamäe. Buses 34 and 38 go to the Botanical Gardens (Kloostrimetsa stop) and the TV Tower (Motoklubi stop).

KADRIORG

The pleasant, wooded **Kadriorg Park** (Map pp66-7; Narva maantee) lies about 2km east of Old Town, and remains a long-time favourite of city dwellers seeking a bit of green space. Oak, lilac and horse chestnut trees are the setting for strollers, cyclists and picnickers, and the park's ample acreage never makes the

paths feel crowded. Together with the baroque Kadriorg Palace, it was designed for the Russian tsar Peter the Great by the Italian Niccolò Michetti, soon after Peter's conquest of Estonia in the Great Northern War.

The centrepiece of the forest is **Kadriorg Palace**, which houses the **Museum of Foreign Art** (Väliskunsti Muuseum; Map pp66-7; Kadrioru loss; ☎ 606 6400; Weizenbergitännav 37; adult/concession 45/20Kr; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, 10am-5pm Wed-Sun Oct-Apr), built between 1718 and 1736 – with the help of Peter himself who laid no less than three sturdy bricks. The museum holds Dutch, German and Italian paintings from the 16th to the 18th centuries, along with Russian works from the 18th to 19th centuries. It's a nostalgic place to stroll for an hour or two among the mostly Romantic works, and there's a handsome flower garden at the back. In the 1930s the palace was the private domain of the president of independent Estonia. Since Estonia's re-independence, part of the palace complex has again become the presidential home.

Behind the palace, in the former kitchen building, the small **Mikkel Museum** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 601 5844; Weizenbergi 28; admission 15Kr; ☎ 11am-6pm Wed-Sun) has a small but interesting assortment of art. Russian and Chinese paintings, 15th-century icons and works in porcelain are all part of the eclectic collection.

Nearby is the cottage Peter the Great occupied on visits to Tallinn while the palace was under construction. Today it houses the **Peter the Great Home Museum** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 601 3136; Mäekalda tänav 2; admission 15Kr; ☎ 11am-4pm Wed-Sat May-Sep) where you may examine his clothes and the boots he made. There's also a small collection of 18th-century furnishings.

Also in Kadriorg is the futuristic **Art Museum of Estonia** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 602 6001; www.ekm.ee; Weizenbergi tänav 34), a massive seven-storey building that houses some 60,000 works by Estonian and foreign artists. Opened in early 2006, the Art Museum contains the largest art collection in the Baltics.

Just west of the park, the last home of the great Estonian novelist Anton Hansen Tammisaare now contains the small **Tammisaare Museum** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 601 3232; Koidula tänav 12A; admission 5Kr; ☎ 11am-6pm Wed-Mon) with period furnishings from the 1930s. The house lies on a tree-lined street among other charming 19th-century homes, and the whole neigh-

bourhood makes a great setting for a stroll. Between the wars, this was Tallinn's most affluent area.

TALLINN SONG BOWL

The **Tallinn Song Bowl** (Lauluväljak; Narva maantee), site of the main gatherings of Estonia's national song festivals, is an open-air amphitheatre said to have a capacity of 150,000 people. In September 1988 300,000 squeezed in for one songfest and publicly demanded independence during the 'Singing Revolution'. Approximately half a million people, including a large number of Estonian émigrés, were believed to have been present at the 21st Song Festival in 1990, the last major festival before the restoration of independence. An Estonian repertoire was reinstated and around 29,000 performers sang under the national flag for the first time in 50 years.

PIRITA TEE

This coastal road curving northwards alongside Tallinn Bay is an ideal walk, affording a sea view that's particularly striking during late-night summer sunsets. It's a popular stretch for joggers, cyclists and Rollerbladers.

A kilometre north of Kadriorg Park, the seldom-visited **Maarjamäe Palace** (Maarjamäe loss; Map pp66-7; ☎ 601 4535; Pirita tee 56; adult/concession 10/8Kr; ☎ 11am-6pm Wed-Sun) covers Estonian history from the mid-19th century onwards. The neo-Gothic limestone palace was built in the 1870s as a summer cottage for the Russian general A Orlov-Davydov.

Further north along Pirita tee is an unmistakably Soviet **war monument** rising in its concrete glory to a sharp point on the eastern side of the street. It was erected in 1975 over the graves of German soldiers who died fighting the Soviets on the Leningrad front. Most of the graves were bulldozed for the purpose, but some remain in a small cemetery behind the statue. Postindependence, a memorial was added to the Nazi war dead (Estonians, after all, fought on both sides; see p50 if this has you baffled). Today the monument has an air of desolation about it, and it's a fascinating relic from 1960s USSR.

PIRITA

Approximately 1.5km beyond Maarjamäe, just before Pirita tee crosses the Pirita River,

a short side road leads down to **Pirita Yacht Club** (Map pp66-7) and the **Tallinn Olympic Yachting Centre** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 639 8980; www.piritatop.ee), near the mouth of the river. This was the base for the sailing events of the 1980 Moscow Olympics, and international regattas are still held here. If you're just passing through, the Yacht Club is a relaxing spot for a drink alfresco. You can also hire rowboats nearby (see p78).

From there it's 50m to the ruined **Convent of St Birgitta** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 605 5000; adult/concession 20/10Kr; ☎ 10am-6pm). Only the Gothic gable still stands, which is the last remnant of this early-15th-century convent. The rest was destroyed courtesy of Ivan the Terrible during the Livonian War in 1577. In 1996 Birgittine nuns in Estonia were granted the right to return to and reactivate the convent. The convent's completed new headquarters are adjacent to the ruins.

North of the bridge is **Pirita beach** (Pirita rand; Map pp66-7), the city's largest and most popular beach (and it's only 6km from

the city centre). Although it's no Bondi beach (or Pärnu, p155, for that matter), Pirita is a quick getaway for urbanites; there are plenty of young, bronzed sun-lovers filling the sands, with a handful of laid-back cafés nearby.

BOTANICAL GARDENS & TV TOWER

Set on 1.2 sq km and surrounded by lush woodlands, the **Botanical Gardens** (☎ 606 2666; Kloostrimetsa tee 52; adult/concession 40/20Kr, family ticket 60Kr; ☎ 11am-4pm Tue-Sun) boast 8000 species of plant scattered in a series of greenhouses and along a 4km nature trail. The gardens lie 2.5km east of Pirita.

The 314m **TV Tower** (☎ 623 8258; www.teletern.ee; Kloostrimetsa tee 58a; adult/child 50/15Kr; ☎ 10am-midnight) is 400m further east. There's a Russian-style restaurant and panoramic viewing platform at the 170m point. At the base there are still a few bullet holes from events during the August 1991 attempted Estonian breakaway (it was as violent as things became in Estonia's bid for independence).

THE STATE OF THE ART

If you've had your fill of old stone churches and Baltic antiquities, take a detour from the medieval street and check out the state of contemporary Estonian art, c early 21st century. Although Tallinn's Warhols and Pollocks have yet to emerge, in the last few years the capital has become an increasingly fertile place for cerebral and often daring young artists on the make. A growing number of galleries have opened their doors, ensuring a wide array of talent is always on view, from the old and nostalgic to the neofuturistic. Keep an eye out for art openings, which are good opportunities to connect to the local scene. Otherwise, drop in at one of the following, and get a taste of Tallinn's *other side*.

Rotterman Salt Storage (Map pp70-1; ☎ 625 7000; www.arhitektuurimuuseum.ee; Ahtri tänav 2; adult/concession 30/10Kr; ☎ 11am-6pm Wed-Sun) East of Old Town, this beautifully restored limestone warehouse once served the unpoetic but utilitarian function as the city's saltcellar. Today the massive space houses the **Estonian Museum of Architecture**, with its permanent architecture exhibitions. Less of a yawn is the incredible array of temporary exhibitions – often the city's best – held here throughout the year. Check the website for details.

City Gallery (Map pp70-1; ☎ 644 2818; www.kunstihoone.ee; Harju tänav 13; admission free; ☎ noon-6pm Wed-Mon) Hosts rapidly changing exhibits – often the most experimental pieces in Tallinn.

Vaal (Map pp70-1; ☎ 627 0161; www.vaal.ee; Väike-Karja tänav 12; admission free; ☎ noon-6pm Wed-Sun) This versatile exhibition space in Old Town displays the works of some of Estonia's best artists. For getting a grip on the contemporary scene, this is the place to be.

Tallinn Art Hall (Map pp70-1; ☎ 644 2818; www.kunstihoone.ee; Vabaduse Väljak 8; admission 25Kr; ☎ noon-6pm Wed-Sun) Daring, avant-garde Estonian art is on the menu at this imposing pre-Soviet-era building overlooking Vabaduse väljak (Freedom Sq). After getting your fill of art, pop next door to stylish Moskva (p85) for a different brand of intoxicant.

Draakoni Gallery (Map pp70-1; ☎ 646 4110; Pikk tänav 18; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat) This cosy Old Town space hosts small, sometimes stimulating, exhibitions. More than anything, though, we like this place for its fabulous sculpted façade.

Southwest of the Centre

The impressive, fortresslike façade of the **Estonian National Library** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 630 7611; Tõnismägi 2; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Fri, noon-7pm Sat) is one example of the mini renaissance Estonia's national stone, dolomite limestone, has undergone in recent years. Built in 1982 by Raine Karp (who also designed the similar Sakala conference and cultural centre on Rävälja puiestee and the enormous Linna-hall concert hall by the port), the library is worth seeing for its cavernous interior. Frequent exhibitions take place on the upper floors (though you may need a day pass from reception).

About 4km due west of the centre (or a 15-minute ride on bus 40 or 48 from Viru-väljak) is **Pelguranna beach** (Map pp66-7), which is purported to be the cleanest beach in the Tallinn area. It has a distinctly local feel but is a pleasant alternative to Piriita.

Tallinn Zoo (Loomaaed; ☎ 694 3300; Paldiski maantee 145; www.tallinnzoo.ee; adult/concession 50/20Kr; ☎ 9am-7pm May-Aug, to 5pm Sep, Oct & Apr, to 3pm Nov-Mar) boasts the world's largest collection of wild goats, and 334 species of animals, birds, reptiles and fish. It's a good place for your kids to meet other kids – the entire child population of northern Estonia is there on summer weekends. Opposite the zoo is **Tivoli** (☎ 656 0110; day pass adult/child 175/120Kr; ☎ noon-8pm Mon-Fri, 11am-8pm Sat & Sun, closed Oct-Apr) a small amusement park for the kids.

One kilometre beyond the zoo, Ranamõisa tee branches right towards Rocca al Mare and its **Open Air Museum** (☎ 654 9100; Vabaõhumuseumi tee 12; adult/child May-Sep 30/15Kr, Oct-Apr 15/10Kr; ☎ buildings 10am-6pm, grounds 10am-8pm). Most of Estonia's oldest wooden structures, mainly farmhouses but also a chapel (1699) and windmill, are preserved here. If you're not heading to villages in the south, this is a good place to see traditional wooden architecture and get an overview of 150 years of rural life. Along those lines, the audio tour (80Kr) is worthwhile. There are also views back to the city and you can walk through the woods or down to the sea. On Sunday mornings there are folk song-and-dance shows. There's also the **Kolu Kõrts tavern** (meals from 80Kr; ☎ 10am-6pm), where you can sample traditional Estonian cuisine. Every June, Rocca al Mare celebrates its *Memme-taadi* days, with folk dancing, songs and craft

fairs. Most kids love this place, particularly for the pony rides.

Buses 21 and 21B go from the train station straight to Rocca al Mare. The zoo is best reached by bus 22 or trolleybus 6 from Vabaduse Väljak, just south of Old Town.

ACTIVITIES

Boating

In summer **Piriita Rowboat Rental** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 621 2105; Kloostri tee 6a; rowboats/paddle boats per hr from 75/50Kr), beside the road-bridge over the Piriita River, rents rowboats and paddle boats. It's an idyllic place for a leisurely float, with thick forest edging towards the water. There's also a pleasant café and restaurant (p84) nearby.

Saunas

Locals attribute all kinds of health benefits to a good old-fashioned sweat out, and truth be told a trip to Estonia just won't be complete until you've paid a visit to the sauna. You won't have to look far: nearly every place listed in the Sleeping section has one. For something a little different, try one of the following:

Beer House (Map pp70-1; ☎ 627 6520; www.beerhouse.ee; Dunkri 5; per hr 300-600Kr; ☎ 10am-midnight Sun-Thu, to 2am Fri & Sat) Two private saunas for rent (the larger has a Jacuzzi) in this large beer hall in Old Town.

Club 26 (Map pp66-7; ☎ 631 5585; www.revalhotels.com; 26th fl, Liivalaia tänav 33; before/after 3pm 300/600Kr; ☎ 6:30am-11pm Mon-Fri, 7:30am-11pm Sat & Sun) On the top floor of the Reval Hotel Olümpia (p82), this is one of the most luxurious saunas in town.

Kalma Saun (Map pp70-1; ☎ 627 1811; Vana-Kalamaja 9A; per person 60-90Kr; ☎ 10am-11pm) In a grand building behind the train station, Tallinn's oldest public bath still has the aura of an old-fashioned Russian-style *banya* (bathhouse).

Meriton Grand Hotel (Map pp70-1; ☎ 667 7000; www.meriton.ee; Toompuiestee 27; per 2hr before/after 5pm 500/800Kr) Cosy and stylish private sauna that can accommodate up to 10 people.

Spas, Health Clubs & Swimming Pools

Body Zone (Map pp66-7; ☎ 630 0940; www.bodyzone.ee; Merivälja tee 5; day pass 300-400Kr; ☎ 7am-10pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat, 11am-8pm Sun) If you need a day at the gym, Body Zone is a good choice. Guests have access to the pool, squash courts, several rooms full of machines and weights, and a wide variety of classes (aerobics, yoga, cardio dance, spinning etc). There's also a

full-service spa, and once you're feeling toned and ready, Piriita beach lies just outside.

Club 26 (Map pp66-7; ☎ 631 5585; www.revalhotels.com; 26th fl, Liivalaia tänav 33; per visit 60-130Kr; ☎ 6.30am-11pm Mon-Fri, 7.30am-11pm Sat & Sun) Atop the Reval Hotel Olümpia (p82), this small health club has a gym and 16m swimming pool with superb views over the city. Good choice for a workout without breaking the bank.

Kalev Swimming Pool (Map pp70-1; ☎ 644 2286; Aia tänav 18; per visit 50-70Kr; ☎ 7am-9:30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-8:45pm Sat & Sun) For serious swimming in an indoor pool of Olympic proportions. Sauna is also available.

Tallinn Sports Hall (Map pp66-7; ☎ 646 6346; Herne tänav 30; per visit 25-75Kr; ☎ 7am-9.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-8.45pm Sat & Sun) State-of-the-art facilities draw Tallinn's most serious athletes (including Erki Nool, Olympic gold medalist). Huge indoor running track, top-notch gym and the all-essential sauna are on hand.

Top Spa (Map pp66-7; ☎ 639 8718; www.topspa.ee; Regati puiestee 1; per person 60-90Kr; ☎ spa 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-3pm Sat, swimming pool 6.30am-10pm Mon-Fri, 8am-10pm Sat & Sun) Inside the Piriita Top Spa Hotel (p81), this spa offers a number of pampering options (massages, salt chamber, solarium, pedicures etc). The adjoining health club has a gym where you can work out, catch a yoga or aerobics class or swim the 25m, six-lane pool. Swimming ticket includes sauna use.

TALLINN FOR CHILDREN

If you're travelling with kids, Tallinn's Old Town with its medieval setting, colourful restaurants and lively street scene is pure eye candy for the under-12 crowd. One place particularly worth visiting is the **Children's Gallery** (Kullo Lastegalerii; Map pp70-1; ☎ 644 6873; Kuninga 6; adult/child 6/3Kr; ☎ 11am-6pm Wed-Mon), which hosts workshops for children, and showcases the work of Estonia's youngest artists. Other youthful attractions in Old Town include the highly recommended **Estonian Puppet Theatre** (Eesti Nukuteater; Map pp70-1; ☎ 667 9555; www.nukuteater.ee; Lai tänav 1; admission 45-60Kr; ☎ box office 10am-6pm), where the animator's art has been going strong since 1952. Performances are held on one of three stages, including the outdoor summer stage. Outside Old Town, the Open Air Museum (opposite) is always a hit with the younger crowd. In the same area, you'll also find Tallinn Zoo (opposite) and the summer-only amusement park Tivoli (opposite), with plenty of rides and games.

TOURS

The Tallinn Tourist Office (p68) and any travel agent (p69) can arrange tours in

English or other languages with a private guide for around €15 to €20 per hour. The city also offers the following organised tours.

Audioguide Old Town Walking Tour (www.audio.guide.ee; 280Kr) On this self-guided tour, you follow a prescribed route through the medieval quarters, listening to historical details and anecdotes along the way. You can find the audio player at the Tallinn Tourist Office and at some hotels.

City Bike (☎ 511 1819; www.citybike.ee; Piriita tee 28; 220Kr; ☎ tours 11am & 5pm Apr-Oct, 11am Nov-Mar) This 14km bicycle tour covers Kadriorg Park, the Song Festival grounds, Piriita and Old Town, and includes commentary in English by the bicycle guide. The tour begins on Piriita tee, but staff can pick you up from Old Town. Book the day before. Price includes bike, helmet and a very stylish emergency green safety vest.

City Bus Tour (☎ 627 9080; www.citytour.ee; adult/child under 7 320Kr/free; ☎ 10am-4pm May-Oct) This red double-decker bus won't exactly help you blend in with the locals. It will, however, give you quick and easy access to a number of the city's top sights. The 48-hour bus pass allows you to hop on and off at the following stops: Virju Väljak, Toompea, Kadriorg, TV Tower, Botanical Gardens and Piriita, among others. A recorded audio tour accompanies the ride (English, German, French, Spanish, etc).

Old Town Walking Tour (☎ 610 8616; with 24hr, 48hr or 72hr Tallinn Card free, without 100Kr; ☎ tours 11.30am, 2pm, 4pm) Offered in English or Finnish, this one- to 1½-hour tour covers Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, Toomkirik, the viewing platform on Kohtu tänav, Lühike Jalg and ends at Raekoja plats. Tours depart daily from the corner of Toompea and Komandandi.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

For a complete list of Tallinn's festivals, visit www.kultuur.info.

Jazzkaar (☎ 611 4405; www.jazzkaar.ee) Jazz greets from around the world converge on Tallinn in mid-April during this excellent two-week festival. Don't miss it if you're in town.

Old Town Days One of Tallinn's biggest annual events, this four-day fest in early June features dancing, concerts, costumed performers and plenty of medieval merrymaking on nearly every corner of Old Town.

Beer Summer (www.ollsummer.ee; 1-5-day ticket 100/300Kr) This extremely popular ale-guzzling, rock-music extravaganza takes place under and around big tents near the Song Festival grounds (Laulaväljak) in early July.

Birgitta Festival (www.filharmonia.ee; per show 150-250Kr) An excellent place to see some of Estonia's vibrant singing tradition, with choral, opera and classical concerts held at the Convent of St Birgitta (p77) over a five-day period in mid-August. Book early; tickets sell out.

Dance Festival (☎ 646 4704; www.saal.ee; per show around 75Kr) Held in the last two weeks in August, this highly recommended contemporary dance festival features troupes from all over Europe and the Baltics. Most performances are held at St Canutus Guild Hall (p88).

Black Nights Film Festival (☎ 631 4640; www.poff.ee) Featuring films and animations from all over the world, this festival brings much life to cold winter nights from late November to early December.

SLEEPING

Tallinn has wide-ranging accommodation, from charming and inviting guesthouses to lavish four-star hotels. Old Town undoubtedly has the top picks, with plenty of atmospheric rooms set in beautifully refurbished medieval houses – though you'll have to pay a premium for them. Midrange and budget hotels are scarcer in Old Town, though apartment rental agencies probably have the best deals. In summer book far in advance: Tallinn's medieval charm is no longer a state secret.

Apartment Rental

Cassandra Apartments (Map pp70-1; ☎ 630 9820; www.cassandra-apartments.com; 7th fl, Tartu maantee 18; per night 1500-6000Kr; ☒) This agency rents bright, modern apartments (with one to three bedrooms), some with saunas and fantastic views. It's located in a high-rise near Old Town.

Erel International (Map pp70-1; ☎ 610 8780; www.erel.ee; Tartu maantee 14; per night from 1450Kr; ☒) Offers dozens of handsomely furnished apartments in Old Town. Airport pick-up included.

Old House Guesthouse (Map pp70-1; ☎ 641 1464; www.oldhouse.ee; Uus tänav 22; apt 850-1900Kr; ☒) Sixteen beautifully furnished apartments are scattered through Old Town.

Rasastra (Map pp70-1; ☎ 661 6291; www.bedbreakfast.ee; Mere puistee 4; per night from 800Kr; ☒) Rasastra can set you up in a private home in central Tallinn. In addition, it arranges rooms in private homes throughout Estonia and the Baltics starting at 275/500Kr per single/double.

Red Group (Map pp70-1; ☎ 620 7877; www.redgroup.ee; Valli 4; per night from 1200Kr; ☒) Specialising in Old Town accommodation, this friendly outfit has a number of modern apartments in excellent locations (some overlook Raekoja plats). Airport pick-up included.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Schlössle Hotel (Map pp70-1; ☎ 699 7700; www.schlossle-hotels.com; Pühavaimu 13/15; s/d from €307/351; ☒) Individually designed rooms are nothing less than breathtaking in this medieval complex in the heart of Old Town. This lovingly restored hotel features details from the original 17th-century building (such as original wooden beams and old stone walls) and its sumptuously decorated rooms are among the country's finest. If you manage to make it out of your room, you can enjoy the fireplace in the antique-laden great hall, the courtyard garden and the historically set restaurant in the cellar.

Budget

Old Town Backpackers Hostel (Map pp70-1; ☎ 517 1337; www.balticbackpackers.com; Uus tänav 14; dm with/without Hl card 200/225Kr; ☒) Young travellers flock to this recently opened hostel in Old Town. The space is small (just one big room of bunk beds), and if you're not up for the party atmosphere, look elsewhere. Bonuses: kitchen and sauna. In the summer the staff arrange excursions out of town.

Euro Hostel (Map pp70-1; ☎ 644 7788; www.eurohostel.ee; 2nd fl, Nunne 2; dm/d 280/650Kr; ☒) Opened in 2005, this hostel has clean but nondescript quarters, shared kitchen use and a fantastic location around the corner from Raekoja plats. It was still undiscovered when we passed through, but will surely emerge as a backpackers' favourite in Old Town.

Tatari Hostel (Map pp66-7; ☎ 646 6287; www.tatarihostel.ee; Tatari tänav 21B; dm/d 250/500Kr; ☒) Just outside Old Town, this fairly new hostel (2002) has clean rooms with tall ceilings on two renovated floors of an old building. It's a friendly place popular with a mix of travellers. Kitchen use and sauna available.

City Guesthouse (Map pp70-1; ☎ 628 2236; www.cityguesthouse.ee; Pärnu maantee 10; dm/s/d/ste 350/500/700/1200Kr; ☒) This recently opened hostel on the edge of Old Town has bland but clean rooms with blue carpeting and fluorescent lights (its office-building days aren't far behind it), and handsome suites with wooden floors and private bathroom (all other rooms have shared bathrooms in the corridor). Kitchen for guest use.

Beata Hostel (Map pp70-1; ☎ 641 1171; Uus tänav 35; dm/s/d 270/555/750Kr; ☒) There's little to recommend this spartan hostel aside from its

excellent location. Dorms feel cluttered, and the smell of cigarettes lingers. Private rooms are a better bet – though all use shared bathrooms. A guest kitchen is available.

Helke (Map pp70-1; ☎ 644 5802; fax 644 5792; Sakala 14; s/d with shared bathroom incl breakfast 450/500Kr; ☒) In an old wooden house 10 minutes' walk from Old Town, this worn favourite has small battered rooms with linoleum floors. It's a friendly place, but be prepared to rough it.

Kämping Kalev (☎ 623 8686; motoklubikalev@hotmail.ee; Kloostrimetsa tee 56a; camp site/caravan 240/300Kr, 2-/4-bed cabins 350/530Kr; ☒ mid-May–mid-Sep; ☒) Near the TV Tower, this small grassy area has secure camp sites, rustic wooden cabins (four-bed cabins are the least claustrophobic) and caravan sites. Meals are available in the pub nearby and there's a shop for self-caterers. Take bus 34A or 38 from Viru väljak in the centre to the Motoklubi stop.

Midrange

Meriton Old Town Hotel (Map pp70-1; ☎ 614 1300; www.meritonhotels.com; Lai 49; s/d €60/75, Bella Vita r €80; ☒) This nicely located hotel has small but comfortable modern rooms, and it's hard to beat this price for en-suite quarters inside Old Town. Worth the extra are the six Bella Vita rooms, which are smarter and roomier (two have balconies).

Reval Hotel Central (Map pp70-1; ☎ 633 9800; www.revalhotels.com; Narva maantee 7; s/d from €70/80; ☒) This large hotel remains the cheapest of the city-centre hotels. Bright, decent-sized rooms and friendly service come without a lick of pretence, and it's a short walk to Old Town.

Dorell (Map pp70-1; ☎ 626 1200; www.dorell.ee; Karu tänav 39; s/d with private bathroom 700/800Kr, with shared bathroom 550/600Kr; ☒) In an ageing building near Old Town, this simple guesthouse has clean and simple carpeted rooms. While it lacks in aesthetics, it's convenient (12 minutes' walk to Old Town), and the prices are reasonable. Sauna available.

Hotell G9 (Map pp70-1; ☎ 626 7100; www.hotellg9.ee; 3rd fl, Gonsiori 9; s/d/tr from €47/45/57; ☒) A few blocks from Old Town, Hotell G9 is a good choice for budget travellers who don't feel like bunking in a hostel. Rooms are simple and clean, with Spartan furnishings. Shared bathrooms; sauna.

Olematu Rüütel (Map pp70-1; ☎ 631 3827; www.hot.ee/olematu.ruytel.ee; Kiriku põik 4a; d with private/shared

bathroom from 800/650Kr; ☒) This small, three-room guesthouse is one of only a few accommodation options on Toompea. The quarters are pretty basic, but for the price and location, you can't beat it. Reservations essential.

Valge Villa (Map pp66-7; ☎ 654 2302; www.white-villa.com; Kännu tänav 26/2; s/d/ste €50/63/83; ☒) This charming, family-run bed and breakfast has pleasant rooms with wooden floors and wood-panelled walls. Rooms get good light, and the owners will make you feel right at home. It's 3km from the centre on trolleybus 2, 3 or 4 to the Tedre stop.

Pirita Top Spa Hotel (Map pp66-7; ☎ 639 8600; www.topspa.ee; Regati puistee 1; s/d from €66/86; ☒) On the seaford, next door to the Olympic Yachting Centre, this large five-storey hotel is Tallinn's premier spa hotel. Rooms are airy and bright with parquet floors and a minimalist design, and some rooms have fine balconies facing the sea (be sure to book the sea-facing 'marine class' rooms). All guests enjoy free access to the pool and sauna, with a full-service spa on site (see p79).

Comfort Hotel Oru (Map pp66-7; ☎ 603 3302; www.oruhotel.ee; Narva maantee 120B; s/d from €65/80; ☒) Set close to Kardiorg Park and Pirita tee, this modern hotel is a decent option for those who don't mind being outside the town centre. Rooms are spacious but uninspiring, with comfortable furnishings and big windows, giving a light, airy feel (some rooms have balconies or saunas). Numerous buses travel Narva maantee to Old Town (19, 29, 35, 44 etc). Sauna available.

Old House Guesthouse (Map pp70-1; ☎ 641 1464; www.oldhouse.ee; Uus tänav 22; dm/s/d incl breakfast 290/450/650Kr, apt 850-1900Kr; ☒) This cosy guesthouse with wooden floors and tasteful furnishings offers warm and friendly hospitality in a superb neighbourhood.

A second branch, the **Old House** (Map pp70-1; Uus tänav 26) up the street functions more as a hostel, and has similarly charming features.

Top End

Three Sisters Hotel (Map pp70-1; ☎ 630 6300; www.threesistershotel.com; Pikk tänav 71; s/d from €310/340; ☒) Offering sumptuous luxury in a lovingly refurbished medieval building, Three Sisters has spacious rooms, each unique but with uniformly gorgeous details, including old-fashioned bathtubs in the rooms, original

wooden beams, tiny balconies and canopy beds. Outside of the rooms, there are plenty of romantic nooks to secrete yourself on chilly nights: the wine cellar, the fireside seats in the lounge, the inviting library, the warmly lit lounge and the lavish restaurant.

Gloria Guesthouse (Map pp70-1; ☎ 644 6950; www.gloria.ee; Müürivahe 2; s/d from 800/1500Kr; ☒) This small guesthouse has colourful rooms featuring lovely Art-Deco details, and some beautiful antique furnishings (the owner is one of Estonia's biggest antique dealers). Artwork and old-fashioned wallpaper gives a nostalgic feel to these charming rooms. Don't miss the exquisite restaurant and wine cellar downstairs.

Olevi Residents (Map pp70-1; ☎ 627 7650; www.olevi.ee; Olevimägi tänav 4; s/d/ste from €77/103/224; ☒) The unique rooms in this medieval dwelling make for a delightful stay. Among the differing features are antique furnishings, arched ceilings, old oil paintings and those beautiful sea views in top-floor rooms.

Baltic Hotel Imperial (Map pp70-1; ☎ 627 4800; www.baltichotelgroup.ee; Nunne 14; s/d from €122/154; ☒) This small luxury hotel has comfortable, modern rooms in an old stone building with loads of character. Other pluses are the atmospheric lounge, the elegant cheese restaurant (with brown-robed waiters), and the adjoining indoor-outdoor pub.

Sokos Hotel Viru (Map pp70-1; ☎ 680 9300; www.viru.ee; Viru väljak 4; s/d from €115/135; ☒) This high-rise hotel outside Old Town isn't much to look at, but inside the rooms are inviting with hardwood floors, colourful furnishings and excellent views over Old Town.

Taanilinna Hotell (Map pp70-1; ☎ 640 6700; www.taanilinna.ee; Us 6; economy tw €95, deluxe d €179, standard s/d €124/137; ☒) Set in a converted 19th-century home, this four-star hotel has a range of wood-floored rooms: from cramped economy rooms to modest but cosy standards, to more spacious, tastefully furnished deluxe rooms with tubs in the bathrooms. The restaurant and wine cellar are equally atmospheric.

Reval Hotel Olümpia (Map pp66-7; ☎ 631 5333; www.revalhotels.com; Liivalaia tänav 33; s/d from 2000/2400Kr; ☒) Built for the 1980 Moscow Olympics, this massive 26-storey hotel has modern, comfortable rooms with meticulous service, loads of amenities and enviable views from the top floors. It lies about 700m south of Old Town.

EATING

Tallinn has an enormous variety of cuisine, from Estonian to Thai with French, Italian, Indian and even Japanese options. Headquartered in Old Town, the restaurant scene has unbeatable atmosphere: whether you want to dazzle a date or just soak up the medieval digs alfresco, you'll find plenty of choices. A word to the wise: it's easy to blow a hole in the eating budget; lunchtime specials offer the best deals.

Restaurants

AFRICAN

African Kitchen (Map pp70-1; ☎ 644 2555; Us tänav 32; meals 70-150Kr; ☒) Featuring authentic African cuisine and a cosy welcoming ambience, African Kitchen has earned many fans since opening in 2005. In summer the upstairs patio is an unbeatable place to linger over a meal, while at night, a festive atmosphere prevails in the loungelike rooms downstairs. Dishes feature flavourings of coconut cream, peanuts and red pepper, and there's a good selection of meat, seafood and vegetarian options.

ESTONIAN

Olde Hansa (Map pp70-1; ☎ 627 9020; Vana Turg 1; meals 75-225Kr) Amid candlelit rooms, with peasant-garbed servers labouring beneath large plates of wild game, Olde Hansa is the place to indulge in a sinfully gluttonous feast. Juniper cheese, forest mushroom soup and exotic meats (such as wild boar and elk) are among the numerous selections available (as well as honey beer). And

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Le Bonaparte (Map pp70-1; ☎ 631 1755; Pikk 43; meals €15-23) The general himself would've been hard-pressed to find fault with this venerable French restaurant in a 17th-century merchant house. The delectable dishes are French with Estonian notes (grilled monkfish wrapped in Parma ham, grilled veal, Hiiumaa eel fillet with eggplant caviar), the service is impeccable and the dining room is restrained but elegant – not unsuitable for captious aristocrats, in other words. There's also a more intimate wine cellar down below and a handsome café (p85) in the foyer.

if the medieval music, communal wooden tables, and thick fragrance of red wine and roast meats sound a bit much, you can take heart – the chefs have done their research in producing historically authentic fare. Besides, where else are you going to see wandering chamber musicians playing 14th-century ballads?

Esti Maja (Map pp70-1; ☎ 645 5252; Lauteri tänav 1; meals 120-185Kr; ☒; 11am-11pm) This fun folksy restaurant is a good place to sample authentic Estonian fare. Traditional favourites such as blood sausage, jellied pork and marinated eel aren't for the timid, but there are plenty of tasty dishes for the unadventurous (salmon, steak etc). There's a small weekday lunch buffet, which is a good place to sample the goods.

Grandma's Place (Map pp70-1; Vanaema Juures; ☎ 626 9080; Rataskaevu tänav 12; meals 140Kr; ☒; noon-10pm Mon-Sat, to 6pm Sun) One of Tallinn's most stylish restaurants in the 1930s, this restaurant still rates as a top choice for Estonian fare. The antique dining room is slightly formal, and the menu has plenty of options aside from pigs' feet.

FRENCH

Egoist (Map pp70-1; ☎ 646 4052; Vene tänav 33; meals 160-360Kr) Another of Tallinn's decadents, Egoist has a small menu showcasing the classics of French *haute cuisine*: duck, lamb, wild trout etc, served with panache in a 1600s-era building.

GEORGIAN

Must Lammas (Map pp70-1; ☎ 644 2031; Sauna tänav 2; meals 110-300Kr; ☒; noon-11pm Mon-Sat, to 6pm Sun) Preceded by a complimentary shot of house schnapps, meals at Must Lammas are a rewarding experience. Hearty, tasty plates of traditional fare go down nicely with the Georgian wine. Try an entrée of *hatšapuri* (cheese bread) or *dolmas* (stuffed vine leaves) before diving into a sizzling kebab.

INDIAN

Elevant (Map pp70-1; ☎ 631 3132; Vene tänav 5; meals 120-180Kr) Boasting a wide selection of vegetarian dishes and expertly prepared Indian cuisine, Elevant is an attractive spot for lingering over a meal. The winding wrought-iron staircase, airy furnishings and eclectic rhythms (bossa nova, progressive sitar etc) add to the charm.

Café VS (Map pp70-1; ☎ 627 2627; Pärnu maantee 28; meals 180Kr) The velvet walls, coloured lights and profusion of polished metal may not be a setting you associate with chicken tikka masala, but in fact, this popular bar and late-night spot serves a tasty assortment of Indian cuisine. It's trashy and fun late at night – and you can watch the chefs through the glass wall in the back room.

INTERNATIONAL & FUSION

Angel (Map pp70-1; ☎ 641 6880; Sauna 1; meals 65-90Kr; ☒; noon-1am Sun-Tue, to 4am Wed-Sat) One of Tallinn's most ebullient and diverse crowds gathers at this stylish 2nd-floor restaurant just off the beaten path. Exposed brickwork, rich woodwork and a trim lounge-like feel provide a warm setting to the small but eclectic menu (salads, pastas and an unbeatable cheeseburger). Best of all, the kitchen stays open late – perfect for those craving chicken curry at 3am some Wednesday night. Adjoining the space downstairs is Tallinn's best gay nightclub, Angel (p87).

Gloria (Map pp70-1; ☎ 644 6950; Müürivahe 2; meals 260-380Kr) Mick Jagger, Pope John Paul II and Jacques Chirac have all eaten here (though presumably not together). What they enjoyed, you can, too: a sumptuous pre-WWII dining room, professional service and savoury dishes such as Estonian lamb with vegetables in puff pastry, blanched Norwegian salmon and duck with mango and raisins. The largest wine cellar in the Baltics is just downstairs (see p86).

Pegasus (Map pp70-1; ☎ 631 4040; Harju 1; meals 123-325Kr; ☒; 8am-1am Mon-Fri, 11am-2am Sat) Amid one of the most beautifully designed spaces in town, Pegasus serves eclectic, award-winning dishes such as pan-fried sea bass with truffle sausage and tiger prawn curry, with risottos, salads and grilled meats rounding out the menu. The breakfasts are among Tallinn's best (eggs Benedict, muesli, smoothies), and by night the party people converge. Upstairs rooms (reached via the curving staircase) offer a vibe that's pure lounge, with an attractive crowd checking each other out over brightly coloured cocktails.

Sisalik (Map pp70-1; ☎ 646 6542; Pikk 30; meals 85-240Kr; ☒; noon-11pm Mon-Sat) Featuring a diverse Mediterranean menu and a handsome interior, Sisalik is a welcome newcomer to the dining scene. Spanish tapas, grilled tuna,

and gnocchi with pesto and cherry tomatoes are among the selections.

Õ (Map pp70-1; ☎ 661 6150; Mere puistee 6e; meals 135-340Kr; 🕒 noon-midnight Mon-Sat, 1-10pm Sun) Named after a vowel that exists in few other languages, Õ has certainly carved a unique space in Tallinn's culinary world. The dining room, with its wild chandelier-sculptures and grey and white overtones, is an understated work of art – no less so than the plates of fresh seafood dishes, featuring inventive touches and Asian accents.

St Michael Cheese Restaurant (Map pp70-1; ☎ 627 4845; Nunne 14; meals 260-380Kr; 🕒 5pm-midnight) A cheese-lover's paradise, this warmly lit, cosy restaurant features cassock-wearing waiters serving plates of Chateaubriand with feta, basil-and-cheese stuffed rockfish and seafood wok (for the non-cheese-lovers) amid medieval decor.

Charital (Map pp70-1; ☎ 623 7379; Kloostri tee 6; meals 150-350Kr) This lavish dining room boasts a superb setting along the Pirita River (and a fairly crusty clientele). Traditional Euro fare is the norm here, but the lobsters are tops. Upstairs is a more laid-back café, a good stop-off after boating along the river (see p78).

ITALIAN

Bocca (Map pp70-1; ☎ 641 2610; Olevimägi 9; meals 140-340Kr) Sophistication and style don't detract from the fresh, delectable cuisine served at this much-lauded restaurant. Creative dishes such as artichoke soup with grilled scallops, and baked monkfish in creamy fennel sauce with black truffles are matched to a strong wine list. Bocca also has a cosy lounge and bar, where Tallinn's A-list gathers over evening cocktails.

Controvento (Map pp70-1; ☎ 644 0470; Katriina käik; meals 130Kr; 🕒 noon-11.30pm) Hidden away on Tallinn's most atmospheric alleyway, this longtime favourite serves nicely prepared Italian dishes in a pleasant old-fashioned setting.

JAPANESE

Sushi House (Map pp70-1; ☎ 641 1900; Rataskaevu 16; meals 120-185Kr; 🕒 11am-11pm) Boasting a surprising combination of 21st-century chic and 14th-century aesthetics, Sushi House has style in spades. It also serves tender fresh sushi and sashimi as well as *yakitori*

(grilled meats), stir-fries, *ramen* (noodles) and some artfully arranged salads. Old wooden rafters, exposed brickwork and other medieval details add to the allure – as does its supposedly haunted past.

RUSSIAN

Troika (Map pp70-1; ☎ 627 6245; Raekoja plats 15; meals from 115Kr) Tallinn's best Russian restaurant is an experience in itself, with wild hunting-themed murals, live accordion music, and an old-style country tavern upstairs. Even if you don't opt for a plate of delicious *pelmeni* (dumplings) or a bowl of heavenly sweet borscht, make sure you stop in for an ice-cold glass of vodka. It's a charming place.

TEX-MEX

Cantina Carramba (Map pp66-7; ☎ 601 3431; Weizenbergi tänav 20a; meals from 100-175Kr) Boasting a delightful pueblo-esque colour scheme and a tasty selection of dishes, Cantina Carramba is ideally placed for a bit of indulgence after a walk in leafy Kadriorg Park. Burritos, fajitas and salads go down oh-so-nicely with the margaritas and Coronas.

Texas Honky Tonk (Map pp70-1; ☎ 631 1755; Pikk 43; meals 80-150Kr; 🕒 closed Sun) Decked out like an old Texas saloon – complete with creaky wooden floors and the smell of sawdust in the air – this lively restaurant is the best place in Old Town to load up on tacos, burritos, pork ribs and other dishes you wouldn't expect to find this side of the Mason-Dixon Line. Kitschy ambience and a fun crowd.

THAI

Villa Thai (Map pp66-7; ☎ 641 9347; Vilmsi 6; meals 95-250Kr) Villa Thai has a sublimely decorated interior: the use of bamboos, dark woods and richly coloured fabrics is in perfect harmony with the nicely prepared Thai and tandoori specialities.

TURKISH

Sultan (Map pp70-1; ☎ 644 4666; Väike-Karja 8; meals 70-155Kr) Tasty little platters of Turkish dishes (with Iberian accents) are the specialities at this airy restaurant. Lamb is the focus, though vegetarian options are available. Following the meal, retreat to the downstairs den for a bit of hookah action.

TOP 10 CAFÉS

Forget Paris and Rome – Tallinn's Old Town is so packed with cafés that you can spend your whole trip wandering wide-eyed and jittery from one charming, espresso-scented coffee house to the next. These warm and cosy settings are fine spots to retreat to with a new friend on a chilly afternoon; or if the setting inspires you, have a go at that murder mystery you've been aiming to write.

- **Kehrwieder** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 644 0818; Saiakäiak 1) This little cellar of a café is a perfect spot to stretch out on a couch, read by lamplight and bump your head on those old arched ceilings.
- **Tristan ja Isolde** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 644 8759; Raekoja plats; 🕒 8am-11pm) A java-lovers' dream, this café built into the Town Hall features heavenly scents and a splendid medieval setting.
- **Le Bonaparte** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 646 4444; Pikk tänav 45; 🕒 8am-10pm) Flaky croissants, moist strawberry truffle cake, warm *pain au chocolat* – these are just a few of the reasons why Le Bonaparte ranks as Tallinn's best patisserie. The coffee and tea selections are also splendid, as is the medieval setting in which to enjoy it all. For more indulgence, try dining at the restaurant (p82).
- **Café-Chocolaterie** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 641 8061; Vene tänav 6; 🕒 10am-11pm) Nestled inside a tiny courtyard in Old Town, this inviting café seems like a hideaway at Grandmother's place. Filled with antiques, it also has delectable handmade chocolates – impossible to resist.
- **Café Anglais** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 644 2160; Raekoja plats 14; 🕒 11am-11pm) A favourite with Tallinn's eccentrics and expats, this elegant café has a vaguely Parisian vibe and a delicious assortment of homemade cakes, coffees and light meals (try the warm salads). Despite the location, it somehow eludes the tour-bussing masses.
- **Spirit** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 661 5151; Mere puistee 6e) This very inviting café and lounge is awash with rich textures: white stonework on the back wall, plush carpets, marble tabletops, a fire in the fireplace, and some poor creature's antlers on the wall. Like a page torn from a fashion mag, Spirit draws the young and fashionable who hold court here regularly. The entrance is at the back.
- **Moskva** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 640 4694; www.moskva.ee; Vabaduse väljak 10; 🕒 9am-midnight Mon-Thu, 9am-4am Fri, 11am-4am Sat, 11am-midnight Sun) An attractive mix of Estonians, Russians and a few straggling out-of-towners gather at this *tres chic* café and nightspot on the edge of Old Town. In addition to cocktails and cappuccinos, Moskva serves *bliny* (small pancakes served with various fillings), salads and other light fare. The upstairs lounge is a slightly swankier place to imbibe, with DJs spinning to young crowds most weekends (cover around 75Kr).
- **Café Peterson** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 662 2195; Narva maantee 15; 🕒 9am-11pm Mon-Sat, 10am-11pm Sun) If you want a dash of culture with your style, head to this charming café outside Old Town. A mix of local residents and students from neighbouring Tallinn Pedagogical University gather here. The café has an art gallery with colourful openings throughout the year, and there's live piano music some nights.
- **Sweet Tooth** (Map pp70-1; Maiasmokk; ☎ 646 4066; Pikk tänav 16; 🕒 8am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun) Open since 1864, the city's oldest café still draws a crowd of greying admirers who appreciate the classic décor and pre-WWII feel. The pastries may taste like they were made on opening day, but who cares – the ambience is fantastic!
- **Narva Kohvik** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 660 1786; Narva maantee 10; 🕒 10am-8pm Mon-Sat, to 6pm Sun) Travel back in time to the days of Brezhnev at this unintentionally kitsch coffee house and restaurant outside Old Town. Serving up *stolovaya* (cafeteria) favourites such as sausages, borscht and *plov* (meat and vegetable pilaf), Kohvik Narva offers brusque service, faded brown décor and a heavy dollop of unmitigated Soviet nostalgia. In short, it's the perfect place for brooding when life (or your entrée) has you down. Meals start at 40Kr.

Cafés

See boxed text, p85, for a list of our favourite 10 places to get jazzed. If you'd rather visit 11 or 12, try these instead.

Bogapott (Map pp70-1; ☎ 631 3181; Pikk jalg 9; ☎ 10am-6pm) One of few cafés in Upper Town, Bogapott serves coffee, pastries and fresh sandwiches amid medieval gloom. There's a pleasant courtyard out front, and an art shop and ceramics studio next door.

Café Boulevard (Map pp66-7; ☎ 631 5891; Reval Hotel Olümpia, Liivalaia 33; ☎ 24hr) Situated in Reval Hotel Olümpia and open all hours, this bright and cheery café/patisserie is the place of choice for insomniacs and late-night partygoers. The ambience here is late-Soviet, the crowd is hyped, and the pies and cakes are pure decadence.

Quick Eats

Kompressor (Map pp70-1; ☎ 646 4210; Rataskaevu tänav 3; meals from 45Kr; ☎ 11am-1am Mon-Thu, to 2am Fri-Sun) This popular student hang-out is known for its inexpensive pancakes. By night, the casual but colourful ambience makes a nice detour for a drink.

Pizza Americana (Map pp70-1; ☎ 644 8837; Müürivahe 2; pizzas from 90Kr) Thick, tasty pizzas of every possible permutation are on offer here, including several vegetarian and seafood options. Red booths, blue walls and creamy white milkshakes will take you to the land of Uncle Sam.

Peeetri Pizza (pizzas from 80Kr; Mere puistee Map pp70-1; ☎ 661 6181; Mere puistee 6; ☎ 11am-10pm; Pärnu maantee Map pp70-1; ☎ 641 8203; Pärnu maantee 22)

This chain opened when Estonia broke free from the USSR and so was practically synonymous with freedom. Pizzas are thin-crust and a bit flimsy, but the outfit remains very popular with locals. They also deliver.

Self-Catering

Load up on provisions at the city's best grocery stores.

Tallinna Kaubamaja (Map pp70-1; Gonsiori tänav 2; ☎ 9am-10pm) Inside Viru Keskus.

Stockmann Kaubamaja (Map pp70-1; Liivalaia 53;

☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, to 9pm Sat & Sun)

Rimi (Map pp70-1; Aia tänav 7; ☎ 8am-10pm)

DRINKING

You've probably heard by now that Tallinn has pretty vibrant nightlife. It's also diverse: whether you seek a romantic wine cellar, an

uber-chic locals-only lounge or a raucous pub full of pint-wielding punters, you'll find plenty to choose from.

Von Krahli Teater Baar (Map pp70-1; ☎ 626 9096; Rataskaevu tänav 12; live music cover charge 50-75Kr; ☎ noon-1am Sun-Thu, to 3am Fri & Sat) One of the city's best bars, Von Krahli hosts live bands and the occasional fringe play, and it's a great place to meet some of Tallinn's more interesting locals.

Leivist Väljas (Map pp70-1; ☎ 507 7372; Olevimägi 12; ☎ 3pm-3am Sun-Thu, 3pm-6am Fri & Sat) Inside this cellar bar you'll find broken furniture, cheap booze and a refreshingly motley crew of punks, has-beens and anyone else who strays from the well-trodden tourist path.

Stereo (Map pp70-1; ☎ 631 0549; Harju 6) White vinyl is the texture of choice at this painfully stylish club on the edge of Old Town. By night this sleek cubelike interior becomes the backdrop to DJs spinning a mix of global tunes to crowds of style mavens and their poseur friends. Love it or hate it, Stereo is worth checking out – just don't forget your iPod and sunglasses.

A few other stylish places where the beautiful people tend to flock include Spirit (p85), Moskva (p85), Bocca (p84) and Pegasus (p83).

Depeche Mode (Map pp70-1; ☎ 644 2350; Nunne 4; ☎ noon-4am) For fans of the '80s New Wave band, this is liable to be the holy grail of drinking establishments. The bar itself is small and fairly nondescript – aside from the DM played in heavy (some would say 'endless') rotation. Ask the owner about the time the Essex lads stopped in for a drink back in 2001.

Gloria Wine Cellar (Map pp70-1; ☎ 644 8846; Müürivahe 2) This mazelike wine cellar and tapas restaurant has a number of nooks and crannies where you can secret yourself with a date and/or a good bottle of Shiraz. The dark wood, antique furnishings and flickering candles add to the allure.

Vinoteek V & S (Map pp70-1; ☎ 660 1818; Mere puistee 6e; ☎ 2pm-midnight Sun-Thu, to 1am Fri & Sat) Boasting fabulous views over Tallinn, this unpretentious wine bar is another enticing setting for a glass (or a bottle).

Scottish Club (Map pp70-1; ☎ 641 1666; Uus 31; ☎ noon-11pm Mon-Sat) Featuring an extensive whisky menu and plenty of pub fare, this cosy bar and restaurant is a fine place to sit by the fire with single malt or even haggis

(sheep offal) in hand. A laid-back crowd meets on the manicured garden terrace in warmer weather.

St Patrick's (Map pp70-1; ☎ 641 8173; Suur Karja 8) One of the dozen or so of its ilk, this lively wooden bar has plenty of beer to go round and the comfy lounge in the adjoining room attracts a surprising number of Estonians. Expect plenty of tourists in the warmer months.

Club Havana (Map pp70-1; ☎ 640 6630; Pikk 11; ☎ closed Sun) A few locals and many tourists gather at this Latin-themed bar near Raekoja plats. On weekends you'll find dancing in the back room, deafening music and a raucous, inebriated crowd. For a more local, but no less sedate experience, check out Cafe VS (p83).

ENTERTAINMENT

It's a small capital as capitals go, but there's never a dull moment in Tallinn, whether in a wild club, laid-back bar or concert hall. Buy tickets for concerts and main events at **Piletilevi** (www.piletilevi.ee) and its central locations, including inside Viru Keskus (p89). Events are posted on city centre walls, advertised on flyers found in shops and cafés, and listed in newspapers as well as in *Tallinn in Your Pocket*.

Nightclubs

Club Hollywood (Map pp70-1; ☎ 627 4770; www.club-hollywood.ee; Vana-Posti tänav 8; admission 50-100Kr; ☎ 10pm-5am Wed-Sat) A multilevel emporium, this one draws the biggest crowds. Plenty of tourists and Tallinn's young party crowd mix it up.

Terrarium (Map pp70-1; ☎ 661 4721; www.terrarium.ee; Sadama 6; admission 50-100Kr; ☎ 10pm-4am Wed-Sat) A more down-to-earth club experience is ensured here, with less attitude than in the posher Old Town clubs. Nevertheless, DJs still kick out the disco and the 20-something crowd laps it up. The outdoor terrace is a big draw – anything can happen in the little pool there.

Privé (Map pp70-1; ☎ 631 0545; Harju tänav 6; admission 100-200Kr; ☎ 10pm-6am Wed-Sat) Tallinn's most elite club (note the deep-red curtains and oxygen bar) gets rowdiest on Saturdays. Despite the high prices, good DJs attract a beautiful and foreign crowd.

Bon Bon (Map pp70-1; ☎ 661 6080; Mere puistee 6e; admission 130-150Kr; ☎ 11pm-4am Fri & Sat) With

enormous chandeliers and a portrait of Bacchus, the god of decadence, overlooking the dance floor, Bon Bon is a recent favourite on the club circuit. Friday-night Brazilian festivals are the draw.

Be sure to check out dance parties at Moskva (p85) as well.

Gay & Lesbian Venues

Angel (Map pp70-1; ☎ 641 6880; www.clubangel.ee; Sauna 1; admission 75-125Kr; ☎ 10pm-5am Wed-Sat) Tallinn's best gay club, Angel packs a festive, celebratory crowd. There's a balcony overlooking the dance floor, a men-only dark room and plenty of fine tunes pumping over the dance floor.

X-Baar (Map pp70-1; ☎ 692 9266; Sauna tänav 1; admission free; ☎ 2pm-1am) The only place in Old Town flying the rainbow flag, X-Baar is Tallinn's oldest gay bar. The minuscule dance floor comes alive late on weekends.

G-Punkt (Map pp70-1; ☎ 688 0747; Pärnu maantee 23; admission free; ☎ 6pm-1am Sun-Tue & Thu, to 4am Wed, Fri & Sat) Unsigned and hidden in an alley behind Pärnu maantee, this club recalls the secrecy of old Eastern European gay bars. Once inside, however, you'll join the cosy atmosphere, with a steady stream of regulars holding down the small dance floor until late most nights.

Cinemas

Check out what's on at www.superkinod.ee. Films are shown in their original language, subtitled in Estonian and Russian. Tickets cost around 100Kr.

Kino Sõprus (Map pp70-1; ☎ 644 1919; Vana-Posti 8) Set in a magnificent Stalin-era theatre, this art-house cinema has an excellent repertoire of European, local and independent productions.

Kinomaja (Map pp70-1; ☎ 646 4164; Uus tänav 3) Another great art-house cinema.

Coca-Cola Plaza (Map pp70-1; Hobujaama tänav 5) Supermodern 11-screen cinema playing the latest Hollywood releases.

Theatre & Dance

Tallinn has several companies staging productions (including translations of Western plays) from September until the end of May. Everything is in Estonian. A useful website for listings is www.concert.ee.

Estonia Theatre & Concert Hall (Map pp70-1; theatre ☎ 626 0215, concert hall 614 7760, opera 683 1201;

www.concert.ee & www.opera.ee; Estonia puistee 4; box office ☎ noon-7pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat) The premier venue for classical concerts, theatre and opera, this hall also hosts some big-name performers.

City Theatre (Linnateater; Map pp70-1; ☎ 665 0800; www.linnateater.ee; Lai tänav 23) The most beloved theatre in town always stages something memorable. Watch for its summer plays on an outdoor stage.

Estonian Drama Theatre (Map pp70-1; ☎ 680 5555; Pärnu maantee 5) The Estonian Drama Theatre stages mainly classical plays and tends to avoid contemporary fare.

Estonian Puppet Theatre (Esti Nukuteater; Map pp70-1; ☎ 667 9555; www.nukuteater.ee; Lai tänav 1) Stages lively and colourful performances – not just for kids!

Von Krahl Theatre (Map pp70-1; ☎ 626 9090; www.vonkrahle.ee; Rataskaevu tänav 10) Known for its experimental and fringe productions.

St Canutus Guild Hall (Map pp70-1; ☎ 646 4704; www.saal.ee; Pikk tänav 20) Tallinn's temple of modern dance also hosts the rare classical dance performance.

Live Music

For major concerts, see what's on at the **Estonia Concert Hall** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 614 7760; www.concert.ee; Estonia puistee 4).

City Concert Hall (Linnahall; Map pp66-7; ☎ 641 1500; www.linnahall.ee; Mere puistee 20) Housed in the rather ugly 4200-seat monolith by the harbour, Linnahall hosts pop concerts.

Chamber, organ, solo and a few other smaller-scale concerts are held at several halls around town, such as the Town Hall (p69) and the Brotherhood of the Blackheads (p73), which has concerts almost nightly.

St Nicholas' Church & Concert Hall (Map pp70-1; ☎ 631 4330; Niguliste tänav 3) This church has incredible acoustics, and holds organ and chamber-music concerts at 4pm on Saturdays and Sundays.

Sport

A Le Coq Arena (Map pp66-7; ☎ 627 9940; Asula tänav 4c) About 1.5km southwest of town, this sparkling, newly refurbished arena is home to Tallinn's football team FC Flora, Estonia's largest sporting club. If you have the chance, don't miss a lively match.

Kalev Stadium (☎ 644 5171; Juhkentali tänav 12) Basketball ranks as one of Estonia's most

passionately watched games, and the best national tournaments are held in this stadium just south of town.

SHOPPING

Old Town is packed with shops and boutiques selling Estonian-made handicrafts. You'll see leather-bound books, ceramics, jewellery, silverware, hand-blown glassware, objects carved out of limestone, and traditional knitwear. You'll also find a plethora of antique stores selling Soviet memorabilia, old Russian icons and other fantastic curiosities. In addition to that battered airman's jumpsuit, don't forget to bring back a bottle of Vana Tallinn (local liqueur).

Antiques

Whether you're looking for that brass pocket watch with Stalin's profile, the Lenin-head belt buckle or perhaps an old marching uniform, you'll find plenty of Soviet nostalgia buried in Tallinn's antique shops. There are tons of other gems waiting to be unearthed (gramophones, furniture, silverware); you just have to dive in. These are some of our favourite spots:

Antique, Military & Collections (Map pp70-1; ☎ 641 2606; Lai 4; ☎ 10am-6pm)

Antik & Kunst (Map pp70-1; ☎ 644 0923; Dunkri tänav 9; ☎ 11am-6pm)

Antik (Map pp70-1; ☎ 631 4725; Raekoja plats 11; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat)

Antikvaar (Map pp70-1; ☎ 641 8269; Rataskaevu 20; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat)

Handicrafts & Artwork

Madelī Käsitöö (Map pp70-1; ☎ 620 9272; Väike-Karja 1; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat & Sun) This small but delightful shop features a unique selection of regional handicrafts, such as slippers from Muhu.

Domini Canes (Map pp70-1; ☎ 644 5286; Kateriina Käik; ☎ 11am-6pm) The ancient craft of glass-making is kept alive at this lovely gallery workshop. Vases, stemware and stained-glass works are for sale.

Kateriina Gild (Map pp70-1; ☎ 641 8054; Kateriina Käik; ☎ 11am-6pm) Next door to Domini, this row of workshops is a great place to browse. You'll find ceramics, leather-bound books, quilts and loads more.

Lühikese Jala Galerii (Map pp70-1; ☎ 631 3181; Lühikese jalg 6; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat & Sun) Fantastic jewellery, some of which

BOUTIQUES

Tallinn's designers have emerged from the postindependence lull and are slowly carving a niche for themselves in Europe's fashion scene. To see what's hot in the Estonian design world, visit the following stores:

Nu Nordik (Map pp70-1; ☎ 644 9392; Vabaduse Väljak 8; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 11am-6pm Sat) Unafraid of the avant-garde, this small boutique has youthful, edgier designs. It's a fun place to browse.

Ivo Nikkolo (Map pp70-1; ☎ 644 4828; Suur-Karja 14; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat, to 4pm Sun) Stylish but staid, Ivo Nikkolo has neat, trim designs made with high-quality fabrics. Nikkolo is one of Estonia's most successful young designers.

Monton (☎ 660 1847; Viru Väljak 4; ☎ 9am-9pm) Features a diverse collection of elegant, versatile designs. Like Ivo Nikkolo, Monton keeps things pretty classic, for women as well as men (the suits here are nicely cut). Inside Viru Keskus shopping mall.

Bastion (Map pp70-1; ☎ 644 1555; Viru 12; ☎ 10-7pm Mon-Fri, 11am-6pm Sat, 11am-4pm Sun) One of Estonia's most successful fashion houses, Bastion has a small but splashy women's collection, aimed towards an older market.

Hoochi Mama (☎ 641 8866; Viru Väljak 4; ☎ 11am-8pm Mon-Thu, 11am-10pm Fri & Sat, noon-6pm Sun) Not just for halter-topped hotties from the Bronx, this youthful boutique has plenty of clubwear and other youthful fashions that run the gamut between the wild, the stylish and the indecent. Inside Viru Keskus shopping mall.

resemble art pieces. There are also ceramics, textiles and glassware.

Navitrolla Galerii (Map pp70-1; ☎ 631 3716; Pikk jalg 7; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat & Sun) Find Navitrolla's fanciful paintings as original artworks or on T-shirts.

Bogapott (Map pp70-1; ☎ 631 3181; Pikk jalg 9; ☎ 10am-6pm) Sip coffee (p86) while watching the potters at work.

If that ceramic cup wasn't quite what you had in mind, take a browse around Tallinn's art galleries; see boxed text, p77, for recommendations.

Markets & Second-Hand Stores

Knit Market (Map pp70-1; Müürivahe & Viru; ☎ 9am-5pm) Along the Old Town wall, there are a dozen or so vendors selling their handmade linens, scarves, sweaters and socks.

Lai (Map pp70-1; ☎ 641 1743; Lai tänav 10; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat) The only second-hand store in Old Town, this funky place occasionally has some good finds – though you'll have to dig. If you collect records, don't miss the back room.

Shopping Malls

Estonia has them, too.

Viru Keskus (Map pp70-1; ☎ 610 1400; Viru Väljak 4; ☎ 9am-9pm) Tallinn's shiniest, newest mall lies just outside Old Town.

Tallinna Kaubamaja (Map pp70-1; ☎ 667 3100; Gonsiori 2; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-7pm Sun)

Stockmann Kaubamaja (Map pp70-1; ☎ 633 9539; Liivalaia 53; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, to 8pm Sun)

GETTING THERE & AWAY

This section concentrates on transport between Tallinn and other places in the Baltics. For listings of some useful travel agencies, see p69.

Air

For information on international flights (including helicopters to Helsinki), see p393. **Tallinn Airport** (☎ 605 8888; www.tallinn-airport.ee) is 3km southeast of Old Town on Tartu maantee.

Estonia has limited domestic routes. **Avies Air** (☎ 605 8022; www.avies.ee) flies from Tallinn to Kuressaare on Saaremaa (45 minutes) once or twice daily from Sunday to Friday. It also flies once or twice daily to Kärda on Hiiumaa (30 minutes).

Boat

See p400 for information about the many services available between Tallinn and Helsinki or Stockholm. Tallinn's seapassenger terminal (Map pp66-7) is at the end of Sadama, about 1km northeast of Old Town. Trams 1 and 2 and buses 3, 4 and 8 go to the Linnahall stop, by the Statoil Petrol Station (Map pp66-7), five minutes' walk from terminals A, B and C. Terminal D is at the end of Lootsi tänav,

ISLAND ESCAPE

Who says you can't relive your favourite scenes from *The Blue Lagoon* in Nordic Estonia? Sure, it's no Bora Bora, but the country offers its share of lovely shoreline and remote island landscapes. An excellent gateway from Tallinn is to the idyllic settings of Aegna and Naissaar islands.

Tiny **Aegna**, just 3 sq km, has been populated for centuries by local fishermen and, from 1689, postal workers who operated mail boats from there to Sweden via Finland. During Soviet times it was an off-limits military base, but since the 1990s Tallinners have been building summerhouses there or just using it for a quick escape into remote nature. There are some military remnants, an old church and cemetery, remains of a medieval village and long stretches of nearly always deserted beach.

Naissaar, much larger at 44 sq km, has an even livelier history, thick forests (covering 85% of the island), and even a boulder with a circumference of nearly 27m! There's a 19th-century cemetery for English sailors from the Crimean and Russo-Swedish wars, which attests to the island's military history. In fact, Naissaar has been a bulwark for defending the capital since the Great Northern War. A railway was even built before WWI for a speedier build-up of armaments. Curiously, from 1917 to 1918, tsarist troops took the island and tried to form their own government. Soviet military traces remain (the island was closed until 1995), with an old army village, gun batteries, empty mines and deep-sea mine anchors. There are dreamy stretches of unblemished beach and two nature trails: south takes you to historical sights, such as memorials, military ruins, a wooden church from 1856, a cemetery for English sailors from the Crimean (1854–55) and Russo-Swedish (1808–09) wars; north leads through forests, mires and past large 'erratic' boulders. Just up the hill from the dock is the Nature Park Centre where you can get lots of info, a warming coffee and a meal.

The Tallinn Tourist Office (p68) can suggest accommodation on both islands, or contact the **Aegna Hostel** (☎ 510 3653; d from 250Kr). To stay at Naissaar's **Männiku Küla** (camp site 25Kr, s 100–200Kr, d 200–400Kr) or book tours (100Kr) of Naissaar, contact **Naissaare Reisid** (☎ 639 8000).

MS Monika (☎ 5657 7021; www.saartereisid.ee; round trip to Aegna adult/concession 50/35Kr, round trip to Naissaar adult/concession 180/120Kr) has two boats daily (three on Sunday) from Tallinn's Linnahall terminal to Aegna (60 minutes). If you come just for the day you'll have eight hours on Aegna.

The boat to Naissaar (60 minutes) also leaves from the Linnahall terminal, and it sails twice daily on Saturdays and Sundays only. If you're day-tripping, you'll have five hours on the island.

Schedules change seasonally, so check the website for the latest.

although there is better access from Ahtri tänav. A taxi between the centre and any of the terminals will cost about 45Kr.

For yachting information, yacht hire and activities contact the Tallinn Olympic Yachting Centre (p77).

Bus

Buses to places within 40km or so of Tallinn depart from the platform next to the **Central Train Station** (Balti Jaam; Map pp70–1). You can get information and timetables from **Harjumaa Liinid** (☎ 641 8218).

For detailed bus information and advance tickets for all other destinations, go to the **Central Bus Station** (Autobussijaam; ☎ 680 0900; www.bussireisid.ee; Lastekodu tänav 46), about 2km southeast of Old Town. Tram 2 or 4 will take you there.

For information regarding bus travel to other countries, see p396. For travel within the Baltic countries see also p404.

Here's the low-down on daily services from Tallinn to other Estonian cities.

Haapsalu 65Kr to 80Kr, 1½ hours, more than 20 buses.

Kärdla 140Kr to 160Kr, 4½ hours, three to five buses.

Kuressaare 170Kr to 195Kr, 4½ hours, eight to 10 buses.

Narva 85Kr to 110Kr, four hours, 15 buses.

Pärnu 80Kr to 115Kr, two hours, more than 20 buses.

Tartu 80Kr to 110Kr, 2½ to 3½ hours, about 30 buses.

Võru 85Kr to 110Kr, 3½ to 4½ hours, eight to 10 buses.

Car & Motorcycle

There are 24-hour fuel stations in the city and on major roads leading to and from Tallinn. The Pärnu maantee Neste (petrol station) has a car-repair service.

Car hire in Tallinn is pricey, around 1000Kr a day. You can hire cars in Tartu or Pärnu instead and save a bundle. The tourist offices in both of those cities have extensive lists of rental agencies.

If you prefer to rent in Tallinn, try one of the following:

Avis (www.avis.ee) Liivalaia tänav (Map pp66–7; ☎ 667 1515; Liivalaia tänav 13/15); Tallinn Airport (☎ 605 8222; Tallinn Airport)

Budget Tallinn Airport (☎ 605 8600; www.budget.ee; Tallinn Airport)

Hertz Tallinn Airport (☎ 605 8923; www.hertz.ee; Tallinn Airport)

R-Rent Tihasse (Map pp66–7; ☎ 605 8929; www.rrent.ee; Tihasse 34) From 500Kr daily.

Sixt Tallinn Airport (☎ 605 8148; www.sixt.ee; Tallinn Airport)

Tulika Rent Tihasse (Map pp66–7 ☎ 612 0012; www.tulika.ee; Tihasse 34) From 600Kr daily.

Train

The **Central Train Station** (Balti Jaam; Map pp70–1; ☎ 615 6851; www.edel.ee; Toompuiestee 35) is on the northwestern edge of Old Town, a short walk from Raekoja plats, or three stops on tram 1 or 2, north from the tram stop at the southern end of Mere puiestee.

The Central Train Station has three ticket areas: the main hall, for travel around Estonia; upstairs, for international tickets; and the separate *elektriraudtee* ticket office, next to the train platforms (and just to the right of the R-kiosk) for *elektrirong* (electric trains) within the Tallinn area.

Most Estonians think train travel is antiquated and old-fashioned, hence domestic routes are pretty limited. Here are some places you can still reach by train:

Narva 75Kr, 3½ hours, one daily.

Paldiski 16Kr, 1¼ hours, 10 daily.

Pärnu 50Kr, three hours, two daily.

Tartu 80Kr, 2½ hours, four daily.

Valga 115Kr, 5½ hours, one daily.

Viljandi 65Kr, three hours, two daily.

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airport

Bus 2 runs every 20 to 30 minutes from terminals A and D at the **Airport-bus Station** (Map pp70–1) via Gonsiori tänav in the centre. From the airport it's just five bus stops to the centre. A taxi to or from the airport should cost about 60Kr.

Public Transport

Tallinn has an excellent network of buses, trams and trolleybuses that usually run from 6am to midnight. Buy *piletid* (tickets) from street kiosks (adult/concession 10/7Kr) or from the driver (15Kr). Validate your ticket using the hole puncher inside

the vehicle (or face a 600Kr fine). All public transport timetables are posted on www.tallinn.ee.

Taxi

Taxis are plentiful in Tallinn. Rides are metered and should cost from 5.50Kr to 7Kr per kilometre. However, if you merely hail one on the street, there's a fair chance you'll be overcharged. To save yourself the trouble, order a taxi by phone. Operators speak English; they'll tell you the car number (license plate) and estimated arrival time (usually five to 10 minutes).

Here are some good choices:

Kiisu Takso (☎ 655 0777; per km 5.50Kr)

Krooni Takso (☎ 638 1111; per km 5.50Kr)

Linnataks (☎ 644 2442; per km 7Kr) It also has vehicles for the disabled.

PEDI-CAB

Throughout central Tallinn, the ecologically sound **Velotakso** (☎ 508 8810) offers rides in egg-shaped vehicles run by pedal power and enthusiasm. Rates are 35Kr for anywhere within Old Town.

Train

Few of the suburban rail services from the central station in Tallinn go to places of much interest in the city. The one line that may be useful heads south to Nõmme, Pääskula and Laagri. There are approximately 40 trains along this line from about 5.30am to midnight. Most continue beyond the city bounds to Keila, Paldiski or Kloogaraanna, but some only go as far as Pääskula.

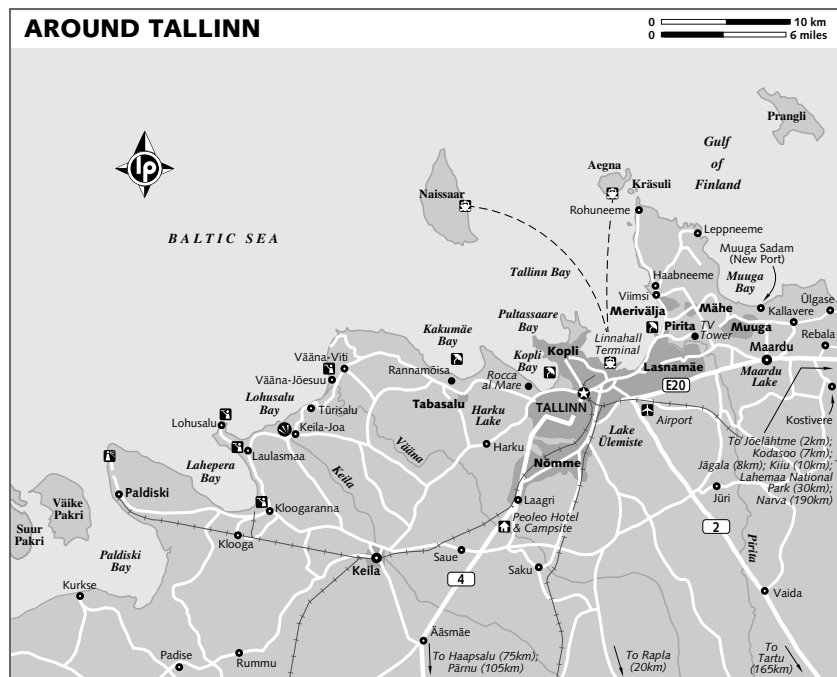
AROUND TALLINN

Countryside and unspoiled coast are not far from Tallinn and there are several places worth making time to visit. All are local telephone calls from the city.

West of Tallinn

Getting There & Away

Buses travelling west along the coast, including 108 and 126 to Rannamõisa, Vänaviti and Väna-Jõesuu, go from the terminal beside Tallinn's Central Train Station (Balti Jaam). Buses 108, 110 and 136 go from there to Keila-Joa (40 minutes). Call **Harjumaa Liinid** (☎ 641 8218) for timetables and the best buses for your destination. From the Central Train Station 10 trains go to Paldiski



(1¼ hours) via Keila; three trains travel to Kloogaranna.

BEACHES & CLIFFS

The coast west of Tallinn is a favourite summer escape for city folk and the first long, sandy beach is at **Väna-Jõesuu**, 24km from the city centre. From the main coast road it's about 600m down a sidetrack to the beach. The beach continues south across the mouth of the Väna River, where there's a stretch of 30m cliffs, one of the highest on the Estonian coast. The road runs right along the cliff top to a very popular lookout called Türisalu (45m), about 2km after the Naage bus stop (the Russian film version of *Hamlet* was filmed here). There are more beaches further west at **Lohusalu**, and at **Laulasmaa** and **Kloogaranna** on Lahepera Bay, all 35km to 40km from Tallinn.

KEILA-JOA & LAULASMAA

About 30km west of Tallinn, the small village of Keila-Joa near the coast boasts a lovely little **waterfall** (at 6.1m the second highest in the country), with an unrestored

manor house (built in 1883) on the edge of the falls. The large park and forest surrounding it make a fine setting for picnicking or hiking (1.7km to the sea). There's a basic restaurant beside the falls, but a more delightful option is **Vana Suvemaja** (☎ 672 3380; Kungla talu; meals 95-150Kr; ☎ noon-10pm Wed-Sun), about 1km west (on the main road to Laulasmaa) of the falls. This pleasant old cottage serves a range of tasty dishes.

Five kilometres west of Keila-Joa is the area's loveliest hotel, **Laulasmaa Resort** (☎ 687 0815; www.laulasmaa.ee; Puhkekodu 4; s/d from 1240/1490), in the town of Laulasmaa. It has an attractive natural setting overlooking a sandy beach. It boasts nicely designed rooms, a full range of spa services, an indoor pool and stylish 2nd-floor restaurant (meals 75Kr to 225Kr; open 11am to 11pm), complete with outdoor terrace, that makes it a worthwhile stop. Fish soup, spinach gnocchi and flambéed shrimp are among the options.

Another lodging option is the rustic **Laulasmaa Side Holiday Camp** (☎ 672 1989; www.puhkekeskus.ee; tw from 400Kr), with small, pleasant wooden rooms, most with private

bathrooms. Kitchen and sauna are available, and you can also join an excursion here. It's located off the Laulasmaa Kloogaranna road (follow the signs).

If you're camping, you'll find a handful of good RMK camp sites, set right along the beach, about 3km from Laulasmaa, just off the main road heading to Keila-Joa.

PALDISKI pop 4200

'Welcome to Hell.' Hands down the most surreal place within a day's travel of Tallinn, Paldiski was once the most heavily militarised Soviet base along the Estonian coast. Today you'll find crumbling old barracks, an eerie nuclear submarine station and a decaying town with a feeling of utter desolation. Not sold yet? Paldiski also has an appealing natural setting near some striking limestone cliffs, as well as a bright-red old lighthouse – Estonia's tallest.

But cliffs and lighthouses aside, it's that weird Soviet past that draws most people here. You'll witness one of the grimmest legacies of the former occupiers – as well as postindependence commentary such as the graffiti that's scrawled on one of the abandoned buildings, alerting us that we're not in Kansas anymore.

This area was the first Estonian area to be occupied by Soviet troops in 1939 and was the last to see them leave in 1994. It became the main Soviet naval base in Estonia, and Paldiski was a completely closed nuclear submarine station until 1994; only in 1995 were the decommissioned reactors removed. The reactors functioned continuously from the early 1970s until 1989. In 1994 a civilian died after stumbling upon radioactive materials (allegedly stolen from the disused base) on wasteland near Tallinn.

The most prominent landmark in Paldiski is the submarine training base – the darkly imposing concrete structure visible from anywhere in town. Locals dubbed this the 'Soviet Pentagon' owing to its monumental stature. In its day the building served as the main training facility for submariners throughout the Soviet Union. It is not open to visitors and entering the grounds is not recommended as the facility is guarded and potentially unsafe.

A trip to the **lighthouse** on the northwest tip (follow the main road straight out of

town), leads through destroyed army barracks and missile sheds, where 16,000 soldiers were stationed. The former training sites are deteriorating but the odd bunker and a staircase built into the limestone, with markers showing strata of rock formation on the exposed sides of the cliff, are still visible.

Paldiski's only hotel – and its only restaurant (meals from 90Kr) – is the **White Boat** (Valge Laev; ☎ 674 2095; www.valgelaev.ee; Rää tänava 32; s/d from 450/860Kr). Set on the main street, this nautically themed place has clean, nicely maintained rooms with big windows. Oil paintings of ships at sea add to the décor.

PADISE

At Padise, about 15km south of Paldiski on a back road between Tallinn and Haapsalu, is an atmospheric Cistercian monastery and cemetery dating back to the 13th century. It was damaged in the Livonian War in the 16th century and again in a 1766 fire. Padise is 4km west of Rummu (the site of Estonia's best-known prison), on the Haapsalu–Rummu–Keila–Tallinn bus route.

East of Tallinn Getting There & Away

The Maardu area is served by city buses 183, 184 and 186, which leave from the Kivisilla stop, a block east of the Gonsiori tänav bus stop. Buses also occasionally leave from the train station. To reach Ülgase, take any of these buses to Kallavere, then change to bus 185. Call **Harjumaa Liinid** (☎ 641 8218) to find the best route for your destination and for information on buses headed further east.

From the bus stop next to the train station, take bus 134 to Jägala (one hour), or bus 151, 152 or 155 to Kiiu (one hour). Bus 143, departing from near the train station, will go through Jõelähtme (45–55 minutes); a small visitor centre with a large information symbol by the highway marks the site of the burial cysts.

MAARDU & REBALA RESERVE

On Tallinn's eastern border, the Tallinn–Narva highway crosses the Maardu area, which is partly an industrial wilderness thanks to phosphate mining and other industries that raged unchecked here in the Soviet era. Phosphate mining in Estonia was stopped in 1991.

As early as 1987, a 25 sq km area to the east and south of Maardu Lake (which lies beside the highway) was declared the **Rebala Reserve** (☎ 603 3097). There are 300 archaeological sites here, with traces of historic and prehistoric settlements and cultures (the oldest are about 5000 years old).

Within the reserve is the Maardu Manor, an 18th-century building that stands on the site where the original manor was built in 1379. There are also sites of pre-Christian cults and 'sliding rocks' said to cure infertility in women who slide down them bare-bottomed. If you want to give the rocks a try, they are just south of **Koostvere** village, a few kilometres from the main highway.

At Jõelähtme a number of late-Bronze-Age stone burial cysts lie beside Peterburgi maantee around 30 minutes by bus from Tallinn, on the main route to Narva. Inside the visitor centre adjoining the site (and posted outside for after-hours visitors) you can find details of the graves, their origins and objects found during excavations.

The **Wolf Piles** near Muuksi, east of Jõelähtme towards Lahemaa, is also a couple of kilometres off the Tallinn–Narva highway. It's the site of approximately 80 more burial chambers, the largest concentration in Estonia.

JÄGALA, ÜLGASE & KIIU TORN

There's a northbound turn-off from the Tallinn–Narva highway leading towards **Jägala**, the site of 'Estonia's Niagara Falls', the country's largest waterfall (7.2m), with the waters of the Jägala River tumbling over pretty limestone banks. On your way, you'll pass under a triple-arched stone bridge from the 19th century.

Several abandoned phosphate mines have been preserved in **Ülgase**, near the coast, north of Rebala village. The area between Ülgase and the highway is vast industrial wasteland, with eerie mountains of soil.

Kiiu Torn (☎ 607 3434; Kiiu; adult/concession 5Kr/free; ☎ 10am–8pm), housed in the smallest fortress in Estonia, 6km east of Maardu on the Narva road, was built in the 16th century. The four-storey tower was restored in 1975 and is now a cute little restaurant. A popular sweet egg liqueur is named after this fortress.

NORTHEASTERN ESTONIA

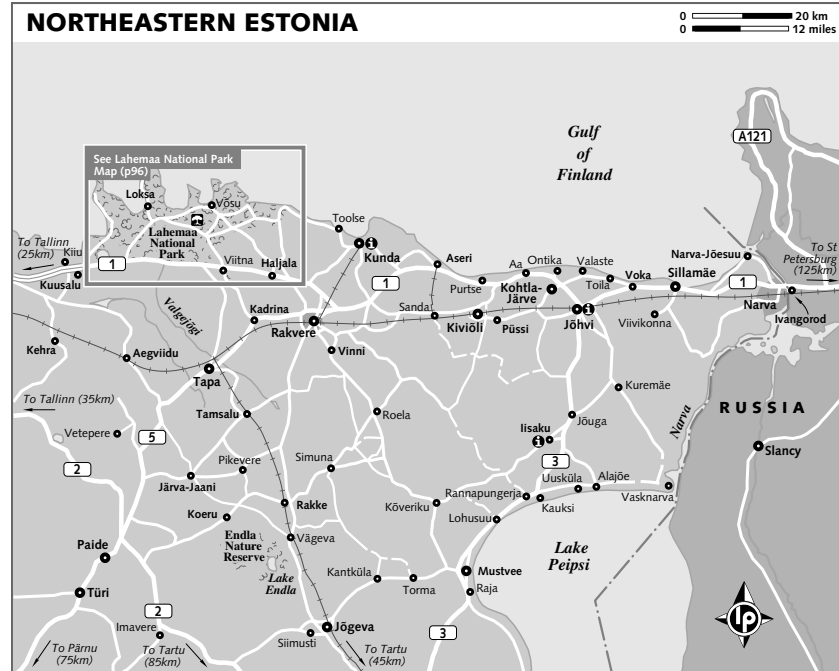
The crown jewel of Estonia's national parks, Lahemaa occupies an enormous place – literally and figuratively – when talk of the northeast arises. Lahemaa, the 'land of bays', comprises a pristine coastline of rugged beauty, lush inland forests teeming with wildlife, and sleepy villages scattered along its lakes, rivers and inlets. Visitors are well looked after here: there are cosy B&Bs, remote camp sites along the sea and an extensive network of pine-scented forest trails.

The park lies about one-third of the way between Tallinn and the Russian border. Travelling beyond the park's eastern borders, the bucolic landscape slowly transforms into an area of ragged, industrial blight. The scars left by Soviet industry are still visible in towns such as Kunda, home to a mammoth cement plant; Kohtla-Järve, the region's centre for ecologically destructive oil-shale extraction; and Sillamäe, once privy to Estonia's very own uranium processing plant. Before reaching for that biohazard suit, however, visitors should know that despite lingering pollution in some areas, the region has vastly improved in the last decade. Those willing to take the time will find some rewarding sites here, including the youthful up-and-coming city of Rakvere, the picturesque limestone cliffs around Ontika, some enchanting castle ruins and the curious spectacle of the seaside city of Sillamäe, a living monument to Stalinist-era architecture. The most striking city of this region is Narva, with its majestic castle dating back to the 13th century.

For those seeking a taste of Russia without the hassle of visas and border crossings, northeastern Estonia makes an excellent alternative. The vast majority of residents here are native Russians, and you'll hear Russian spoken on the streets, in shops and in restaurants; and you'll have plenty of opportunities to snap photos of lovely Orthodox churches, frightening communist-bloc high-rises and other legacies left behind by Estonia's mystifying eastern neighbours.

National Parks

In addition to the very worthwhile Lahemaa National Park, Northeastern Estonia



also contains the more modest Endla Nature Reserve, a fine place for a bog walk.

Getting There & Away

Unfortunately, bus travel is infrequent between Tallinn and towns inside Lahemaa. Hiring a car is the best way to reach and explore the many different areas inside the park. From Tallinn to Narva or Rakvere, there are numerous daily buses, as well as trains (see p89).

Getting Around

Lahemaa National Park is spread out and not well served by public transport. You can try hitching inside the park or getting around by bicycle, but bus isn't recommended. Elsewhere in the region, buses will be your best means of getting around.

LAHEMAA NATIONAL PARK

Estonia's largest *rahvuspark* (national park), Lahemaa is an alluring, unspoiled section of rural Estonia with varied coastal and inland scenery. It takes in a stretch of deeply indented coast with several peninsulas and

bays. There are 475 sq km of forested hinterland, including 14 lakes, eight rivers and four waterfalls, plus 250 sq km of marine area.

The natural attractions of the coast, forests, lakes, rivers and bogs encompass many areas of historical, archaeological and cultural interest. About 24% of the park is human-influenced, 68% is forest or heath and 8% is bog. Roads traverse the park from the Tallinn–Narva highway to the coast, with a few parts accessible by bus. Walking, hiking and cycling trails encourage exploration of a more active kind.

Around 300,000 people now visit the Lahemaa National Park every year, but only a small number go out of season, when the park is transformed into a magical winterland of snowy shores, frozen seas and sparkling black trees.

Geography & Geology

The landscape is mostly flat or gently rolling, with the highest point just 115m above sea level. Geologically, much of the park is on the North Estonian limestone plateau, the

Meremuuseum; ☎ 323 8136; Merekooli tee 4; adult/concession 10/5Kr; ☎ 9am-7pm). In the 1920s a third of all registered boats in Estonia belonged to this village; at one time there were 62 long-distance captains living here. From 1945 to 1991 the entire national park's coastline was a military-controlled frontier, with a 2m-high barbed wire fence ensuring villagers couldn't access the beach or sea. The museum has photographs and memorabilia tracing the history of the village and exhibits on marine life from the area. It also hosts the **Viking Days** festival in August, when Vikings of all nations congregate for a bloodless battle.

The fishing village of Altja was first mentioned in 1465, though today no building older than 100 years is left. The park has reconstructed traditional net sheds here and set up an open-air museum of stones along the protected coastline. Altja's Swing Hill (Kiitemägi), complete with traditional Estonian swings, has long been the centre of Midsummer's Eve festivities in Lahemaa. Other coastal villages with an old-fashioned flavour are **Natturi** and **Virve**.

ISLANDS

Until 1992 **Hara Island** was a Soviet submarine base and hence a closed area. Soviet-era maps of the park did not mark the island. During the 1860s, Hara enjoyed a successful sprat industry and about 100 people worked there. If you're interested in a trip over, the visitor centre can help find someone to take you. When the water's low enough, you can walk (check with the visitor centre for best times).

When waters are low it's also possible to walk to **Saartneem** and **Älvi**, two other small islands. Again, check with the centre before rolling up your trousers. Älvi is a strictly protected nature reserve and Saartneem is only open to visitors from mid-July, after the bird nesting season is finished.

From **Viinistu** it's possible to cross over to **Mohni Island**, and guided tours (see opposite) are available.

LAKES, TOMBS & MANORS

Although technically outside the park, there are three lakes near **Viitna** that make lovely settings for a swim or hike along the pine-covered shoreline.

Old farm buildings still stand in villages such as **Muuxsi**, **Uuri**, **Vatku**, **Tõugu** and

Võhma. On the small hill of Tandemägi, near Võhma, four stone tombs from the 1st century AD and earlier have been reconstructed after excavation.

There are more old German manors at **Kolga**, **Vihula**, and **Sagadi**, the most impressive of the bunch. Now fully restored, Sagadi Manor houses a **Forest Museum** (☎ 325 8888; adult/concession incl entry to manor 30/10Kr; ☎ 11am-6pm Tue-Sun 15 May-30 Sep, by appt 1 Oct-14 May), with exhibits on the park's flora and fauna. The collection of chainsaws and hunting rifles is impressive indeed. On the grounds is a decent hotel.

The classical-style manor house at **Kolga** dates from the end of the 17th century but was largely rebuilt in 1768 and 1820, and is long overdue for restoration. It currently houses a restaurant and hotel.

Activities

BIKING

Lahemaa is a splendid place to ride. You can work up a sweat along forest-lined roads, then take a dip in a lake or in the sea. The Sagadi Manor rents mountain bikes (150Kr per day). The Kolga Manor rents for similar prices but only to guests.

HIKING

Some excellent hikes course through the park's diverse landscapes. Pick up maps and trail info from the visitors centre.

Altja 3.5km circular trail beginning at 'Swing Hill' on the coast at Altja, taking in traditional net sheds and fishing cottages, and the open-air museum of stones.

Beaver Trail 1.7km trail, 900m north of Oandu; a beautiful trek past beaver dams, although you're unlikely to see the shy creatures.

Käsmu 8.5km circuit from Käsmu village, taking in coast, pine forest, 'erratic' boulders and the Lake Käsmu (Käsmujärv); a longer route takes you to Eru.

Majakivi 3.5km trail on the Juminda Peninsula taking in the 7m-high Majakivi boulder.

Oandu 4.7km circular trail, 3km north of Sagadi, that is perhaps the park's most interesting. Note the trees that wild boars and bears have scratched, bark eaten by irascible moose, and pines scarred from resin-tapping.

Viitna Three paths (2km, 4km and 7km) that take in the lakes and forest shaped by glacier. Just south of busy Viitna bus stop.

Viru Rapa 3.5km trail across the Viru Bog, starting at the first kilometre off the road to Loksa off the Tallinn-Narva highway; look for the insectivorous sundew (Venus flytrap, Charles Darwin's favourite plant).

HORSE RIDING

Kuusekännu Riding Farm (Kuusekännu Ratsatalu; ☎ 325 2942; www.kuusekannu.maaturism.ee) arranges horse riding for all levels, and trail rides through Lahemaa. Sample trips: a six-hour ride to Lahemaa Streams passing two waterfalls (€55), a two-day trek to Altja coastal village (€157). Prices include the ride, meals and accommodation in a guesthouse. To reach the farm, head 68km east of Tallinn along the Tallinn-Narva highway. Take the turn-off to Tapa city, drive 300m and turn right at the first intersection, then follow the signs to the farm. Be sure to call before showing up.

Tours

The Lahemaa National Park Visitor Centre keeps lists of guides operating in the park. Contact the centre far in advance, as many guides get completely booked out during the summer. **Anne Kurepalu** (☎ 323 4100; anne@palmse.ee) arranges tours through the fragile ecosystem of Mohni Island.

Sleeping

Käsmu, set near a tiny beach, has plenty of low-key B&Bs. If you want rowdier beach action, head to Võsu, a popular summer-time hang-out for Estonian students. Other guesthouses are sprinkled throughout the region. The Lahemaa National Park Visitor Centre in Palmse can arrange accommodation. Also, many small guesthouses have dogs (big ones). Keep that in mind before vaulting over fences.

Merekalda B&B (☎ 323 8451; www.merekalda.ee; Neeme tee 2, Käsmu; d with private bathroom 550-750Kr, 2-person cabin with shared bathroom 220Kr, apt 1100Kr) You'll have to book early if you want a spot in this peaceful B&B by the sea. Rooms are elegant, some with balconies and sea views. Cabins are more rustic (summer only) with shared bathrooms. There are also four attractive two-room apartments with kitchens. Sauna and boat hire are available.

Uustula B&B (☎ 325 2965; Neeme tee 78, Käsmu; camp site per person 25Kr, d 600Kr) Also in Käsmu, at the end of the road/start of the hiking trail, this quaint B&B has four simple, pleasant wooden rooms (three have bathrooms inside, one is outside the room). B&B guests can use the kitchen. Campers can pitch a tent on the grassy lawn. It offers bike rental and a sauna.

Postimaja Hostel (☎ 529 2722; rakvere@post.ee; Mere 63, Võsu; s/d 400/500Kr) Set back from the main street in Võsu, this bright-yellow house has trim and tidy rooms, some with balconies. Kitchen use, sauna (150Kr per hour).

Toomarahva Tourist Farm (☎ 325 2511; Altja; d 500Kr, camp site per person 25Kr) This friendly place has several handsome wooden ensuite cabins and a yard for camping. It's on the main road in Altja, just beyond the Altja Kõrts restaurant.

Hara Guesthouse (☎ 607 7323; www.aivel.ee; Hara; camp site 50Kr, r per person 260Kr) Along the main road in Hara (not the island but the town facing it), this countrified house has small wood-panelled rooms with shared bathrooms. There's a kitchen, a sauna and a billiards table. It's 150m to a sandy beach.

Viitna Holiday Centre (☎ 329 3651; camp site per person 25Kr, d from 240Kr) Overlooking a pretty lake, this place has rustic wooden cabins surrounded by forest. Several rooms have private bathrooms, but most share facilities. You can also pitch a tent. It's located in Viitna, about 600m east of the bus stop on the Tallinn-Narva highway (look for the 'Viitna Landscape Reserve' sign). It also has a beautiful lakeside sauna, which costs 270Kr for three hours.

Ojaäärse Holiday Home (☎ 628 1532; www.rmk.ee; dm 225Kr) Run by RMK, this handsome converted 1850s farmhouse has tidy rooms with two to 10 beds each. There's a small lake (sometimes algae-covered) on the property. There's a guide service, a kitchen, and a sauna (250Kr per hour). Travelling from Palmse to Sagadi, it's signposted on the right. It's essential to book in advance (sometimes closed).

Park Hotel Palmse (☎ 322 3626; www.palmse.ee; s/d 690/890Kr) This hotel offers pristine and pine-fresh rooms inside the Palmse Manor distillery; book well ahead as it's favoured by groups.

Sagadi Manor (☎ 325 8888; sagadihotell@rmk.ee; dm from 200Kr, hotel s/d from 700/900Kr) In Sagadi, this restored governor's house offers charming quarters amid grand surroundings. The adjoining hostel with spotless rooms is a good, affordable option. Bike rental; sauna.

Kolga Mansion (☎ 607 7477; www.kolgahtell.ee; s/d with private bathroom 600/900Kr, with shared bathroom from 400/600Kr) Set on the grounds of a

rundown manor, this guesthouse, formerly occupied by lucky horses, has pleasant wood-floored rooms amid lots of greenery. It has a restaurant, and also rents out bikes (guests only).

The camping is simply fantastic in Lahemaa, with lots of free RMK-administered camp sites. You will find them near Tsiitre at Kolga Bay, at the northern tip of Juminda and Pärissa peninsula, on the Mustoja–Vijula road near the bridge in a river bend, and by the Sadi–Altja road, 300m south of the Oandu trail. When looking for these sites, keep your eyes peeled for the small wooden signs with the letters 'RMK'. All camp sites (free RMK ones and private ones) are marked on the excellent *Lahemaa Rahvuspark* map available in the visitor centre.

Esti Karavan (☎ 324 4665; caravan site 100Kr; ☹ May–Aug) In Lepissa, 1km from Võsu; 100 caravan places.

Eating

Café Isabella (☎ 322 3626; meals 40–85Kr) In the grounds of Palmse Manor, this elegant café overlooks a swan-filled lake. Skip the mains (sausages etc) and concentrate on coffee, rhubarb cake and those idly floating birds.

Sagadi Manor (☎ 325 8888; meals 80–160Kr) This pleasant restaurant on the 2nd floor of the manor serves a decent selection of international fare (salmon soup, duck fillet, risotto with vegetables).

Võsu Kõrts (☎ 516 5115; Jõe 3, Võsu; meals 70–200Kr; ☹ 11am–midnight) Võsu's best restaurant is a fine wooden tavern with indoor/outdoor seating. Smoked-fish salad, roasted codfish and grilled lamb are among the choices. Live music some nights.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Altja Kõrts (Altja; meals 50–130Kr; ☹ 11am–11pm) Set in an old wooden farmhouse with a thatched roof and traditionally attired waiters, this charming place serves delicious plates of home cooking. Cauliflower soup, salmon pie (the best!) and omelettes can't be beaten. Follow it up with fresh blueberry pie (in season). The menu is posted in Estonian, but the staff will gladly translate. It's on the main road leading into Altja, overlooking a yard full of swings.

Viitna Kõrts (☎ 325 8681; tavern ☹ 7.30am–8pm, restaurant ☹ noon–11pm; meals from 60Kr) Almost opposite the eastbound bus stop at Viitna is this reconstruction of an 18th-century tavern serving a bare-bones buffet, with a more peaceful restaurant next door.

Võsu Grill Baar (☎ 325 8681; Mere 49, Võsu; meals 70–200Kr; ☹ noon–11pm) Remains popular despite the basic fare: chicken, Wiener schnitzel, salmon.

If you're camping, you can load up on your provisions at the small, crowded **food shop** (☹ 9am–9pm) in Võsu or in Loksas at the much bigger **Loksa Kauplus** (☹ 9am–10pm) store on the main road. There's a simple café next door.

If you're staying at a tourist farm, don't bypass the traditional home cooking. Just ask your host in advance.

Getting There & Away

Visit www.bussireisid.ee for bus timetables.

PALMSE

From Tallinn there are one or two buses daily to Palmse (80Kr, 1½ to 2½ hours).

VIITNA

There are 19 buses daily from Tallinn to Rakvere, which stop at Viitna (50Kr, one hour). To go from Narva to Viitna take a bus to Rakvere (80Kr to 95Kr, about seven daily) and then a bus to Viitna (20Kr, 18 daily). From Tartu there's a bus to Võsu, stopping at both Viitna and Palmse (80Kr, 2½ hours).

VÕSU & KÄSMU

There are six buses daily from Tallinn to Võsu (55Kr to 85Kr, 1½ to 2½ hours), one of which goes on to Käsmu (40Kr, 1¼ to 1½ hours). A bus also connects Viitna and Käsmu, but runs only once daily, four days per week.

Getting Around

A car is extremely handy for getting around; this is also a great cycling region, though distances between points can be great. Hiking and cycling routes are marked in blue and red respectively; maps and trail information are available from the visitor centre. Some tourist farms and hotels rent out bikes. See p98 for information on renting bicycles.

You can also rent a bike in Tallinn and take it on the bus to Viitna as cargo.

You can also use the buses running to the coastal villages to get around the park, though these are infrequent. Ask at the visitor centre for the latest schedule.

EAST OF LAHEMAA

The territory from Lahemaa to the Russian border at Narva has for decades been Estonia's main industrial corridor. Oil shale, used in power generation, comes from the region, and for years its by-product of sulphur dioxide has been the largest pollutant in Estonia.

Aside from marvelling at the destruction wreaked upon the landscape, there are other things you can do here: explore the headland castle (p102) at Toole, photograph the handsomely wrought Stalinist architecture of Sillamäe (p103), make an offering at the Russian Orthodox convent of Pühtitsa (p104), and get a taste of Russian history in Narva (p103). The biggest surprise in this region is Rakvere, a city with some stylish cafés and restaurants, and a fantastic castle perched on a hill.

If you're travelling in this rarely visited corner, you'll be among a handful of Western pioneers. Most visitors are Russians who come for a soak in one of the institutional sanatoriums in Narva-Jõesuu or a holiday along the northern shores of Lake Peipsi. Many Estonians are wary of this predominantly Russian-speaking area, but don't let them scare you off – see it with your own eyes first.

Rakvere

pop 17,000

Set with a magnificent castle – and very large bull sculpture – Rakvere is a small city, the tiny centre of which contains pleasant streets, nicely manicured parks and a lively, youthful population. In addition to the castle there are a few museums and historic churches, but the real charm of this town lies in simply strolling the streets.

Your first stop should be the **tourist information office** (☎ 324 2734; www.rakvere.ee; Laada 14; ☹ 9am–6pm Mon–Fri, 10am–3pm Sat & Sun May 15–Sep 14, 10am–5pm Mon–Fri Sep 15–May 14), where you can pick up a town map and walking-tour guide from the affable staff. It's located a block south of the main square.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Rakvere's star attraction, **Rakvere Castle** (☎ 322 5500; www.svm.ee; Tallinna 3a; adult/concession 40/25Kr; ☹ 11am–7pm Jun–Aug, 11am–5pm Wed–Sun Sep–May) was built by the Danish in the 14th century, though the hillside has served many masters over its 700 years: Danes, Russians, Swedes and Poles. The fortress was badly damaged in the battles of the 16th and 17th centuries and later turned into an elaborate manor in the late 1600s. Extensive reconstruction was completed in 2004, and today the castle contains exhibits related to its medieval history with medieval-style amusement that's aimed mostly towards small children (make a candle, make a nail at the blacksmiths, pony rides), though the adults can try their hand at archery. Don't miss the medieval torture chamber. Concerts and plays are held at the castle in summer; ask at the tourist information office to see what's on.

In front of the castle is Rakvere's other icon – a massive seven-ton **bull statue**, which was completed by local artist Tauno Kangro to commemorate the city's 700th-year anniversary.

In town, the **Rakvere Museum** (☎ 322 5503; Tallinna 3; adult/concession 15/10Kr; ☹ 10am–5pm Thu–Sat), housed in a late-18th-century building, contains modest expositions related to the town's history. A few blocks south, on one of Rakvere's most historical streets, is the interesting **Citizen's House Museum** (☎ 322 5503; Pikk 50; adult/concession 10/5Kr; ☹ 10am–5pm Thu–Sat). Displays here show what an early-20th-century apartment looked like; several workshops tap into Rakvere's rich artisan tradition.

SLEEPING

Hotell Wesenbergh (☎ 322 3480; www.wesenbergh.ee; Tallinna tänav 25; s/d 600/890; ☹) Rakvere's best hotel has comfortable, modern rooms with wooden floors.

Katariina Kelder (☎ 322 3943; www.katariina.ee; Pikk tänav 3; d with private/shared bathroom 550/400Kr; ☹) This small well-located guesthouse has decent rooms and friendly staff. There's a restaurant on the ground floor.

EATING

Art Café (☎ 325 1710; Lai tänav 13; meals 45–65Kr; ☹ 9am–11pm Mon–Fri, 11am–10pm Sat & Sun) This stylish space features a lounge-like interior with an outdoor patio in back. Serving

eclectic fare, this café is a good spot for a drink in the evening.

Berlini Trahter (☎ 322 3787; Lai tänav 15; meals 60-90Kr; ☎ 11am-midnight) Facing the main square, this old wooden pub is a Rakvere favourite for its cosy ambience and tasty international fare. Live music Saturdays.

Virna (☎ 322 3907; Tallinna tänav 8; meals around 70Kr; ☎ 11am-midnight Mon-Sat) This handsome pub serves up a mix of Thai and Chinese fare. Live music on Friday and Saturday nights.

Old Victoria (☎ 322 5345; Tallinna tänav 27; meals 90-150Kr; ☎ 11am-midnight Mon-Sat) Amid antique wallpaper and leather sofas, this English-style pub is the place to go for cottage pie, salmon-filo pastry and English breakfasts. There's also a peaceful backyard garden.

Turu Kaubamaja (Tallinna tänav 27; meals 90-150Kr; ☎ 11am-midnight Mon-Sat) Overlooking the main square (Turu plats), this is the best grocery shop in town (hint: grab some picnic food and head to the park).

ENTERTAINMENT

Rakvere Theatre (Rakvere Teater; ☎ 329 5420; Kreutzwaldi tänav 2) This historic theatre hosts an assortment of both classic and avant-garde performances in Estonian throughout the year.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Rakvere is well connected by bus to Tallinn (20 daily, 55Kr to 65Kr, 1½ hours), Narva (10 daily, 70Kr to 75Kr, two to 2½ hours). There are also decent links to Lahemaa towns like Viitna (14 daily, 20Kr to 30Kr, 30 minutes), Võsu (six daily, 17Kr to 20Kr, one hour), Käsmu (five daily, 18Kr to 24Kr, 1½ hours) and Palmse (four weekly, 15Kr, 40 minutes). The bus station is on the corner of Laada and E Vilde, one block south of the information centre.

Rakvere has one or two trains daily to Tallinn (46Kr, 1¼ to two hours) and Narva (46Kr, 1¼ hours). The train station is on Jaama puiestee, 1200m northeast of the main square.

Lahemaa to Sillamäe

On a headland at **Toolse**, 8km west of Kunda, are the evocative ruins of a **castle** (adult/concession 30/15Kr; ☎ 11am-7pm mid-May-Sep) built in 1471 by the Livonian Order as defence against pirates. Summer visits include a 20-minute tour (English available) led by young guides

who can point out the old medieval toilet, where the kitchen and livestock were, and relate some of the legends of the castle. Children can scramble around on the tiny pirate ship nearby.

At **Purtse**, 10km north of Kiviõli, there's more medieval action in the picturesque, restored, 16th-century **castle** (☎ 335 9388; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, visits by appt). The coast between Aa and Toila is lined by cliffs where it coincides with the edge of the Baltic Glint. At **Ontika**, north of Kohtla-Järve, these cliffs reach their greatest height of 56m. The views out to sea are spectacular, though getting a good look at the cliffs is near impossible as they're obscured by trees, and climbing down can be a deadly affair. To save lives, a 2-million-Kroon metal staircase was built in 1999, 5km east at **Valaste**, facing Estonia's highest waterfalls (25.6m), which, depending on the month, may be a mere trickle.

Along a former Viking trade route, **Toila**, a lovely village on the coast 12km northeast of Jõhvi, is famous for its parklands. Here stood the majestic Oru Castle, built by famous St Petersburg businessman Yeliseev in the 19th century, which was later used as President Konstantin Päts' summer residence between the wars and subsequently destroyed. Parts of the park have been reconstructed, including the old terrace, making it a pleasant place for a stroll or picnic. The views from the Baltic Glint in the Toila region are spectacular, and here the glint forms part of the Saka-Ontika-Toila landscape reserve. There are seven buses daily to Toila from Jõhvi, and two to Ontika (none on Sundays).

SLEEPING & EATING

Sanatoorium Toila (☎ 332 5233; www.toilasanaatoorium.ee; Ranna tänav 12; camp site per person 50Kr, caravan 110Kr, d/tr cabin 250/350Kr, s/d from 600/800Kr) In Toila, this large institutional sanatorium offers affordable spa treatments (massages, salt baths, salt chamber) on a fine spot overlooking a rocky beach. Rooms are clean but dated with old yellow wallpaper but fine sea views. Simple wooden cabins with shared bathrooms lie behind the hotel, with space for camping and caravans. There are tennis courts, bike rental and a 25m swimming pool, with a new water centre (pool, slide, steam rooms) planned, which might be ready by the time you read this.

Fregatt (☎ 336 9647; Pikk tänav 18; meals 60-120Kr; ☎ noon-10pm) A local favourite, this friendly Toila restaurant serves eclectic dishes (pepper steak, pad Thai), amid a polished chrome setting. It's along the main road in town.

Sillamäe

pop 16,700

Located on the coast between Kohtla-Järve and Narva, Sillamäe is a pleasant, rarely visited town with a tree-lined main street that functions as a living museum of Stalinist-era architecture. Planned by Leningrad architects, Sillamäe features grand, solid buildings with gargoyles and a cascading staircase ornamented by large urns. Around the central square, there's a **town hall** specially designed to resemble a Lutheran church, a **cultural centre** (constructed in 1949) that still has reliefs of Marx and Lenin on the walls inside, and a very Soviet-style monument erected in 1987 to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the October Revolution. This is one of few places in Estonia where the aura of the USSR still lives on, and it feels caught between two worlds.

The region's fate was sealed in the post-WWII years upon the discovery that oil shale contains small amounts of extractable uranium. The infamous uranium processing and nuclear chemicals factory was quickly built by 5000 Russian political prisoners, and the town centre by 3800 Baltic prisoners of war who had previously served in the German army. By 1946 the city was strictly off limits; it was known by various spooky code names (Leningrad 1; Moscow 400) and was often omitted from Soviet-era maps.

Only unfinished uranium was processed at the plant, though the eerily abandoned buildings on the city's western border are testament to Soviet plans to process pure, nuclear reactor-ready uranium; only the disbanding of the USSR saved Estonian ecology from this. The plant was closed in 1991 and today the radioactive waste is buried under concrete by the sea; fears of leakage have alarmed environmentalists. The **Sillamäe Museum** (☎ 397 2425; Mayakovskiy tänav 18a) details the history of the area. But the real attraction of this town is wandering its classical alleys and leafy boulevards.

Krunk (☎ 392 9030; www.krunk.ee; Kesk tänav 23; d 690Kr) In an attractive yellow building on the main street, this hotel has simple rooms and a beautifully set restaurant (open noon to 9pm Monday to Saturday). Sauna available.

At least 20 buses travel daily between Tallinn and Sillamäe (100-110Kr, three hours); and more than 30 buses go between Narva and Sillamäe (15Kr to 30Kr, 30 minutes).

Narva & Around

pop 67,000

Estonia's easternmost town is separated only by the thin Narva River from Ivanogorod in Russia. Narva, which has the look and feel of a Russian city, has a magnificent castle and an intriguing history that spans many centuries. Although the most outstanding architecture was destroyed in WWII, Estonia's third-largest city is an intriguing place to wander – as you'll find no other place in Estonia (or in Russia for that matter) quite like it.

People have lived here since the Stone Age, and it was a fortified trading point in 1172. It was embroiled in border disputes between the German knights and Russia; Ivan III of Muscovy built a fort at Ivanogorod in 1492. In the 16th and 17th centuries Narva changed hands often from Russian to Swede, until falling to Russia in 1704.

Narva was almost completely destroyed in 1944 during its recapture by the Red Army. Afterwards it became part of the northeastern Estonian industrial zone and one of Europe's most polluted towns. Today emissions have been greatly reduced, with investment in cleaner technology well underway.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

The castle, Narva's biggest landmark, is by the river, just south of the Russian-Estonian bridge. The train and bus stations are next to each other on Vaksali tänav 2; from there it's a 500m walk north along Pushkini tänav to the castle. You'll pass the friendly **tourist information office** (☎ 356 0184; www.narva.ee; Pushkini tänav 13; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat & Sun mid-May-mid-Sep, 10am-5pm Mon-Fri mid-Sep-mid-May), where you can get maps and city information. They can recommend guides in town.

A block east is the **public library** (2nd fl, Maimi tänav 8; ☎ 11am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat; ☎), with free Internet access.

SIGHTS

The imposing **Narva Castle** is an absolute must-visit. Built by the Danes at the end of the 13th century, it faces Russia's matching Ivangorod Fortress across the river, creating an architectural ensemble unique to Europe. Restored after damage during WWII, Narva Castle houses the **Town Museum** (☎ 359 9230; www.narvamuseum.ee; adult/concession 30/10Kr; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Sun) and the castle grounds are the refuge of Narva's statue of Lenin – the only fully intact one left in the Baltics. North of the castle, the baroque **Old Town Hall** (Raekoja väljak), built between 1668 and 1671, is impressive, as is the 19th-century **home of Baron von Velio** (nr Sepa & Hariduse tänav), two blocks north. The Russian Orthodox **Voskresensky Cathedral** (Bastrakovy tänav), built in 1898, is situated north of the train station. On the square in front of the train station is a monument to the Estonians who were loaded into cattle wagons here and deported to Siberia in 1941.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotel Vanalinn (☎ 352 2486; Koidula tänav 6; s/d 490/640Kr; ☎) The rooms are well worn, but you can't beat the setting: inside a 17th-century house with tall wooden ceilings and views overlooking the river.

King Hotel (☎ 357 2404; Lavretsovi tänav 9; s/d 590/790Kr; ☎) Featuring cosy modern rooms, King Hotel is an excellent option. There's a decent restaurant next door.

Rondel (☎ 359 9257; Peterburi maantee 2; meals 15-100Kr; ☎ noon-8pm) On the castle grounds, this casual restaurant serves fresh-grilled meats, sandwiches and salads.

German Pub (☎ 357 3060; Tiimani tänav 5; meals 50-120Kr) Trout *shashlik* and other grilled favourites are on offer at this cosy pub. It has several outdoor tables.

Gulliver Pub (☎ 359 1551; Lavretsovi tänav 7; meals from 50Kr) This animated two-storey pub is a good place to stop in for a pint or a simple, hearty meal.

Alexander Kohvik (☎ 357 1350; Pushkini tänav 13; meals from 30Kr) Serving a good selection of salads, soups, and fish and meat dishes, this no-nonsense coffee shop and restaurant is a blast from the USSR past.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Over 15 daily buses travel between Tallinn and Narva (85Kr to 110Kr, 3½ hours) and

one train (75Kr, three to four hours) runs daily, stopping in Rakvere. There are also 10 daily Narva-Tartu buses (85Kr to 105Kr, three to 3½ hours).

Narva-Jõesuu

Lying about 12km north of Narva, the holiday resort of Narva-Jõesuu is a pretty but dilapidated town, which has been popular since the 19th century for its long golden-sand beach backed by pine forests. There are a number of unique, impressive early-20th-century wooden houses and villas throughout the town. This town makes a good base for exploring Narva. Here you'll find a dozen hotels and spas to choose from, all overlooking a fine sandy beach.

SLEEPING & EATING

Guesthouse Valentina (☎ 357 7468; keeping@hotmail.ee; Aia 49; s/d from 300/400Kr; ☎) Boasting pleasant, simply furnished rooms, this charming new guesthouse is also the best place for a meal. It has a small outdoor patio where you can have grilled trout, stuffed peppers and delectable desserts.

Narva-Jõesuu Sanatoorium (☎ 359 9529; sanator@hotmail.ee; Aia 3; s/d/ste from 450/800/990Kr; ☎) Resembling a large white cruise ship (that's going nowhere), this aging hotel has decent rooms and a range of spa services. Bike rental is available.

Mereranna Hostel (☎ 357 2826; www.narvahotel.ee; Aia 17; s/d 300/350Kr; ☎) Rooms here have old wooden floors, faded wallpaper and tiny bathrooms; but the beach is right outside the door.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Nine daily buses and numerous daily *marshrutkas* (minibuses) connect Narva with Narva-Jõesuu (20Kr, 20 minutes).

Kuremäe

Originally the site of ancient pagan worship, the village of Kuremäe, 20km southeast of Jõhvi, is home to the stunning Russian Orthodox **Pühtitsa Convent** (☎ 339 2124; admission free; ☎ noon-6pm Mon-Fri). Built between 1885 and 1895, the magnificent nunnery has five towers topped with green onion domes and is a place of annual pilgrimage for Russian Orthodox believers, operating a fully self-sufficient entity. Murals by the convent gate depict the Virgin Mary, who, it is said,

appeared to a 16th-century shepherd by an oak tree. An icon was later found in the area and it is still in the main church of the convent. There is also a revered holy spring that never freezes.

Downhill from the monastery is a coffee-shop, where you can enjoy cakes and coffee on the outdoor patio.

Two weekly buses connect Kuremäe with Tallinn (100 Kr, 3½ hours). A daily bus connects Kuremäe with Narva, with a stop in Jõhvi en route.

Lake Peipsi (North)

Estonia's finest (and least crowded) beaches are found on the northern coast of Lake Peipsi; 42km of clean, sandy dunes hug the shoreline of what appears to be a sea rather than a lake. The area had popular resorts during Soviet times but many of them have been left to crumble. Development has been slowly arriving to this beautiful area with enormous tourism potential.

On the northeastern shore of the lake, is **Vasknarva**, an isolated fishing village with about 100 residents. There is an evocative Orthodox church here that, according to some, held a KGB radio surveillance centre in Soviet times. Scant ruins of a 1349 Teutonic Order castle stand by the shore of Lake Peipsi. At **Alajõe**, is the area's main Orthodox church and a few shops. **Kauksi**, where the Narva-Jõhvi-Tartu road reaches the lake, is the area's most popular beach.

From **Lohusuu** extending southwards is Old Believers' territory (for more details, see p127). Further south, towards Jõgeva, are the lakeside towns of **Mustvee** and **Raja**. Mustvee, a town of just 2000, has four churches (there used to be seven): Orthodox, Baptist, Lutheran and Old Believer. There is also a forlorn WWII memorial by the sea, the **Mourning Lady**, a young woman with her head hung low. Some 8km south is the charming, one-street village of Raja, where a wooden church contains some rare icons dating from the 19th century when a prestigious school of icon painting was founded there.

Locally caught and smoked fish (trout or salmon) is a speciality of the area. Some would say the delicious catch alone warrants the journey. Look for *suitsukala* (smoked fish) stands scattered all along the main road curving around the lake.

SLEEPING & EATING

There are a number of resorts around Alajõe, but many are in dire need of repair. The following are off the main road that follows the shoreline.

Uusküla Holiday Centre (☎ 339 3249; tasandik@hotmail.ee; s/d from 300/400Kr) This sprawling complex of cottages and lodges has old, worn rooms and a restaurant on site.

Kauksi Beach (☎ 339 3835; telklager@hotmail.ee; camp site/wooden cabin per person 20/70Kr) Several kilometres further south, this popular camp site gets packed with young partygoers on weekends. It has tiny two-person cabins and a café on the grounds.

Peipsi Lained Hostel (☎ 339 3723; www.peipsi-lained.ee; d from 500Kr) Another two kilometres leads to this friendly place with clean cosy rooms and shared bathrooms. The beach is 50m from the door. There are numerous free RMK camp sites, just outside the gate (closer to the beach), and also about one kilometre south of Uusküla Holiday Centre.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Getting to this area is tricky without your own wheels. To Kauksi and Alajõe, two buses a day leave from Kohtla-Järve and Jõhvi (two to 2½ hours). There are also about 10 Tartu-bound buses a day from Narva, many of which will stop in Kauksi.

There are 10 buses connecting Mustvee with both Jõhvi (one to 1½ hours) and Tartu (one hour).

Endla Nature Reserve

Endla Nature Reserve (Endla Looduskaitseala), covering a boggy area inhabited by beavers, begins south of Koeru, approximately 10km north of Jõgeva. The nature reserve includes Lake Endla and a number of springs in the western part of the reserve, including the 4.8m-deep Sopa spring (Estonia's deepest) and the Völingi and Oostriku springs. Endla Nature Reserve was established in 1981.

The **reserve headquarters** (☎ 774 5339) is in Torma. You can visit the reserve and follow a 1.5km nature trail on boards across the bog, taking in two watchtowers along the way. Guided tours are also available, by advance arrangement through the headquarters.

SOUTHEASTERN ESTONIA

Set with rolling hills, picturesque lakes and vast woodlands, the southeast boasts some of Estonia's most attractive countryside. It also contains one of Estonia's most important cities: the heart of this region, the vibrant university centre of Tartu, the cobbled streets of which mark a rich history that spans centuries. This is where the national awakening began over 100 years ago, making it in some ways the spiritual birthplace of modern Estonia. Its lush parks, stimulating galleries and eclectic cafés and restaurants make for some fine exploring.

Beyond the city – no matter which direction you head – you'll find resplendent natural settings. In the south lie the towns of Otepää and Võru, the gateway to outdoor adventuring: hiking and lakeside swimming in summer and cross-country skiing in winter. Quaint towns set on wandering rivers or in picturesque valleys add to the allure. For a serious dose of woodland, head to Haanja National Park or Karula National Park.

To the east stretches Lake Peipsi, one of Europe's largest lakes. Along its shores are beautiful sandy beaches and a surprisingly undeveloped coastline. Aside from swimming, boating, fishing and soaking up the scenery, you can travel up its western rim stopping at roadside food stands and in tiny villages dotting the lakeside. Further north, the lake is also traditionally the land of Old Believers, Russians who came in the 18th and 19th centuries fleeing persecution in the east.

One of Estonia's most intriguing regions is also among its least visited. In the far southeast, clustered in villages near Lake Pihkva, live the Setus, ancestors of Balto-Finnic tribes who settled here in the first millennium. Today this proud group continues to preserve their culture and language, with colourful festivals staged throughout the year. Sadly, the Russian border now divides this previously united community.

National Parks

Highly recommended is the 200-sq-km Haanja Nature Park with its crisp lakes, lush woodlands and gently rolling hills. There

are ample opportunities for hiking, camping and just absorbing the subtle beauty of Estonia's scenery.

Further west, the smaller Karula National Park is another decent choice for hikes. Its highlight is the sparkling Lake Ähijärv. The Luhasoo Nature Study Trail acquaints visitors with one of Estonia's most underappreciated geographic features, the swamp.

Getting There & Away

Frequent buses connect Tallinn with Tartu; though more nostalgic travellers will enjoy the train, which stops in Tartu before continuing on to Valga on the Latvian border. From Tallinn you can also catch direct buses to other southeastern cities (Põlva, Võru and Otepää), though all buses will go through Tartu. Tartu is also a sensible gateway to Lake Peipsi.

Getting Around

If you plan only to dip into the region, then you'll be fine getting around by bus. For more in-depth exploring – particularly around Haanja National Park, Setumaa and Lake Peipsi – bus services are infrequent and you'll save loads of time by renting a car. You'll also want a car – or a bicycle for the very fit – to explore the scenic countryside around Otepää. Tartu has plenty of affordable car-hire agencies.

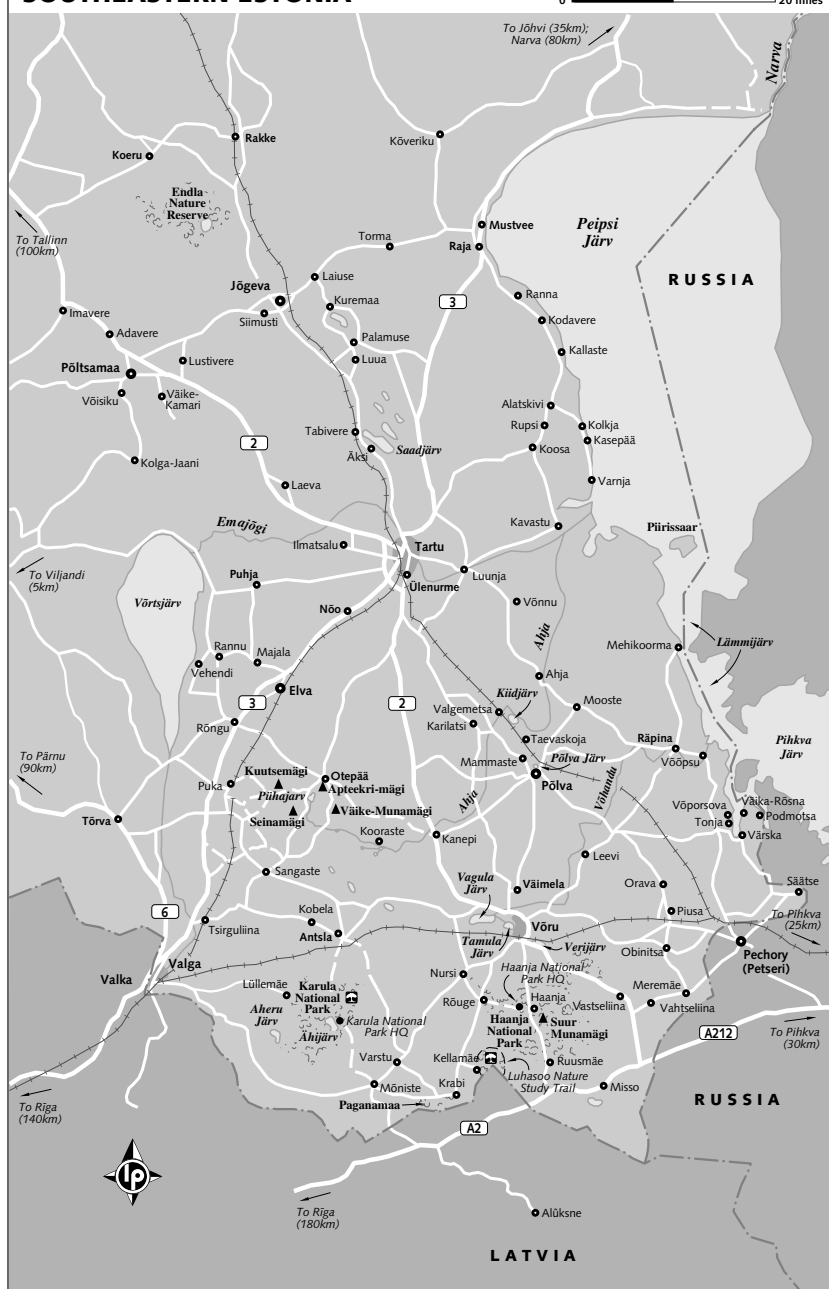
TARTU

pop 101,000

Tartu lays claim to be Estonia's spiritual capital. Locals talk about a special Tartu *vaim* (spirit) inhabiting its 19th-century streets, old wooden houses, green parks and peaceful riverfront. Small and quaint, with the quietly flowing Emajõgi River running through it, Tartu is also Estonia's premier university town, with students making up nearly one-fifth of the population. This injects a boisterous vitality into the leafy, historic setting and grants it a surprising sophistication for a city of its size.

Tartu was the cradle of Estonia's 19th-century national revival and it escaped Sovietisation to a greater degree than Tallinn. Its handsome centre is lined with classically designed 18th-century buildings, many of which have been put to innovative uses by the city's idealists. Today visitors can get a more authentic depiction of Estonian life

SOUTHEASTERN ESTONIA



than in its glitzier cousin to the north. In addition to galleries and cafés, there are fascinating museums here, and Tartu is a convenient gateway to exploring southern Estonia.

History

Around the 6th century AD there was an early Estonian stronghold on Toomemägi. In 1030 Yaroslav the Wise of Kyiv is said to have founded a fort here called Yuriev. The Estonians regained control, but in 1224 were defeated by the Knights of the Sword, who placed a castle, cathedral and bishop on Toomemägi. The town became known as Dorpat – its German name – until the end of the 19th century.

Throughout the 16th and 17th centuries Dorpat suffered repeated attacks and changes of ownership as Russia, Sweden and Poland-Lithuania fought for control of the Baltic region. Its most peaceful period was during the Swedish reign, which coincided with the university's founding in 1632. This peace ended in 1704, during the Great Northern War when Peter the Great took Tartu for Russia. In 1708 his forces wrecked the town and most of its population was deported to Russia.

In the mid-1800s Tartu became the focus of the Estonian national revival: the first Estonian Song Festival was held here in 1869,

and the first Estonian-language newspaper was launched here – both important steps in the national awakening.

The peace treaty, which granted independence to Estonia (for the first time in its history), was signed in Tartu between Soviet Russia and Estonia on 2 February 1920. Tartu was severely damaged in 1941 when Soviet forces retreated, blowing up the grand 1784 Kivisild stone bridge over the river, and again in 1944 when they retook it from the Nazis. Both occupying forces committed many atrocities. A monument now stands on the Valga road where the Nazis massacred 12,000 people at Lemmatsi.

Orientation

The focus of Tartu is Toomemägi and the older buildings between the hill and the Emajõgi River. Its heart is Raekoja plats (Town Hall Sq). Ülikooli tänav and Rüütli tänav are the main shopping streets.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Mattiesen (☎ 730 9723; Vallikraavi tänav 4; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 10am-3pm Sun) Tartu's best selection is inside the Café Wilde building.

Nora (☎ 740 7715; Raekoja plats 11; ☎ 11am-7pm Mon-Fri, 11am-3pm Sat) Small English-language bookshop.

University Bookshop (Ülikooli Raamatukauplus; ☎ 744 1102; Ülikooli tänav 11; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat) English-language books on 2nd floor.

INTERNET ACCESS

The tourist has one computer with free Internet access.

City Library (Kompanii 3; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat) Free Internet upstairs.

Kohvik Virtual (Pikk tänav 40; per hr 20Kr; ☎ 11am-midnight) A sleek Internet café on the east side of the river.

Zum Zum (Küüni 2; per hr 25Kr; ☎ 11am-11pm) Downstairs from the pub.

LEFT LUGGAGE

Left-luggage room (pakihoid; Tartu bus station, Soola tänav 2; ☎ 6am-9pm) Off the ticket hall on the ground floor of the bus station.

MONEY

ATMs are prevalent here. There are dozens of places to change cash in Old Town including:

Estravel (☎ 744 0300; www.estravel.ee; Vallikraavi tänav 2; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat)

LANGUAGE

In addition to Estonian, visitors may notice a quite different, choppy-sounding language spoken in the southeastern corner of this region. Võro-Seto, previously considered an Estonian dialect, was declared a separate language in 1998. For centuries, the northern and southern languages flourished quite independently of each other until the end of the 19th century. Then, in the interests of nationalism, a one-country, one-language policy was adopted, and the dominant Northern Estonian became the country's main language. Today the language is once again enjoying a resurgence, and Võro-Seto has over 70,000 native speakers, most of whom live in Võrumaa and Setumaa. To learn more about this unique language, contact the **Võro Institute** (☎ 782 1960; www.wi.ee; Tartu 48, Võru).

TARTU

Scale: 0 to 300 m / 0.2 miles

Grid: A-D, 1-6

Legend: INFORMATION, SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES, SLEEPING, EATING, ENTERTAINMENT, TRANSPORT

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Estravel.....	2	C5
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Tampere Maja.....	32	B4
Tartu University Student Village (Pepleri).....	33	B6
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POST

Central post office (Vanemuise tänav 7; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office (☎ 744 2111; www.visittartu.com; Raevoja plats 14; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat) This friendly office has local maps and brochures, and loads of other city info. They can also book accommodation and tour guides (200Kr per hour). Be sure to pick up the excellent Tartu in Your Pocket guide (25Kr).

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Estravel (☎ 744 0300; tartu1@estravel.ee; Vallikraavi tänav 2) Official Amex agent.

Hermann Travel (☎ 730 1444; tartu@hermann.ee; Lossi tänav 3) Specialises in nature tours, but can arrange anything.

Sights

RAEKOJA PLATS

At the town centre on Raevoja plats is the **Town Hall** (built between 1782 and 1789), topped by a tower and weather vane, and fronted by a statue of lovers kissing under a spouting umbrella. The building's design came courtesy of the German architect JHB Walter, who modelled it on a typical Dutch town hall. A clock was added to encourage students to be punctual for classes.

Nearby is the wonderfully crooked building housing the **Tartu Art Museum** (☎ 744 1080; www.tartmus.ee; Raevoja plats 18; adult/concession 20/10Kr; ☎ 11am-6pm Wed-Sun), former home of Colonel Barclay de Tolly (1761–1818), an exiled Scot who distinguished himself in the Russian army's 1812 campaign against Napoleon. Foundations laid partially over an old town wall have given the building its pronounced lean.

UNIVERSITY & AROUND

The university was founded in 1632 by the Swedish king Gustaf II Adolf (Gustavus Adolphus) to train Lutheran clergy and government officials. It was modelled on Uppsala University in Sweden. The university closed during the Great Northern War around 1700 but reopened in 1802, later becoming one of the Russian Empire's foremost centres of learning. Its early emphasis on science is evidenced by the great scholars who studied here in the 19th century, including physical chemistry pioneer W Ostwald, physicists HFE Lenz and MH Jakobi, and the founder of embryology, nat-

ural scientist Karl Ernst von Baer, whose image adorns the 2 kroon note, as well as the main building on Ülikooli tänav.

Lined with Corinthian columns, the impressive main building of **Tartu University** (Tartu Ülikooli; ☎ 737 5400; www.ut.ee; Ülikooli tänav 18) dates from 1803. Stop in at the **information centre** (☎ 737 5100; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) if you have the sudden urge to become a student. If you'd rather not, there are two other sites here that may warrant the visit. The **Tartu University Art Museum** (Ülikooli Kunstimuseum; ☎ 737 5384; adult/concession 7/4Kr; ☎ 11am-5pm Mon-Fri) contains mainly plaster casts of ancient Greek sculptures, made in Europe in the 1860s and 1870s, and an old mummy. The rest of the collection was evacuated to Russia during the war and has never returned.

More fascinating is the **Student's Lock-Up** (admission 5Kr; ☎ 11am-5pm Mon-Fri), where 19th-century students were held in solitary confinement for various infractions. Back then, if you failed to return library books on time, you'd net two days in the attic; insulting a lady, four days; insulting a (more sensitive?) cloakroom attendant, five days; duelling, up to three weeks. Today one of these rather comfy rooms, with walls covered in original graffiti, is open for viewing.

North of the university, on the continuation of Ülikooli, stands the magnificent **St John's Church** (Jaani Kirik; ☎ 744 2229; Jaani 5; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sat). This brick church dates back to at least 1323, and is unique for its rare terracotta sculptures in niches around the main portal. It lay in ruins following the Soviet bombing raid in 1944. Today it is once again open – after 16 years of renovation.

The **Botanical Gardens** (Botaanikaaed; ☎ 737 6180; Lai tänav 40; greenhouse adult/concession 20/7Kr; ☎ 10am-5pm), founded in 1803, nurtures 6500 species of plants and a large collection of palm trees in its giant greenhouse. A wander through the grounds is both pleasant and free.

The **Tartu Sports Museum** (Spordimuseum; ☎ 730 0750; Rüütli tänav 15; adult/concession 30/20Kr; ☎ 11am-6pm Wed-Sun) chronicles much more than Estonian Olympic excellence. There's a display of the life of a 19th-century postman and early-20th-century bodybuilders, and interactive tug-of-war on the 2nd floor.

Amid period furnishings, the **19th-century Tartu Citizen's Home Museum** (☎ 736 1545; Jaani 16; adult/concession 10/5Kr; ☎ 11am-6pm Wed-Sun) shows how a burgher from the 1830s lived.

Set in one of Tartu's oldest buildings (dating back to the 1770s), the **Toy Museum** (☎ 736 1551; Lutsu 8; adult/concession 15/10Kr; ☎ 11am-6pm Wed-Sun) is a big hit with the under-eight crowd. Dolls, model trains, rocking horses, toy soldiers and tons of other toys on display date back 100 years. If all those unobtainable toys have unearthed your inner child, there's a playroom upstairs for more hands-on activity.

TOOMEMÄGI

Toomemägi (Cathedral Hill), rising behind the Town Hall, is a splendidly landscaped park, with walking paths meandering through the trees. This hill is the original reason for Tartu's existence, functioning on and off as a stronghold from around the 5th or 6th century. The approach from Raevoja plats is along **Lossi tänav**, which passes beneath the **Angel's Bridge** (Inglisild), which was built between 1836 and 1838. A bit further up the hill is **Devil's Bridge** (Kuradisild).

Atop the hill is the imposing Gothic **Tartu Cathedral** (Toomkirik). It was built by German knights in the 13th century, rebuilt in the 15th century, despoiled during the Reformation in 1525, used as a barn, and partly rebuilt between 1804 and 1807 to house the university library, which is now the **Museum of University History** (☎ 737 5677; adult/concession 20/5Kr; ☎ 11am-5pm Wed-Sun). Inside you'll find a reconstructed autopsy chamber and other exhibits chronicling student life.

Also on the hill is the old **observatory** (☎ 737 5798; www.ahhaa.ee), set in a grand 1810 building. It's open by appointment, so phone ahead.

SOUTH OF TOOMEMÄGI

Tartu, as the major repository of Estonia's cultural heritage, has an abundance of first-rate museums. Among them is perhaps the country's best: the **Estonian National Museum** (☎ 742 1311; www.erm.ee; Kuperjanovi tänav 9; adult/concession 20/14Kr; ☎ 11am-6pm Wed-Sun) traces the history, life and traditions of the Estonian people. Don't miss the regional displays of folk costumes and exhibits of uniquely handcrafted tankards. Temporary exhibits here are also noteworthy.

The former KGB headquarters, known infamously as the 'Grey House', is now the sombre **KGB Cells Museum** (KGB Kongide; ☎ 746 1717; Riia maantee 15b, entrance on Pepleri; adult/concession 5/3Kr; ☎ 11am-4pm Tue-Sat), chronicling the deportations and life in the gulags. In 1990 the **weeping cornflower monument** was erected in front of the KGB buildings in memory of the victims of Soviet repression. The blue cornflower is Estonia's national flower.

One of the country's most important archives, the **Estonian Literary Museum** (Kirjandusmuuseum; ☎ 737 7700; www.kirmus.ee; Vanemuise tänav 42; admission free; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) is a national research museum housing an immense collection of Estonian folklore, ethnomusicology and cultural history. The museum hosts periodic exhibitions of historical artefacts and photographs from the collection.

BEER & BEACHES

North of Toomemägi, the **A Le Coq Beer Museum** (☎ 744 9711; Tähtvere 56; 25Kr; ☎ tours 2pm Thu, 10am, noon & 2pm Sat), at the brewery, briefly covers the history of beer-making, but focuses mainly on the machinery and techniques A Le Coq has used to churn out their trademark beverage since 1879. Free samples at the end.

If you can't make it to Pärnu, there's a pleasant **beach** (with sand volleyball court) along the north side of the Emajõgi, a 1km walk west of Kroonuaia tänav. Another **beach** is on the south side of the Emajõgi, at the start of the walking path (see p123).

Activities

HIKING

Lovely walks into the countryside begin just at the edge of Tartu. A 5km **walking path** begins just west of Emajõe tänav at the signpost that reads 'Jänese rada' (rabbit path). From here you'll hike along the river through birch groves and past the ruins of the Jänese tavern (an 18th-century pub destroyed in WWII) as well as an old archaeological site. Bring mosquito repellent.

RIVER CRUISES

Throughout the summer months **Atlantis** (☎ 738 5485; Narva maantee 2; 50Kr; ☎ cruise 2pm daily) runs a motor ship, *Pegasus*, which leaves from the dock in front of the restaurant for an hour-long cruise along the Emajõgi.

A hydrofoil, *Polaris*, also sails three times a week to Piirissaare, leaving from the city harbour.

SAUNAS

Many hotels have saunas, but if you're looking for something a little different, head to **Emajõe Ärikeskus Sauna** (☎ 737 1001; Soola 8; per hr from 500Kr; ☎ 8am-11pm Mon-Fri, 10am-10pm Sat & Sun). In a shiny building that resembles a hip flask, this sauna provides unbeatable views. You can reserve by phone or at the information desk on the ground floor.

TENNIS

If you're hungering for a match, head to **Dorpat Sport** (☎ 509 0705; Laulupeo puiestee 19; court per hr 60-100Kr; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-8pm Sun), where you can play on one of three new clay courts. Racket and ball hire available.

Festivals & Events

Ski Marathon (www.tartumaraton.ee) In mid-February the city hosts this 60km race, which goes along the cross-country tracks near Otepää.

University Spring Days festival You can catch a glimpse of modern-day student misdeeds at the end of April. Students take to the streets to celebrate winter's end in every way imaginable. Raucous fun, parades and boat rallies are the order of the five sleepless days.

Tartu Bicycle Marathon (www.tartumaraton.ee) One of Tartu's big sporting events is this 136km race held at the end of May, with a second race held in mid-September.

Sleeping

Some hotels give discounts just for asking.

APARTMENT RENTAL

Domus Dorpatensis (☎ 733 1345; www.dorpatensis.ee; Raekoja plats 1; apt €28-50; ☎) This foundation rents out three apartments ranging from small to large in an unbeatable location next to the Town Hall. Apartments are simple, comfortably furnished affairs that offer great value for money.

Wilde Guest Apartments (☎ 730 9765; www.wilde.ee/kylaliskorterid.php; Vallikraavi 4; apt 1100-1500Kr; ☎) Rents beautiful modern apartments (one has a sauna and balcony) with old-world details. All are within a short distance of the pub.

BUDGET

Tartu University Student Village (☎ 740 9955; www.kyla.ee; s/d 250/400Kr; ☎; Pepleri dorm Pepleri tänav 14; Raatuse dorm Raatuse tänav 22) These student dorms

offer cheap, clean accommodation. The Raatuse dorm is brand-new but somewhat institutional and every three rooms share a kitchen and bathroom. It's set up for disabled access. The Pepleri dorm is older but a bit cosier, with a kitchenette and bathroom in each room.

Tähtvere Hostel (☎ 742 1708; Laulupeo puiestee 19; s/d from 250/350Kr; ☎) A 1km walk west of the centre, this no-frills hostel has fairly worn rooms. It's next to tennis courts and a leafy park. Bike hire next door.

Hiie Maja (☎ 742 1236; www.bed.ee; Hiie 10; r per person €15; ☎) In a peaceful residential neighbourhood 15-minutes' walk west of the centre, this friendly bed and breakfast offers small clean rooms in a private house.

MIDRANGE

Tampere Maja (☎ 738 6300; www.tamperemaja.ee; Jaani 4; s/d/apt incl breakfast from €40/60/80; ☎) Boasting an excellent location in the old quarters, this small guesthouse has trim, cosy rooms in a historic building. The apartment has a kitchen; room guests have access to a shared kitchen. Sauna available.

Aleksandri Guesthouse (☎ 736 6659; www.aleksandri.ee; Aleksandri 42; s/d with shared bathroom 400/500Kr, with private bathroom 450/550Kr; ☎) A 15-minute walk southeast of the main square, this pleasant guesthouse has clean, simple rooms on a quiet street.

Park Hotell (☎ 742 7000; www.parkhotell.ee; Vallikraavi tänav 23; s/d 800/1080Kr; ☎) Nestled to the side of Toomemägi, the Park Hotell has pleasant wood-floored rooms painted in pale shades of green (others in cream). The lush greenery through the windows and parkland outside the door is the big draw.

Hotel Tartu (☎ 731 4300; www.tartuhotell.ee; Soola tänav 3; dm/s/d 300/715/1045Kr; ☎) Across from the bus station, this hotel isn't in the most charming locale, but its nicely renovated rooms are trim and comfortable with big windows. 'Youth rooms' are triples with shared bathrooms. Sauna available.

TOP END

Pallas Hotel (☎ 730 1200; www.pallas.ee; Riia maantee 4; s/d from 975/1250Kr; ☎) On the top two floors of a renovated building that used to house a famous art school, the Pallas has some of the most uniquely decorated rooms in Estonia, with vibrantly colourful walls and decent furnishings. Some rooms boast

floor-to-ceiling windows, giving sweeping views over the city.

London Hotel (☎ 730 5555; www.londonhotel.ee; Rütüli tänav 9; s/d from 1125/1600Kr; ☎) This handsome modern hotel has comfortable, nicely set rooms – some with enviable views over the old streets. The pond and fountain in the lobby and the inviting restaurant are nice features.

Barclay Hotel (☎ 744 7100; www.barclay.ee; Ülikooli tänav 8; s/d/ste/ste with sauna 990/1520/1800/2300Kr; ☎) This charming hotel has elegant rooms with high ceilings and abundant greenery surrounding the 1912 building. The Barclay has a surprising past: the Red Army was headquartered here until 1992; you can also stay in the room where Chechen president Dudayev kept his office.

Hansa Hotell (☎ 737 1800; www.hansahotell.ee; Aleksandri 46; s/d/apt €60/80/105; ☎) A 15-minute walk southwest of Raekoja plats, this charming hotel has decent, comfortably furnished rooms and more spacious apartments with wood-beamed ceilings, exposed brick and full kitchens. There's a lively bar and restaurant in the courtyard.

Hotel Draakon (☎ 744 2045; www.draakon.ee; Raekoja plats 2; s/d/ste from 975/1550/2600Kr; ☎) Overlooking Raekoja plats, this elegant hotel has tastefully furnished rooms with deep wood tones, large windows and classic colour schemes. The double room with private sauna is worth the upgrade.

Eating

University Café (☎ 737 5405; Ülikooli tänav 20; meals 60-120Kr, 1st fl buffet per kilo 10Kr; ☎ 7.30am-1am Mon-Sat, 10am-10pm Sun) This old-world café with beautiful wooden floors and an outdoor patio is one of the gems of Tartu. Palm trees, high ceilings and black-and-white photographs give a colonial charm to the upstairs airy space. Downstairs there's a simpler buffet (decent breakfasts), also with outdoor patio, that makes a good spot for coffee or a quick meal.

Café Wilde (☎ 730 9764; Vallikraavi tänav 4; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Wed, 9am-10pm Thu-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun) This richly decorated place serves good coffees, decadent homemade cakes and light sandwiches. Its namesake is Peter Ernst Wilde, who opened a publishing house on the premises in the 18th century, though the pub also pays tribute to two literary Wildes: Oscar Wilde and Eduard Wilde.

For heartier dining (and drinking) head to the upstairs pub (p114).

La Dolce Vita (☎ 740 7545; Kompanii 10; meals 45-80Kr) Thin-crust pizzas come straight from the wood-burning oven at this charming pizzeria. You'll also find pastas, salads and classic but casual décor (red-and-white checked tablecloths, Fellini posters). There's a patio at the back.

Crepp (☎ 742 2133; Rütüli 16; meals from 55Kr) This Parisian-style café serves delicious crepes, fresh salads and sandwiches in a cosy, candlelit setting. Outdoor tables are used in summer.

Gruusia Saatkond (☎ 744 1386; Rütüli 8; meals 45-90Kr) A rustic but colourfully decorated dining room sets the scene for feasting on hearty plates of Georgian cuisine. Eggplant with walnuts, *hatsapur*, trout with walnuts and *shashlik* are among the favourites.

Suudlevad Tudengid (☎ 730 1893; Raekoja plats 10; meals 50-150Kr) One of several outdoor cafés on the main square, this one serves nicely prepared international fare (pasta, gazpacho, burgers, mushroom risotto). Downstairs there's a cosy brick-lined café. The restaurant incidentally means 'Kissing Students' – presumably named after the fountain rather than the sometimes frisky customers.

Maailm (☎ 742 9099; Rütüli 12; meals from 50Kr) The old wooden floors, beamed ceilings and wildly decorated walls may make you feel like you've stumbled across Greg Brady's secret Tartu hideaway. The food is just as eclectic: curry chicken, fish soup, vegetarian enchiladas and milkshakes.

Bambus (☎ 742 2448; Ülikooli tänav 5; meals 75-125Kr) Serving Indian, Thai and other dishes from the East, this lounge-like space is beautifully set with bamboo furniture, exposed brick walls and other warm touches. The food is excellent.

Tsink Plekk Pang (☎ 744 1789; Kiiütri tänav 6; meals 50-200Kr) Named after the zinc buckets that are suspended from the ceiling as lampshades, this warmly lit Chinese pub serves decent meals with plenty of vegetarian fare. The outdoor patio up top is particularly inviting.

Püssirohukelder (☎ 730 3555; Lossi tänav 28; meals 50-100Kr) Set majestically in a cavernous old gunpowder cellar, this place doubles as a boisterous pub and it's a good choice for tasty meat and fish dishes. A more secluded wine cellar joins the space.

Werner (☎ 744 1274; Ülikoolitänav 15; ☎ 9am–8pm) This old-world classic serves fresh pastries, teas and coffees. It's a Tartu favourite.

Kondiitriärii (☎ 740 0366; Riiutli tänav 5; ☎ 8am–7pm Mon–Fri, 9am–5pm Sat, 10am–4pm Sun) Another lovely spot for cakes, pastries and coffee.

Outdoor Market (☎ 8am–5pm Mon–Fri, to 3pm Sat & Sun) The outdoor market, just east of the bus station, is a fun place to browse for fresh produce, flowers and other goodies.

There's a more extensive **indoor market** (☎ 8am–4pm Tue–Fri) across Riia maantee from the bus station.

Drinking

Wilde Irish Pub (☎ 730 9765; Vallikraavi tänav 4; meals from 60Kr) Upstairs from Café Wilde (p113), this pub has good food (both Estonian and Irish), live music and a popular terrace.

Zavood (☎ 744 1321; Lai 30) This battered cellar bar attracts an alternative, down-to-earth crowd with its inexpensive drinks and lack of attitude. Student bands sometimes play here.

Hansa Tall (☎ 737 1802; Aleksandri 46) Set like an old-fashioned tavern, this lively pub also has an extensive outdoor courtyard that draws a fair mix of locals and tourists on warm summer days. If it's not your scene you can always try Õlle Tare, a popular pub next door.

Zum Zum (☎ 744 1438; Küüni 2) Just off Rae-koja plats, this indoor-outdoor pub and restaurant is a fun, welcoming place for a drink.

Entertainment

NIGHTCLUBS

Illegaard (☎ 742 3743; Ülikooli tänav 5; ☎ 5pm–2am) This New Wave–inspired jazz vault attracts an artsy crowd who cluster around tables for lively conversations. Live jams happen during the school year (September to May), and infrequently in the summer.

Atlantis (☎ 738 5485; www.atlantis.ee; Narva maantee 2; ☎ 10pm–3am Tue–Sat) Overlooking the Emajõgi River, Atlantis is a popular place that's pretty short on style; the riverside setting, however, is nice, and if you're in the mood, the retro hits make for a cheesy good time.

Club Tallinn (☎ 740 3157; www.dubtallinn.ee; Narva maantee 27; ☎ 10pm–3am Wed, Fri & Sat) Tartu's best nightclub is a multistoreyed dance fest with many nooks and crannies. Top-notch DJs

spin here, drawing an eager, young crowd. Unfortunately, it's open only during the school year. During the summer, Club Tallinn (p160) packs up and moves to Pärnu.

THEATRE

Vanemuine Theatre (☎ 744 0165; www.vanemuine.ee; Vanemuise tänav 6) Named after the ancient Estonian song god, this theatre hosted the first Estonian-language theatre troupe, which performed here in 1870. The venue still hosts an array of classical and alternative theatrical and musical performances. It also stages performances at its **small stage** (☎ 744 0160; Vanemuise tänav 45) and **Sadamateater** (☎ 734 4248; Soola 5b).

Shopping

You'll find handicrafts stores scattered about the old streets.

Antoniuse Gild (Lutsu 5; ☎ 11am–5pm Tue–Fri) One of the best places to shop. Here you'll find ceramics, stained glass, leather-bound books, quilts, woodcarvings, as well as clothing made by some of Tartu's talented young fashion designers.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Daily buses run between Tartu and Tallinn (80Kr to 110Kr, 2½ to 3½ hours) every 15 to 30 minutes from 6am to midnight. International bus tickets are sold from the Euro-lines office inside the **Tartu bus station** (☎ 733 1277; Soola tänav 2).

Daily bus services to and from Tartu include the following:

Haapsalu 110Kr to 170Kr, 4½ hours, one bus.
Kuressaare 200Kr to 220Kr, six to seven hours, two buses.
Narva 85Kr to 105Kr, three to 3½ hours, 10 buses.
Pärnu 85Kr to 115Kr, two to 3 hours, 16 buses.
Riga 120Kr, four hours, one morning bus.
St Petersburg 240Kr, eight hours, one bus.
Valga 55Kr to 65Kr, 1½ to 2½ hours, eight buses.
Viljandi 50Kr to 60Kr, 1½ to 2 hours, 16 buses.
Võru 45Kr to 55Kr, one hour, 26 buses.

TRAIN

The seemingly abandoned **train station** (☎ 737 3200; Vaksali tänav 6) is 750m west of Toomemägi. Timetables are posted outside; tickets are sold on the train.

Four trains make the daily journey to Tallinn (80Kr, 2½ hours). One daily train

also travels from Tartu to Elva (12Kr, 50 minutes), continuing on to Valga (36Kr, two hours).

Getting Around

The central stop for city buses is on Riia maantee, opposite the old Kaubamaja department store.

Bikes can be rented from **Jalgratas** (☎ 742 1731; laulupeo 19; per day 120Kr), adjoining the Tähtvere Hostel.

The tourist office keeps up-to-date lists of car-hire agencies with prices. Among the many options are **City Car** (☎ 523 9699; www.citycar.ee; Jõe 9a) and **Sixt** (☎ 744 7260; www.sixt.ee; Ülikooli 8), which is handily located in the Barclay Hotel but isn't the cheapest. Call first before stepping out, as most agencies can pick you up, and many of these places are quite a hike.

By far, the cheapest place to rent a car is at **Olev's** (☎ 503 0151; per day from €10) in Elva, where you can hire a refurbished Audi; Olev, the friendly owner, can help arrange transport down.

AROUND TARTU

Piirisaar

This island in Lake Peipsi lies on the border with Russia, 50km due east of Tartu. It used to be a refuge for young men fleeing from conscription into tsarist armies. In its heyday at the end of the 1920s, the island had 700 inhabitants. Now less than 100 Russian Old Believers live on Piirisaar, scattered among three villages. There's a working church with services every Sunday morning, a border guard station (climb the observation tower for a great view), a general store, the villages, marshland and not much else. A visit on the two biggest feast days in the Orthodox Old Believers' calendar could prove interesting: 12 July is Peter and Paul Day, and 28 August is Uspeniya (Lady Day). For more information on the Old Believers, see p127

The **Polaris hydrofoil** (☎ 734 0066; 200Kr) departs from Tartu on Thursdays at 10am, returning at 5.30pm; and on Sundays at 10am, returning at 4pm. There's also a Friday 5.30pm boat, but it returns at 8.30pm, leaving little time to explore. Check with the Tartu tourist office for the latest schedule. Accommodation on the island can be arranged by the **general store** (☎ 743 4160).

Half the fun is the 90-minute boat trip along the Emajõgi. The **Polaris** leaves from the river port, 100m northeast of the bus station.

Elva & Around

pop 6300

A small town 27km from Tartu in a hilly, forested landscape on the Tartu–Valga road, Elva is set between two pretty lakes, Verevi and Arbi. Just outside town is Elva Vitipalu, a small, beautiful nature reserve with hiking trails, pristine rivers and lakes.

For more lake action, you can head 15km further west of Elva to **Võrtsjärv** (www.hot.ee/vjarv), Estonia's second-biggest lake. The best beaches lie on the northern and western shores.

The friendly **tourist information office** (☎ 735 6057; www.elva.ee; Pikk 2; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Fri, to 3pm Sat) near the train and bus stations is a good place to pick up maps and hiking guides, and get info on boating and horse riding in the area. The same building also contains the small **Tartumaa Muuseum** (☎ 745 6141; www.tartumaamuuseum.ee, in Estonian; Pikk 2; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Fri, to 3pm Sat), featuring exhibits on local history, folklore and artists.

From there, you can stroll west along Kesk street, the town's main street, which has banks, restaurants and a supermarket. Abutting Kesk street to the north is the pine-shrouded Arbi järv, the pleasant lake with a 1.5km walking path circling it. In the winter Arbi järv transforms into a skating rink.

About 1km northwest of Arbi järv off Tartu maantee is Verevi järv. With its sandy beach, refreshing water and views of the forest on the far shores, this lake makes a good setting for a swim on summer days.

Elva Vitipalu lies about 2km southeast of town. If you're on foot, you can take the walking path from the information office. Inside the reserve, hiking and biking trails pass near idyllic lakes, through pine forests and along the wandering Elva River. You can overnight in the reserve inside wooden cabins or camp sites. Pick up trail maps from the Elva information office.

SLEEPING & EATING

WaideMotel (☎ 730 6606; www.waide.ee; camp site/caravan/s/d50/150/500/700Kr; ☒) Some 2.5km southwest of Elva towards Rannu is this small complex. Here you'll find comfortable,

THE BLUE, BLACK AND WHITE: THE BIRTH OF A NATIONAL SYMBOL

Estonia's tricolour dates back to 1881, when a theology student named Jaan Bergmaan wrote a poem about a beautiful flag flying over Estonia. The only problem, for both Jaan and his countrymen, was that no flag in fact existed. Very clearly, something had to be done about this. This was, after all, the time of the national awakening, when the idea of independent nationhood was on the lips of every young dreamer across the country.

In September of that year, at the Union of Estonian Students in Tartu, 20 students and one alumnus gathered to hash out ideas for a flag. All present agreed that the colours must express the character of the nation, reflect the Estonian landscape, and connect to the colours of folk costumes. After long discussions, the students came up with blue, black and white. According to one interpretation, blue symbolised hope for Estonia's future; it also represented faithfulness. Black was a reminder of the dark past to which Estonia would not return; it also depicted the country's dark soil. White represented the attainment of enlightenment and education – an aspiration for all Estonians; it also symbolised snow in winter, light nights in summer and the Estonian birch tree.

After the colours were chosen, it took several years before the first flag was made. Three young activist women – Emilie, Paula and Miina Beermann – carried this out by sewing together a large one made out of silk. In 1884 the students held a procession, which went from Tartu to Otepää, a location far from the eyes of the Russian government. All members of the students' union were there as the flag was raised over the vicarage. Afterwards it was dipped in Puhajärv (a lake considered sacred to Estonians, see p118), and locked safely away in the student archive.

Although the inauguration of the flag was a tiny event, word of the flag's existence spread, and soon the combination of colours appeared in unions and choirs, and hung from farmhouses all across Estonia. By the end of the 19th century the blue-black-and-white was used in parties, and at wedding ceremonies. Its first political appearance, however, didn't arrive until 1917, when thousands of Estonians marched in St Petersburg demanding independence. In 1918 Estonia was declared independent, and the flag was raised on Pikk Hermann in Tallinn's Old Town. There it remained until the Soviet Union seized power in 1940.

During the occupation the Soviets banned the flag, and once again the blue-black-and-white went underground. For Estonians, keeping the flag on the sly was a small but hopeful symbol of one day regaining nationhood. People hid flags under floorboards or unstitched the stripes and secreted them in bookcases; those caught with the flag faced severe punishment – including a possible sentence in the Siberian gulags. Needless to say, as the Soviet Union teetered on the brink of collapse, blue, black and white returned to the stage. On February 1989, 45 years after its first time up, the flag was raised again on Pikk Hermann. Independence had been regained.

all-wooden en-suite rooms (some with balconies) and a pleasant café, and the property is backed by woods. Staff can help arrange activities – cycling, canoeing, sailing – if you arrange in advance.

Tartumaa Health & Sport Centre (Tervise-sportikeskus; ☎ 745 6333; cabin from 300Kr; ☒) Inside the nature reserve, these tidy wooden cabins are rich with the scent of pine, and sleep from two to four. Bathrooms, shower and sauna are inside the main building.

Free RMK camp sites are scattered throughout the park.

Kolmas Eesti (☎ 730 3616; Keskk 10; meals 50-80Kr; ☒ 9am-midnight; ☒) A few blocks from the information office, this handsome wooden

pub serves good soups, *shashlik*, perch fillet, and many other selections.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Between 6.30am and 9.30pm, more than 25 buses travel daily between Elva and Tartu (20Kr to 30Kr, 30 minutes to one hour). There's also a daily train to Elva (12Kr, 45 minutes).

Otepää pop 2200

The small hilltop town of Otepää, 44km south of Tartu, is the centre of a picturesque area of forests and lakes, scenic hillsides and crisp rivers. The district is belved by

Estonians for both its natural beauty and its many possibilities for hiking, biking and swimming in summer, and cross-country skiing in winter. Some have even dubbed this the 'Estonian Alps' – a teasing reference not to its 'peaks' but to its lovely ski trails.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

The centre of town is the triangular main 'square', Lipuväljak, with the bus station just off its east corner. There you'll find the **Otepää Tourist Office** (☎ 766 1200; www.otepea.ee; Lipuväljak 13; ☒ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat) with well-informed staff who can distribute maps and brochures, and make recommendations for activities, guide services and lodging in the area. Near the bus station,

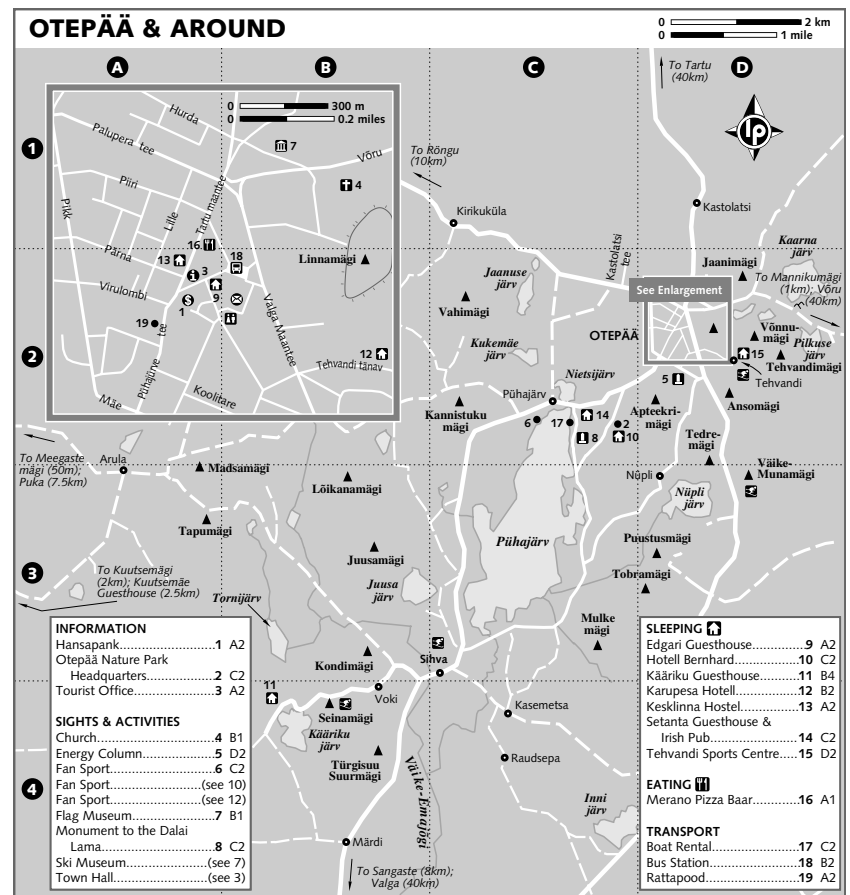
you'll find the **post office** (Lipuväljak 24) and a **Hansapank bank** (Lipuväljak 11) with ATM.

For information about hiking in the area, stop in at the **Otepää Nature Park headquarters** (☎ 765 5876; otepea.looduspark@mail.ee; Kolga tee 28; ☒ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) near Puhajärv.

SIGHTS

Church

Otepää's pretty little 17th-century church is on a hill top about 100m northeast of the bus station. It was in this church in 1884 that the Estonian Students' Society consecrated its new blue, black and white flag (see boxed text, opposite) which later became the flag of independent Estonia. Facing the church's west door is a small mound with a monument



to those who died in the 1918–20 independence war. The former vicar's residence now houses two museums: **Flag Museum** (Eesti Lipu Muuseum; ☎ 765 5075; admission free) and **Ski Museum** (Suusamuuseum; ☎ 766 3670; adult/child 10/7Kr; ☎ 9am–2pm Tue–Fri, 10am–1pm Sat); both museums can be viewed by appointment.

Linnamägi

The tree-covered hill south of the church is Linnamägi (Castle Hill), a major stronghold from the 10th to 12th centuries. There are traces of old fortifications on top, and good views of the surrounding country. Archaeological finds indicate that the area around the hill was inhabited as early as the 1st century AD.

Pühajärvi

The islets and indented shore of 3.5km-long Pühajärvi (Holy Lake), on the southwest edge of Otepää, provide some of the area's loveliest views. A 12km nature trail and a bike path encircle the lake, making it a lovely spot for a walk. The lake was blessed by the Dalai Lama when he came to Tartu in 1992, and a **monument** on the eastern shore commemorates his visit.

According to legend, Pühajärvi was formed from the tears of the mothers who lost their sons in a battle of the *Kalevipoeg* epic. Its islands are said to be their burial mounds. Major midsummer St John's Day (Jaanipäev) festivities take place here every year. If energy levels are low after the walk to the lake, recharge at the **energy column** down Mäe tänav. The column was erected in 1992 to mark the long-held belief of psychics that this area resonates with positive energy.

The northern tip of the lake is around 2km southwest of Otepää, reached via Pühajärve tee.

ACTIVITIES

It would be a shame not to take advantage of some of the excellent outdoor activities this scenic region has to offer.

Canoeing & Rafting

If you're thinking about a trip, call these firms a day or two ahead of time. They can pick you up from your hotel, take you to the river and drop you back afterwards. All-day trips cost about 300Kr for an adult and 150Kr for a child, with lunch included.

Veetee (☎ 767 9963; www.veetee.ee) offers a range of canoeing and rafting trips along the Ahja River, the Võhandu River and in Lake Kooraste.

Toonus Pluss (☎ 505 5702; www.toonuspluss.ee), near Arula and about 10km south of Otepää, specialises in canoeing trips, which can include combined hiking and mountain-biking tours.

In addition to rentals, Fan Sport (see Hotell Bernhard, opposite) also offers five-hour canoeing excursions on the Võhandu River.

If you want to just get in a boat and go, you can rent **rowboats** (☎ 5343 6359; ☎ 10am–7pm) and water-bikes on the north shore of Puhajärvi.

Cycling & Rollerblading

To hire bikes, Rollerblades, skis and snowboards, contact **Fan Sport** (☎ 507 7537; www.fan.sport.ee; blades/skis/bikes/snowboards per day 80/150/200/275Kr), which has three offices in Otepää, including one located inside the Karupesa Hotell (opposite) and one inside the Hotell Bernhard (opposite). The third office is just north of Pühajärvi.

Bicycle rental is available in Otepää at **Ratatapod** (Pühajärve tee; per day 150Kr; ☎ 10am–6pm).

Skiing

For cross-country skiing, the closest trails are near the **Tehvandi Sports Centre** (☎ 766 9500; www.tehvandi.ee; trail use per day 50Kr), just outside town. You can also find some good trails near **Kääriku järv**. Both have guesthouses conveniently nearby, and will rent skis.

Most skiing is cross-country here, but there are a few places for downhill skiing, including **Kuutsemägi** 12km west of Otepää, which is among the top ski centres. There, the **Kuutsemäe Resort** (☎ 766 9007; www.kuutse.mae.ee; 1-day lift ticket 120–190Kr, ski/snowboard rental 300/400Kr) operates seven runs; there's also Kuutsemäe Guesthouse (opposite) overlooking Kuutsemägi. Other downhill skiing can be done at **Ansomägi**, 2km south of Otepää; **Meegaste mägi**, 10km west; and **Seinamägi**, 10km to the southwest. The 63km Tartu **Ski Marathon** begins in Otepää every February.

SLEEPING

In Town

Kesklinna Hostel (☎ 765 5095; info@kesklinnahotell.ee; Lipuväljak 11; s/d 300/600Kr; ☎) In the centre of town, Kesklinna has clean but bare rooms.

The place is short on charm, but at least there's a guest kitchen.

Edgari Guesthouse (☎ 765 4275; Lipuväljak 3; d from 400Kr; ☎) Undergoing extensive renovations at the time of research, Edgari has small, clean rooms with decent light and wooden furnishings. There's also a communal kitchen, a pleasant 1st-floor pub, and bigger, better rooms are on the way.

Karupesa Hotell (☎ 766 1500; www.karupesa.ee; Tehvandi tänav 1a; s/d incl breakfast 650/800Kr; ☎) Karupesa has a range of comfortable rooms, with nicely sized windows but an uninspiring colour scheme. The cosy lounge with fireplace makes a nice hideaway during chilly weather. It also has a good restaurant, tennis courts, a sauna, and you can hire bikes, Rollerblades and other gear here.

OUT OF TOWN

Setanta Guesthouse & Irish Pub (☎ 766 8200; www.setanta.ee, in Estonian; Nüpli Village; d 500–1200Kr; ☎) Better known for its Irish pub, Setanta has nine pleasantly furnished rooms, the best of which have terraces and splendid views over the lake.

Tehvandi Sports Centre (☎ 766 9500; www.tehvandi.ee; off Tehvandi tänav; s/d/tr 400/550/750Kr; ☎) Just outside Otepää, Tehvandi has neat and functional rooms with balconies, housed in the rather Soviet octagonal building. Ski gear and other equipment can be hired on the trails just outside.

Hotell Bernhard (☎ 766 9600; www.bernhard.ee; Kolga tee 22a; d/ste from 890/1600Kr; ☎) On the eastern edge of Pühajärvi, this long, three-storey hotel has excellent rooms set with hardwood floors, big windows, and balconies overlooking the lake and forest. There's a good restaurant and tennis courts, and you can hire sports gear.

Kuutsemäe Guesthouse (☎ 766 9007; www.kuutse.mae.ee; d 300–700Kr, cottage 1000–2000Kr; ☎) Right at the slalom course and downhill slopes, this pleasant guesthouse has nice, simple rooms set among abundant greenery. You can also rent handsome three-bedroom wooden cottages (sleeping six to eight), complete with kitchens and electric saunas.

Kääriku Guesthouse (☎ 766 5600; www.kaariku.com; s/d 450/680; ☎) Overlooking Lake Kääriku, this modern place has clean, comfortable rooms, but they're a bit nondescript. What most people come here for though are the lovely swimming lakes

nearby as well as the many kilometres of trails through the surrounding forest. You can hire skis and other gear here. You can also hire one of two wooden saunas right on the lake.

Sangaste Castle (Sangaste Loss; ☎ 767 9300; www.sangasteloss.ee; dm/s/d from 125/250/390Kr; ☎) About 22km south of Otepää, this fairy-tale brick castle is one of the most unusual places to stay in the Baltics. Erected between 1874 and 1881, it's said to be modelled on Britain's Windsor Castle. Rooms here are pretty basic with thin mattresses and bare walls. The castle is also open to visitors (museum adult/concession 20/15Kr, open 9am to 6pm). Five buses run daily, connecting Sangaste with Otepää (25Kr, 30 minutes) and Tartu (50Kr, one hour).

EATING & DRINKING

In general, the dining scene here is pretty disappointing.

Setanta Irish Pub (☎ 766 8200; Nüpli Village; meals 70–140Kr) Hands down Otepää's best restaurant, this pleasant wooden pub has a lovely outdoor terrace overlooking the lake, and eclectic dishes: pesto pasta, paella and salmon steak among the options.

Merano Pizza Baar (☎ 767 9444; Tartu maantee 1a; pizzas 35–65Kr; ☎ 10am–midnight Mon–Sat, to 10pm Sun) Opposite the Town Hall, this place remains popular despite its flimsy pizzas.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses connect Otepää with Tartu (45 minutes to one hour, 10 daily); Elva (45 minutes, four daily Monday–Saturday); Valga (one hour, one daily); Võru (1½ hours, one daily) and Tallinn (three hours, three daily). If you're heading to Põlva or towns further east, you'll have to go through Tartu first.

Põlva & Taevaskoja pop 6500

Põlva lies in an attractive valley 48km southeast of Tartu, and makes for a pleasant stop on the way to Võru, 25km to its south. Aside from its tiny sand **beach** on the shoreline of the **lake**, Põlva has little to entice tourists. It does, however, have some enticing countryside nearby.

If you stop in town for a swim, you'll pass by Põlva's oldest building, St Mary's Church, which sits just back from the shore. This handsome country church dates from

1452, although its original foundations were laid in 1240. You can also check out the two war monuments in town, visit a lively food and clothing market, and perhaps stop in a wooded cemetery on your way out of town.

The amiable **tourist office** (☎ 799 4089; www.polvamaale.ee; Keskk tänav 42; ☎ 10am–6pm Mon–Fri, to 3pm Sat & Sun) can provide you with a map and hints on how to make the most of your time. Another excellent outfit is the **Kagureis travel agency** (☎ 799 8530; www.kagureis.ee; Uus tänav 5), located inside the Hotell Pesa. Staff here can organise hiking, biking, canoeing, riding and skiing trips. This agency also handles excursions with Timmo Tallid (right), which is located 1km north of Põlva on the road to Tartu. In addition to horse-riding excursions (two/four hours 400/600Kkr), this riding centre offers sleigh rides in the winter (300Kkr per hour) and they maintain a hostel year-round.

Taevaskoja, 7km north of Põlva, is in the valley of the Ahja River and is an idyllic base for expeditions of all kinds, or even just for a picnic. The area is noted for two large caves, Väike and Suur Taevaskoja, which are about 2km past the train tracks coming from the Tartu–Põlva road. There are strikingly beautiful red sandstone embankments above the caves, up to 24m high and 190m long, pockmarked by swallows and kingfishers, which nest in them. Sign-posted multilingual commentaries detail the myths that surround these formations. There are walking and biking paths in the surrounding woods, and you can also follow the river to **Kiidjärv**, 6km north, where you can hire a canoe.

For more in-depth exploration of the Ahja River, you can take a one-hour boat trip on the good ship *Lonny*, which in good weather departs on the hour between 10am and 6pm (50Kkr). The ship docks at the entrance to the trails, just up from the car park. You can also book a canoe trip with the **Taevaskoja Holiday Centre** (☎ 799 2067; ttpk@estpak.ee).

SLEEPING & EATING

Pesa Hotel (☎ 799 8530; www.kagureis.ee; Uus tänav 5; s/d €38/57; 🍷) In Põlva, this modern hotel has trim, nicely designed rooms with wooden floors and warm colours. A decent restaurant (with outdoor patio in the summer)

adjoins the space. You can also book outdoor activities here.

Ääl Klubi (☎ 799 8542; Tuglase tänav 2; meals 30–70Kkr) Overlooking the lake, this simple restaurant offers basic Estonian fare. The tables out front are a nice setting for coffee.

Timmo Tallid (☎ 799 8530; beds 150–200Kkr) In addition to horse-related activities, Timmo Tallid has a hostel with plain two- to four-bed rooms with shared bathrooms in the hall. There's also a pub where you can mingle with other admirers of those dashing four-legged animals. Bookings can be made through Kagureis at the Pesa Hotel.

Taevaskoja Tourism & Holiday Centre (☎ 799 2067; ttpk@estpak.ee; camp site/dm 40/170Kkr) In Taevaskoja, this centre offers a wide range of activities from canoeing the sparkling Ahja River to rock climbing, bike tours, bird-watching, skiing and winter sled picnics. Guests can stay in basic wooden cabins, and have access to cooking facilities.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

From Tartu you can reach Põlva either by bus (28Kkr to 45Kkr, one hour, 15 daily) or by train (22Kkr, one hour, one daily except Saturday).

Taevaskoja is 2km east of the Tartu–Põlva road, which is the nearest a bus will take you. There are six to 10 buses daily between Põlva and Võru (14Kkr to 30Kkr, 30 minutes to one hour), and four between Põlva and Tallinn (80Kkr to 110Kkr, 3½ hours).

An evening train from Tartu stops at Taevaskoja (daily except Saturday), which is a 1km walk from the Tourism & Holiday Centre and 2km from the caves.

VÕRU

pop 15,000

A small pleasant town on the eastern shore of Lake Tamula, Võru has a bucolic feel with its leafy parks and picturesque churches, and 19th-century houses lining its old lanes. Võru's sandy shoreline is perhaps its most attractive feature, and its refreshing lake attracts plenty of beachgoers in summer.

The town was founded in 1784 by special decree from Catherine the Great, though archaeological finds here date back several thousand years. Its most famous resident, however, was neither a tribesman nor a tsarina, but the writer Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald (1803–1882), who is known as

the father of Estonian literature for his folk epic *Kalevipoeg*.

Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 782 1881; www.vorulinn.ee; Tartu maantee 31; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Fri, 9am–3pm Sat & Sun May–Sep, 9am–5pm Mon–Fri Oct–Apr) is a good place to pick up a map and get info about festivals, attractions and tourist farms throughout Võru and Setu counties.

Banks, including **Ühispank** (Tartu maantee 25), are scattered about town. Free Internet access is available at the **public library** (Jüri; ☎ 10am–6pm Mon–Fri, to 4pm Sat).

Sights & Activities

Võru's most interesting museum is the **Kreutzwald Memorial Museum** (Kreutzwaldi tänav 31; adult/concession 10/5Kkr; ☎ 11am–4pm Wed–Sun), set in the former house where the great man lived and worked as a city doctor from 1833 to 1877. In addition to personal relics, there's a lovely garden at the back.

In front of the 18th-century **Lutheran Church** (Jüri tänav 9) overlooking the central square is a granite **monument** to 17 local town council of-

ficials who lost their lives in the 1994 *Estonia* ferry disaster. Up the road is the classical yellow and white Russian Orthodox **Jekateriina kirik** (Tartu tänav 26), built in 1793 and named in honour of Catherine II.

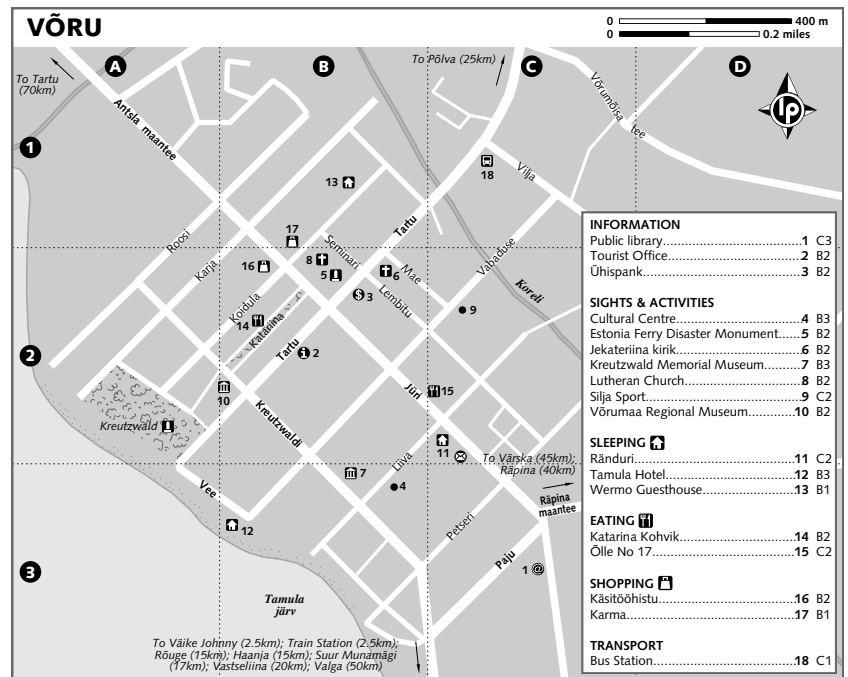
Located in one of the town's ugliest buildings, the **Võrumaa Regional Museum** (☎ 782 1939; www.hot.ee/muuseumvoru; Katarina tänav 11; adult/concession 10/6Kkr; ☎ 11am–6pm Wed–Sun) has mildly interesting exhibits on regional history and culture.

Undergoing renovation at research time, the **Cultural Centre** (Liiva tänav 11) should be open again by the time you read this. The garden behind the building hosts concerts and folk festivals. Check the tourist office to see if anything is on when you're in town.

Silja Sport (☎ 782 1916; Vabaduse 1; bikes per day 200Kkr; ☎ 9am–7pm) hires out bikes, snowboards and ski equipment. It's on the ground floor of the Semu department store. Ask at the tourist office about December snow-safari tours.

Sleeping & Eating

Tamula Hotel (☎ 783 0430; www.tamula.ee; Vee tänav 4; s/d 500/800Kkr; 🍷) Võru's loveliest hotel has



a minimalist, Scandinavian design with bright airy rooms, big windows and lake-front balconies. Best of all, the beach is right outside your door.

Ränduri (☎ 786 8050; www.randur.ee; Jüri tänav 36; s/d with private bathroom from €28/45, with shared bathroom €24/35) Ränduri has handsomely set 2nd-floor rooms, each decorated around a different motif and colour scheme (Japanese, Egyptian, Russian etc). Third-floor rooms are pleasant but more basic, with shared bathrooms. Downstairs, the wood-lined pub serves fairly good food: schnitzel, salmon, soups and salads (meals cost from 30Kr to 80Kr).

Wermo Guesthouse (☎ 782 3418; Koidula tänav 6; s/d from 250/400Kr) This basic hotel has a range of rooms. The best are newly renovated with clean lines and nice views; the worst have linoleum floors and sagging mattresses.

Ölle no 17 (☎ 782 8461; Jüri tänav 17; meals 40-70Kr) This Irish-style pub is a friendly place for a pint or some hearty food. The pleasant outdoor terrace is a popular meeting spot during the summer.

Katarina Kohvik (☎ 782 4490; Koidula tänav 4; meals 20-35Kr; ☎ 9am-7pm) Although this café serves food, skip the pizzas and come for the laid-back ambience and decent coffee.

Väike Johnny (☎ 783 0192; meals 50-75Kr; ☎ 11am-11pm) This combo shop, fuel station and restaurant is located 3km out of town towards Haanja. The ambience is old school and the cook serves some tasty dishes: grilled salmon, 'cowboy' steak, shrimp soup. If you have a car, it's worth the trip.

Shopping

Karma (☎ 782 5755; www.antiques.ee; Koidula tänav 14; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Fri, to 2pm Sat) One of Estonia's best antiques stores, and a fun place to browse even if you already have enough WWII helmets, scythes, sleigh bells, Soviet matchbooks and wooden beer steins.

Käsitöohistu (☎ 782 0240; Koidula tänav 16) Across the street. For a small selection of locally made handicrafts.

Getting There & Away

Between 6am and 6.30pm approximately 20 buses connect Võru and Tartu (45Kr to 55Kr, one hour). Buses also connect to Tallinn (85Kr to 110Kr, 3½ to four hours, eight to 10 daily), Põlva (14Kr to 30Kr, 30 minutes to one hour, six daily), Rõuge (9Kr

to 14Kr, 30 minutes, nine daily), Haanja (9Kr to 18Kr, 30 minutes to one hour, seven daily) and Krabi (18Kr to 23Kr, 45 minutes to two hours, four daily). There's a daily bus to Võru (60Kr, two hours). The **bus station** (☎ 782 1018) can provide the latest schedules. Entrance is on Vilja.

HAANJA NATURE PARK

Thick forests, rolling hills and dozens of sparkling lakes and rivers make up this lovely national park south of Võru. This 200-sq-km protected area also includes charming rural villages and some excellent tourist farms. The **Haanja Nature Park headquarters** (☎ 782 9090; www.haanjapark.ee, in Estonian) in the village of Haanja can provide detailed information about the area.

SUUR MUNAMÄGI

Great Egg Hill (Suur Munamägi), about 17km south of Võru, is the highest hill in the Baltics at just over 318m. Still, the tree-covered 'summit' is easy to miss if you're not looking out for it. The best way to enjoy the Great Egg is to ascend its 29m **observation tower** (☎ 787 8847; www.haanjakompass.ee; adult/child stairs 30/15Kr, elevator 60/60Kr; ☎ 10am-8pm May-Aug, 10am-5pm Sep, 10am-8pm Sat & Sun Oct). On a clear day you can see Tartu's TV towers, the onion domes of Pihkva (Pskov), Russia, and lush forests stretching in every direction (binocular rental 15Kr). There's a pleasant indoor-outdoor coffee shop on the ground floor.

The summit and tower are a 10-minute climb from the Võru-Ruusmäe road, starting about 1km south of Haanja village.

RÕUGE

One of Estonia's most picturesque settings, the tiny village of Rõuge lies among gently rolling hills, with seven small lakes strung out along the ancient valley floor. The village itself sits on the edge of the gently sloping Ööbikuorg (Nightingale Valley), which is named for the nightingales that gather here (for their own songfest) in the spring.

Rõuge is a good base for exploring the countryside, enjoying fresh strawberries in summer and going for swims in the pristine Suurjärv, in the middle of the village. This is Estonia's deepest lake (38m) and is said to have healing properties.

You can pick up maps and obtain regional information at Rõuge's well-signed **tourist office** (☎ 785 9245; raueinfo@hotmail.ee; Haanja maantee 1; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat & Sun), 30m from the bus stop.

Opposite **Santa Maria**, Rõuge's attractive 18th-century village church, stands a **monument** to the local dead of the 1918-20 independence war. The memorial was buried in one local's backyard through the Soviet period to save it from destruction.

Rõuge's **Linnamägi** (Castle Hill), by Lake Linnjärv, was an ancient Estonian stronghold during the 8th to 11th centuries. In the 13th century Rougetaja, a man who healed people with his hands, and to whom the ailing travelled from afar to see, lived here. There's a good view here, across the valley.

For a unique tour of the area and historical explanations of local sites and lore, call **Padimees** (☎ 785 9271), who works out of the Saarsilla Café. Padimees can guide you (in Estonian) through nearby places to assess whether you are sensitive to the area's energy fields. His granddaughter sometimes translates the tour into English for him.

Rõuge lies 10km west of Suur Munamägi by dirt road, or by paved road from Võru.

Sleeping & Eating

Ööbikuoru Kämping (☎ 509 0372; www.hot.ee/oo bikuorg; camp site 30Kr, cabin per person 75-90Kr, r per person 175-190Kr, cottage 1450Kr; ☎) Set on a lovely spot overlooking Nightingale Valley, this outfit offers lodging in simple wooden cabins with bathrooms in another building. You can also bunk in a winterised cottage with a private bathroom (or rent the whole cottage yourself). Rowboat rental is available. Located 600m from the main road; heading south, take the first left after Saarsilla Café.

Rõuge Suurjärve Guesthouse (☎ 524 3028; Metsa 4; r per person 250-350Kr; ☎) This pleasant guesthouse has a range of comfortable rooms, the best of which have a private balcony overlooking the lake. Sauna available. The turn-off to the guesthouse is opposite Rõuge's church.

Rohtlatte Talu (☎ 787 9315; www.rohtlatte.ee; camp site/r per person €4/16; ☎) Near the village of Nursi, 12km from Võru on the Valga road, this comfortable country place lies in a lush setting overlooking a creek. There are hiking trails (guided excursions available), a sauna and trout fishing.

Vaskna Talu (☎ 782 9173; info@vaskna.ee; s/d from 350/600Kr; ☎) Just south of Haanja by Lake Vaskna is this farmhouse in a particularly pretty spot. Try swimming, boating and water-biking here.

Saarsilla Café (☎ 785 9271; Haanja maantee 2; ☎ 10am-11pm; ☎) Situated just outside Rõuge, Saarsilla boasts a lovely terrace by Lake Suurjärv.

Several shops, a few cafés, a restaurant and a post office lie 1km out of town on the road to Nursi.

LUHASOO TRAIL & KARULA NATIONAL PARK

Located in wild swampland on the border with Latvia, some 15km south of Rõuge, the **Luhasoo Nature Study Trail** provides a fascinating glimpse into Estonia's primordial past. The 4.5km well-marked trail passes over varied bogs and along a velvety black lake, with Venus flytraps, water lilies and herbivorous shrubs among the scenery.

To get there, take the Krabi road from Rõuge and, after the Pärlijõe bus stop, turn right towards Kellamäe, then continue another 5km.

Further along the main road that borders Paganamaa, and about 12km along dirt roads north of the village of Mõniste, is an area of round, wooded hills dotted with many small lakes and ancient stone burial mounds, which forms Karula National Park. The **National Park Visitors Centre** (☎ 782 8350; kiri@karularahvuspark.ee) in Ähijärve, past Lüllemäe, 25km east of Valga, distributes maps and hiking trail information. The highlight is Ähijärve, a 3km long lake with several bays, inlets and promontories. There are four marked trails in the park, the longest beginning in Lüllemäe. This area can also be reached via Antsla to the north.

Set in the Forest Fairy Park (Metsamoori Perepark), **Veetka Farm** (☎ 786 7633; www.met samoor.ee; camp site 50Kr) is one of several tourist farms in the area offering some unusual attractions. In addition to hiking trails, you can camp here, spend a sleepless night out on a raft floating in the lake and learn about healing herbs and forest spirits.

In Vastse-Roosa near Mõniste, 8km west of Paganamaa, there is **Metsavenna Talu** (☎ 789 1280; info@metsavennatalu.ee; camp site/chalet bed 25/200Kr), an authentic reconstruction of typical living quarters used by the Forest

Brothers resistance (Metsavendlus). Being the initiative of one of the original brothers, authenticity is assured. It is also possible to camp overnight or sleep in a dorm bed in the chalet. Sauna and guided nature tour are also available.

VALGA

pop 16,000

The once-battered border town of Valga is enjoying a slow process of gentrification, and its old wooden houses and curious history make it an interesting place to wander through before moving on. The town, contiguous with Valka in Latvia, is set in the only region that was seriously contended between Estonia and Latvia after WWI. A British mediator had to be called in to settle the dispute and suggested the current border line, effectively splitting the town in two.

The **information centre** (☎ 766 1699; www.valgalv.ee; Keskk 11; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat & Sun), located near the border crossing in town, can provide you with a town map and recommend inexpensive homestays in the area.

Sites of interest include the 19th-century **St John's Church** (Jaani Kirik) and a local history **museum** (Valga Koduloomuuseum; ☎ 766 8867; Vabaduse 8; ☎ 11-6pm Tue-Fri; 10am-3pm Sat & Sun).

An estimated 30,000 people were murdered at the Nazi death camp Stalag-351, located in converted stables at Priimetsa on Valga's outskirts.

You can also stay in the lovely new **Metsis Hotell** (☎ 766 6050; www.hotellmetsis.com; Kuperjanovi 63; s/d from 500/700Kr), which also has a good restaurant (meals 75Kr to 150Kr). On the same road is **Voorimehe Pubi** (☎ 767 9627; Kuperjanovi 57; meals 40-65Kr), an atmospheric dark-wood pub that serves filling salmon, pork and the like.

Around eight daily buses connect Valga with Tartu (55Kr to 65Kr, 1½ to 2½ hours), and one bus daily goes to Võru (two hours). One daily train runs between Tallinn and Valga (115Kr, 5½ hours). Twice daily trains travel from Valga to Tartu (36Kr, two hours) via Sangaste Castle (6Kr, 20 minutes).

VASTSELIINA CASTLE

Vastseliina Castle (Vastseliina linnus) was founded by the Germans on their border with Russia in the 14th century. The evocative ruins stand on a high bluff above the

Piusa River on the eastern edge of the village of **Vahtseliina**, 4km east of the small town of **Vastseliina**, itself 12km southeast of Võru along the road to Pihkva (Pskov). The area prospered from its position on the Pihkva-Riga trade route until the mid-19th century and was also the scene of many battles.

The castle stands on the Meremäe road out of Vahtseliina. In the valley, down to the left as you walk from the former inn to the castle, is the park of the old Vastseliina manor, where a pretty 15km hiking trail (piusa matkarada) along the river begins a circuit north to Suuremetsa. A map near the ruins details the region's hiking and mountain-biking routes.

To reach Vahtseliina turn east off the Võru-Pihkva road 1km south of the southernmost turning to Vastseliina (which is just west of the road) and go 2km. Several buses from Võru go to Vastseliina daily and some, including most of those to Misso, continue along the Pihkva road to the Vahtseliina turning and beyond.

SETUMAA

In the far southeast of Estonia lies the (politically unrecognised) area of Setumaa, stretching over into Russia. It's one of the most interesting and tragic areas of the country, politically and culturally. Its native people, the Setus, have a mixed Estonian-Russian culture. They are originally Finno-Ugric but the people became Orthodox, not Lutheran, because this part of the country fell under Novgorod and later Pihkva's (Russian: Pskov) subjugation and was not controlled by Teutonic and German tribes and barons, as was the rest of Estonia. They never fully assimilated into Russian culture and throughout the centuries retained their language (today known as Võro-Seto), many features of which are actually closer in structure to Old Estonian than the modern Estonian language. The same goes for certain cultural traditions, for instance leaving food on a relative's grave; this was practised by Estonian tribes before Lutheranism.

All of Setumaa was in independent Estonia between 1920 and 1940, but the greater part of it is now in Russia. The town of Pechory (Petseri in Estonian), 2km across the border in Russia and regarded as the 'capital' of Setumaa, is famed for its fabulous 15th-century monastery, considered the

DEVIL'S RUN

Along the Latvian border just south of the village of Krabi lies **Paganamaa** (Devil's Land), another scenic area with four lakes strung out along the Estonian side of the border in the Piiriorg Valley. Legend has it that this was the home of Vanapagan (Old Heathen), a devil who set about building a bridge across Lake Kikkajärv to his friends in Latvia. As he was collecting boulders, a thunderstorm frightened him (thunder was the god of heaven to ancient Estonians) and he ran, creating the craters and sharp valleys that are characteristic of the area (glacier-formed, to us modern sceptics). The small island in Kikkajärv is supposed to be one of the boulders he dropped on the run. There's an observation tower and bathing spot at Liivajärv, a lake which lies half in Estonia, half in Latvia. Three buses per day go to Krabi from Võru (one hour), passing through Rõuge en route.

most breathtaking in Russia (it looks more like an Italian villa than a monastery).

Today the Setu culture is in the sad, slow process of disappearing. There are approximately 4000 Setus in Estonia (and another 3000 in Russia), which is half the early-20th-century population. While efforts are made to teach and preserve the language, and promote customs through organised feasts, the younger generation are being quickly assimilated into the Estonian mainstream. The impenetrable border with Russia that has split their community since 1991 has further crippled it.

A rough look at the Setu landscape illustrates how unique it is in the Estonian context. Notably, their villages are structured like castles, with houses facing each other in clusters, often surrounded by a fence. This is in stark contrast to the typical Estonian village where open farmhouses are separated from each other as far as possible. Here, the Orthodox tradition has fostered a tighter sense of community and sociability.

Setumaa is particularly known for its women folk singers who improvise new words each time they chant their verses. Setu songs, known as the *leelo*, are polyphonic and characterised by solo, spoken verses followed by a refrain chanted by a group.

Obinitsa & Piusa

The village of Obinitsa, near a pristine lake, makes for a pleasant stopoff on the road. The chief attraction is the one-room **Setu House Museum** (Setu Tare Muuseum; adult/concession 15/10Kr; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Sun May-Oct, other times by appt), which has a few folk costumes, tapestries, cookware and some old photos. It also functions as the **tourist office** (☎ 785 4190; setotour@hot.ee). A few blocks away, you

can have a traditional Setu meal – if you arrange it in advance. The town also has a church (built in 1897), a cemetery and a sculpture to the Setu 'Song Mother', which stares solemnly over Lake Obinitsa. There's a swimming platform by the lake.

Obinitsa has several big Setu celebrations, the most important being the 19 August **Feast of the Transfiguration**. Thousands of Setus come for a procession from the church to the cemetery, which ends with a communal picnic and the leaving of food for the departed souls.

The road north from Obinitsa passes under a railway bridge after some 5km. The first dirt road east, following the sign for the Piusa Pood (shop), will take you to one of Estonia's more intriguing sights, the **Piusa sand caves** (Piusa Koopad), the result of a sand mining industry, which began in the area in 1922. (Sand is still mined for glass production 1km north of this spot.) You can visit the smaller of the two unused caves; the larger one remains plunged in darkness and home to some 2000 bats (one of Europe's largest colonies), just behind the friendly **shop/café** (☎ 10am-4pm). There's a small **RMK office** (☎ 10am-6pm) here where you can pick up maps of the nearby regions.

You can wander through a maze of cathedral-like caves (bring a flashlight) and look for the sand altar, made by some well-known modern-day Estonian witches in the early 1990s. If you place your palms on the altar top and they feel warm, your spiritual energy is derived from the land, if they feel cold, your energy comes from the sky.

Setsimaja (☎ 786 1412; meals 100Kr) is a private Setu home doubling as Obinitsa's community centre, and if you call the day before, you can order a very filling home-cooked

DAY OF THE SETUS

Peko, the pagan god of fertility, is as important to the Setus as the Orthodox religion they follow. The 8000-line Setu epic *Pekolanõ* tells the tale of this macho god, the rites of whom are known only to men. The epic dates back to 1927 when the Setus' most celebrated folk singer, Anne Vabarna, was told the plot and spontaneously burst into song, barely pausing to draw breath until she had sung the last (8000th) line.

According to folklore, Peko sleeps night and day in his cave of sand. So on the Day of the Setu Kingdom – proclaimed around 20 August each year – an *ülemtsotska* (representative) for the king has to be found. The Setus then gather around the statue of their 'Song Mother' in search of someone worthy of bearing the crown of the sleeping king's royal singer. Competitions are also held to find a strongman for the king.

The Setu king's dress, and the bread, cheese, wine and beer he consumes are also important. On the same day that his kingdom is declared for another year, people from the Setu stronghold are selected to serve the king as his mitten and belt knitters, and bread, beer, wine and cheese makers.

And so completes the royal throne. Amid the day's celebrations, traditional Setu songs and dances are performed and customary good wishes exchanged. The women are adorned with traditional Setu lace and large silver breastplates and necklaces, said to weigh as much as 3kg each. Later in the day respects are paid to the dead.

meal. You can also buy a few handicrafts. It's on the main road into town, and is well-signed.

Set on a small lake, **Setumaa Turismitalo** (☎ 508 7399; <http://setotalu.maaturism.ee>; d/tr 440/660Kr, 7-room cabin 2800Kr) has a few simple wooden rooms with shared bathrooms, and several sizable, very comfortably furnished cottages for rent. There's a sauna and a place for bonfires.

You're welcome to camp for free on the small grounds next to the Piusa sand caves. No fires.

Värška & Around

The pretty town of Värška is known for its rich mineral water, sold throughout Estonia, and its healing mud. There's plenty of rural charm here, including a picturesque stone church and a leafy cemetery surrounding it. The best reason for coming here is the **Setu Farm Museum** (Setu Talu Muuseum; ☎ 505 4673; adult/concession 20/10Kr; ☎ 10am-5pm May-Sep, 10am-4pm Tue-Sun Oct-Apr) on the south edge of town. Presided over by a wooden carving of Peko, the museum comprises a re-created 19th-century farmhouse complex, with stables, granary and the former workshops for metalworking and ceramics. Don't bypass the charming restaurant here or the excellent gift shop – the region's best – selling handmade mittens, socks, hats, dolls, tapestries, books and recordings of traditional Setu music.

Võporzova and **Tonja**, a few kilometres north of Värška on the west side of Värška Bay, are classic Setu villages. In Võporzova there's a monument to folk singer Anne Vabarna, who knew 100,000 verses by heart. Võporzova homesteads typically consist of a ring of outer buildings around an inner yard, while Tonja's houses face the lake from which its people get their livelihood.

Traditional Setu holidays are still celebrated. The biggest feast of the year, **Lady Day**, falls on 28 August (though it is celebrated only in Pechory), close to which the **Day of the Setu Kingdom** is held. The **Day of Setu Lace** is 1 March and **midsummer** celebrations are held on 6 July in accordance with the Julian calendar. Värška also celebrates **St George's Day** (Jüripäev) in spring (6 May) and winter (9 December).

Other exotic features of this area are the borders. There are only a few official border crossing points with Russia, the rest are abandoned control points, or seemingly unguarded wooden fences, creepy dead ends or lonely plastic signs. One road, from Värška to Saatsen even crosses the zigzagging border line into Russian territory for 2km. You're not allowed to stop on this stretch.

Near the tiny, ancient village of **Podmotsa**, northeast of Värška, a beautiful Orthodox church in the Russian village of Kulje is visible across the inlet – as is the border guard watchtower. Be aware that crossing the border at any nonofficial point (even if

you have a Russian visa) is illegal and can lead to your arrest.

SLEEPING

The Obinitsa tourist office is the best source of information on farmstays in the area.

Hirvemäe Puhkekodus (☎ 797 6105; www.hirve.mae.ee; Silla tänav 2a; s/d with breakfast 350/560Kr; ☎) Set on a pretty lake, this guesthouse has wood-floored rooms and a café. There's a tiny beach, tennis courts and a playground. It's located 500m south of the church.

Setu Farm Restaurant (☎ 505 4673; meals around 60Kr; ☎ 11am-7pm Tue-Sun) Across from the museum, this handsome wooden farmhouse makes an unbeatable setting for a delicious home-cooked meal. The fare is nothing fancy – roast vegetables, pork, mashed potatoes, pancakes, omelettes and the like – but it's a real gem nonetheless.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are five buses daily between Tartu and Värška (50Kr to 65Kr, 1½ to two hours) via Röpina, three of which continue to Koidula, 2km across the border from Pechory. There's one bus daily between Põlva and Värška (1¼ hours).

From Võru, three to five buses go daily to Meremäe (22Kr, 45 minutes to one hour) and Obinitsa (18Kr to 29Kr, 45 minutes). There are no buses running between Võru and Värška.

LAKE PEIPSI (SOUTH)

In the 18th and 19th centuries Russian Old Believers, a sect of the Orthodox Church persecuted for refusing to accept liturgical reforms carried out in 1666, took refuge on the western shores of Lake Peipsi (Chudkoye Ozero in Russian), particularly in Kallaste. They founded several coastal villages, namely Kolkja, Kasepää and Varnja, and settled the island of Piirissaar.

About 37km north of Tartu lies the spectacular **Alatskivi Castle** (Alatskivi loss; ☎ 528 6598; info@muusa.ee; adult/concession 15/5Kr; ☎ 9am-7pm Wed-Sun), which was built in the late 1500s, though its neo-Gothic centrepiece dates from the 19th century. It's on the main road, easily spotted once you reach Alatskivi.

Four kilometres south of Alatskivi, in the hamlet of Rupsi, is the **Liiv Museum** (☎ 745 3846; info@muusa.ee; adult/concession 15/5Kr; ☎ 9am-7pm Wed-Sun), another worthwhile stop. It houses ex-

hibitions on both Juhan Liiv, a celebrated writer and poet who died in 1913, and Eduard Tubin, a composer of some of Estonia's best-known songs and symphonies (No 5 is highly regarded). Both were born in the area. Occasional concerts and poetry competitions are held at the museum, which also doubles as the region's tourist office.

From Alatskivi, it's 6km southeast to **Kolkja**, a village of Russian Old Believers church, a dainty, green wooden Orthodox church, an **Old Believers' Museum** (☎ 745 3431; 25Kr; ☎ by appt) in the new schoolhouse, and some of the most charming village architecture in the country. Unlike most of Estonia's Russian population, the people and their descendants have been living here for centuries, and most also speak Estonian. Few tourists make it out here, and even the dogs stop and stare at strangers.

Kallaste (pop 1285), 8km north of Alatskivi, is where a settlement of Old Believers has existed since 1720, when the area was known as Red Mountains (Krasniye Gori) because of the red sandstone cliffs, up to 11m high, that surround this town. Nearly all the villagers are Russian-speaking. There's a large Old Believers' cemetery at the southern end of town, a sandy beach with small caves, and a lakeside café.

The northern half of Lake Peipsi (p105) is covered in the Northeastern Estonia section.

Sleeping & Eating

The best places to stay in the area are just north of Kallaste.

Piirisaar Holiday Centre (☎ 501 8990; www.peipsi.com; camp site per person/4-person cabin 50/400Kr) A few kilometres south of Mustvee, this open grassy space contains new small wooden cabins and room for camping. In addition to beach activities, you can hire a rowboat, fishing tackle or use the sauna.

Hansu Farm (☎ 745 2518; hans.turism@mail.ee; bed per person/camp site from 240/40Kr) About 3km north of Kallaste at the village of Kodavere, and 50m west of the main road, this pleasant farmhouse near the shore has simple, comfortable rooms, a sauna, home cooking, and boat and bicycle hire.

Getting There & Away

A car is the handiest way of getting around this area. Ten buses go daily between Tartu and Kallaste (35Kr, 1¼ hours), with fewer

runs on Saturdays and Sundays. Around 15 buses go from Tartu to Alatskivi (27Kr to 35Kr, one hour), again with limited service on weekends. About five daily buses go from Tartu to Kolkja (33Kr, 1½ hours), most via Alatskivi, others via Varnja.

WESTERN ESTONIA & THE ISLANDS

One of the Baltics' most alluring regions, the west coast of Estonia is the gateway to forest-covered islands, idyllic countryside, and seaside villages slumbering beneath the shadows of picturesque medieval castles.

Pine forests and juniper groves cover Saaremaa and Hiiumaa, Estonia's largest islands. Dusty roads loop around them, passing desolate stretches of coastline, with few signs of development aside from 19th-century lighthouses and old wooden windmills – both iconic symbols of the islands. Here you'll find peaceful settings for hiking, horse riding or simply rambling through the countryside in search of hidden stone churches and crumbling fortresses – ruins left behind by both 14th-century German Knights and 20th-century Soviet military planners.

Saaremaa, the largest and most visited of the islands, boasts spa resorts, a magnificent castle and a pretty town that comes to life during the summer months. It's also the departure point for the wildlife-rich islands in Vilsandi National Park and the pastoral setting of Abruka, an island with less than two dozen permanent residents.

Vormsi is another peaceful island of tiny villages and pristine coastline, as is Muhu, which offers unusual attractions, including an ostrich farm and a preserved traditional 19th-century village now functioning as a living museum.

On the mainland, Haapsalu is an enchanting but ragged town that was once a resort for 19th-century Russian aristocrats. The jewel of its Old Town is a 14th-century bishop's castle, today the setting for open-air festivals and summer concerts. The town's byside promenade, its small but attractive beach and the narrow tree-lined lanes make for an idyllic wander into the past.

The bird life in this region is the best in the country. Bird-watchers, and those interested in experiencing Estonia's verdant forest and marshlands, should head to the Matsalu Nature Reserve, where some 275 bird species can be found.

National Parks & Reserves

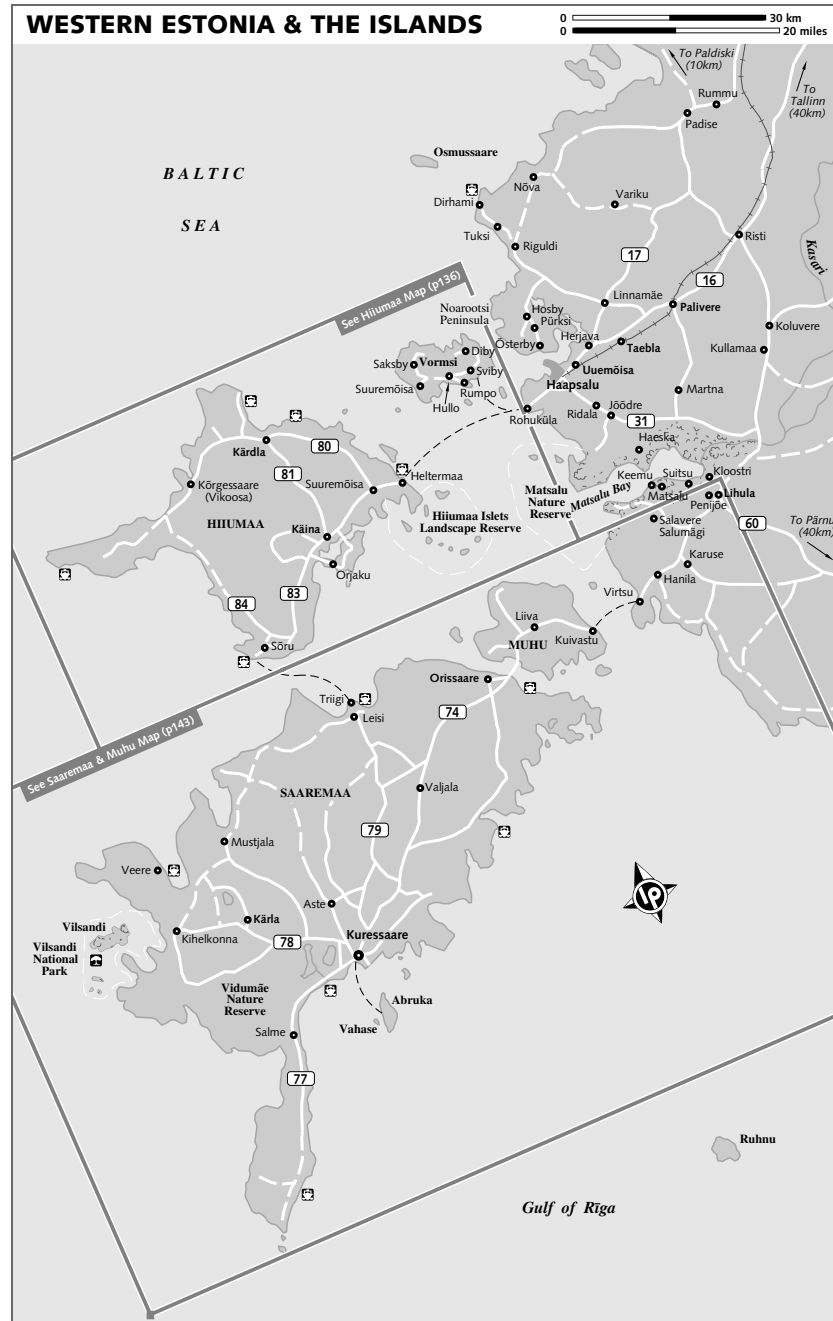
Rich in natural beauty, Western Estonia boasts a range of attractive national parks and reserves. On the mainland, the Matsalu Nature Reserve is one of the country's most important bird habitats. Other important bird sanctuaries are the Käina Bay Bird Reserve in Hiiumaa, and the Hiiumaa Islets Landscape Reserve, just off Hiiumaa, where you can spend the night on one of several tiny islands. Off Saaremaa's west coast, the Vilsandi National Park is the largest and most outstanding choice for nature seekers. Comprising numerous uninhabited islands, this reserve also contains rare orchids, seals and more than 200 species of bird.

Getting There & Away

If you don't want to waste time, you can fly directly from Tallinn to either Kärdla in Hiiumaa or Kuressaare in Saaremaa (see p89). Haapsalu is situated just a short bus ride from Tallinn. To reach Hiiumaa, you can also take a bus there directly from Tallinn (see p90). The same bus that drives onto the ferry will drive to its end destination on the island. This also holds true for Saaremaa. If you're not going direct, you can catch ferries from Rohuküla, south of Haapsalu, to both Vormsi and Hiiumaa. To reach Saaremaa by ferry, you'll go via the port of Virtsu to Muhu Island, which is connected to Saaremaa by a causeway. A summer ferry links Saaremaa with the remote island of Ruhnu (p162).

Getting Around

Both Saaremaa and Hiiumaa are quite large and bus service around the islands is highly inadequate. Plenty of people thumb rides, but you'll need time on your hands. Hiring a car is a better alternative. You can rent in both Kuressaare (Saaremaa) and Kärdla (Hiiumaa). Travelling between the two islands, there is a year-round car-ferry service between Sõru in Hiiumaa and Triigi in Saaremaa.



HAAPSALU

pop 12,000

Set on a fork-shaped peninsula that stretches into Haapsalu Bay, this quaint, peaceful town makes a pleasant stopover en route to the islands. Haapsalu has a handful of museums and galleries, and a few rather modest spa hotels, but the town's biggest attraction is its striking castle. A bit rough around the edges, Haapsalu's Old Town is more rustic than urban, with old wooden houses set back from the narrow streets, a slender promenade skirting the bay, and plenty of secret spots for watching the sunset.

Those seeking mud or spa treatments might opt for Haapsalu over Pärnu or Kuusaaare, though the centres here are a bit more proletarian. Nevertheless, Haapsalu lays claim to superior mud, which is used by health centres throughout Estonia.

Haapsalu makes a good base for visiting Vormsi Island or Matsalu Nature Reserve.

History

Like other Estonian towns, Haapsalu has changed hands many times since its founding centuries ago. The German Knights of the Sword conquered this region in 1224, and Haapsalu became the bishop's residence, with a fortress and cathedral built soon afterwards. The Danes took control during the Livonian War (around 1559), then the Swedish had their turn in the 17th century, but they lost it to the Russians during the Great (but brutal) Northern War in the 18th century.

The city flourished under the tsars, mostly because of mud. Once the curative properties of its shoreline were discovered in the 19th century, Haapsalu transformed into a spa centre. The Russian composer Tchaikovsky and members of the Russian imperial family visited the city for mud baths. A railway that went all the way to St Petersburg was completed in 1907 with a 214m-long covered platform, then said to be the longest in the Russian Empire. Visitors can still admire the colourfully designed station with its wooden lace ornamentation and grand colonnade, though now only buses run from this station.

Orientation

The castle, which is the centre of Old Town, is just over 1km northeast of the bus sta-

tion. About halfway between the two is the tourist office. Väike viik, a tranquil lake, is just north of the castle. The prettiest beach in town is 1km west of the bus station.

Information

Library (Posti tänav 3; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat) Free Internet access.

Post office (cnr Niine & Nurme tänav) A block east of Posti tänav.

Tourist office (☎ 473 3248; www.haapsalu.ee; Posti tänav 37; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat & Sun mid-May-mid-Sep, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri mid-Sep-mid-May) This friendly, well-staffed office has loads of info about Haapsalu and the surrounding area.

Sights & Activities

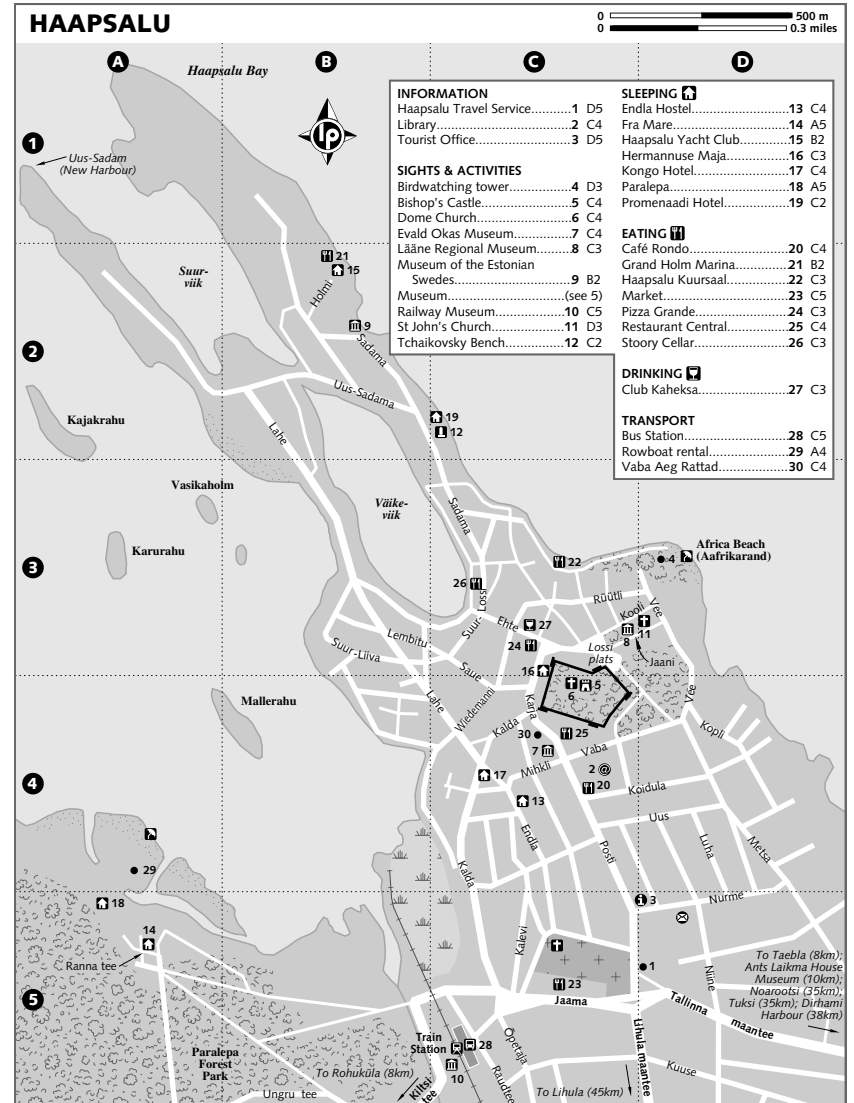
CASTLE & CATHEDRAL

Haapsalu's unpolished gem is the 13th-century **Bishop's Castle** (☎ 472 4470; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun mid-May-mid-Sep). Today the fortress stands in partial but very picturesque ruins. A turreted tower, most of the outer wall and some of the moat still remain. To find out about the castle's history and see some dramatically displayed cassocks and medieval weaponry, don't miss the **museum and dome church** (adult/child 15/5Kr). The church is actually a Roman-Gothic cathedral, with three inner domes – the largest such structure in the Baltics – and its acoustics are phenomenal. The cathedral was not strictly Roman Catholic from the start, due to the lukewarm welcome Christianity received in these parts. It was assimilated into the Episcopal stronghold in the second half of the 13th century. Concerts are regularly held here. Inside the church keep your eyes peeled for the ghost of the White Lady (see boxed text, p132). For fine views, you can climb the **tower** (adult/child 15/5Kr). There's a medieval-themed restaurant in the castle grounds.

MUSEUMS

The **Evald Okas Museum** (☎ 508 9105; Karja tänav 24; adult/concession 10/5Kr; ☎ noon-6pm Jun-Aug) features the colourful works of one of Haapsalu's oldest and best-known local artists; temporary exhibitions are on the 1st floor.

The somewhat dry **Lääne Regional Museum** (☎ 473 6065; Kooli tänav 2; adult/concession 15/5Kr; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Sun mid-May-mid-Sep, 11am-4pm Wed-Sun mid-Sep-mid-May) offers a glimpse of the region's history. It's set in an 18th-



INFORMATION		SLEEPING	
Haapsalu Travel Service.....1	D5	Endla Hostel.....13	C4
Library.....2	C4	Fra Mare.....14	A5
Tourist Office.....3	D5	Haapsalu Yacht Club.....15	B2
		Hermannuse Maja.....16	C3
		Kongo Hotel.....17	C4
		Paralepa.....18	A5
		Promenaadi Hotel.....19	C2
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		EATING	
Birdwatching tower.....4	D3	Café Rondo.....20	C4
Bishop's Castle.....5	C4	Grand Holmi Marina.....21	B2
Dome Church.....6	C4	Haapsalu Kuursaal.....22	C3
Evald Okas Museum.....7	C4	Market.....23	C5
Lääne Regional Museum.....8	C3	Pizza Grande.....24	C3
Museum of the Estonian Swedes.....9	B2	Restaurant Central.....25	C4
Museum.....(see 5)		Stoory Cellar.....26	C3
Railway Museum.....10	C5		
St John's Church.....11	D3	DRINKING	
Tchaikovsky Bench.....12	C2	Club Kaheksa.....27	C3
		TRANSPORT	
		Bus Station.....28	C5
		Rowboat rental.....29	A4
		Vaba Aeg Rattad.....30	C4

century building that was at one time the town hall.

The quaint **Museum of the Estonian Swedes** (Rannarootsi Muuseum; ☎ 473 7165; Sadama tänav 32; adult/concession 20/10Kr; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Sun 15 May-Aug, 11am-4pm Sep-Apr) has relics, photos, old fishing nets and a marvellous tapestry tracing the history of Swedes in Estonia from

the 1200s to their flight back to Sweden on the *Triina* in 1944.

The boxcar-sized **Railway Museum** (Raudteemuuseum; ☎ 473 4574; Raudtee 2; admission 5Kr; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Sun) on the station's west side records the golden years of train travel. You're free to check out the old locomotives nearby.

OTHER ATTRACTIONS

The streets in the area around the castle are the hub of the historic centre – an idyllic setting for a stroll past old wooden houses along leafy streets. Between Kooli tänav and Jaani tänav, east off Lossi plats, is the 16th-century **St John's Church** (Jaani Kirik).

Just north of the church is a **bird-watching tower** that you can climb and a small park overlooking the pint-sized **Africa Beach** (Aafrikarand), which earned its name from the statues of wild animals that used to grace the shoreline. The **promenade** begins here and passes by the magnificent 1905 **Haapsalu Kuursaal** (Spa Hall), which functions as a restaurant in summer (see opposite). Sculptures dating from Haapsalu's fashionable era are scattered along the promenade, including a sundial commemorating mud-cure pioneer Dr Carl Abraham Hunnius and the symphony-playing **Tchaikovsky Bench**, erected in 1940.

On the western edge of town, beyond the train station, is the **Paralepa Forest Park** with a serene beachfront. It attracts plenty of sun seekers in the summer, with **rowboat rental** (per hr 60Kr; ☎ 11am–5pm) nearby.

Festivals & Events

Haapsalu has a packed calendar of concerts and festivals, although most are held between June and August. Among the attractions are '**Medieval Haapsalu**', a three-day music, arts and crafts festival (mid-July). There's also the **Ladies in Jazz Festival** (first weekend of August) and the **Blues Festival** (second weekend of August), though the biggest annual event is Days of the White Lady (Valge Daami Päevad). See boxed text, right, for more info.

Sleeping

Fra Mare (☎ 472 4600; www.framare.ee; Ranna tee 2; s/d 750/1050Kr; ☎) Haapsalu's best spa hotel has a peaceful waterfront location and a full range of spa services, including mud baths. Rooms are comfortable but a bit heavy-handed with the floral theme. It has a seawater pool, an outdoor café and a restaurant.

Promenaadi Hotel (☎ 473 7250; www.promenaadi.ee; Sadama tänav 22; s/d €45/55Kr; ☎) Set on the water's edge, Promenaadi has attractive rooms, all with balconies and sea views. The all-glass bar and restaurant also offers great views (but hit-and-miss food).

DAYS OF THE WHITE LADY

Haapsalu's biggest annual event, **Days of the White Lady** coincides with the August full moon. The day begins with merriment – storytelling for the kids, theatre for the adults – and culminates with a ghastly apparition. During the full moon every August and February, moonlight at a precise angle casts a ghostly shadow across a cathedral window. According to legend, the shadow is cast by a young girl who in the 14th century was bricked up alive inside the walls. Back then, the castle was an all-male enclave, and the archbishop got pretty worked up when he heard that a young woman, disguised in monastic vestments, sneaked in to be close to her lover-monk. In August excited young crowds stay out late to see a play recounting the story in the castle grounds, after which everyone gathers around the wall to await the shadow.

Kongo Hotel (☎ 472 4800; www.kongohotel.ee; Kalda tänav 19; s/d/d with kitchen Sep–Apr 700/850/1000Kr, Jun–Aug 950/1150/1350Kr; ☎) Set with pleasant, airy rooms and light-coloured wood floors, Kongo is probably the most stylish hotel in town. Breakfast and morning sauna included.

Paralepa (☎ 5564 1674; paralepa@hot.ee; Ranna tee 4; tent/bed per person 40/150Kr, caravan 150Kr; ☎ Jun–Aug; ☎) Located near Haapsalu's sandy beach, this place offers simple, clean rooms with shared bathrooms. The grassy lawn at the back accommodates tent camping and caravans; a simple café overlooks the beach.

Hermannuse Maja (☎ 473 7131; www.hermannuse.ee; Karja 1a; s/d/tw/ste 500/650/750/950Kr; ☎) Better known for its colourful pub, Hermannuse has several comfortably furnished en-suite guestrooms.

Endla Hostel (☎ 473 7999; www.hot.ee/hostelendla; Endla tänav 5; tw/tr 360/500Kr; ☎ reception 1–6pm; ☎) Located on a quiet street, this white two-storey building has small basic quarters with shared bathrooms and a guest kitchen. It's popular with budget travellers.

Eating & Drinking

Grand Holm Marina (☎ 565 2887; Westmeri 3; meals 50–175Kr) Haapsalu's best restaurant has an outdoor terrace overlooking the marina and a beautifully set dining room. The food

is delicious. For something different try the juniper-smoked duck breast with polenta, followed by warm rhubarb tart.

Hermannuse Maja (☎ 473 7131; Karja 1a; meals 40–150Kr) With eclectic South Pacific furnishings, and a warm and inviting atmosphere, this pub serves hearty meals, though it's a cosy spot just for a drink.

Restaurant Central (☎ 473 5595; Karja tänav 21; meals 180Kr) This elegant dining room offers tasty varied selections such as *farfalle* with smoked cheese, and oven-baked trout. The music is bad, but the service is friendly, and the *crème brûlée* is not to be missed. There's also an outdoor terrace and an atmospheric bar downstairs.

Stoory Cellar (☎ 473 5568; Suur-Lossi 15; meals 75–135Kr) During the summer this café's grassy backyard, perched on the edge of the lake, makes a lovely setting for a drink. It serves food, but the only thing commendable is the freshly grilled *shashlik*.

Club Kahaksa (☎ 5665 7963; Ehte 8; meals from 45Kr) This stylish lounge, café and restaurant features a large outdoor terrace and often has live music on weekends.

Haapsalu Kuursaal (☎ 509 7795; www.kuursaal.ee; Promenaadi 1; meals around 175Kr; ☎ May–Aug) Inside a beautiful 1898 spa hall, you'll find international, somewhat overpriced fare, but the seaside setting and surrounding rose garden are a big draw. Come for coffee, cocktails or the concerts and performances held here. Check website for listings.

Pizza Grande (☎ 473 7200; Karja tänav 6; meals 40–110Kr) This casual, popular spot serves decent pizzas and Italian dishes. Outdoor terrace at the back.

Café Rondo (☎ 474 4592; Posti tänav 7; ☎ 8.30am–5.30pm Mon–Fri, 9am–4pm Sat & Sun) A charming old café with freshly baked apple cakes and cinnamon buns.

For fresh fruits and vegetables visit the **Market** (Turg; Jaama tänav; ☎ 7am–2pm Tue–Sun) a few blocks east of the bus station. Don't miss fresh strawberries in summer.

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** (☎ 473 4791; Jaama tänav 1) is inside the pretty but defunct train station. At least 17 daily buses connect Haapsalu and Tallinn (65Kr to 80Kr, 1½ hours, 100km). There's also one daily bus to/from Tartu (110Kr to 170Kr, 4½ hours), and two daily buses to Kärdla, Hiiumaa (three hours).

Unfortunately, the fastest way to reach Pärnu, Virtsu or Kuressaare, Saaremaa, is to go to Tallinn first.

Ferries to Hiiumaa and Vormsi leave from Rohuküla, 9km west of Haapsalu. See p137 and p135 for ferry details.

Getting Around

You can rent bicycles at **Vaba Aeg Rattad** (☎ 521 2796; Karja 22; bikes per hr/day 25/100Kr; ☎ 10am–6pm Mon–Fri, to 3pm Sat). Car and bicycle rental is available from **Grand Holm Marina** (☎ 565 2887; Westmeri 3). Bus 1 runs almost hourly between Lossi plats, the train station and Rohuküla; timetables are posted at Lossi plats and the bus station. Bus 2 goes about hourly between the bus station and the Yacht Club. For taxi service, call **ESRA Taxi** (☎ 473 4555).

AROUND HAAPSALU**Taebla**

pop 3000

About 10km east of Haapsalu, and 2km beyond Taebla, is **Ants Laikmaa House Museum** (Ants Laikmaa majamuuseum; ☎ 472 9756; adult/concession 15/5Kr; ☎ 10am–6pm Wed–Sun mid–May–mid–Sep, 10am–4pm Wed–Sun mid–Sep–mid–Apr), in the eclectic house of inexhaustible artist Ants Laikmaa (1866–1942), who walked more than 2600km from Riga to Düsseldorf in Germany (in six weeks apparently) to study art. His efforts extended to designing and building the house itself. Buses along the Tallinn–Haapsalu road will drop you at Taebla.

Haapsalu's tourist office can arrange accommodation in the region, with rooms from 200Kr per person.

Kiige Farm (☎ 479 5492; www.hot.ee/kiigefarm; Linnamäe, Oru district; r per person 140–240Kr), 10km north of Taebla at Linnamäe, is a small family homestead with beds in a pretty wooden summerhouse or in the main house. It's well liked by young Estonian travellers, and there are ample opportunities for leisure – volleyball, walks in the forest, or a go round on the giant swing (aka kiiking).

Tuksi & Around

Some of Estonia's loveliest – and least discovered – beaches lie along the northern coastline between Nõva and Dirhami. You can camp along this stretch, take some sun or just enjoy the fabulous expanse of isolated light-sand beach.

Roosta Holiday Village (☎ 479 7230; www.roosta.ee; Tuksi; 1-/2-/3-bedroom cottage incl breakfast from €75/110/144) is an attractive holiday cottage complex in a pine forest beside a lovely, relatively deserted beach. These neat all-wood cottages are equipped with kitchenette, living room, shower and veranda. Two cottages have disabled facilities; there's also caravan space. On site are a restaurant, bar, sauna and tennis courts. Bicycle, sailboard and rowboat rentals are available.

Roosi Talu (☎ 525 3408; www.hot.ee/roositurismitalu; d per person 220Kr), not to be confused with Roosta, is a little further north at Nõva. Accommodation is provided in this friendly private home within a stone's throw of the sea and forest. The kitchen is available for guest use, and excursions to Osmussaare Island can be arranged. From Roosi, it's 1.5km to a sandy beach.

To get to Tuksi from Haapsalu, turn north off the main Tallinn–Haapsalu road 2km east of Herjava and continue about 30km through Linnamäe and Riguldi. It's well off the beaten track and the only buses that go there are Haapsalu–Variku–Nõva–Dirhami buses, which go once each way daily except Monday and Thursday.

There's a **harbour** at Dirhami, a few kilometres north of Tuksi, where a knowledgeable captain can take you to **Osmussaare** (round trip in a 10-person boat 1300Kr), a small island 7.5km from the mainland that was once inhabited by Estonian Swedes. It's known to them as Odensholm, the legendary burial place of the Viking god Oden. The island's **cemetery** and **chapel ruins** are reminders of the Swedish presence prior to their forced exodus by the USSR. After they were driven out a Soviet army base was built here in the early 1940s. The island is uninhabited, so if you plan to camp, bring food and water with you.

Noarootsi Peninsula

pop 750

The Noarootsi Peninsula is 2km across the bay from Haapsalu but about 35km by road. Estonian Swedes lived here for several centuries before their exodus in 1944. There's an old church from the Swedish era at **Hosby**, a fine manor park at **Pürksi** and views to Haapsalu from the old village of **Österby**.

One daily bus goes between Haapsalu and Österby via Pürksi, taking 1¼ hours.

VORMSI

pop 340

Vormsi, Estonia's fourth biggest island (93 sq km), lies covered in pine and spruce forests, mixed with coastal pastures and wooded meadows, with tiny lakes dotting the landscape. Vormsi's topography is fascinating: this is the only place in the world where Arctic lichen grows south of the Arctic Circle. There's even coral reef hidden in one forest – brought by retreating glaciers 10,000 years ago. (Some believe that trolls now lie buried under the rocklike coral). Vormsi has remained largely undisturbed owing to sparse human settlements, largely Swedes until 1944. Today cars are rarer than peregrine falcons – along with 200 other bird species.

Orientation & Information

More information about the wildlife and landscape, including the 30 protected islets in Hullo Bay, is available through **Vormsi Landscape Reserve** (☎ 472 9430; http://vormsi.silma.ee; Rumpo Village).

Vormsi lies 3km off the Noarootsi Peninsula. Ferries make the 10km-crossing to Sviby on Vormsi's south coast from Rohuküla, 9km west of Haapsalu.

Sights

Vormsi – 16km from east to west and averaging 6km from north to south – is a good place to tour by bicycle, but you could also take a car or walk. There are about 10km of paved road. **Hullo**, Vormsi's largest village, lies about 3km west of Sviby. A further 7km by paved and dirt road will bring you to Saksby, the westernmost village, where it's a short walk to a **lighthouse**. Rumpo is due south of the stretch between Sviby and Hullo.

Other highlights include the **14th-century church** at Hullo, which has a fine baroque pulpit and a collection of old Swedish-style, wheel-shaped crosses in the graveyard; the southern **Rumpo Peninsula**, dotted with juniper stands (and the famous Arctic lichen); and the 5.8m-high boulder, **Church Rock** (Kirikukivi), near Diby in the northeast.

Sleeping

You can find more options online (www.vormsi.ee) or at the tourist office in Haapsalu. Both places listed here rent out bicycles

and boats, have saunas, and include breakfast in the price.

Rumpo Mäe Talu (☎ 472 9932; www.hot.ee/streng; per person camp site/bed 35/240Kr; ☹ Apr–Nov; ☒) Near Rumpo, and just a few steps from the coast, this handsome farmhouse offers Vormsi's best accommodation. Rooms have an authentic, old-style feel, and guests have access to kitchen and grill.

Elle-Malle Boarding House (☎ 473 2072; www.vormsi.ee/ellemall; r per person from 240Kr; ☒) Another good option is this cosy spot in Hullo. There's a romantic double room inside a windmill (summer only) or rooms inside a separate wooden cottage (year-round).

Getting There & Away

A vehicle and passenger ferry (adult/concession/car 30/14/110Kr, 45 minutes) leaves Rohuküla for Sviby two to three times daily. If you're taking a vehicle in the summer, reserve a place in advance by calling ☎ 443 1069. For the latest timetable and fares visit www.kihnu.ee/veetee (in Estonian) or check with the Haapsalu tourist information office.

Haapsalu town bus 1 runs regularly (10 times daily) to Rohuküla from Lossi plats and the bus station, where timetables are posted. All the Vormsi ferries wait for this bus except on Sunday morning. There are also daily buses to/from Tallinn.

MATSALU NATURE RESERVE

A bird-watcher's paradise, Matsalu Nature Reserve is a prime bird-migration and breeding ground, both in the Baltics and in Europe. Some 275 different bird species have been counted here, and the reserve has been around since 1957. The reserve encompasses Matsalu Bay, which is over 20km long and is also the deepest inlet in the west Estonian Coast.

Spring migration peaks in April/May, but some species arrive as early as March. Autumn migration begins in July and can last until November.

Bird-watching towers, with extensive views of resting sites over various terrain, have been built at Penijõe, Kloostri, Haeska, Suitsu and Keemu. There are two marked **nature trails**, one at Penijõe (5km), another at Salevere Salumägi (1.5km). Bring reliable footwear, as the ground is wet and muddy. The reserve's headquarters is 3km north of the

Tallinn–Virtsu road at Penijõe, near Lihula. There you'll find a small **visitor centre** (☎ 472 4236; www.matsalu.ee; ☹ 8am–5pm Sat–Thu, 8am–3.45pm Fri mid-Apr–Sep, 8am–5pm Mon–Fri Oct–mid-Apr) and a permanent exhibition with slide show. The centre can hook you up with guides offering tours of the reserve, from two-hour canoe trips around the reed banks to several days of bird-watching. It can also recommend lodging in the area. It's best to contact the centre in advance. If you're planning an extensive bird-watching trip, consider contacting **Kumari** (☎ 477 8214; www.kumari.ee) before you head out. This outfit employs naturalist guides who have a wealth of knowledge on Matsalu's avian riches.

HIIMUMAA

pop 11,000

Hiiumaa, Estonia's second-biggest island, is a peaceful and sparsely populated place with some delightful stretches of coastline and a forest-covered interior. Though there's plenty to do on the island, most visitors come here to breathe in the fresh sea air and simply relax amid pastoral splendour.

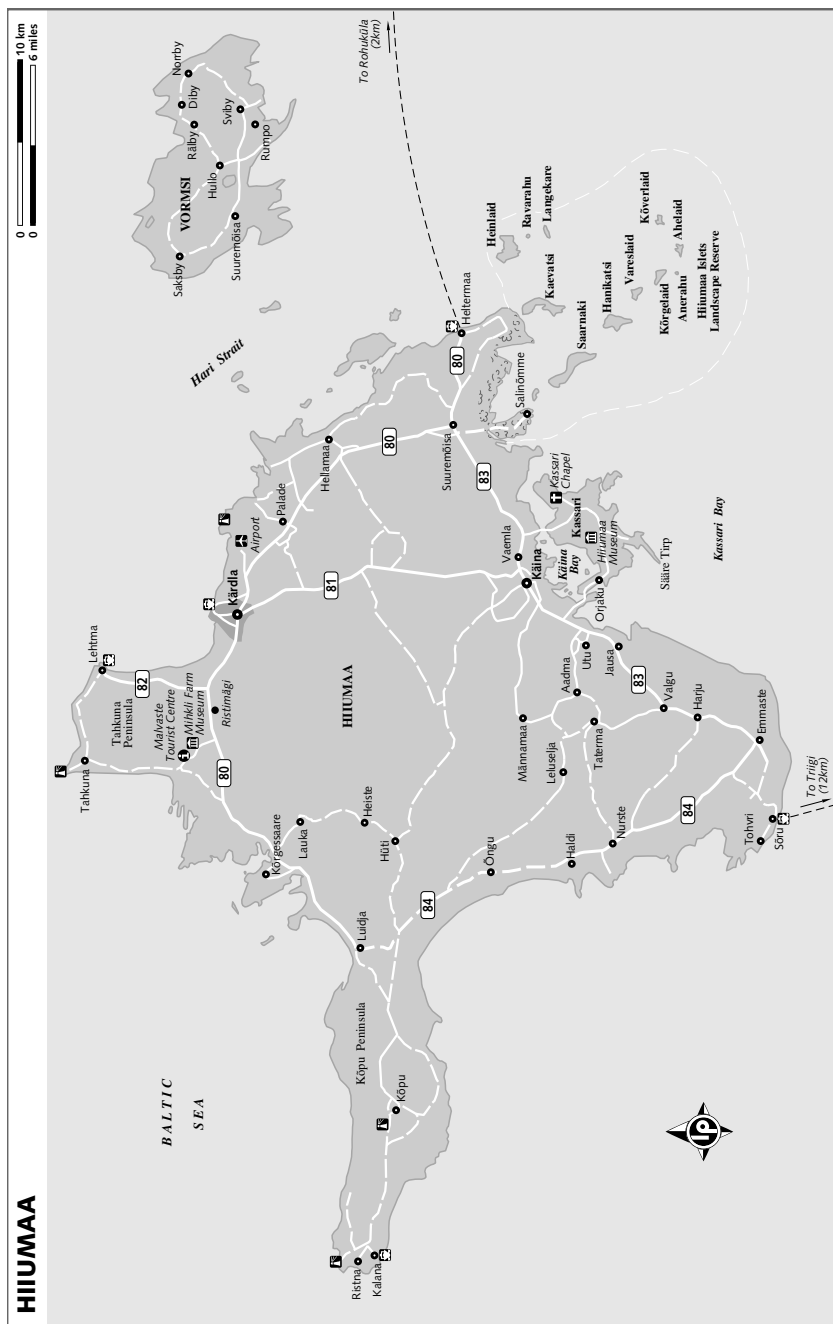
Scattered about Hiiumaa you'll find picturesque lighthouses, eerie old Soviet bunkers, empty beaches and a nature reserve with over 100 different bird species. Those seeking a bit more activity can hike, horse ride or, on rare days, even surf – the only place in the Baltics with a bit of swell.

Given their relative isolation from mainland Estonia, it's not surprising that the islanders have a unique take on things, and a rich folklore full of legendary heroes, such as Leiger, who had nothing to do with Kalevipoeg (the hero over on the mainland). People who move onto the island must carry the name *isehakanud hiidlane* (would-be islanders) for 10 years before being considered true residents. Hiiumaa is also said to be a haven for fairies and elves, ancestors of those born on the island. Modern-day Hiiumites rarely discuss this unique aspect of their family tree, however, as this can anger their elusive relatives.

Hiiumaa (1000 sq km) is not quite visible from the mainland, 22km away.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

A passenger and vehicle ferry runs between Rohuküla on the mainland and Heltermaa at Hiiumaa's eastern end. Buses from Tallinn



via Haapsalu run all the way to Hiiumaa; the ferry crossing is included in the trip. Other buses will drop you off or pick you up at either ferry terminal. It's also common to hitch or ask for lifts off the ferries at either end.

A ferry also connects Hiiumaa and Saaremaa, just 5.5km away.

Air

Avies Air (☎ 605 8002; www.avies.ee) flies twice per day Monday to Friday, and once on Saturdays and Sundays between Tallinn and Kärđla (adult/concession one way 245/215Kr, 30 minutes).

Boat

SLK Ferries (Saaremaa Laevakompanii; ☎ 452 4444; www.laevakompanii.ee) runs ferries between Rohuküla and Heltermaa four to six times daily (adult/child/vehicle 45/20/95Kr one way, 1½ hours). Check website for departure times.

Most people don't bother calling ahead, but if you're taking a car and you want to be on the safe side, book ahead, and show up at least 20 minutes before the ferry departs. Have your vehicle registration handy. You can also purchase tickets at either port: **Rohuküla ticket office** (☎ 473 3666) or **Heltermaa ticket office** (☎ 463 1630), a small building on the right as you leave the pier.

SLK Ferries also operates a year-round ferry (adult/vehicle 20/75Kr one way, one hour) two to three times daily from Sõru ferry terminal, on the southwesternmost tip of Hiiumaa, to Triigi on Saaremaa.

Bus

There are two to three buses daily from Tallinn to Kärđla (140Kr to 160Kr, 4½ hours), which can also be caught in Haapsalu and Rohuküla.

GETTING AROUND

Paved roads circle Hiiumaa and cover several side routes; the rest are dirt roads. In Kärđla, **Jaanus Jesmin** (☎ 511 2225; www.carent.hiiumaa.ee; Põllu 2a) rents out cars from 300Kr per day. Padu Hotell (p138) also rents cars as well as bicycles. There are fuel stations at Kärđla and Käina.

Jalgrattarent (☎ 5660 6377; www.hot.ee/jalgrattalaenus; per day €7) rents bicycles in Heltermaa, near the ferry landing.

Buses, nearly all radiating from Kärđla but some from Käina, get to most places on the island, though not very often. Schedules are posted inside the bus station in Kärđla or are available through **Tiit Reisid** (☎ 463 2077; www.tiitreisid.ee; Sadama tänav 13, Kärđla). Hitching is fairly common on Hiiumaa's roads.

Heltermaa to Kärđla

At Suuremõisa, 6km inland from Heltermaa, you can visit the chateaulike, late-baroque **Suuremõisa manor and park** (adult/concession 10/5Kr; ☎ 10am-4pm Jun-Sep), created in the mid-18th century. The property once belonged to the rich baronial Ungern-Sternberg family. The nearby **Pühalepa Church** dates from the 13th century. Legends surrounding a mound of rocks known as the **Stones of the Ancient Agreement** (Põhilise leppe kivid), about 1km northeast of the manor, suggest that they mark the grave of a ruler of Sweden.

Kärđla

pop 3950

Hiiumaa's 'capital' grew up around a cloth factory founded in 1829 and destroyed during WWII. It's a green town full of gardens and tree-lined streets, with a sleepy atmosphere and few diversions except that it's Hiiumaa's centre for services of all kinds.

ORIENTATION

The centre of town is Keskväljak (Central Square), a long plaza 500m north of the main Heltermaa-Kõrgessaare road. The bus station lies 200m north of its northern end. To the west is Rannapark, which runs down to the sea.

INFORMATION

Cultural Centre (☎ 463 2192; Rookopli tänav 18) Hosts occasional exhibitions and performances.

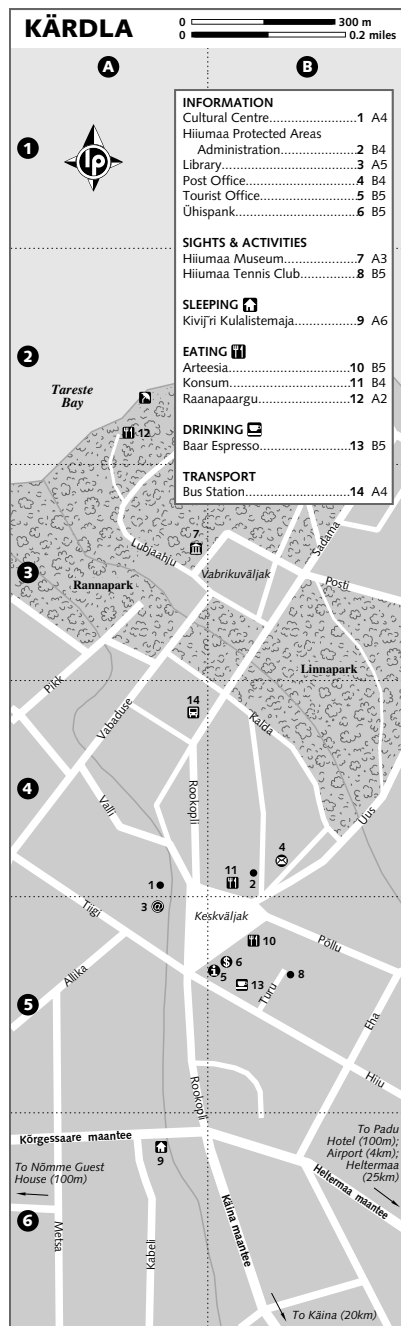
Hiiumaa Protected Areas Administration (☎ 462 2101; Vabrikuväljak 1; www.bka.hiiloodus.ee) Oversees Hiiumaa's landscape reserves and protected areas. Maps and brochures available.

Library (☎ 463 2142; Rookopli tänav 18) Next door to the cultural centre, the library provides Internet access.

Post office (Keskväljak 3)

Tiit Reisid (☎ 463 2077; www.tiitreisid.ee; Sadama tänav 13) Run by Hiiumaa experts, this travel agency inside the bus station arranges accommodation and tours.

Tourist office (☎ 462 2232; www.hiiumaa.ee; Hiiu tänav 1; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri & 10am-3pm Sat & Sun mid-May-mid-Sep, 10am-5pm Mon-Fri mid-Sep-mid-May)



This friendly centre distributes maps and can help arrange accommodation and guide service. It also sells the *Lighthouse Tour*, a 40-page driving tour of the island in English. The office is housed in an old fire tower. Climb up the steps for a great view over the area.

Uhispank (Keskväljak 7) Money exchange and ATM.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

On a rainy day, visit the small **Hiiumaa Museum** (☎ 463 2091; Vabrikuväljak tänav 8; adult/concession 10/5Kr; ☎ 10am-5pm May-Jun, 10am-5pm Mon-Fri Jul-Apr), which has displays related to the cloth factory, and work from local artists.

Call the **Hiiumaa tennis club** (Tenniseklubi; ☎ 463 3010; Turu tänav 2) about court hire. At the **beach** (follow Lubjaahju tänav) there's a clean, sandy shore, a café and minigolf.

You can hire bicycles and cars from Padu Hotell.

SLEEPING

Padu Hotell (☎ 463 3037; www.paduhotell.ee; Heltermaa maantee 22; s/d/apt incl breakfast 450/650/800Kr; ☎) One of Kärđla's better options, this pleasant two-storey hotel has cosy wooden rooms, all with balconies. There's a sauna with a small pool, and a relaxing café.

Kivijüri Kulalistemaja (☎ 469 1002; www.hot.ee/kivijuri; Kõrgessaare maantee 1; s/d incl breakfast 300/500Kr; ☎) This bright-red, warm country house has simple rooms. There's a backyard patio and lots of greenery nearby.

EATING & DRINKING

Raanapaargu (☎ 463 2053; Lubjaahju tänav 3; meals 35-65Kr) Overlooking the beach, this pyramid-shaped restaurant with outdoor patio offers a pleasant setting for a meal. Dance parties are held here on weekends (entrance 25Kr).

Baar Espresso (☎ 463 1213; Hiiu tänav 1a; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat noon-6pm Sun) This tiny café serves the best coffee in town. It's a pleasant pit stop before sightseeing.

Arteesia (☎ 463 2173; Keskväljak 5; ☎ 9am-11pm Mon-Sat, 11am-10pm Sun) This cheery place serves basic fare (meat and potatoes, anyone?), but there are few other options.

Konsum (Keskväljak; ☎ 9am-9pm) Load up on provisions at the island's largest grocery store.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Several buses a day travel along the main road from Kärđla past the Malvaste turn-off, a 15-minute ride.

Tahkuna Peninsula

The sparsely populated Tahkuna Peninsula stretches 8km north into the Baltic Sea, west of Kärđla. Northern Hiiumaa had a population of free Swedish farmers until the late 18th century, when they were forced to leave, with many ending up in Ukraine on the false promise of a better life. At Ristimägi, 7km west of Kärđla, there's a **Hill of Crosses**, a small dune decked with handmade crosses just off the main road. These mark the spot where the last 1200 Swedish people living on Hiiumaa performed their final act of worship before leaving the island in 1781. It has become a tradition for first-time visitors to Hiiumaa to lay a cross there.

At Tahkuna, on the peninsula's northwest tip, there's a **lighthouse** dating from 1875. This area was the scene of a battle between German and Russian troops during WWII; the official Soviet story was that the Soviets bravely fought to the bitter end, and the last man climbed to the top of the lighthouse and flung himself off while still firing at the Germans. Behind it stands an eerie **memorial** to the victims of the *Estonia* ferry disaster. Facing out to sea, the 12m-tall metal frame encases a huge cross, from the bottom of which a bell with carved, sculpted faces is suspended; it only rings when the wind blows with the same speed and in the same direction as that fatal night in September 1994, when the *Estonia* went down.

On the road south of Tahkuna, and especially on the winding dirt road eastwards towards Lehtma, you'll see deserted **Soviet army bases**, including a complete underground bunker to wander through; bring a torch.

At Malvaste, 2km north of the Kärđla-Kõrgessaare road from a turning 10km west of Kärđla, there's the open-air **Mihkli Farm Museum** (☎ 523 2225; adult/concession 10/5Kr; ☎ 10am-6pm mid-May-mid-Sep). It has a working smoke sauna (built in 1915) for hire, which can hold up to 10 people. It's a unique, old-fashioned experience – but not recommended for sensitive eyes.

SLEEPING

If you're looking for a dose of nature, there are several good options on Tahkuna Peninsula.

Kalda Puhketalu (☎ 462 2122; www.kaldapuhketalu.ee; cabin per person 180Kr, holiday house 2000-2500Kr; ☎) Less than 1km north of Malvaste, this friendly

tourist farm rents out simple wooden cabins (with separate shared bathrooms) and much larger holiday houses, each with kitchen, fireplace and bathroom. It's an excellent location 200m from a sandy beach. Sauna, bike and boat hire are available.

Randmäe (☎ 5691 3883; www.hot.ee/puhketalu/etutvustus.htm; camp site 50Kr, cabin per person 150Kr; ☎) Just south of Kalda, this place offers more rustic accommodation in small wooden cabins. It's close to the beach. Sauna available.

Western Hiiumaa

The harbour village of **Kõrgessaare**, 20km west of Kärđla, offers little by way of distractions except a quaint restaurant and guesthouse (see below) on your way westward.

The best-known landmark in Hiiumaa is the inland **Kõpu lighthouse** (☎ 469 3474; adult/concession 20/10Kr; ☎ 9am-10pm May-mid-Sep), the third-oldest, continuously operational lighthouse in the world. A lighthouse has stood on this raised bit of land since 1531, though the present white limestone tower was built in 1845. At 37m high, it can be seen 55km away. East of here, near the 61km highway mark, is the 1.5km Rebastemäe **nature trail**, which takes in forest paths along the highest (therefore oldest) parts of the island.

You can get more information at the small information booth next door to the restaurant near the lighthouse base.

A second lighthouse stands at the western end of the peninsula near **Ristna** (Stockholm is just over 200km west of here). It was brought to Hiiumaa by freighter from Paris, where it was made, together with the lighthouse at Tahkuna.

Near Ristna is **Surf Paradiis** (☎ 5625 1015; www.paap.ee), set on a stretch of lovely sandy beach. You can hire sea kayaks, surfboards and wetsuits or have a sauna. Check surf conditions (Paradiis' website has a webcam) before you come. Remember, this is the Baltic Sea we're talking about.

SLEEPING & EATING

At Kõpu lighthouse, you can arrange **camping** (☎ 469 3476; camp site 20Kr) at the information booth. You can also camp for free along Tõnupsi beach north of there.

Viinakök (☎ 469 3337; Kõrgessaare; d 500Kr) Set in a picturesque 1880s building (formerly a vodka factory), this place offers fairly

shabby rooms painted in undersea colours, and shared bathrooms. The more attractive restaurant downstairs serves an OK buffet lunch (110Kr), and there's a well-stocked bar to help it all go down.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Kärdla buses run several times most days to/from Kõrgessaare and Luidja at the start of the Kõpu Peninsula, and two or three times daily to/from Kalana near the end of the peninsula.

Käina & Käina Bay Bird Reserve

pop 2390

Hiiumaa's second-largest settlement is a fairly nondescript place, apart from the ruins of a fine **15th-century stone church**, which was wrecked by a WWII bomb, near the main road. On the western edge of Käina is the **Tobias Museum** (☎ 463 2091; adult/concession 10/5Kr; ☞ 10am-5pm mid-May-mid-Sep), former home of Rudolf Tobias (1873-1918), composer of some of Estonia's first orchestral works.

The main appeal of the town is its proximity to the shore of **Käina Bay**, an important bird reserve that is virtually cut off from the open sea by the twin causeways to **Kassari Island**. You can get a good view over the action from the bird-watching tower north of Orjaku on Kassari, where you'll also find a short walking trail. During the hot summer months a large part of the bay dries up and becomes nothing more than a mud field. About 70 different species breed at Käina Bay. The headquarters of the Hiiumaa Protected Areas Administration (p137) publishes a variety of leaflets to take you through nature trails within the reserve.

Four kilometres from Käina, at Vaemla on the road to Kassari, is a small **wool factory** (Hiiu Vill; ☎ 463 6121; admission free; ☞ 10am-6pm), which still uses original 19th-century weaving and spinning machines to produce some fine traditional knitwear. In addition to sweaters and mittens, the factory sells wool in bulk if you want to do your own knitting. There's a decent café on site.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotell Liilia (☎ 463 6146; www.liiliahotell.ee; Hiiu maantee 22; s/d/tr incl breakfast 700/800/1000Kr; ☞) Set in a Spanish colonial two-storey building, Liilia has bright, airy rooms with hard-

wood floors and private bathrooms. There's also a popular restaurant and bar serving Estonian and international dishes.

Tondilossi (☎ 463 6337; Hiiu maantee 11; s/d 250/500Kr; ☞) This is a comfortable, wooden lodge that also has a café (open 11am to 6pm Monday to Saturday). Boat and car rental are available.

Lõokesse Hotel (☎ 463 6107; www.lookesse.com; Lõokesse tänav 14; s/d from 600/670Kr; ☞ ☞) This uninspiring brick building hides clean rooms with wild carpeting and bright drapes. There's a small pool and a children's playground.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

A good paved road runs 20km across the island from Käina to Kärdla. Five or six buses daily go between Kärdla and Käina, with fewer runs on weekends.

Kassari

pop 90

This pleasant 8km-long island is thickly covered with mixed woodland and boasts some striking coastal scenery. It's linked to Hiiumaa by two causeways.

Southern Kassari narrows to a promontory with some unusual vegetation and ends in a thin 3km spit of land the tip of which, **Sääre Tirp**, juts out into the sea. It's a beautiful place for a walk. On the way towards Sääre Tirp you'll pass by a small **swimming beach** (about 500m past the fork to Orjaku).

You'll also notice a **statue** of the local hero, Leiger, carrying a boulder on his shoulder. He was a relative of Suur Töll, Saaremaa's hero. Legend has it that the Sääre Tirp is the result of an aborted bridge he started to build to Saaremaa, to make it easier for Suur Töll to visit and join in various heroic acts.

Just inland of the main road, a short distance west of the Sääre Tirp fork, is the single-storey **Hiiumaa Museum** (☎ 463 2091; adult/concession 10/5Kr; ☞ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-2pm Sat), which was formerly servants' quarters on the Kassari estate. It has a small collection of artefacts and exhibits on Hiiumaa's history and biodiversity. Among the curiosities: the jewel-like prism of the 1874 Tahkuna lighthouse and the stuffed body of the wolf that allegedly terrorised the island in the 1960s.

M/S ESTONIA: CONSIGNED TO MYSTERY

About 30 nautical miles northwest of Hiiumaa's Tahkuna Peninsula lies the wreck of the ferry *Estonia*, which sank during a storm just after midnight on 28 September 1994. Only 137 people survived the tragedy, which claimed 852 lives in one of Europe's worst maritime disasters.

In 1993 the Swedish-Estonian joint venture Estline launched the *Estonia* to service the increasingly popular route between Tallinn and Stockholm. The 15,000-tonne roll-on/roll-off ferry was already a veteran of Scandinavian seas, having sailed between Sweden and Finland for 14 years. The ferry was a source of pride and a symbol of freedom to the newly independent Estonians, even for those whose only experience of it would be seeing the huge white vessel dock at Tallinn's port.

The cause of the tragedy remains the subject of contention and burgeoning conspiracy theory. In 1997 the final report of the Joint Accident Investigation Commission (JAIC), an official inquiry by the Estonian, Swedish and Finnish governments, concluded that the ferry's design was at fault and the crew were probably underskilled in safety and emergency procedures. The report claimed the bow gate, or visor, was engineered inadequately for rough sailing conditions and that during the storm the visor was torn from the bow and in the process breached the watertight seal of the loading ramp. This exposed the car deck to tonnes of seawater that sank the *Estonia* completely within one hour. Escape time for the 989 people on board was estimated at only 15 minutes and they were denied access to lifeboats due to the sudden list and sinking of the ferry. For those who did escape, the freezing conditions of the water that night reduced survival time to only minutes.

The integrity of the report was questioned after dissent within the JAIC became public. Allegations followed that vital information had been withheld and that the Commission did not act impartially. The report also met with criticism from relatives of the victims, the majority of whom were Swedes. In 2000 a Swedish newspaper survey claimed over 70% of victims' families were still calling for a new investigation. Subsequent reports from Sweden and an inquiry commissioned by the ferry's German manufacturers argued that, contrary to the JAIC findings, the *Estonia* was not seaworthy, it had been poorly serviced and the visor-securing mechanisms were in need of repair.

In 2000 a joint US-German diving expedition and new analyses of the *Estonia*'s recovered visor prompted theories of an explosion on board, which explosive experts believe would be the most feasible explanation for the damage sustained and the ferry's rapid sinking. Estline suspected an underwater mine, while it has also been suggested that the ferry collided with another vessel. Conspiracy theorists claim that the *Estonia* was transporting unregistered munitions cargo, as an illicit trade in weapons was to be curtailed with new export laws about to come into effect. Claims of a cover-up have been bolstered by the alleged disappearance of eight crew members, initially listed as survivors.

Unexplained interference with the wreck, along with the Swedish government's dumping of sand to stabilise it in 2000, further fuelled conspiracy claims and calls for a new inquiry. The governments of Estonia, Finland and Sweden are resolute that the ferry will remain where it sank as a memorial to the dead; an estimated 700 people are thought to be inside. To date no-one has been found liable and no compensation has been paid to the victims or their families.

Another enjoyable walk, ride or drive is to a pretty, whitewashed, 18th-century **chapel** at the east end of Kassari. A sign 'Kassari Kabel 2' directs you down a dirt road from the easternmost point of the island's paved road. A path continues nearly 2km to a small bay in Kassari's northeastern corner.

Along the way to the chapel, you'll also pass Hiiumaa's largest horse farm, the **Kassari Ratsamatkad** (☎ 469 7102; www.kassari.ee; 1hr/

day tour €10/40), which offers a range of horse-riding excursions through forests and along untouched coastline.

SLEEPING & EATING

Vetsi Tall (☎ 462 2550; www.vetsitall.ee; camp site/r per person/apt 40/200/1200Kr; ☞) On the main road between Orjaku and the fork to Sääre Tirp, Vetsi Tall offers accommodation in simple, wooden, barrel-shaped cabins. It also rents

a comfortable three-room apartment with kitchen. You can camp, use the sauna or have a meal at the pleasant tavern (meals 50Kr to 80Kr; restaurant open 10am to 10pm). The food is basic but among Hiiumaa's better options.

Seeba (☎ 5661 8036; www.hot.ee/seebatalu; d incl breakfast 790Kr; ☒) Near the horse farm (Kassari Ratsamatkad), Seeba rents small but charming wooden cabins, with tiny kitchenettes and bathrooms. There's also one large room with a balcony. Sauna available.

Camping (☎ 5625 3535; camp site 50Kr) is available near the swimming beach on the way to Sääre Tirp. Stop in at the snack stand by the side of the road.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are only two buses a day between Kärdla and Kassari. Check with the tourist office in Kärdla for the latest times. It's also possible to hitch.

Southern Hiiumaa

The main paved road from Käina runs southwest through Valgu and Harju, villages separated from the coast by a 3km-wide marshy strip. **Harju** has two restored windmills. At Emmaste the main road turns northwest to end at Haldi, just past Nurste. Hamlets and isolated farmsteads dot the west-facing stretch of coast and its hinterland. The southern tip of Hiiumaa around the harbour of Sõru (where ferries to Saaremaa depart) is bleaker with few trees. North of Haldi, dirt roads continue through Öngu to the western Kõpu Peninsula and to Lüidja, the end of the paved road west from Kärdla.

There are buses from Kärdla and Käina to Valgu, Harju, Emmaste, Tohvri (in the south near Sõru), Nurste and Öngu every day.

Hiiumaa Islets Landscape Reserve

Saarnaki, Hanikatsi, Vareslaid, Kõrgelaid and other islets off southeastern Hiiumaa form the Hiiumaa Islets Landscape Reserve, now incorporated into the Hiiumaa Protected Areas Administration which has its headquarters (p137) in Kärdla. This is a breeding place for some 110 bird species, including avocets, eider ducks and goosanders, as well as a migration halt for swans, barnacle geese and other species. Over 600 plant species – almost half Esto-

nia's total – grow here, including the rare red helleborine.

Saarnaki and **Hanikatsi**, the two largest islands at almost 1.5 and 1 sq km respectively, were inhabited until the 1960s or 1970s. They were depopulated, like many other Estonian coastal villages, because of Soviet bans on seagoing boats, which meant people could no longer earn a living from fishing.

Birds on the islands have been carefully monitored since 1974. A number of observation towers have been built within the reserve, including one near the **Hiiumaa Islets Reserve Centre** (☎ 469 4299; www.laiud.hiiuma.ee) at Salinõmme on Hiiumaa. It is possible to spend a night on deserted and peaceful Saarnaki or Hanikatsi Islands but you have to get permission from the reserve centre first. It can arrange for a guide to take you by boat to the islands. Note some of the smaller islands are off limits until the beginning of July, after the nesting season has ended.

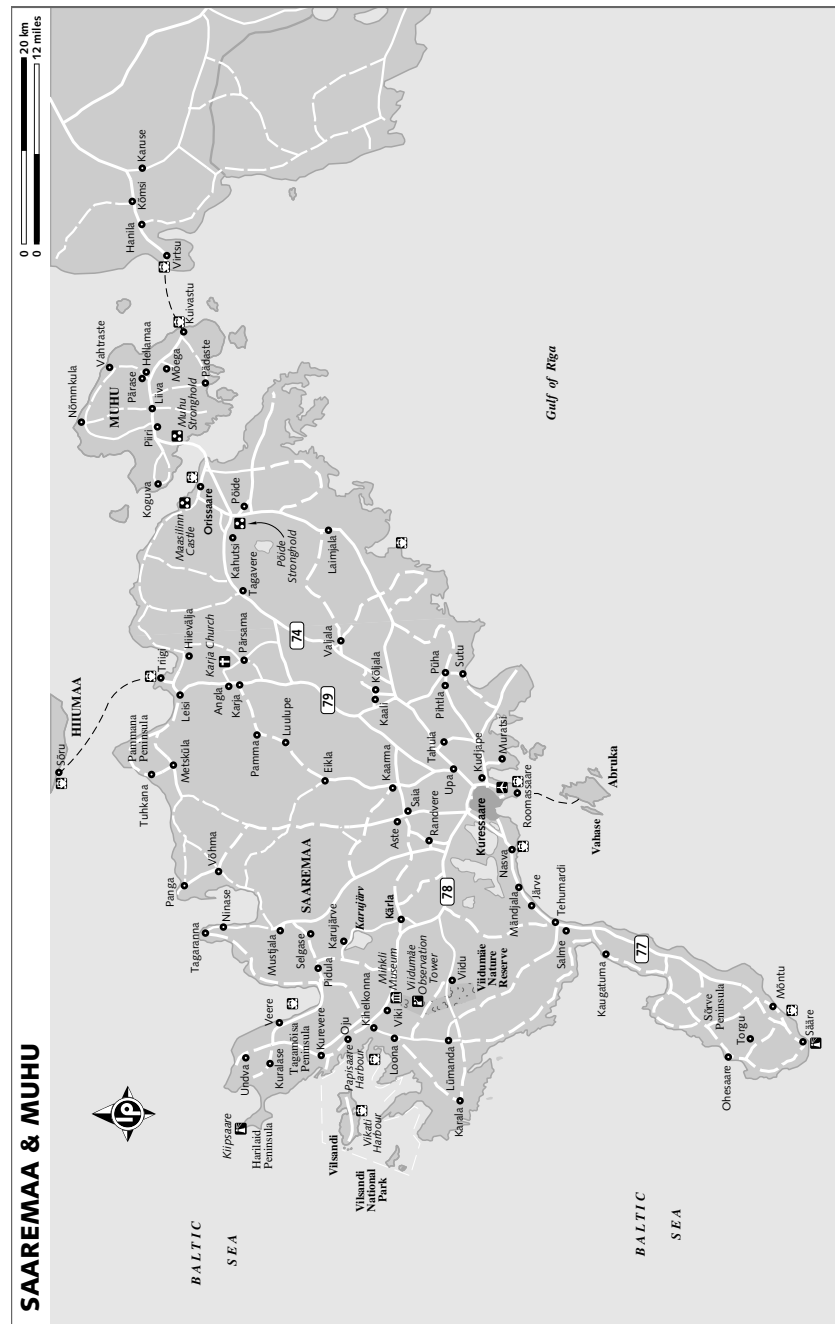
SAAREMAA

pop 35,600

Estonia's largest island still lies covered in thick pine and spruce forests, while old windmills, slender lighthouses and tiny villages still appear as if unchanged by the passage of time. Saaremaa, more than any other place in Estonia, offers a glimpse of 'old Estonia'. There are long empty stretches of sparkling coastline, juniper bushes slumbering beneath the ruins of a 15th-century church, and the stray sheep staring out from an old stone wall.

This unique old-time setting goes hand-in-hand with inextinguishable Saaremaa pride. Saaremaa has always had an independent streak and was usually the last part of Estonia to fall to invaders. Its people have their own customs, songs and costumes. They don't revere mainland Estonia's Kalevipoeg legend, for Saaremaa has its own hero, Suur Tõll, who fought many battles around the island against devils and fiends.

Yet this vision of the idyllic clashes somewhat with the modernity that Kuressaare has thrust upon it. With its magnificent castle, charming Old Town and picturesque bayside setting, Saaremaa's capital has clearly established itself as a premier summer destination. When the long days arrive so do the crowds of Finns and Swedes, jostling for beach space



beside urban Estonians arriving from the city. They come to Kuressaare's spa resorts, art galleries and cafés, its restaurants and guest-houses. Meanwhile, it's easy to beat the tourist trail by heading out of town, where it's still possible to find gorgeous sandy beaches, mystifying old ruins and windswept peninsulas, with no other soul in sight.

During the Soviet era the entire island was off limits (due to an early-radar system and rocket base stationed there), even to 'mainland' Estonians who needed a permit to visit. This resulted in a minimum of industrial build-up and the unwitting protection of the island's rural charm.

Saaremaa is joined by a causeway to the neighbouring island, Muhu, to which ferries run from Virtsu on the mainland.

HISTORY

Saaremaa's earliest coastal settlements (dating from the 4th millennium BC) now lie inland because the land has risen about 15m over the last 5000 years. In the 10th to 13th centuries Saaremaa and Muhu were the most densely populated parts of Estonia. Denmark tried to conquer Saaremaa in the early 13th century; however in 1227 the German Knights of the Sword subjugated it. The island was then carved up between the knights, who took Muhu and eastern and northwestern parts of Saaremaa, and the Haapsalu-based bishop of Ösel-Wiek, who made Kuressaare his stronghold.

Saaremaa rebelled against German rule numerous times between 1236 and 1343 (when the Knights' castle was destroyed and the Germans were expelled from the island), though their efforts were always short-lived (in 1345 the Germans reconquered the island).

In the 16th century Saaremaa became a Danish possession during the Livonian War, but by 1645 the Swedes had their turn compliments of the Treaty of Brömsebro. Russia took over in 1710 during the Great Northern War and Saaremaa became part of the Russian province of Livonia, governed from Riga.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Avies Air (☎ 605 8002; www.avies.ee) flies twice per day Monday to Friday and once on Saturdays and Sundays between Tallinn

and Kuressaare (adult/concession one way 385/255Kr, 45 minutes).

Boat

SLK Ferries (Saaremaa Laevakompanii; ☎ 452 4444; www.laevakompanii.ee) operates a daily ferry between Virtsu ferry terminal on the mainland and Kuivastu ferry terminal on Muhu. The ferries make the 30-minute crossing between seven and 12 times daily (adult/concession/vehicle 20/10/55Kr). You can reserve a place for your car by calling SLK Ferries.

Year-round ferries run from Sõru on Hiiumaa to Triigi on the north coast of Saaremaa at varying frequencies. For further details, see p137.

For details on the Saaremaa ferry to Latvia, see p404.

A new summer-only line recently started running between Roomassaare in Saaremaa and Ruhnu. See p162 for details.

Saaremaa is very popular with visiting yachting. The best harbour facilities are at the new **Kuressaare City Harbour** (☎ 453 3540, 503 1953; www.kuressaare.ee/yachtharbour), within a stone's throw of three spa hotels. Visit www.tt.ee/renza/sadamad for details of other harbours on Saaremaa.

Bus

At least eight direct buses travel daily between Tallinn and Kuressaare (170Kr to 195Kr, 4½ hours, 220km). There are two buses daily to/from Tartu (200Kr to 220Kr, six to seven hours) and three buses daily to/from Pärnu (140Kr, 3¼ hours).

There are five buses daily between Virtsu and Saaremaa, and another five buses daily each way between Kuivastu (Muhu) and Kuressaare; a 1½-hour trip timed to connect with ferry arrivals and departures. Likewise, at Virtsu you can board a bus bound for Tallinn or elsewhere.

ISLAND BREW

When you're out on the islands, be sure to try the homemade beer. A longtime island tradition, the brew features the traditional malt, yeast and hops, but comes off a bit sour on the palate. It's light and refreshing, best quaffed from a wooden tankard on a warm summer day.

GETTING AROUND

There are over 400km of paved road on Saaremaa and many more dirt roads. Hitching is not uncommon on the main routes (but there's not much traffic on minor roads). Buses do get around the island, but not very frequently. It's possible to put a bike or two in the baggage compartments, though you have to ask the driver for permission. Before you head out, call the friendly folks at **Kuressaare bus station** (☎ 453 1661) for help in route planning.

Eastern Saaremaa

The first place you reach on Saaremaa is **Orissaare**, the island's second-largest town. The small **tourist office** (☎ 454 5051; Sadama 1; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat & Sun) can provide maps and general info. The German knights built **Maasilinn Castle** just north of Orissaare during the 14th to 16th centuries. It was badly damaged in 1576 but you can still see the ruins, and wander through a restored underground chamber. The town itself is a quaint, sleepy settlement, with a tiny handicrafts shop, **Uku** (Rana puistee 9; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat), where you can watch Orissaare's old weavers in action.

Põide, 3km south of the main road, was the German knights' headquarters on Saaremaa. Their fortress was destroyed in 1343 in the St George's Night Uprising, but Põide Church, built by the Germans in the 13th and 14th centuries a short distance east of the road, remains an imposing symbol of their influence.

Kaali

At Kaali, 18km north of Kuressaare, stands a 100m-wide, water-filled **meteorite crater** blasted into existence about 2700 years ago. In Scandinavian mythology, the site was known as 'the sun's grave'. It's Europe's largest and most accessible meteorite crater, though it looks small up close. There's a new museum and hotel here as well as an old-style tavern with Estonian fare (and homemade beer). To get there, take Rd 10 north from Kuressaare, and keep your eyes peeled for the well-marked turn-off on the left.

Angla, Karja, Triigi & Tuhkana

If you are arriving on the ferry from Hiiumaa, this region provides a bucolic introduction to the island.

Angla, 40km from Kuressaare on the main road to the north coast, is the site of the biggest and most photogenic grouping of Saaremaa's old **windmills** – five of them of various sizes lined up together on the roadside. Opposite the windmills is the turn-off to the 14th-century **Karja Church**, 2km east, which has a fortresslike façade and an elaborate crucifixion carving on one of its inner walls.

North of Angla, the road continues 5.5km to Leisi, the venue for **Ölletoober** (www.olletoo.ber.ee), a beer festival each July showcasing both sophisticated and feral brews. From Leisi it's 3.5km to the harbour of Triigi, a picturesque bay on Saaremaa's north coast with views across to Hiiumaa. If arriving from Hiiumaa, the **Leisi tourist office** (☎ 457 3073; ☎ noon-7pm Jun-Aug) on the main road is a good place to pick up maps and get general Saaremaa information.

There's a sandy beach at Tuhkana, 3km north of Metsküla, which is 10km west of Leisi, mostly by unpaved roads.

SLEEPING

Kuressaare tourist office (p147) can arrange accommodation in the region.

Püharisti Hostel (☎ 454 5149; www.eelk.ee/orissaare; Ranna puistee 11, Orissaare; camp site/bed per person from 200/50Kr; ☎) Overlooking the sea, Püharisti offers hostel-like accommodation in a warm, superfriendly environment. Kayaks are available (100Kr per hour). You can also pitch a tent nearby.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses between Kuressaare and the mainland take the main road passing within 1km of Valjala, while the local Kuressaare-Kuivastu service takes the more southerly road through Laimjala and within 1km of Põide. There are 10 buses daily between Kuressaare and Orissaare (30Kr, 1¼ hours) and 10 between Orissaare and Kuivastu (30Kr), mostly in the morning and afternoon.

Up to 14 buses daily run between Kuressaare and Leisi, a trip of about an hour, passing right by the Angla windmills and close to Karja Church. Those via Pärnasma go right by Karja Church. Kaali is half-way between the Kuressaare-Valjala and Kuressaare-Leisi roads, about 3km from each, so you could use a bus along either road to get within walking distance.

Kuressaare

pop 16,000

Saaremaa's star attraction, Kuressaare is a picturesque town with peaceful leafy streets, charming guesthouses and cafés, and a magnificent castle rising up in its midst. The town is also famous for its spas, which range from Eastern-bloc sanatoriums to sleek and stylish resorts. Its reputation as a health centre began as early as the 19th century, when the ameliorative properties of its coastal mud were discovered and the first health spas opened.

Kuressaare's reason for being is its castle, which was founded in the 13th century as the Haapsalu-based Bishop of Ösel-Wiek's stronghold in the island part of his diocese.

Kuressaare became Saaremaa's main trading centre, developing quickly after passing into Swedish hands in 1645. In the Soviet era Kuressaare was named Kingisseppa, after Viktor Kingissepp, an Estonian communist of the 1920s.

ORIENTATION

The road from Kuivastu and the mainland enters Kuressaare as Tallinna tänav, passing southwest through modern suburbs to the central square, Keskväljak. Kuressaare Castle and its surrounding park, which reaches down to the coast, are 750m beyond Keskväljak, along Lossi tänav. The **bus station** (Pihlta tee 25) is located northwest of Keskväljak.

KURESSAARE

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INFORMATION

There are several banks, ATMs and exchange bureaux on Keskväljak.

Arensburg travel agency (☎ 453 3360; abr@tt.ee; Tallinna maantee 25; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) Extremely knowledgeable about the island and offers arranged boat trips to Vilsandi.

Estravel (☎ 454 5345; www.estravel.ee; Tallinna maantee 8) Good all-purpose travel agent.

Hansapank (Kohtu tänav 2)

Library (Tallinna maantee 6; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat) Free Internet access.

Post office (Torni tänav 1) Public phones (telephone-card only).

Tourist office (☎ 453 3120; www.kuressaare.ee; Tallinna tänav 2; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 9am-3pm Sun May-Sep, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri Oct-Apr) Inside the old town hall. It sells maps and guides, arranges accommodation, and books boat trips and island tours.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES**Kuressaare Castle**

The majestic Kuressaare Castle stands at the southern end of the town, on an artificial island ringed by a partly filled moat. It's the best-preserved castle in the Baltics and the region's only medieval stone castle that has remained intact.

A castle was founded in the 1260s, but the mighty dolomite fortress that stands today was not built until the 14th century, with some protective walls added between the 15th and 18th centuries. It was designed as an administrative centre as well as a stronghold. The more slender of its two tall corner towers, Pikk Hermann to the east, is separated from the rest of the castle by a shaft crossed only by a drawbridge, so it could function as a last refuge in time of attack.

Inside the castle is a warren of chambers, halls, passages and stairways to fuel anyone's fantasies about Gothic fortresses. It houses the **Saaremaa Regional Museum** (Saaremaa Koduloomuseum; ☎ 455 6307; adult/concession/audiotour 30/15/60Kr; ☎ 10am-7pm Wed-Sun). On the ground floor look for the *hüükaust* (hypocaust) on the southwestern side, a furnace that fuelled a medieval central-heating system. According to legend, condemned prisoners were dispatched through a small floorless room near the bishop's chamber, to be received by hungry lions. Legends also tell of a knight's body found when a sealed room was opened in the 18th century. It's said that, upon discovery, the knight's body dissolved into dust, which has given rise to varying accounts of how he met his tragic fate.

SAAREMAA'S SEDUCTIVE SPAS

Saaremaa's reputation as a major spa destination may be a bit premature, but there are still some excellent opportunities for pampering, detoxing and/or sliding into a bathtub full of slippery coastal mud – a Saaremaa remedy for over 150 years. You'll also encounter some downright bizarre (some would say innovative) treatments – anyone up for a NeoQui Energy Cocoon? But whatever your yin, if you've come to Saaremaa, give a treatment a try.

Although the island has a number of spas, if you don't want to feel like you're checking into a hospital, you have only two options: the elegant **Georg Ots Spa Hotell** (p148) or the **Spa Hotel Rütüli** (p148) up the road. While both spas offer the standard classical massage, Thai massage (where they roll you all over the floor until you're nice and supple), aromatherapy and herbal baths, the Georg Ots Spa tends to lean more in the pampering direction. For instance, you can soak in a juniper bath, get a body wrap or have a chocolate massage. Meanwhile, the Rütüli, which may not be as stylish as the Georg Ots, has a much wider range of offerings – some of them clearly leaning towards the category of 'punishment' – like the full body massage with hot lava stones, the caviar facial, and our favourite, Charcot's shower, where someone sprays you with streams of water from a hose (improves circulation while lowering self-esteem). There's also music therapy, a salt chamber (good for asthmatics), and you can even go 'grossing' (they strap you into a harness suspended from the ceiling and you bounce across a gym floor). Both of these places offer package deals, though you can also reserve a treatment or two (best to book ahead).

Incidentally, a NeoQui Energy Cocoon (with or without cream) isn't for sissies. It involves lying in an enclosed capsule and undergoing the effects of infrared sauna, steam sauna, vibration massage, aromatherapy, Vichy douche and hydrobath massage. In the sandwich world, this would be called 'the works'. Both spas have 'em. What are you waiting for?

On the top floor, the castle has a café boasting fine views over the bay and surrounding countryside. Down below, outdoor concerts are held throughout the summer just inside the fortress walls. There's also a few targets where you try your hand at **archery** (four arrows 15Kr; ☎ 10am-5pm).

The shady park around the castle moat that extends to Kuressaare Bay was laid out in 1861 and there are some fine wooden resort buildings in and around it, notably the 1889 **Spa Hall** (Kuursaal).

Other Attractions

The best of Kuressaare's other old buildings are grouped around the central square Keskväljak, notably the **town hall** (built in 1670), on the eastern side, with a pair of fine stone lions at the door, and the **weigh-house** (now Vaekoja pub) across from it, both 17th-century baroque. There's a handsome **Lutheran Church** at the northeast end of Keskväljak and an **Orthodox Church** (Lossi tänav 8).

Aviik Museum (☎ 455 7553; Vallimaa tänav 7; adult/child 10/5Kr; ☎ 11am-6pm Wed-Sun) is dedicated to the life and works of linguist Johannes Aviik (1880-1973), who introduced major reforms to the Estonian language, and his musically talented cousin, Joosep Aviik (1899-1989). One of several galleries on Lossi, **Valguse Galerii** (☎ 513 0921; Lossi tänav 13; ☎ 10am-6pm) contains a small variety of works by Estonian artists. You'll find ceramics, wood-block prints, sculptures and paintings.

Boating

If the weather's nice, you can hire rowboats and float idly around the castle. **Boat hire** (Allee tänav 8; per hr 80Kr; ☎ noon-6pm) is available at Lossi Konn café.

Beaches

The best beach in the Kuressaare area is Järverand at Järve, about 14km west, some 2km past Mändjala. There's also a beach at Sutu, 12km east. Salme, Torgu or Sääre buses from Kuressaare go to Järverand.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The biggest event in Kuressaare is the **Castle Days** fest held in early July. Vespers, an old-time feast, Renaissance tournaments, a handicrafts market and lots of medieval fanfare take place. If you're in town, don't miss it. Other events include the **Waltz Festi-**

val (June), the **Saaremaa Summer Days** classical music festival (July), **Opera Days** (August), the **chamber-music festival** (August) and **Maritime Days** (August), which features lots of sea-related activities. There are also fortnightly concerts held in the castle grounds. Find out what's underway at the tourist office.

SLEEPING Town Centre

The tourist office can arrange accommodation in private flats around town (starting at 200Kr) or advise on out-of-town options.

Lossi Hotel (☎ 453 3633; lossihotel@tt.ee; Lossi tänav 27; s/d/ste 850/990/1290Kr; ☎) Set on the castle grounds, this beautifully restored mansion has elegant Art-Nouveau rooms, many of which boast stunning views of the castle.

Georg Ots Spa Hotell (☎ 455 0000; www.gospa.ee; Tori tänav 2; s/d from €101/112; ☎) Kuressaare's most stylish hotel, the Georg Ots has attractive modern rooms with wildly striped carpeting (most people like it, but be warned), enormous beds and a warm but minimalist design. Most rooms have balconies, and there's a lovely pool, fitness centre and spa services just down the hall.

Spa Hotel Riiutli (☎ 454 8100; www.sanatorium.ee; Pargi tänav 12; s/d €81/102; ☎) This large spa hotel has airy and comfortable wood-floored rooms, all of which have balconies. There are many spa services available, as well as a large swimming pool with water-slide, a sauna and a small gym. Even if you don't stay here, you can use the sauna, pool and gym (a bargain for 70Kr).

Hotell Arensburg (☎ 452 4700; www.sivainest.ee; Lossi tänav 15; s/d/ste 1050/1290/2100Kr; ☎) In a historic building near the main square, this hotel has great service and a lovely terrace out back. Rooms are decent, if a bit formal and heavy-handed with the colour green.

Daissy Hotell (☎ 453 3669; www.hot.ee/daissy/hotell; Tallinna maantee 15; s/d/ste 950/1190/1600; ☎) Daissy has simple elegant rooms, though the suites – with either a fireplace or a balcony – are less cramped than the attic rooms. Good restaurant housed in the old brick cellar. Can arrange scooter rental.

Johan Hotel (☎ 453 3036; www.saaremaa.ee/johan; Kauba tänav 13; s/d/ste 750/900/1700Kr; ☎) This peaceful guesthouse has small, simple rooms painted in warm colours, but the place could use new carpeting. There's a handsome wood-toned pub next door.

Repo Hotel (☎ 453 3510; Vallimaa tänav 1a; www.saaremaa.ee/repo; s/d incl breakfast 560/790Kr; ☎) A short walk from Raekoja plats, Repo has small, charming rooms painted in different colours. Good buffet breakfasts.

Staadioni Hotell (☎ 453 3556; www.staadioni/hotell.ee; Staadioni tänav 4; s/d 590/750Kr; ☎) Good views are on offer at this pleasant, secluded spot, 1km south of the centre. Clean, modern rooms have big windows facing either towards the castle or the sea. There's an athletics stadium next door.

Hotell Arabella (☎ 455 5885; www.arabella.ee; Tori tänav 12; s/d 575/800Kr; ☎) Although not terribly popular, this guesthouse offers clean, comfortable if slightly dated rooms. Try to snag the double room with balcony.

Mardi Guesthouse (☎ 452 4633; mardiametikool.ee; Vallimaa tänav 5a; s/d/tr incl breakfast 370/470/600Kr; ☎) This centrally located budget place has clean, basic rooms, every two of which share a bathroom.

Ovelia (☎ 455 5732; Suve tänav 8; d with private/shared bathroom 400/200Kr; ☎) One of the cheapest places in town, friendly Ovelia has small, poorly furnished rooms, and rustic cabins in the garden. Ovelia has a following among student travellers. You can cook on the outdoor grill or have a sauna (50Kr per person). It's a 12-minute walk southwest of the town square.

Out of Town

Owing to infrequent bus service, these places are mainly geared towards people with cars.

Puhkemaja Nasva (☎ 453 3603; jurigo@hot.ee; r/ste/house 220/700/1300Kr) Seven kilometres west of Kuressaare, this small homey property contains several basic cabin rooms with shared bathrooms, and more spacious, cosier suites. Some rooms have kitchenettes and look out over a pretty garden. You can also rent the whole house – a good option for four. The beach is nearby.

Kämping Mändjala (☎ 454 4193; www.mandjala.ee; camp site/cabin per person 60/200Kr, cabin with private bathroom 700Kr; ☎ May-Sep; ☎) Ten kilometres west of Kuressaare, Mändjala offers rustic wooden cabins and camping amid lots of greenery. You can also book a cabin with kitchen and private bathroom. It's a short walk to the beach. Three buses per day from Kuressaare to Torgu or Sääre go to the Mändjala bus stop, about 500m beyond the site.

Hotel Saaremaa (☎ 454 4100; www.saarehotell.ee; d/ste 1140/1410Kr; ☎) About 600m past Kämping Mändjala, this pleasant whitewashed hotel has trim, modern rooms and a pleasant outdoor terrace. Best of all, it's right on the beach.

EATING & DRINKING

Georg Ots Spa Hotell (☎ 453 3020; Tallinna maantee 3; meals from 70Kr; ☎ 9am-10pm) Saaremaa's best restaurant is found inside this attractive spa hotel. Amid a lovely dining room with big windows facing onto the sea, you can feast on seafood favourites such as trout with vegetable ratatouille, fish and shellfish stew, and salmon steak with sweet chilli sauce.

La Perla (☎ 453 6910; Lossi tänav 3; meals 50-140Kr) A handsome new addition to the dining scene, this Italian restaurant serves tasty brick-oven baked pizzas and plenty of other Italian options.

Vaekoja (☎ 453 3020; Tallinna maantee 3; meals from 70Kr; ☎ 9am-10pm) One of several inviting restaurants on the main square, Vaekoja serves eclectic fare (rainbow trout with blue cheese, grilled ostrich, salads) amid historic elegance. The front terrace is a popular meeting/drinking spot in the summer.

Üuemaja (☎ 453 3423; Uus tänav 20a; meals 20-65Kr; ☎ 10am-9pm Mon-Sat, 11am-8pm Sun) This popular no-frills restaurant serves decent, not terribly healthy food in a hurry. Noted writer and linguist Johannes Aviik and his musician cousin Joosep Aviik once lived here.

Veski (☎ 453 3776; Pärna tänav 19; meals 55-125Kr) This cosy multilevel restaurant is set inside a windmill; unfortunately, the chef is wildly inconsistent. The menu features grilled fish, roasted meats and other dishes.

Kodulinna Lokaal (☎ 453 1178; Tallinna maantee 11; meals 80-165Kr) This is an atmospheric cellar restaurant and bar that makes a pleasant retreat during chilly weather. Grilled fish, meats and salads are on offer.

Hansa Café (☎ 455 4321; Tallinna Maantee 9; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) One of Kuressaare's finest cafés, Hansa exudes old-world bohemian ambience. Fresh homemade pastries and a vibrant art gallery next door add to the charm.

Bella Mimi Kohvik (☎ 454 5123; Kauba tänav 6; ☎ 8am-6pm) This superfriendly café provides a cosy setting for lattes, waffles and fresh-baked cakes. Entrance on Kohtu.

Kalev (☎ 453 3088; Tallinna Maantee 19a; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat) Sample Estonia's famous chocolates here.

Kuursaal (☎ 453 9749; Pärigi tänav 1; meals 50-120Kr) Inside a former early-20th-century spa hall, Kuursaal is a fine stop-off for a coffee or light meal, but time your visit well to avoid tour-bus troops.

Kulapood (Torni tänav & Kirikuk; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat) If you're self-catering, this is the place for fish-lovers. Don't miss the delicious smoked salmon. An iron fish marks the downstairs entrance.

RAE Supermarket (☎ 453 3776; Raekoja tänav 10; ☎ 9am-10pm) This is the best grocery store in Saaremaa.

Wildenbergi Kohvik (☎ 4545325; Tallinna maantee 1; ☎ 9am-midnight) Also on the main square, this charming café is a lovely place for a drink – it has a fantastic tea selection.

Kapteni Kõrts (☎ 453 3406; Kauba tänav 13; meals from 65Kr) With its old saloon-like feel and summer terrace, the Kapteni Kõrts pub draws a lively crowd.

Raekelder (☎ 453 1170; Raekoja plats; meals 90-175Kr) Another winner for the ambience, the stone floors, old beamed ceiling and antique sitting room of the town hall basement is a fine place for coffee. The food and service is less enticing.

John Bull Pub (☎ 453 9988; Pärigi tänav 4) This friendly bar has a pleasant outdoor deck facing the castle; an unbeatable spot in summer.

Lonkav Konn (☎ 455 3240; Kauba tänav 6) This battered, easy-going pub attracts a mix of locals and tourists. It sometimes gets lively on the weekends.

SHOPPING

Central market (Raekoja plats) You'll find dolomite vases, wool sweaters, honey, strawberries and other Saaremaa treats at this small market near the square.

Antik (Lossi tänav 19) Antik sells all sorts of antiques, from 19th-century farm tools to Soviet memorabilia. It's a fun place to browse.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

For direct bus/ferry connections between Kuressaare, the mainland and Hiiumaa, see p144. Kuressaare's **bus station** (☎ 453 1661; Pihlta tee 25) is the terminus for most buses on the island; schedules are posted inside.

GETTING AROUND

Kuressaare airport is at Roomassaare, 3km southeast of the town centre. Buses 2 and 3 run throughout the day to/from Keskväljak. There's a **taxi rank** (Raekoja tänav) just off Keskväljak.

For car hire, try **Autorent A-rent** (☎ 453 6620; Vallimaa tänav 5) or **Hertz** (☎ 453 3660; Tallinna maantee 9). It's wise to book ahead in the summer. You can rent bicycles at **Bivarix** (☎/fax 455 7118; Tallinna maantee 22; bike per day 150Kr; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat) and scooters at Daissy Hotel (p148).

Western Saaremaa

SÕRVE PENINSULA

Small cliffs, such as the Kaugatuma pank (bank) and Ohessaare pank, rear up along the west coast of the 32km southwestern Sõrve Peninsula. Legend has it that the cliffs were formed when the Devil tried in vain to wrench this spit of land from the mainland to separate Suur Tõll, who was vacationing on Sõrve, from Saaremaa. This is where the island's magic can really be felt. A bike or car trip along the coastline will reveal fabulous views.

This sparsely populated strip of land saw heavy fighting during WWII, and the battle scars remain; by the lighthouse at Sääre on the southern tip, you can walk around the ruins of an old Soviet army base. Other bases and the remnants of the Lõme-Kaimri antitank defence lines still stand. There's a large monument at Tehumardi, south of the beach at Järve, which was the site of a gruesome night battle in October 1944 between retreating German troops and an Estonian-Russian Rifle Division. The horror defies belief: both armies fought blindly, firing on intuition or finding the enemy by touch. Russian-Estonian dead lie buried in double graves in the cemetery nearby.

Near the village of Torgu on the Sõrve Peninsula in rugged windswept surrounds, **Sõrve Holiday House** (☎ 452 3061; www.saaremaa.ee/sorve; bed per person €8, d/cottage from €33/87) is a 20-minute walk to the coast. Here you'll find rustic cabins, comfy cottages with kitchens and a range of excursions on offer (boating, hiking, bird-watching).

VIIDUMÄE NATURE RESERVE

Founded in 1957, Viidumäe Nature Reserve covers an area of 19 sq km, with a 22m

observation tower on Saaremaa's highest point (54m) at Viidumäe, about 25km west of Kuressaare. The tower, about 2km along a dirt road off the Kuressaare-Lümanda road at Viidu, offers a panoramic view of the reserve and the wonders of the island itself. The view is particularly memorable at sunset. There are two nature trails (2.2km and 1.5km), marked to highlight the different habitats of the area. Viidumäe is a botanical reserve, its favourable climate and conditions making it home to rare plant species such as the blunt-flowered rush, the Saaremaa yellow rattle and the whitebeam. Some plants are indigenous to the island.

At the reserve's **headquarters** (☎ 457 6321; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Sun Jun-Aug) in Viidu, you can see a small exhibition and book guided tours.

THE NORTH COAST

At Viki on the road to Kihelkonna, about 30km from Kuressaare, a 19th-century farm has been preserved as the **Mihkli Farm Museum** (Talumuseum; adult/concession 15/10Kr; ☎ 10am-6pm). Here you can tour the old wooden farmhouses, rent out the sauna (200Kr per hour) or pitch a tent (camp site 25Kr). Kihelkonna, 3km beyond, has a tall, austere, early German church.

On the western side of the Tagamõisa Peninsula north of Kihelkonna there's an old **watchtower** and the ruins of a port where Saaremaans were shipped to Siberia. Further up the peninsula stretches a beautiful and rarely visited coastline. At its northwestern tip is the striking **Kiipsaare lighthouse**, which leans at a steep angle towards the sea.

East of the peninsula and 1km west of Pidula is the **Pidula Fish Farm** (☎ 454 6513; trout per kg 110Kr; ☎ 10am-2pm), where you can 'fish' for trout in stocked ponds. They'll even clean it and cook it for you if you wish. Camping and simple wooden cabins (350Kr) are available.

Heading east from here, you'll pass the town of Mustjala, where you'll find **Musta Jala Galerii** (☎ 5342 1215; ☎ 11am-7pm), an art gallery where you can see colourful works by Navitrolla and other Estonian artists. There's a handicrafts shop and a homy café with a garden patio.

North of Mustjala along the Ninase Peninsula is one of Saaremaa's kitschier icons. You can't miss the clunky wooden **folk**

windmill, built to resemble a giant man in traditional costume. Sadly, his counterpart, a giant clothed female windmill, burned down in 2004.

Panga pank, Saaremaa's highest cliffs, run along the northern coast near Panga and offer some lovely panoramic views from the top.

Sleeping & Eating

Loona Manor (☎ 454 6510; www.loona.ee; camp site/s/d/ste/50/450/700/1200Kr; ☎) This handsome 16th-century manor house offers simple, clean-swept guestrooms in a historic setting. There's a pleasant restaurant on the 1st floor, a sauna, and the manor arranges guided trips to Vilsandi National Park. Reserve far in advance – or plan on pitching a tent on the extensive grounds.

Pilguse Manor (☎ 454 5445; www.pilguse.ee; s/d 550/860Kr; ☎) Housed in the stables of an old country estate west of Lümanda, Pilguse has nicely refurbished rooms with stone floors, simple furnishings, bathrooms and kitchenettes, and large windows facing onto grazing sheep next door. Incidentally, this manor was once home to Fabian von Gellingshausen, the early-19th-century Russian explorer who achieved fame for his Antarctic voyages.

Värava Tourist Farm (☎ 518 4814; www.varava.fie.ee; cabin/camp site per person 150/25Kr; ☎) In a forested area along the idyllic northern coast, this well-kept place offers rustic accommodation in wooden cabins. Camping is possible, and the owners rent bicycles and offer hiking tours. It's located near Selgase, just off the Kihelkonna-Mustjala road.

Kämping Karujärve (☎/fax 454 2034; cabin per person 270Kr; ☎ mid-May-mid-Sep) Among the trees on the east side of Lake Karujärve, some 9km east of Kihelkonna, this campground offers basic facilities. Boat hire possible.

If you're camping and you have a car, you'll find some of Estonia's loveliest camp sites (for free no less) along the shoreline on the eastern and western sides of the Pammana Peninsula.

Lümanda Söögimaja (☎ 457 6493; meals 85-175Kr) In a red house on the main road in Lümanda, this cosy country place serves tasty freshly prepared meals (fish soup, pork with turnips, white fish and potatoes) made with only organic ingredients. Beer-lovers should try the somewhat sour home-brew.

Getting There & Away

At least three buses daily go from Kuressaare down the Sõrve Peninsula to Sääre or Torgu, and six daily to Kihelkonna along different routes. A good combination bus/bike trip is bussing from Kuressaare to Viidu (bikes in the baggage compartment), then cycling north through Viidumäe Nature Reserve towards Kihelkonna or further on to the Tagamõisa Peninsula. Be sure to arrive early for your return trip as buses in these remote parts can deviate from their schedules.

VILSANDI & VILSANDI NATIONAL PARK

Vilsandi, west of Kihelkonna, is the largest of 161 islands and islets off Saaremaa's western coast protected under the Vilsandi National Park (containing about 10% of Estonia's islands). The park covers an area of 181.6 sq km and is an area of extensive ecological study. The breeding patterns of the common eider and the migration of the barnacle goose have been monitored very closely here. Ringed seals can also be seen here in their breeding season and 32 species of orchid thrive in the park.

Vilsandi, 6km long and in places up to 3km wide, is a low, wooded island. The small islets surrounding it are abundant with currant and juniper bushes. Up to 247 bird species are observed here, and in spring and autumn there is a remarkable migration of waterfowl: up to 10,000 barnacle geese stop over on Vilsandi in mid-May, and the white-tailed eagle and osprey have even been known to drop by.

The **Vilsandi National Park headquarters** (☎ /fax 454 6554), at Loona, can arrange accommodation and wildlife-watching tours given advance notice, as can the Arensburg travel agency (p147) in Kuressaare.

Aside from camping, the only place to stay on the island is at **Kusti Talu** (☎ 5623 0606; bed per person 250Kr; ☹ May–mid-Sep), a tourist farm offering an idyllic setting amid the island's beauty.

Süla Talu (☎ 454 6927, 5649 0503; sylla.talu@mail.ee) offers boating excursions to Vilsandi or around the Tagamõisa Peninsula. It's located in Oju, a tiny village 4km northwest of Kihelkonna. It also offers horse-riding excursions (on Saaremaa).

The best time to visit the island is from the beginning of May to mid-June. In summer a **private boat** (☎ 520 2656; adult/concession

one way 35/20Kr) makes between one and three trips per day on Tuesday, Friday and Sunday. It travels between Papisaa Harbour and Vikati Harbour. You can also book the boat at nonscheduled times for 300Kr. In July, if the waters are shallow enough, an old bus ploughs its way across from Papisaa to Vikati instead, a one-way journey taking about 20 minutes.

ABRUKA & VAHASE

Known as a 'Mecca for naturalists' by Estonians, the 10-sq-km island of Abruka and neighbouring Vahase stretch 6km from Roomassaare, off Saaremaa's south coast. The wooded meadows are lined with lush ferns and rare plant species, with a small deer population (now endangered) scattered about the island. There are two 1920s lighthouses but very few people: less than 20 permanent residents live year-round on Abruka, though the population increases during the summer.

In summer a **private boat** (☎ 513 6961; one way 30Kr) departs three times weekly for the island from Saaremaa. Stop by the tourist office in Kuressaare (p147) for the latest times. During particularly cold winters it's possible to walk across the ice to Saaremaa, but not recommended without local advice.

There are several tourist farms on the island open in the summer only. Inquire at the Kuressaare tourist office.

Innu Farm (☎ 452 6633; bed per person 200Kr; ☹ mid-May–mid-Sep), on the island, provides accommodation with kitchen facilities; tents can also be pitched. The family running the centre rents out bicycles and can pick you up by boat from Roomassaare Port for an extra charge. Horse-riding tours of the island can be arranged.

MUHU

pop 1900

Muhu, unfortunately, has a reputation for being the Kansas of the archipelago – lots of people passing through, but no-one stopping. In fact, Estonia's third-biggest island has a traditional old village, now functioning as a living museum, where you can get a grasp on the culture and history of this region. There's also a quirky ostrich farm, more Teutonic ruins and some downhome country hospitality that may make you want to stick around a while.

Near the main road about halfway across the island is the 13th to 14th century **Liiva Church**, with some unusual ship murals. Southwest of there is the **Muhu stronghold**, which is where the islanders surrendered to the Knights of the Sword in 1227, marking the end of Estonian resistance. The nearby **Eemu Tuulik** (windmill; ☎ 452 8130; adult/concession 5/3Kr; ☹ 10am–6pm Wed–Sun) has a small exhibit and sells bread baked with its milled flour.

The turn-off to the **Ostrich Farm** (☎ 452 8148; adult/concession 15/10Kr; ☹ 10am–6pm) is 200m east of the windmill. The quirky owners will give you an earful about these strange creatures and even let you feed them (mind your fingers). A small shop sells feathers, eggs, purses and shoes made from a certain leather.

Koguva, on the western tip of Muhu, 6km off the road, is an exceptionally well-preserved, old-fashioned island village, now protected as an **open-air museum** (☎ 454 8885; adult/concession 25/15Kr; ☹ 10am–5pm). One ticket allows you to wander through a number of interesting houses: an old schoolhouse, a museum containing beautiful traditional textiles from the area, including the painstakingly detailed folk costumes once worn by the locals in the area. You can also peer into author Juhan Smuul's ancestral home.

Also on the grounds of the village is the handsome modern art gallery and café **Koguva Kunstitalis** (☹ 11am–5pm).

Sleeping & Eating

Pädaste Manor (☎ 454 8800; www.padaste.com; s/d/ste from 1560/1820/3050Kr; ☹) Housing one of Estonia's grandest hotels, this lovely bay-side manor dates from the 19th century. Elegant rooms, a cosy lobby with fireplace and beautifully manicured grounds make for a decadent stay. There's also an excellent restaurant (meals 160Kr to 350Kr).

Vanatoo Farm (☎ 454 8884; www.vanatoa.ee; camp site/s/d/from 40/400/550Kr; ☹ May–Sep; ☹) In an idyllic setting near the open-air museum, Vanatoo has homy, down-to-earth rooms and friendly service, as well as boat trips and bicycle hire. The country-style restaurant serves decent meals, though it's sometimes booked with tour groups.

Muhu Restoran (☎ 5333 4005; meals 40–125Kr) Located in Liiva, this pleasant, airy restaurant serves wholesome food, which you can enjoy on the front terrace in the summer.

Getting There & Away

Use the Kuivastu–Kuressaare bus; it's also possible to hitch to reach the points along the main road.

SOUTHWESTERN ESTONIA

Southwestern Estonia contains the country's most popular resort town, as well as charming country villages, a vast national park and two remote islands that see few foreign visitors every year.

Perched along a lovely, sandy coastline, Pärnu attracts legions of holidaymakers during the summer. Young partygoers appear from Tallinn and Tartu en route to the city's nightclubs, cafés and restaurants, just as busloads of elderly out-of-towners arrive seeking spa treatments and mud cures. Perhaps owing to the odd mix, Pärnu has a little something for everyone – colourful museums and galleries, boutiques and handicraft markets, good theatre, and amusements for the kids – and plenty of mud baths and drinking spots.

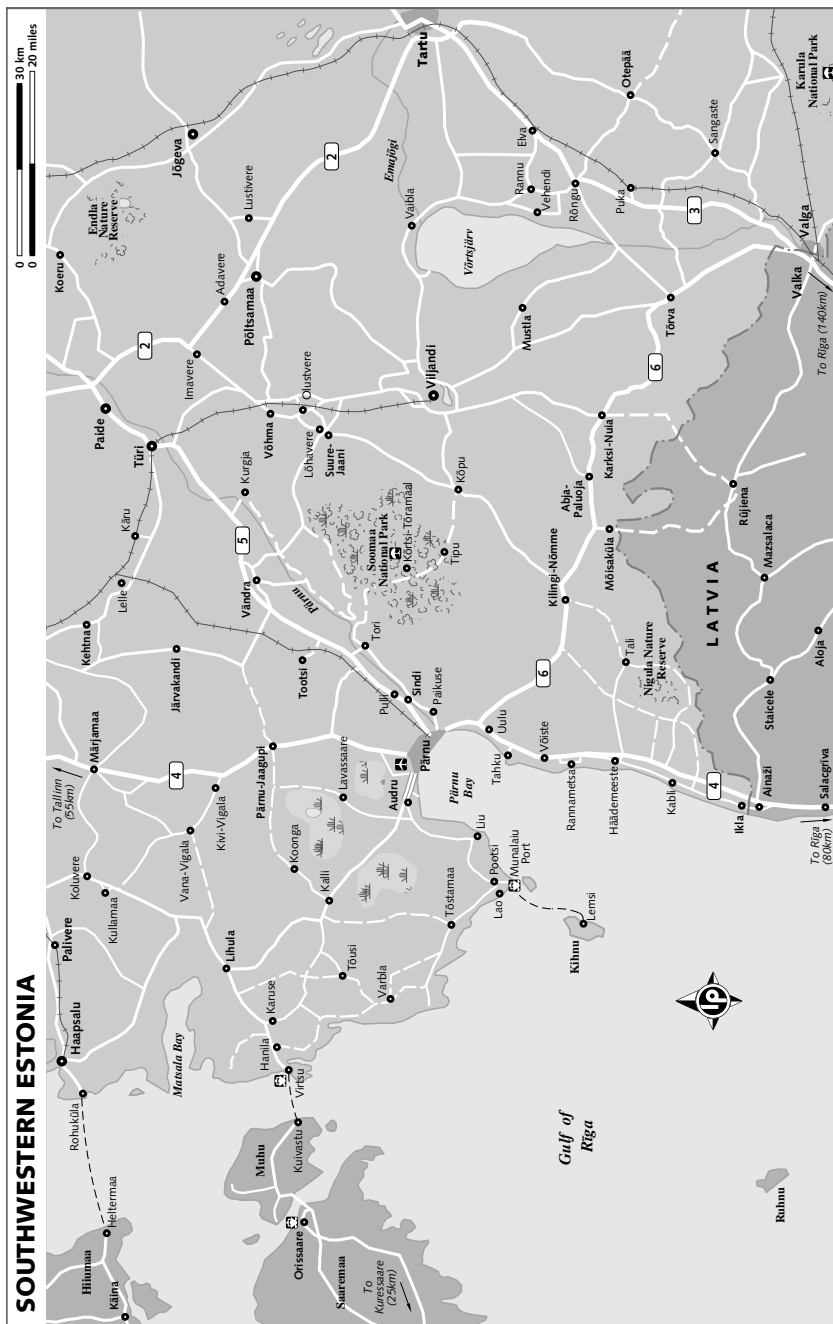
East of Pärnu stretches Soomaa National Park, a biodiverse region of meandering rivers, wooded meadows and swamp forest. Full of wildlife, Soomaa is an excellent place to experience Estonia's natural beauty – whether floating along streams in a dugout canoe or hiking through ancient bogs.

Among the most charming country towns, Viljandi lies just beyond Soomaa. It has a tiny but historic centre, old castle ruins and breathtaking views over a forested valley and the pristine Lake Viljandi. Põltsamaa, another pleasant town in the region, is noted for its pleasant river, old stone church and fragrant rose gardens.

Visitors yearning to get off the beaten path can find peaceful settlements and deserted coastline on the island of Kihnu, one of Estonia's most traditional places. Ruhnu, even tinier and more remote, has a few sandy beaches, an old wooden church and plenty of spots for connecting to the land in that almost spiritual Estonian fashion.

National Parks & Reserves

The star attraction is Soomaa National Park, a 367 sq km region comprising some of the



biggest mires, floodplain grasslands and forests in Estonia. In addition to the rich flora, 46 mammal species and 172 species of bird have been spotted in the area. The Nigula Nature Reserve, known for its path through the Nigula bog, lies further south.

Getting There & Away

Numerous buses and two daily trains run between Tallinn and Pärnu (p90). There are also numerous buses between Pärnu and Tartu (p160), and several daily buses to Kuressaare, Saaremaa (p144). The island of Ruhnu can be reached by boat from Saaremaa, but only in summer.

Getting Around

Ten daily buses connect Viljandi and Pärnu. To reach the islands, there are a few options. To Kihnu, summertime boats depart from both Munalaiu port and from Pärnu city port. Air Livonia flies between Pärnu and Kihnu, but only from October to April. Air Livonia flies year-round to Ruhnu Island (twice weekly), with one plane continuing on to Kuressaare, Saaremaa. Soomaa National Park is not reachable by public transport. Cars can be hired in Pärnu or Viljandi.

PÄRNU

pop 45,000

Boasting golden-sand beaches, lush sprawling parks and a historic, picturesque centre, Pärnu (*pair-nu*) is Estonia's premier resort town. On warm summer nights, young revellers pack the city's beachside bars and nightclubs, its cosy wine bars and outdoor cafés. By day, people head to the pleasant seaside, though Pärnu has first-rate museums and galleries, with colourful boutiques and shops sprinkled about Old Town.

Yet youth and bacchanalia aren't the only spirits moving through town. Pärnu is a popular health resort for older visitors from the Baltics, Finland and Eastern Europe who come seeking rest, amelioration and Pärnu's vaunted mud treatments, available in both old-school Soviet-style sanatoriums and more modern, glitzier spa resorts.

Pärnu lies 130km south of Tallinn on the main road to Riga.

History

Stone-Age objects from around 7500 BC found at Pulli, near Sindi on the Pärnu

River about 12km inland, are among the oldest human artefacts found in Estonia. At that time the mouth of the river was at Pulli and the site of Pärnu was still sea bed.

There was a trading settlement at Pärnu before the German crusaders arrived, but the place entered recorded history when the Pärnu River was fixed as the border between the territories of the Õsel-Wiek bishop (west and north) and the Livonian knights (east and south) in 1234. The town, joined by rivers to Viljandi, Tartu and Lake Peipsi, became the Hanseatic port of Pernau in the 14th century. (Sinking water levels have since cut this link.) Pernau/Pärnu had a population of German merchants from Lübeck origin till at least the 18th century. It withstood wars, fires, plagues, and switches between German, Polish, Swedish and Russian rule, and prospered in the 17th century under Swedish rule until it had its trade devastated by the Europe-wide blockades during the Napoleonic wars.

From 1838 it gradually became a popular resort, with mud baths proving a draw as well as the beach. Only the resort area was spared severe damage in 1944 as the Soviets drove out the Nazis, but many parts of Old Town have since been restored.

Orientation

Pärnu lies on either side of the Pärnu River estuary, which empties into Pärnu Bay. The southern half of the town contains the major attractions, including Old Town, which begins a few blocks south of the river, and the beach, which lies half a kilometre further on the far southern end. Between Old Town and the shoreline are a series of parks extending westward towards the bay.

The bus station is at the western end of Old Town, walking distance to many hotels.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Apollo ☎ 654 8485; Riiüti 41; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat) Sells books, maps and English-language books.

INTERNET ACCESS

Central Library (Keskraamatukogu; Akadeemia tänav 3; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat) Free Internet.

Pärnu New Art Museum (Esplanaadi tänav 10; per hr 30Kr; ☎ 24hr)

PÄRNU

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Rüütli Internetipunkt (Rüütli tänav 25; per hr 25Kr; ☎ 10am-9pm Mon-Fri, to 6pm Sat & Sun) A basement-level café.

LEFT LUGGAGE

Pakihoid (per day 15Kr; ☎ 8am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun) At the southern end of the bus terminal, near platform 8.

MONEY

Uhispank (Rüütli tänav 40a) Behind the bus station, this bank provides many services.

POST

Central post office (Akadeemia 7; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat & Sun)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office (☎ 447 3000; www.parnu.ee; Rüütli tänav 16; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat, 10am-3pm Sun Jun-Aug, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri Sep-May) Pick up maps, brochures and the helpful *Pärnu in Your Pocket*, published annually (25Kr).

Sights & Activities

The wide, sandy beach, and Ranna puistee, the buildings along which date from the early 20th century, are among Pärnu's finest attractions. A new beach promenade should be completed by the time you read this.

You can experience Pärnu's famous mud baths inside the neoclassical **Mudaravila** (☎ 445 9020; Ranna puistee 1; mud therapy 160Kr; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat), which offers a large selection of mud to wallow in. A more upscale mud/spa experience can be had at Tervise Paradiis (p159), which also boasts a sparkling new **water park** (Veepark; ☎ 445 1606; Side tänav 14; adult 90-135Kr, concession 65-90Kr; ☎ 10am-10pm), with pools, slides, tubes and other slippery fun.

The main thoroughfare of the historic centre is **Rüütli tänav**, lined with splendid buildings dating back to the 17th century. Just off the main street is the **Red Tower** (Punane Torn; Homniku tänav 11; ☎ 10am-6pm), the city's oldest building, which dates from the 15th century. Originally bigger, this was the southeast corner of the medieval town wall, of which nothing more remains. At one stage the tower was used as a prison. Today a small gallery is housed on the top floor, and a **craft market** fills the courtyard.

Two blocks west, on Pühavaimu tänav, is a pair of large **17th-century conjoined houses**, a fascinating example of ambitious early

home-renovation efforts. Originally separate residences, the buildings received a neo-classicist face-lift in the 1840s. One block further west is the former **Town Hall** (Raekoja Hoon; nr Nikolai tänav & Uus tänav), a yellow and white classical edifice originally built in 1797 as the home of a rich merchant. The grey and white Jugendstil north wing with its little spire was added in 1911.

Across Nikolai from the main Town Hall building there's a half-timbered house dating from 1740, and a block down the street on the corner of Nikolai and Kuninga is the baroque Lutheran **Elisabeth Church**, also from the 1740s, named after the Russian empress of the time. The Russian Orthodox **Catherine Church** (Ekatarina Kirik; nr Uus & Vee tänav), from the 1760s, is named after another Russian empress, Catherine the Great.

At the western end of Rüütli tänav a stretch of Pärnu's **Swedish ramparts** overlooks the **moat**, from where the west side of Old Town was defended. Where the rampart meets the western end of Kuninga tänav it's pierced by the tunnel-like **Tallinn Gate** (Tallinna Värav), which once marked the main road to Tallinn. It was one of three gates in the ramparts built as part of the strengthening of Pärnu's defences.

The **Pärnu New Art Museum** (☎ 443 0772; www.chaplin.ee; Esplanaadi tänav 10; adult/concession 25/15Kr; ☎ 9am-9pm), in the former Communist Party headquarters, is among the cultural highlights in Estonia, and often features some of the country's most forward-thinking exhibitions. Founded by film maker Mark Soosaar, it also hosts an annual film festival. There's a café and art shop near the entrance, and a decapitated Lenin statue out back.

The **Lydia Koidula Memorial Museum** (☎ 443 3313; Janseni tänav 37; adult/concession 15/10; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Sun) stands north of the river. Here you can learn about one of Estonia's great poets in the former school she attended.

Despite its modest size, the **Pärnu Museum** (☎ 443 3231; www.parnu.ee; Rüütli tänav 53; adult/concession 30/15Kr; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Sun) covers 11,000 years of regional history. Archaeological findings along with relics from the country's German, Livonian, Russian and even Soviet periods are on display.

Open in summer, **Ranna Park**, west of Seedri tänav, is a small amusement park with a Ferris wheel, bumper cars and bouncy rides.

Tours

Offering summer cycling, walking, canoeing and horse riding excursions, **City Bike** (☎ 5660 8990; www.citybike.ee; Seedri 4; ☹ Jun-Aug) is based in the Maritime Hotel.

Festivals & Events

The biggest annual event is the **Pärnu Film Festival** (first week of July), featuring documentary and anthropology films. It's held at the Pärnu New Art Museum and other venues in town. See www.chaplin.ee for details.

The tourist office distributes the annual *Pärnu This Week*, which lists events happening around town.

Sleeping

For inexpensive accommodation in private flats, contact the **Majutisbüroo** (☎ 443 1070, 518 5319; Hommiku 7; r from 200Kr; ☹).

BUDGET

Lõuna Hostel (☎ 443 0943; www.hot.ee/hostellouna; Lõuna tänav 2; dm €13-17; ☹) This spotless, well-located hostel has quality budget accommodation in two- to seven-bed rooms. The shared kitchen doubles as social room; it's a good place to meet other travellers.

Camping Konse (☎ 5343 5092; www.konse.ee; Suur-Jõe 44a; camp site/caravan/d/tr from €4/9/36/50) One of several camping options near the city, this one is barely 1km from the centre on a perfect spot on the river, and offers tent, rowboat and bike rentals. Most rooms share bathroom. Open year-round.

MIDRANGE

Vesiroos Hotel (☎ 443 0940; www.pina.ee; Esplanaadi tänav 42a; d/tr 900/1250Kr; ☹) The only hotel in town with an outdoor swimming pool, Vesiroos was fully renovated in 2001 and features bright, airy rooms painted in cheery pastels, with wooden floors.

Villa Kristina (☎ 442 9803; www.zone.ee/villakristina; Suvituse tänav 1; d/ste 680/1200Kr; ☹) This small family-run guesthouse has spotless rooms with wooden floors. The owner, a doctor, has made the place hypoallergenic and can arrange mud baths and other therapies.

Hommiku Hostel (☎ 445 1122; www.hot.ee/pav; Hommiku tänav 17; d/tr 700/1000Kr; ☹) Nicer than your average hostel, this stylish modern place has handsome rooms with private bathrooms and kitchenettes, and old beamed ceilings throughout.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Ammende Villa (☎ 447 3888; www.ammende.ee; Mere puistee 7; meals 190-310Kr) This lovely villa boasts beautiful rooms (below), but the food is the real reason we love coming here. If the weather is warm, bypass the splendid Art-Nouveau dining room and go instead to the lovely garden at the back. There you can dine on roast beef with morel sauce, seared tuna steak and a range of French and Mediterranean dishes. In the morning don't miss the superb buffet breakfasts (fresh fruit, French toast, smoked salmon and champagne). Weekly classical concerts are held on the lawn in summer.

Ranna Villa (☎ 444 1120; www.rannavilla.ee; Ringi 52; d/ste €66/80; ☹) This pleasant guesthouse has good-sized rooms with big windows, wood floors and a splash of colour (usually orange); some rooms have balconies.

Hotel Park (☎ 447 6915; www.spaestonia.ee; Pärna tänav 12; s/d 500/700Kr; ☹) Packed full of convalescing elders, this unattractive seven-storey hotel screams 'sanatorium'. Once you're past the uninspiring corridors, however, you'll find tidy rooms with faux-wood floors and a balcony with sea views. The top floor bar has panoramic views (and a telescope).

TOP END

Ammende Villa (☎ 447 3888; www.ammende.ee; Mere puistee 7; s/d cottages 1200/1550Kr, d 3100Kr, ste 4300-6500Kr; ☹) Class and luxury abound in this fabulously refurbished 1905 Russian Art-Nouveau building, set amid handsomely manicured grounds. Suites contain period furnishings while the other rooms are quite comfortable. Top-notch service includes surprises for the guests, such as a winter picnic outside with bonfire and vodka or schnapps. See boxed text, above for a review of the hotel's restaurant.

Rannahotell (☎ 443 2950; www.scandic-hotels.ee; Ranna puistee 5; s/d from €71/95; ☹) Inside this stunning 1930s building you'll find beautifully renovated rooms with wood floors and big windows (overlooking the beach or the park); some rooms have balconies. For beach action, it's the best location in town.

Victoria Hotel (☎ 444 3412; www.victoria.ee; Kuninga tänav 25; s/d from 945/1265Kr; ☹) In the town centre, this 1920s gem has lavish rooms

with curved walls, soft colours and lots of old-fashioned touches; on the ground floor is one of Pärnu's most elegant restaurants, the Café Grand.

Tervise Paradiis Spa Hotell (☎ 445 1600; www.terviseparadiis.ee; Side tänav 14; s/d/ste €82/102/159; ☹) This enormous spa hotel near the water has nicely designed rooms with wooden floors and balconies; guests have access to spa services, fitness club, pool and waterpark. There's a good restaurant on the ground floor, and a handsome bar on the top floor.

Eating

Trahter Postipoiss (☎ 446 4864; Vee tänav 12; meals 80-230Kr) One of Pärnu's new additions, this converted 17th-century postal building houses a delightful Russian tavern, with excellent Russian cuisine, a garrulous crowd (especially after a few vodka shots) and imperial portraits watching over the proceedings. The spacious patio opens during the summer.

Mõnus Margarita (☎ 443 0929; Akadeemia tänav 5; meals 65-145Kr) This colourful Tex-Mex restaurant serves freshly prepared Mexican fare, with vegetarian options, and seductive strawberry margaritas.

Café Grand (☎ 444 3412; Kuninga tänav 25; meals 130-220Kr) Pärnu's most stately dining room serves up delicately prepared Chateaubriand, rack of lamb and other favourites amid 1920s grandeur. The plush chairs in the bar and café make a cosy spot for coffee and *crème brûlée*.

Munga (☎ 443 1099; Munga tänav 9; meals around 70Kr) In a tucked-away 19th-century cottage, this charming café has lots of homy touches. Meals are fairly standard, but the eclectic appetizers and ambience warrant the visit.

Steffani Pizzeria (☎ 443 1170; Nikolai tänav 24; meals 65-80Kr) A good choice for thin-crust and pan pizzas, particularly in summer when you can dine al fresco in the courtyard.

Suve Steffani (☎ 449 5505; Ranna puistee 1) A second branch of Steffani Pizzeria, this recently opened near the beach.

Kadri (☎ 442 9782; Nikolai tänav 12; meals 22-45Kr; ☹ 7.30am-9pm Mon-Sat, 9am-5pm Sun) This long-time local favourite serves tasty, inexpensive, home-cooked meals.

Georg (☎ 443 1110; Rüütli tänav 43; meals 30-50Kr; ☹ 7.30am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-7.30pm Sat & Sun) This streamlined diner has inexpensive soups, salads and basics such as beef stroganoff, served buffet style.

Ellen Bakery (☎ 447 0044; Kuninga tänav 32; tarts 6-8Kr; ☹ 7.30am-4pm) A tiny bakery serving rhubarb tart, strudel and other fresh delights.

Provisions abound at the **central market** (Turg; Suur-Sepa 18; ☹ 8am-3pm Tue-Sun), southeast of the centre.

Drinking

Ranna Café (☎ 446 4890; Ranna puistee 3) Overlooking the beach, this handsome new three-storey café boasts several outdoor terraces and a laid-back ambience perfect for sipping cocktails at sunset.

Picadilly (☎ 442 0085; Pühavaimu 15) This cosy wine bar has plush chairs you can sink into while you sample some of the vintages. Colourfully painted walls decked with local artwork and a small front patio add to the allure.

Jazz Café (☎ 442 7546; Ringi 11; ☹ 10am-midnight) A bit disappointing for jazz-lovers, this indoor-outdoor café still makes a lively spot for a drink. Live performances most Fridays.

Kuursaal (☎ 442 0368; www.kuur.ee; Mere puistee 22) This early-20th-century spa hall has been transformed into a spacious countrified beer hall with a large terrace at the back. An older mix of tourists and locals come for draft beer and occasional rock shows.

Romantic Bar (☎ 445 1600; Tervise Paradiis Spa Hotell, 8th fl, Side tänav 14) Although the name is uninspiring, this glass-sided hotel bar has extraordinary views over the water, and we can't deny the appeal of the stylish lounge-like interior or the patio outside.

Väike Klaus (☎ 447 7208; Supeluse 3) A casual, welcoming ambience prevails at this German-inspired pub; it's a popular meeting spot over drinks or billiards games.

Entertainment

Pärnu Town Orchestra holds classical concerts every weekend in summer. Check with the tourist office.

THEATRE

Endla Theatre (☎ 442 0667; www.endla.ee; Keskväljal 1) This is Pärnu's best theatre and it stages a wide range of performances. It also houses an art gallery and an open-air café on the rooftop.

Nooruse Maja Cultural Centre (☎ 444 1768; www.noorusemaja.ee; Roheline tänav 1b) This cultural centre stages periodic folk shows and concerts.

NIGHTCLUBS

Club Tallinn (www.clubtallinn.ee; Merepuistee 22; entrance 40-100Kr; ☎ Tue-Sat Jun-Aug) This summertime-only club is held in one section of Kuussaare (p159). It's the city's hottest spot, with excellent DJs and an eager young crowd.

Sunset Club (☎ 443 0670; www.sunsetclub.ee; Ranna puistee 3; entrance 60-100Kr; ☎ closed Sun & Mon) In a grandiose building dating from 1939, this club has an outdoor beach terrace and a sleek multifloor interior with plenty of cosy nooks when the dance floor gets crowded.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Pärnu's **airport** (☎ 447 5001; www.eepu.ee) lies on the northern edge of town, west off the Tallinn road. Bus 23 runs from the bus station to the airport (20 minutes).

Air Livonia (☎ 447 5007; www.airlivonia.ee) flies twice weekly from Pärnu to Rohnu (adult/concession 300/200Kr one way, 25 minutes); one of these flights continues on to Kuussaare (adult/concession 300/200Kr one way, one hour), Saaremaa. Air Livonia also has daily flights from Pärnu to Kihnu, but only from October to April (120Kr, one way). Book well in advance.

BOAT

It's possible to take a ferry or private boat trip from Pärnu to Kihnu (see p162). **Pärnu Yacht Club** (Pärnu Jahtklubi; ☎ 447 1740; Lootsi tänav 6) has a harbour with a customs point and passport control.

BUS

The **bus station** (☎ 447 1002; ☎ 5am-8.30pm) is at the north end of Ringi tänav, just off Pikk. **Cargobus** (☎ 442 7845) near platform 8 sells Eurolines tickets to Riga, Vilnius and beyond, though you can purchase tickets from the driver. For destinations throughout Estonia, the **ticket office** (☎ 6am-7.30pm), a red-brick building, is 100m south on the opposite side of Ringi tänav. More than 20 daily buses connect Pärnu with Tallinn (80-115Kr, two hours). Buses depart three times daily (one hour) for Munalaiu Port, the departure point for ferries to Kihnu. See p397 for information on getting from Pärnu to Russia. Other buses to/from Pärnu include: **Kuussaare** 140Kr, 3¼ hours, three daily. **Riga** 110Kr, three hours, two daily. **Tartu** 85Kr to 115Kr, two to three hours, 16 daily.

Viljandi 65Kr, 1½ to two hours, 10 daily.

Vilnius 280Kr, eight hours, two weekly.

Virtsu 55Kr, 1¼ hours, three daily.

TRAIN

Two daily trains run between Tallinn and Pärnu (50Kr, three hours). The **Pärnu station** (Riia maantee 116) is 5km east of the town centre along the Riga road. There's no station office there; buy tickets on the train.

Getting Around

A main local bus stop in the town centre is the Sidesõlm stop on Akadeemia tee in front of the main post office. **Taxis** (nr Pikk & Ringi tänav) line up near the bus station. You'll get better rates by calling **E-Takso** (☎ 443 1111) or **Pärnu Takso** (☎ 443 1200).

BICYCLE

During the summer you can rent bicycles from **Tõruke** (☎ 502 8269; Supeluse; bike per hr/day 40/150Kr), a bike stand near the beach, and **City Bike** (☎ 5660 8990; www.citybike.ee; Seedri 4; bike per hr/day 35/150Kr).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Neste, Shell and Statoil stations along Riia maantee are all open 24 hours. There's a fuel station next to the Port Artur Shopping Centre. There are numerous car-hire agencies in town. Get a list from the tourist office for the best rates. A couple of budget rentals are **MDM Auto** (☎ 443 2113; Jannseni 36b) – look out for the sign that says 'SEAT' – and **Foxman** (☎ 443 4800; Roheline tänav 64).

Around Pärnu

LAVASSAARE

Railways are used in the peat-extraction industry at Lavassaare, in an area of bogs 25km northwest of Pärnu, and there's a **railway museum** (☎ 527 2584; www.museumrailway.ee; ☎ 11am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun Jun-Aug, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun Sep) close to the peat fields with locomotives from all over the Baltics. It's best to come on Saturday, when the museum offers rides on its little old steam engine along the narrow-gauge tracks. To reach Lavassaare turn north off the Lihula road 13km west of central Pärnu, then go about 12km north.

TORI

A tiny town along the Pärnu river, Tori has a **stud & horse-riding farm** (☎ 446 6080;

www.hot.ee/torihobune; Pärnu maantee 13; rides per person per hr 150-250Kr; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) that's been in operation since 1856, when attempts began to breed bigger, stronger Estonian farm and cart horses. Learn more about Estonia's finest breeds at the **horse-breeding museum**. You can also go riding, by horse or carriage – or sleigh in winter. Just be sure to call at least one day in advance.

Across the road from the farm is **Tori Matkakeskus** (☎ 511 4253; www.tori.ee, in Estonian), a friendly adventure outfit that offers one- and two-day kayaking trips (from 300Kr) along the nearby rivers and in Soomaa National Park. You can also pitch a tent here (per person 25Kr) or hire a kayak (per hour 100Kr) to paddle around the Pärnu river, which stretches downhill from the house.

Tori lies 20km northeast of Pärnu.

KURGJA

At Kurgja, on the Pärnu River 15km east of Vändra and 65km northeast of Pärnu, stands the **Carl Robert Jakobson farm & museum** (☎ 445 8171; adult/concession 15/8), where you can learn about the much revered leader of the Estonian nationalist movement. Jakobson was a professional educator and edited the radical newspaper *Sakala* in Viljandi. (His face adorns the 500Kr banknote.) Jakobson's farm, which he founded in 1874, still operates using 19th-century methods. In addition to touring the old country estate, you can take a swim in the river or camp on the grounds (50Kr per person), a popular activity with school groups.

PÄRNU TO THE LATVIAN BORDER

Highway 4 from Pärnu to the Latvian border, a 65km stretch, runs through forest much of the way, usually 2km to 3km inland. The border on the older, more pleasant coastal road from Häädemeeste is no longer operational.

Sights & Activities

Konstantin Päts, the semidictatorial president of independent Estonia before WWII, was born at **Tahku**, 20km down the coast from Pärnu. His statue here was the first **political monument** to be restored in post-Soviet Estonia. Estonia's biggest dunes are off the highway at **Rannametsa**, about 3km north of Häädemeeste, but they are forested and inland, so there's little to see. Ten kilometres

south of Rannametsa is **Kabli**, a seaside town fronted by sandy **beaches**.

The **Nigula Nature Reserve** protects the **Nigula bog** (Nigula raba), just north of the Latvian border, about 10km east of Highway 4. This treeless peat bog is filled with pools and hollows, in the western part of which there are five 'bog islands'. It's also an important bird-breeding area: golden eagles and black-throated divers are occasionally sited, as are 144 other bird species. You can follow a 6.8km trail along wooden planks that pass through the wild scenery here.

For more information about the bog, stop in the **Nigula Nature Reserve office** (☎ 445 6668; www.loodus.ee/nigula; Pärnu tänav 2) in Kilingi-Nõmme.

Sleeping

Lepanina Hotell (☎ 446 5024; www.lepanina.ee; camp site/caravan €3/8, s/d/cottage incl breakfast €46/66/33; ☎) This sprawling, modern complex lies near the coast, just south of Kabli, following the old border road. Rooms inside the hotel are comfortably set with sea-facing balconies. There are also some simple wooden cottages on the grounds. It's a stone's throw to the beach.

KIHNU

pop 500

Kihnu Island, 40km southwest of Pärnu in the Gulf of Riga, is one of the most traditional places in Estonia. Most women still wear the colourful striped skirts nearly every day. There are three main villages on the 7km-long island, plus a school, church, and combined village hall and bar in the centre of the island. Long, quiet beaches line the western coast. Kihnuans are among the few non-Setu Estonians who follow the Russian Orthodox religion.

In December 2003 Unesco declared the Kihnu Cultural Space a masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. This honour is a tribute to the rich cultural traditions that are still practised, in song, dance, the celebration of traditional spiritual festivals and the making of handicrafts. In part, the customs of Kihnu have remained intact for so many centuries owing to the island's isolation.

Many of the island's first inhabitants, centuries ago, were criminals and exiles from the mainland. Kihnu men made a living

from fishing and seal hunting, while women effectively governed the island in their absence. The most famous Kihnuan was the sea captain Enn Uuetoa (better known as Kihnu Jõnn), who became a symbol of lost freedom for Estonians during the Soviet period when they were virtually banned from the sea. Kihnu Jõnn, said to have sailed on all the world's oceans, drowned in 1913 when his ship sank off Denmark on what was to have been his last voyage before retirement. He was buried in the Danish town of Oksby but in 1992 his remains were brought home to Kihnu and reburied in the island's church.

You can learn more about him and life on Kihnu at the **Kihnu Museum** (☎ 446 9983; adult/child 15/6Kr; ☎ 10.30am-4pm), across the street from the picturesque Orthodox church. Town information and Internet access is available 50m up the road at the **tourist office** (☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sat, 11am-3pm Sun).

In the south stands a picturesque light-house, shipped over from Britain.

After WWII a fishery collective was established. Fishing and cattle herding continue to be the mainstay of employment for Kihnu's inhabitants.

Sleeping & Eating

Tolli Tourist Farm (☎ 446 9908; r/camp site per person 250/60Kr; ☎) Offers accommodation in the main house or in a more rustic log cabin. You can also pitch a tent. Sauna available. Tolli offers bike rental, boating excursions, and guests can order meals. The farm is located about 2km north of the port.

Rock City (☎ 446 9956; d 350Kr; ☎) Near Tolli, this place offers simple wood-floored rooms with shared bathroom. The restaurant (meals 18Kr to 45Kr) serves hearty country fare.

Kurase Pood Kohvik (☎ 446 9938; meals from 20Kr) Near the church and museum in the island centre, this food shop has a pleasant restaurant with a patio out the back. It's Kihnu's best place to pop in for a meal.

Getting There & Away

From mid-May through September, the ferry **Amalie** (☎ 448 9924; one way 30Kr) departs from Munalaiu Port for Kihnu twice daily Sunday to Friday, once daily on Saturday, taking about 50 minutes. Munalaiu Port is in the village of Pootsi, 40km southwest of

Pärnu; buses from Pärnu are theoretically timed to meet the ferries.

From the Pärnu city port (Kalda tänav 2), the ferry **Liisi** (☎ 5344 1294; one way 70Kr) sails between Pärnu and Kihnu daily from Thursday to Monday, taking about 2½ hours.

The Pärnu tourist office keeps updated ferry departure times.

Air Livonia (☎ 447 5007; www.airlivonia.ee; one way 120Kr) has one or two daily flights from Pärnu to Kihnu but only from October to April.

Getting Around

Once you reach Kihnu, bicycle is the best way to get around. You can rent bikes and pick up a map (10Kr) of the island at **Jalgrattaläie nutus** (bikes per hr/day from 25/125Kr), in a brick building 150m from the port.

RUHNU

pop 65

Ruhnu, smaller than Kihnu at just 11 sq km, is 100km southwest of Pärnu and nearer to Latvia than the Estonian mainland. For several centuries Ruhnu had a mainly Swedish population of about 300, but they all fled in August 1944, abandoning homes and livestock, to avoid the advancing Red Army. Ruhnu has some sandy beaches, but the highlight is a very impressive **wooden church** (dating back to 1644), making it the oldest surviving wooden structure in Estonia. It has a wooden altar and pulpit dating from 1755 in its atmospheric interior. The island is flat but there's a forest of 200- to 300-year-old pines on its eastern dunes.

If you're arriving in summer (19 May to 31 August), you can reach Ruhnu by boat from Saaremaa. **SLK Ferries** (Saaremaa Laevakompanii; ☎ 452 4444; www.laevakompanii.ee) sails five times weekly between Roomassaare and Ruhnu (200Kr one way, two hours).

Air Livonia (☎ 477 5007; www.airlivonia.ee; adult/concession one way 300/200Kr) operates twice weekly flights between Pärnu and Ruhnu; it flies once weekly between Kuressaare and Ruhnu.

VILJANDI

pop 20,500

One of Estonia's most charming towns, Viljandi overlooks a picturesque valley with the lovely Lake Viljandi at its centre. The town is relaxed and peaceful, with some evocative castle ruins, historic buildings

and abundant surrounding greenery. It makes a good base for exploring the natural wonders of Soomaa National Park, or for just unwinding in a pretty country town.

The Knights of the Sword founded a castle at Viljandi in the 13th century. The town around it later joined the Hanseatic League, then was subject to the usual comings and goings of Swedes, Poles and Russians. Today its tiny centre, with an eclectic mix of 19th-century architecture, makes for lovely strolls, and it's easy to feel like you've stepped back in time.

Viljandi is 160km south of Tallinn en route to Valga on the Latvian border.

Orientation

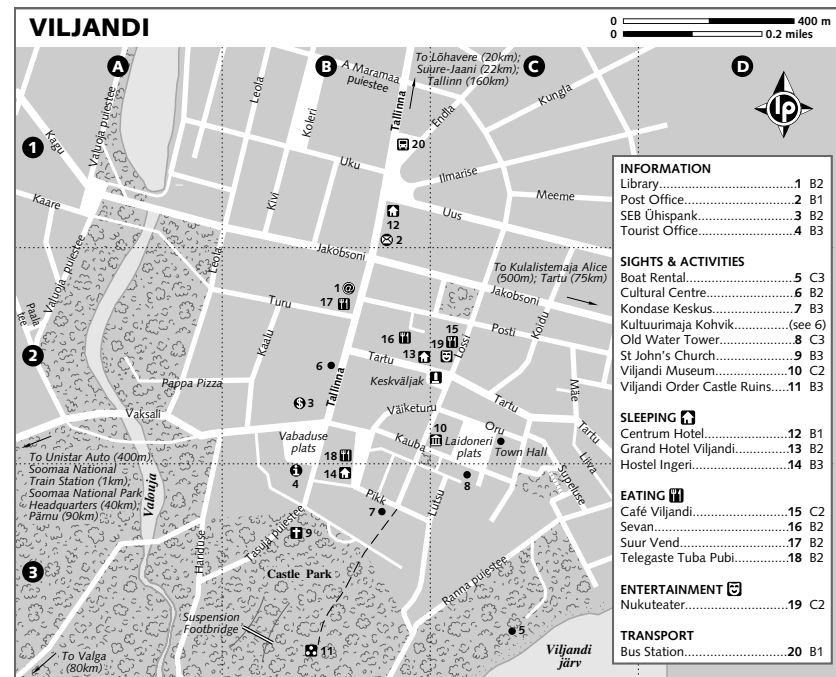
The centre of town is about 500m back from Lake Viljandi, with steps leading down to the shoreline. The central square is Keskväljak, where Tartu tänav meets Lossi tänav. Lossi tänav leads south to the castle park. The **bus station** (Tallinna maantee) is 500m north of the centre, past the **main post office** (Tallinna maantee 22); the **train station** (Metalli tänav 1) is 2km west of the centre along Vaksali.

Information

The **Viljandi tourist office** (☎ 433 0442; www.viljandi.ee; Vabaduse plats 6; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) can help with accommodation; it has many brochures on the area. For free Internet access, try the public **Library** (Tallinna maantee 7; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat). You can change money and use the ATM at **SEB Ühispank** (Vaksali tänav 2).

Sights & Activities

One of the highlights is visiting **Castle Park** (Lossimäe), a lush area containing the ruins of the 13th-century **Viljandi Order Castle**, founded by the Knights of the Sword. The castle park has sweeping views over the primeval valley and the lake directly below. Also in the castle park are the medieval **St John's Church** (Jaani Kirik; Tasuja puistee) and a **suspension footbridge** built in 1931. The ravines surrounding the castle ruins are what remain of the castle moat; trenches from WWII came later. A small cemetery to the rear of the castle area is the final resting place of the Germans killed in the fighting.



The old part of town is lined with brick streets and handsome wooden buildings with finely wrought details. Facing the old market square stands the modest two-storey **Viljandi Museum** (☎ 433 3316; Laidoneri plats 10; adult/concession 10/5Kr; ☎ 10am-5pm Wed-Sun), which has displays tracing Viljandi's history from the Stone Age to the mid-20th century. There are folk costumes, black-and-white photos of the city, and a mock-up of what the original castle probably looked like. Nearby, the **old water tower** (Vana Veetorn; Kauba tänav; adult/concession 10/5Kr; ☎ 11am-6pm May-Sep) offers fine views over the countryside.

A few blocks south is the excellent **Kondase Keskus** (☎ 433 3968; Pikk tänav 8; adult/concession 15/5Kr; ☎ 10am-7pm Wed-Sun), with some vibrantly colourful works by the painter Paul Kondas and other self-taught artists working outside the mainstream. It's the country's only gallery dedicated to naive art.

The **lake** (Viljandi järv) is a lovely place for a swim on warm summer days. There's a pleasant café near the water and a swim platform just offshore. You can rent **boats** (paddleboats/rowboats per hr 30/40Kr; ☎ 10am-8pm Jun-Aug) from a shack by the water. Access the steps to the lake by heading east along Kauba tänav.

Doubling as an art gallery, **Kultuurimaja kohvik** (☎ 433 5888; Tallinna maantee 5) is inside the main **cultural centre**, which hosts chamber and choral concerts throughout the year, as well as exhibitions, workshops and symposiums. It has a pleasant summertime terrace café.

Festivals & Events

Viljandi's small but worthwhile festivals happen in July; its **Old Music Festival** (mid-July) is staged in and around St John's Church. The town also hosts a **Folk Festival** (end of July). Stop in at the tourist office for venue and ticket information. If you're around Viljandi in mid-May don't miss the **International Puppet Festival**, which is held at the Nukuteater (right).

Sleeping

Hostel Ingeri (☎ 433 4414; valeriinkeri@hot.ee; Pikk tänav 2c; s/tw 300/500Kr; ☎) Along one of Viljandi's loveliest streets, this small guesthouse offers bright, comfortable rooms. The largest one has a balcony with views onto Castle Park.

Grand Hotel Viljandi (☎ 435 5800; www.ghv.ee; Tartu tänav 11; s/d 1100/1400Kr; ☎) The town's most elegant hotel has sumptuous rooms with dark wood trim, satiny chairs, large windows and wildly patterned carpets. There's a pleasant indoor-outdoor café in front.

Kulalistemaja Alice (☎ 434 7616; alice@matti.ee; Jakobsoni tänav 55; s 400Kr, d 500-700Kr; ☎) In a peaceful neighbourhood 10 minutes' walk east of the centre, this small, friendly guesthouse has neat, airy rooms with wooden floors. Most rooms have private bathrooms, and guests can use the kitchen. Prices include breakfast.

Centrum Hotel (☎ 435 1100; www.centrum.ee; Tallinna maantee 24; s/d 700/900Kr; ☎) Near the bus station, Centrum has large but uninspiring rooms with modern furnishings. There's a sauna and a restaurant on site.

Eating & Drinking

Café Viljandi (☎ 433 3021; Lossi tänav 31; meals 28-55; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, 9am-10pm Sat & Sun) This cosy café has lots of old-world charm; the full menu offers basic meals, or you can come for coffee and pastries (seductively displayed in the front counter).

Telegaste Tuba Pubi (☎ 433 3944; Pikk tänav 2b; meals 35-65Kr) This inviting pub serves hearty Estonian standards and plenty of ice-cold beer. The pleasant outdoor terrace is a popular summer meeting spot.

Sevan (☎ 5566 5295; Posti tänav 6; meals 40-95Kr) This unassuming café serves delicious Armenian cuisine. During the summer enjoy grilled meats, dolmas, *shawerma* and vegetarian options on the backyard patio.

Suur Vend (☎ 433 3644; Turu tänav 4; meals 65-120Kr) One of several pubs in the area, this one has a pool table, outdoor deck and lots of dark wood ambience inside.

Entertainment

Nukuteater (☎ 433 4295; www.viljandinukuteater.ee; Lossi tänav 31) This puppet theatre stages eye-catching performances throughout the year. It hosts a puppet festival in mid-May.

Getting There & Away

At least 13 daily buses connect Viljandi with Tallinn (70Kr to 85Kr, 2½ to four hours). There are 10 daily buses to Pärnu (65Kr, 1½ to two hours), 16 to Tartu (50Kr to 60Kr, 1½ to two hours), seven to Valga

(1¼ hours) and three to Kuressaare, Saaremaa (4¾ hours).

Two trains run daily to/from Tallinn (65Kr, three hours). For bus schedules, call ☎ 433 3680; for train schedules, call ☎ 434 9425.

Car hire is available at **Unistar Auto** (☎ 345 5921; Tenika tänav 2; cars from 600Kr). This is a good option for reaching and exploring Soomaa National Park.

Around Viljandi

At **Lõhavere**, just northeast of the lovely town of **Suure-Jaani** on the Viljandi-Vändra-Pärnu road, is the site of the fortress of Lembitu, the 13th-century Estonian leader who put up the most resistance to the invading Knights of the Sword. There's a large granite monument near a hill but little more. A few kilometres east is **Olustvere Manor**, a 1730s manor house with a watermill, distillery and English-style gardens housing the **Olustvere tourist office** (☎ 437 4280; www.olustvere.edu.ee/loss; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-4pm Sat & Sun May-Aug, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Sep-Apr). You're free to tour the manor, and if you call the day before, you can also order a meal, which will be served in the elegant dining room. From Viljandi at least eight daily buses (25-45 minutes) stop in Olustvere on the Viljandi-Tallinn route. Tallinn-bound trains from Viljandi (two or three daily) also stop at Olustvere, taking a little over two hours.

Vaibla is a sandy beach with **camping facilities** (☎ 504 9102; www.vaibla.ee, in Estonian; camp sites/caravans/cabins 50/150/280Kr) at the northern end of Võrtsjärv, just off the Viljandi-Tartu road. Nearby hamlets of Paissu, Kaalgu-Jaani, Leie and Paistu lay claim to scenes from the *Kalevipoeg* epic and sacrificial stones from pre-Christian times. A detailed map is available from the Viljandi tourist office. You'll find loads of information on Lake Võrtsjärv at www.hot.ee/vjarv.

SOOMAA NATIONAL PARK

Embracing Estonia's largest area of swamps, flat meadows and waterside forests, Soomaa National Park (Soomaa: literally 'land of wetlands') is primarily made up of four bogs – Valgeraba, Öördi, Kikepera and Kuresoo – the peat layer of which measures 7m in places. The bogs are split by tributaries of the Pärnu River, the spring flooding creating a 'fifth season' for the inhabitants of this

boggy land, where the waters can rise to 5m in March and April.

Up to 46 different mammal species inhabit the surrounding forests, among them the wolf, lynx, brown bear, elk, wild boar and otter. Thousands of birds migrate to Soomaa every year, with 172 observed species.

The best way to explore the national park and its numerous meandering waterways, is by canoe or by *haabja*, a traditional Finno-Ugric single-tree boat carved from aspen and used for centuries for fishing, hunting, hauling hay and transportation.

Bogs, as forest, have historically provided isolation and protection to Estonians. Witches were said to live there. According to Estonian folklore, it is the evil will-o'-the-wisp who leads people to the bog, where they are forced to stay until the bog gas catches fire, driving the grotesque bog inhabitants out for all to see. Closer to reality, bogs were also hiding places for partisans escaping from outside invaders who couldn't penetrate the bogs as easily as forests (probably because they were scared of the witches).

Park information is available from the **Soomaa National Park visitor centre** (☎ 435 7164; www.soomaa.ee), which is a welcoming, highly professional outfit in Kõrtsi-Tõramaal. It distributes hiking maps and arrange accommodations and guide service (best to contact the centre in advance).

Soomaa.com (☎ 506 1896; www.soomaa.com; excursions from €30) offers a number of excursions, from five-hour canoeing trips to multiday bird-watching, mushroom-picking and wolf-tracking excursions. They also offer four-day *haabja*-building workshops each June. Call in advance, and they'll arrange a meeting time at the visitor centre. Pick up in Pärnu or Tori available at extra charge.

PÕLTSAMAA

pop 5100

Known for its rose gardens, Põltsamaa is a quaint town set along an idyllic river, with quiet leafy streets, a restored 17th-century church and the cinematic ruins of a medieval castle. It makes a pleasant stop when heading into the region.

During the 13th century the Knights of the Sword set up a fortification along the Põltsamaa River. The ruins of the **castle** date from the 1770s, although it – along with the 17th-century church adjoining it –

THE FOREST BROTHERS' RESISTANCE AND THE UNDERGROUND WAR

Today the sleepy marshes and quiet woodlands of Estonia are a haven only for wildlife, but between 1944 and 1956 much of what is now national park and nature reserve was a stronghold of the Metsavendlus pro-independence movement. The Metsavennad (Forest Brothers) fiercely resisted the Soviet occupation. Many resorted to an underground existence in the woods and some remained there for years. They knew their terrain well and used this knowledge to their advantage both for their own survival and in the fight to restore the republic.

The Soviets claimed Estonia in the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of 1939 and, after the Germans retreated from a difficult three-year occupation, secured this claim by advancing on Tallinn in 1944. The early resistance, believing this latest occupation would not be recognised in accordance with the British-US Atlantic treaty of 1941 (which states that sovereignty and self-governance should be restored when forcibly removed), rallied support for what some thought would be a new war. As international assistance did not eventuate, the independence cause remained Estonia's own.

Resistance action began with isolated attacks on Red Army units that claimed the lives of around 3000 soldiers. Tactical expertise and secure intelligence networks resulted in damaging offensives on Soviet targets. At the height of the resistance there were over 30,000 Metsavennad and their supporters, which included women, the elderly, young people and a network of 'Urban Brothers'. The impact of resistance activity is found in Soviet records from the time, which detail incidents of sabotage on infrastructure such as railways and roads that hindered early attempts at moulding Estonia into a new Soviet state.

In the years that followed the Metsavendlus suffered high casualties, with varied and increasing opposition. The NKVD (Soviet secret police) provided incentives to some of the local population who were able to infiltrate the resistance. The Soviets coordinated mass deportations of those suspected to be sympathetic to the resistance cause and some Metsavennad supporters were coerced into acting against the resistance. By 1947 15,000 resistance fighters had been arrested or killed. The greatest blow to the Metsavendlus came in 1949 with the deportation of 20,000 people – mainly women, children and the elderly – many of whom had provided the support base and cover for resistance activities.

The movement continued for some years but was greatly impeded by the strength of the Soviets and loss of local support due to ongoing deportations and the clearing of farmhouses for collectivisation. Some of the Metsavennad who were not killed or imprisoned escaped to Scandinavia and Canada.

There are many heroes of the Metsavendlus; most came to a tragic end. Kalev Arro and Ants Kaljurand (*hirmus*, or horrible Ants to the Soviets) were famous for their deft disguises and the humour and tact with which they persistently eluded the Soviets. It was only in 1980 that the final active Forest Brother, Oskar Lillenuum, was found – shot dead in Lääne county.

Much work has been done to compile a history of the movement by recording accounts of local witnesses. Enemies of Metsavennad are still finding themselves in court, while surviving members are regarded as national heroes and are awarded some of the country's highest honours.

was badly damaged in WWII. The church boasted one of Estonia's most magnificent organs, which was out of commission until its restoration in 2004. Concerts are held here throughout the year.

Also inside the castle walls is the town **museum** (☎ 775 1390; Loss tänav 1; adult/concession 8/5Kr; ☎ 10am-6pm May-Sep, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr), which has photos of the original castle, as well as history about Põltsamaa's development and its notable residents. The museum has an **information centre** (☎ 775 1390; Loss tänav 1; ☎ 10am-6pm May-Sep, 10am-4pm Mon-

Sat Oct-Apr), and is probably one of Estonia's friendliest bureaus. Pick up a town map and get excellent local and regional info here. If the church is closed when you arrive, the centre can open it for you.

Several **islands** in the river are a short stroll southeast of the castle. This is a good area for seeing the summer rose gardens. Upstream from the islands is a swimming spot – and a good area for a picnic.

A more extensive collection of roses is found at the **Roosiaed** (☎ 776 9877; Karja tänav; admission 10Kr), which contains over 3000

types. The Roosiaed is 1½km north of the bridge over the river (off the main road, Pajusi maantee).

Rivaal (☎ 776 2620; www.rivaal.ee; s/d 400/600Kr; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Sat; ☒) On Flower Island, along the east side of the river, this pleasant spot rents out small but comfortable rooms in the attic of the house. Downstairs is a popular café and restaurant (meals 20Kr to 65Kr), serving tasty dishes, with outdoor seating in the summer.

One or two buses daily connect Põltsamaa with Viljandi (one to two hours); Põltsamaa has more frequent connections with Tartu (two hours, 10 buses daily) and Tallinn (two hours, 10 buses daily).

ESTONIA DIRECTORY

The following contains practical information related to travelling in Estonia. For regional information pertaining to all three countries, see the Regional Directory.

ACTIVITIES

Estonia offers plenty of adventure and relaxation amid pastoral splendour. One of the most enjoyable summer activities is simply heading to the country's beautiful lakes and rivers for swimming in pristine, refreshing waters. Southeastern Estonia is particularly well served by lakes ideal for swimming.

Whatever you do, don't leave Estonia without a trip to the sauna. You'll find them on lakesides, tucked away in forests and in most hotels. It's the true Estonian experience.

For a complete list of activities in the Baltics, see the Activities chapter.

CUSTOMS

If arriving from another EU country, the limits for alcohol and tobacco are generous; see www.customs.ee for the latest restrictions. Antique objects made outside Estonia before 1850 or in Estonia before 1945 need special permits to be taken out of the country. These can be obtained from the **Division of the Export of Cultural Objects** (☎ 644 6578; Sakala tänav 14, Tallinn).

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

For up-to-date contact details of Estonian diplomatic organisations as well as foreign embassies and consulates in Estonia, con-

tact the **Estonian Foreign Ministry** (631 7600; www.vm.ee; Islandi Väljak1, Tallinn).

Estonian Embassies & Consulates

Estonia has diplomatic representation in a number of overseas countries, including the following:

- Australia** Sydney (☎ 02-9810 7468; eestikon@ozemail.com.au; 86 Louisa Rd, Birchgrove, NSW 2041)
- Canada** Toronto (☎ 416-461 0764; estconsu@ca.inter.net; 202-958 Broadview Ave, Toronto, Ontario M4K 2R6)
- Finland** Helsinki (☎ 9-622 0260; www.estemb.fi; Itäinen Puistotie 10, 00140 Helsinki, Suomi)
- France** Paris (☎ 01 56 62 22 00; 46 rue Pierre Charron, 75008 Paris)
- Germany** Berlin (☎ 30-25 460 600; www.estemb.de; Hildebrandstrasse 5, D-10785 Berlin); Hamburg (☎ 40-450 4026; fax 40-450 40 515; Badestrasse 38, 20143 Hamburg)
- Ireland** Dublin (☎ 1-219 6730; embassy.dublin@mfa.ee; Riversdale House, St Ann's, Ailesbury Rd, Dublin 4)
- Latvia** Riga (☎ 781 2020; www.estemb.lv; Skolas iela 13, Riga LV 1010)
- Lithuania** Vilnius (☎ 5-278 0200; www.estemb.lt; Mickėvičiaus gatvė 4a, Vilnius)
- Netherlands** Amsterdam (☎ 3120-316 54 40; embassy.hague@mfa.ee; Snipweg 101, 1118 DP Amsterdam Schiphol Airport)
- Russia** Moscow (☎ 095-290 5013; www.estemb.ru; Malo Kislowski 5, 103009 Moscow); St Petersburg (☎ 812-109 0920; fax 812-109 0927; Bolsaja Monetnaja 14, 197101 St Petersburg)
- Sweden** Stockholm (☎ 08 5451 2280; www.estemb.se; Tyrgatan 3, 10041 Stockholm)
- UK** London (☎ 020-7589 3428; www.estonia.gov.uk; 16 Hyde Park Gate, London SW7 5DG)
- USA** New York (☎ 212-883 0636; www.nyc.estemb.org; 26th fl, 660 3rd Ave, New York 10016); Washington DC (☎ 202-588 0101; www.estemb.org; 2131 Massachusetts Ave, NW, Washington DC 20008)

Embassies & Consulates in Estonia

Most of the following embassies or consulates are in or near Tallinn's Old Town unless otherwise indicated.

- Australia** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 650 9308; mati@standard.ee; Marja tänav 9) Southwest of the centre.
- Canada** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 627 3311; tallinn@canada.ee; Toom-Kooli tänav 13)
- Finland** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 610 3200; www.finland.ee; Kohtu tänav 4)
- France** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 631 1492; www.ambafrance-ee.org; Toom-Kuninga 20)
- Germany** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 627 5300; www.germany.ee; Toom-Kuninga tänav 11)

PRACTICALITIES

- For news, the best English-language weekly is the *Baltic Times* (www.baltictimes.com).
- The bimonthly *City Paper* is a glossy magazine with in-depth articles and sometimes quirky features.
- For events listings pick up the excellent *In Your Pocket* series (www.inyourpocket.com), published quarterly for Tallinn and twice yearly for Tartu and Pärnu (also available as pdf downloads).
- Tallinn visitors can pick up three Finnish channels in addition to Estonia's three channels (Eesti TV, www.etv.ee, is the state-run network).
- Radio 2 (101.6 in Tallinn) and Sky Plus (95.4) are the two most popular radio stations among Estonia's pop and Euro-disco lovers. You can also listen to the BBC World Service (100.5 FM) 24 hours a day.
- PAL is the main video system used in Estonia.
- Electrical current is 220V, 50Hz AC. Sockets require a European plug with two round pins.
- Estonia uses the metric system for weights and measures. Food and drink often appears on menus listed by the gram (200g of wine, 500g of schnitzel, etc).

Ireland (Map pp70–1 ☎ 681 1888;

embassytallinn@eircom.net; Vene tänav 2)

Latvia (Map pp66–7; ☎ 646 1313, consular 646 13 10;

embassy.estonia@mfa.gov.lv; Tõnismägi 10, EE10119 Tallinn)

Lithuania (Map pp70–1; ☎ 631 4030; www.hot.ee/lietambasada; Uus tänav 15)

Russia Narva (☎ 356 0652; fax 356 0654; Riiütlit tänav 8);

Tallinn (Map pp70–1; ☎ 646 4175; www.estonia.mid.ru; Lai tänav 18)

Sweden (Map pp70–1; ☎ 640 5600; www.sweden.ee; Pikk tänav 28)

UK (Map pp66–7 ☎ 667 4700; www.britishembassy.ee; Wismari tänav 6)

USA (Map pp66–7 ☎ 668 8100; www.usemb.ee; Kentmanni tänav 20) Southeast of the centre.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Estonia has a long list of festivals and cultural events, especially during the summer months. The tourist office in Tallinn (p68) has information on events around the capital and further afield. For a complete listing of Estonia's festivals, visit www.culture.ee.

February

Student Jazz Festivalu (www.tudengijazz.ee) This international festival held in mid-February in Tallinn attracts musicians from around the Baltic region.

Tartu Ski Marathon Held outside Tartu in mid-February, this 63km cross-country race brings a bit of cheer to an otherwise dreary season.

March

World Music Days (www.maajailm.ee, in Estonian) Taking place in mid-March, Tartu's small world-music festival attracts some colourful performers.

April

Jazzkaar (www.jazzkaar.ee) This international jazz festival is headquartered in Tallinn, though events happen in towns throughout the country. Held in late April.

Estonian Music Days (www.ehl.kul.ee) In Tallinn, this event features both classical Estonian performances and new, emerging works during mid-April.

Tartu Student Days (www.studentdays.ee) Tartu's students let their hair down in late April in this wild, pagan celebration marking the end of term and the dawn of spring.

May

International Puppet Festival (www.hot.ee/viljandi_nukuteater) Viljandi's puppet theatre gathers a specialist crowd at this four-day fest in mid-May.

June

St John's Day (Jaanipäev) Held on June 23, Estonia's biggest annual night out is a celebration of the pagan Midsummer's Night, best experienced out in the country where huge bonfires flare for all-night revellers.

Tallinn Old Town Days (www.vlp.ee) Held in Tallinn's cinematic 14th-century quarters in early June, this fest features lots of medieval amusement.

July

Beer Summer A hugely popular festival in Tallinn (at the Song-Festival Grounds on the road to Pirita) in early July.

Tallinn Rock Summer The Baltics' biggest three-day international rock-music festival takes place in the Tallinn Song Bowl.

Pärnu International Documentary & Anthropology Film Festival (www.chaplin.ee) Pärnu's big-name film fest features dozens of films from all over the world in early July.

Saaremaa Summer Festival This week-long largely classical event takes place mostly in Kuressaare, but is also held in venues throughout the island in mid-July.

Kuressaare Castle Days Against the backdrop of one of the Baltics' most magnificent castles, this two-day fest in early July features lots of medieval chicanery.

Muhu Future Music Festival (www.nordicsounds.ee) Jazz, experimental music, progressive rock and much more are on offer at this colourful event held on the island of Muhu in early July.

Viljandi Folk Festival (www.folk.ee) This four-day festival in late July features bands from Estonia and abroad.

August

Ladies in Jazz Festival (early August) One of Haapsalu's many music fests. Held in early August.

International Organ Music Festival Features concerts held in Tallinn and throughout Estonia during early August.

Blues Festival (www.haapsalu.ee/kk) Another of Haapsalu's popular musical events, held in mid-August.

White Lady Festival (www.haapsalu.ee/kk) On Haapsalu's castle grounds, this festival culminates in the appearance of a mysterious visitor during late August.

September

Matsalu Nature Film Festival One of the more unusual film festivals in the Baltics, this one features nature films submitted by a wide variety of film makers. It's held in Lihula near the lush Matsalu Nature Reserve in late September.

November & December

Black Nights Film Festival (www.poff.ee) Estonia's biggest film festival showcases world cinema in its myriad

forms: feature-length films, animated films and student films. Held in late November–early December.

HOLIDAYS

New Year's Day 1 January

Independence Day Anniversary of 1918 declaration, 24 February.

Good Friday March/April

Easter Monday March/April

Spring Day 1 May

Võidupüha Victory Day Commemorating the anniversary of the Battle of Võnnu (1919), 23 June.

St John's Day (Jaanipäev; Midsummer's Night) 24

June. Taken together, Victory Day and St John's Day are the excuse for a week-long midsummer break for many people.

Day of Restoration of Independence (1991) 20 August

Christmas Day (Jõulud) 25 December

Boxing Day 26 December

INTERNET ACCESS

Wireless Internet access (wi-fi) is widespread in Estonia. You'll find over 200 hot spots in Tallinn and in many places connection is free (see www.wifi.ee for a complete list). If you can't find a free connection, prices are around 35 senti per minute. The only adjustment you may have to make is to set your outgoing mail server (SMTP) to a local host such as mail.hot.ee. If you're not packing a laptop, there are numerous Internet cafés (charging around €2 to €4 per hour) with speedy connections in virtually every corner of the country. Most public libraries (Tallinn, Tartu, Narva, Pärnu, Haapsalu, Kuressaare etc) have Web-connected computers that anyone can use free of charge. During peak times, however, you may have to wait in line.

INTERNET RESOURCES

For more information about Estonia, check out the following websites:

Estonia Directory (www.ee) This Estonia-wide directory has links to national parks, car-hire agencies, guesthouses and hundreds of other businesses in Estonia. Start your search on 'tourism'.

Estonica (www.estonica.org) Nicely designed website with information on Estonian history, culture, the economy and nature.

Estonian Institute (www.einst.ee) This site has 'publications' that you can click on, which provide colourful info on Estonian cuisine, art, song traditions and more.

Tallinn Tourism (www.tourism.tallinn.ee) This is the portal to Tallinn's events and attractions.

ON THE HORIZON

■ **All-Estonian Song Festival** (www.laulupidu.ee) Convenes every five years and culminates in a 30,000-strong traditional choir, due in Tallinn in 2009.

■ **Baltika Folklore Festival** A week of music, dance and displays focusing on Baltic and other folk traditions, this festival is shared between Rīga, Vilnius and Tallinn; Tallinn will host it in 2007.

MAPS

EO Map (www.eomap.ee) has fold-out maps for every Estonian county, and city- and town-centre maps. If you're driving, pick up EO's excellent road atlas or its *Estonia in Your Pocket*, featuring detailed street maps for several dozen cities. **Regio** (www.regio.ee) produces road atlases and maps for professional reference, and digital maps on CD-ROM. Maps are available at most bookstores.

MONEY

See the inside front cover for exchange rates.

Estonia's currency is the kroon (pronounced krohn), which is pegged to the euro at 15.64Kr. The kroon comes in two, five, 10, 25, 50, 100 and 500Kr notes. One kroon is divided into 100 senti (cents), and there are coins of five, 10, 20 and 50 sents, as well as one- and five-kroon coins. Estonia has a fair chance of adopting the euro by 2007.

POST

Mail service in and out of Estonia is highly efficient. Most letters or postcards take about one or two days within Estonia, three or four days to Western Europe and about a week to North America and other destinations outside Europe. There is a post-restante bureau, where mail is kept for up to one month, in the basement of Tallinn's **central post office** (Narva maantee 1, Tallinn 10101).

To post a letter up to 20g to Scandinavia/Europe/rest of the world costs 6/6.50/8Kr.

TELEPHONE

Estonia phased out all city codes in 2004. If you're calling anywhere within the country, just dial the number as it's listed here. All land-line phones have seven digits. All mobile phone numbers have seven or eight digits, and all begin with ☎ 5. Estonia's country code is ☎ 372. To make a collect

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

- 24-hour roadside assistance ☎ 1188
- Fire, ambulance and urgent medical advice ☎ 112
- Police ☎ 110
- Tallinn's First Aid hotline (☎ 697 1145) can advise you in English about the nearest treatment centres.

call dial ☎ 16116. To make an international call dial 00-country code-area code-subscriber number.

About 95% of Estonia is covered with digital mobile-phone networks. Mobile phones that work on the GSM mobile network in Europe and the UK will work here. To avoid the high roaming charges, you can get a starter kit (around 150Kr), which will give you an Estonian number, a SIM card that you pop into your phone and around 100Kr of talk time (incoming calls are usually free with most providers). You can buy scratch-off cards for more minutes as you need them. SIM cards and starter kits are available from mobile-phone stores, post offices and kiosks.

Public telephones accept chip cards (30Kr, 50Kr or 100Kr), available at post offices, hotels and most kiosks. For placing calls outside Estonia, an international telephone card with PIN, such as *Voicenet* (available at many kiosks), is better value.

TOURIST INFORMATION

There are tourist offices in many of the larger centres, national parks and reserves throughout Estonia, and at nearly every one you'll find English-speaking staff. See the Information sections in each section for individual addresses. The main administrative office of the **Estonian Tourist Board** (www.visitestonia.com; Liivalaia tänav 13/15) is in Tallinn.

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