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estonia



# Haapsalu & Lääne County

Rich history and exciting culture  
embraced by untouched nature





- Haapsalu was granted city status in 1279.

- Haapsalu is the oldest resort in Estonia, famous for its healing sea mud; in the summer of 2010, a total of 51 people set a new world record by simultaneously taking a mud bath on the promenade.
- In Haapsalu cathedral, the notes ring for eleven seconds, which makes it a concert hall of unique acoustics.
- The 216 metre-long platform at the historic Haapsalu railway station is fully covered by a train shed roof.
- The Haapsalu shawl, a wondrous piece of handcraft work, is so fine that it can be pulled through a ring.
- Ilon Wikland's drawing of Ronia's castle in the Astrid Lindgren book was inspired by the episcopal castle of Haapsalu.
  - The Haapsalu Town Hall exhibits the oldest preserved monument in the world by Friedrich Schiller.
- The largest collection of sun crosses in the world - over 300 sun crosses — can be found in Olavi Cemetery on Vormsi Island.
  - Nõva Church (13.6 x 7.1m) is one of the smallest in Estonia.
- The sand on Nõva beach sings, as the grains of sand make a sound resembling a violin being played when stepped on.
- The altar paintings 'The Last Supper' and 'Resurrection' in Lääne-Nigula Church are copies of Leonardo da Vinci's paintings of the same names.
  - The Neugrund meteorite crater at the bottom of the sea near Osmussaare is the largest in Estonia with its seven kilometre diameter.
- Matsalu National Park is the oldest Ramsar site of international importance in Estonia.

## Romantic Haapsalu

The resort of Haapsalu, with its dignified style, leaves one with the impression of another era. Wooden lace architecture in the old town, a gorgeous beach promenade, cosy cafes, warm sea water, famous therapeutic mud, and the most famous ghost in Estonia, the White Lady who resides in the episcopal castle, are always happy to welcome anyone on a health or cultural holiday.



Mart Vares



Olev Mihkelmaa



## Active cultural life

Haapsalu's cultural calendar offers something for everyone. Are you interested in the horror and fantasy film festival, the blues festival, the Italian wine party, the yoga festival, or the music festival which is dedicated to the work of the composer Pyotr Tchaikovsky? In winter, visitors get to enjoy the Russian fair or test themselves in the sauna rally in Noarootsi. And this is not even close to everything; it's always a good idea to keep an eye on the selection of events available in Haapsalu!



Gunnar Laak



Dirhami sadama pildikogu

## To the sea

Rowing boats can be rented on the promenade in Haapsalu, and a kayaking trip can be taken on the sea. The **Kallis Mari steamboat** will take the entire family on a lovely short trip on Lake Väike Viik. Anyone arriving by yacht can land safely at the ports of **Veskiviigi**, **Grand Holm Marina**, and **Westmer** in Haapsalu. Visiting yachts are also accepted by **Dirhami** (Noarootsi), **Sviby** (Vormsi Island), and **Rohuküla** ports in Lääne County.

## Exciting history

Haapsalu was granted city status in 1279 and was one of the nine medieval cities of Estonia. The first mud baths in Haapsalu were opened in 1825. Thereafter, the city has been attracting visitors from all over the world, with the Russian emperors Peter I (1715), Alexander I (1804), Alexander II (1852, 1856, 1857, & 1859), Alexander III (1871 and 1880),

and Nicholas II (1880) among the most renowned of those. In 1867, the 27 year-old Pyotr Tchaikovsky, the later world-famous composer, spent the summer in Haapsalu. This small seaside town has also inspired the painter Nikolai Roerich (1880 and 1910). The history of the resort of Haapsalu can be seen at the **Haapsalu Old Town Hall Museum**.



## Therapeutic sea mud

The famous therapeutic mud of Haapsalu is believed to have been discovered by a military physician, Dr Carl Abraham Hunnius, whose initiative led to the opening of the internationally-known mud baths here in 1825. Members of the Russian emperor's family and the

wealthier townsfolk from western Europe used to visit Haapsalu in the hope of finding a cure for their rheumatism or other joint problems. Today, various healing mud procedures can be enjoyed in the spas in Haapsalu.



# The wonderful beaches of north-western Estonia

Kilometre after kilometre of sandy beach can be found around Nõva and Noarootsi in northern Lääne County, places in which one can find a cosy form of peace, enjoying summer peacefully. The beaches of Nõva are famous for

their singing sands. Roosta is a favourite spot for many surfers, as it offers ideal conditions for surfing or learning to surf.



Sven Zacek

## Rich in nature

The northern coast of Lääne County enchants visitors with its beautiful beaches and their singing sands and pine forests, the latter being full of mushrooms and berries. The southern areas of Lääne County boast the Matsalu National Park, one of the best-known at an international level and one of the largest bird protection zones in Europe. For hikers and anyone who loves nature there is Marimetsa bog which is located slightly further away from the coast. Several hiking trails, a viewing platform, and rest areas have been built for visitors to help them get acquainted with the natural beauty of Lääne County.

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Olev Mihkelmaa

## Bird-watching

The western shore of Estonia is on the migration route of birds which nest in the Arctic. In the southern part of Lääne County is the Matsalu National Park - one of the largest and internationally best-known bird protection zones in Europe. Every spring and autumn, hundreds of thousands of waterfowl pass by, of whom many have chosen Matsalu for their nesting place. Cape Põösapea in northern Lääne County is considered to be one of the best spots in northern Europe for observing the migration of waterfowl.



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# Ilon's Wonderland

Ilon Wikland became famous as the illustrator of the books of Astrid Lindgren. The Ilon Wikland Gallery was opened in Haapsalu in 2006 and the centre was renamed Ilon's Wonderland three years later. The gallery exhibits the artist's original pieces. This three-level display centre also includes a cinema and an exhibition hall, Karlsson's Room, Ilon's Kitchen, and a playroom, where various theme events are organised with fun-filled practical activities. In the summer season, the courtyard of Ilon's Wonderland with Mattias' residence and the Handicrafts Cottage is also open, which is where children can go to try their hand at making various fun-filled items.



# The Haapsalu shawl

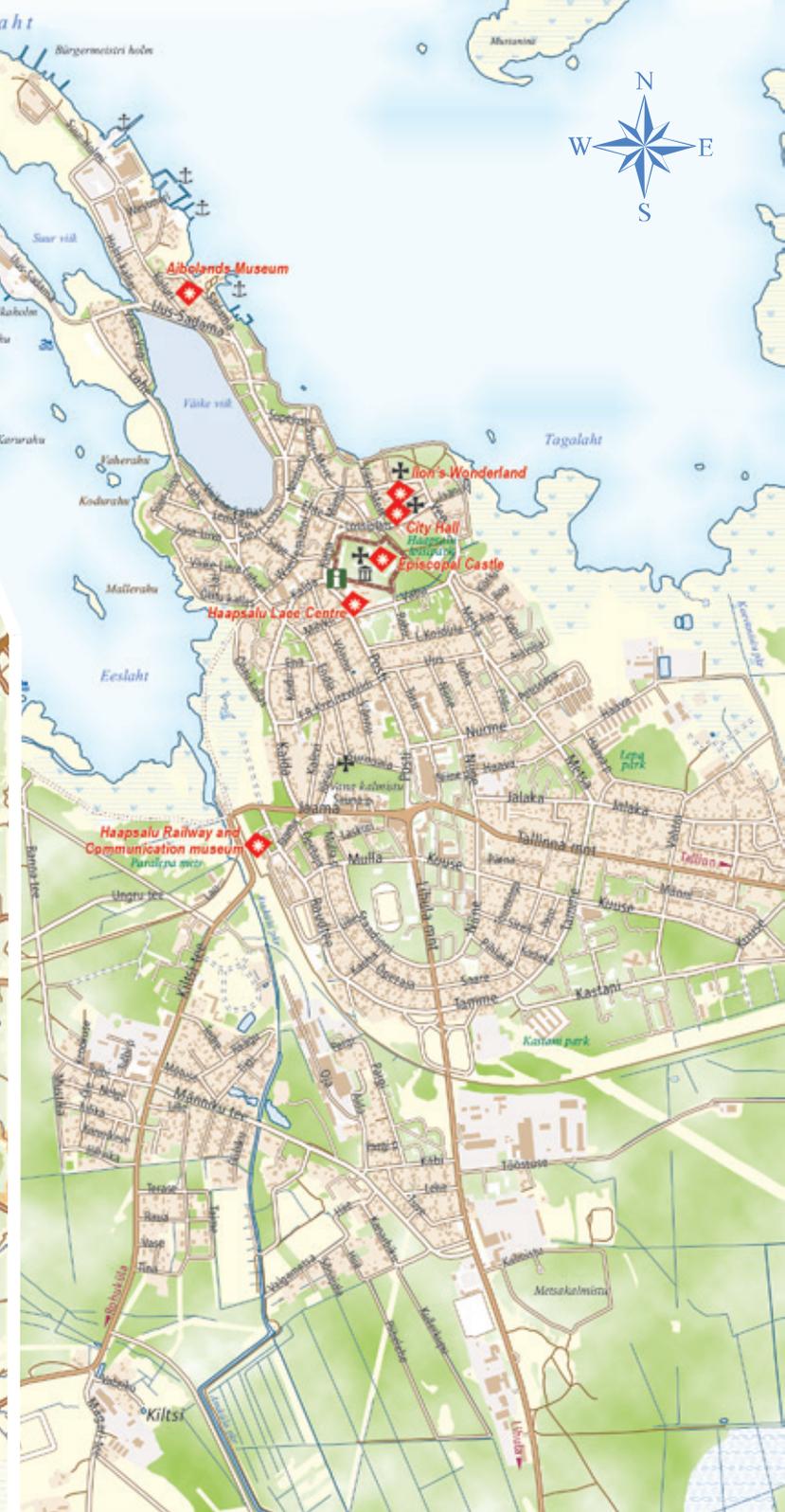
The tradition of knitting the lacy shawls and headscarves of Haapsalu originates from the second half of the nineteenth century. The Haapsalu shawl became a famous special luxury item thanks to the wealthy bathers visiting the town. The fine ladies needed fine shawls and headscarves, so the simple, coarse woollen yarn was traded for a finer yarn. The skill of knitting shawls and scarves, which can be pulled through a ring, have been passed down from one generation to the next. Haapsalu shawls can be seen and purchased at the **Haapsalu Lace Centre** (Pitsikeskus).

## Art

Lääne County has been a favourite place for a good many creative people when it comes to spending their time. In Haapsalu, art exhibitions can be enjoyed in the **Haapsalu Linnagalerii Gallery**, in the **Epp Maria Gallery**, and in the **Haapsalu Art School Gallery**. The **Ilon's Wonderland gallery** exhibits the work of the artist Ilon Wikland, who spent her childhood in Haapsalu. The **Evald Okas Museum** exhibits the art of Evald Okas and his family members. The summer exhibition programme also includes the work of other painters. The **Ants Laikmaa museum**, one of the most interesting personalities in Estonian art history, has been opened in Kadarpiku Village, Lääne-Nigula Parish, so that visitors can have the chance of seeing the painter's studio, workrooms, and living quarters in addition to various exhibitions.



# Läänemaa & Haapsalu



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  - Church
  - Manor house, castle
  - Lookout tower
  - Beach

# The grandiose railway station

Haapsalu railway station, which was built at the beginning of the twentieth century, has become famous for its 216 metre-long platform, which was the longest covered platform in northern Europe when the construction work had been completed. The fact that the railway station was built to serve the residence of the Russian emperor is evident from the separate emperor's pavilion to be found at the station. The length of the platform was determined by the length of the

czar's train. Haapsalu does not have a rail connection today, but the **Raudtee- ja Sidemuuseum** can still be found at the former railway station, and the station building is a popular shooting site for many film makers. What's more, there are still some trains running in Haapsalu - in the summer season, the station marks the starting point of enjoyable Old Town tours on board a **tiny recreational train named Peetrike**.



Danel Rinaldo



Danel Rinaldo

# Haapsalu Episcopal Castle

The Episcopal Castle is at the heart of the old town of Haapsalu. Haapsalu Episcopal Castle, which was built to serve as the centre of a small, medieval state known as the Bishopric of Saare-Lääne, is one of the best-preserved castles in Estonia. The castle was built in the thirteenth century and was actively used until the end of the seventeenth century. At the heart of the castle complex is the main building, which housed the living quarters and administrative premises, as well as this small medieval state's 'cathedral',

a decorated dome church. The main structure is surrounded by outer wards, which are all circled by a medieval wall which is embellished with seven towers and four gates. Today, the main castle houses a museum, which in 2019 will be complemented by the addition of an interactive museum and visitor centre to introduced medieval history. The outer wards have been turned into a park and there is an exciting thematic playground for children in the moat.



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# The White Lady - the most famous legend in Estonia

During the full moon nights of August, a white female figure appears at the round window of Haapsalu cathedral's baptismal chapel. According to legend, one of the canons once brought a lady dressed as a boy into the castle with him. The deceit was revealed and the young lady, who had violated the Monastery Act which prohibited women from setting foot over the threshold of a monastery, was walled up in the baptismal chapel. The same young lady is said to appear

at the chapel window as the White Lady. Thousands of people from near and far make their way to Haapsalu during the full moon in August to see the lady, if only for just the blink of an eye. This time of the year in which the lady makes her appearance is celebrated in Haapsalu. The White Lady days are held with the entire city being taken over by concerts, plays, exhibitions, and parties dedicated to the legend.



Silver Raidla

# The history of coastal Swedes

Swedes have been populating the coastal areas and the various islands of north-western Estonia for over a thousand years. The areas which they chose to populate were generally isolated, and thanks to their various privileges and the language barrier, the Estonian Swedes or coastal Swedes remained a relatively closed community with their own unique

language and culture. During World War II, most Estonian Swedes were forced to leave their homes and flee to Sweden. To this day, bilingual place name signs can be spotted around Noarootsi. The culture and history of the coastal Swedes can be seen at the **Aibolands Museum** in Haapsalu.



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# Osmussaar

Osmussaar (Odensholm) is an island which has a lot to offer to bird watchers, or anyone at all who is interested in history or nature, as well as to holidaymakers in general. The island is also exciting for divers, as it has the largest and oldest meteorite crater in Estonia, Neugrund, which lies to the north-east of Osmussaare, and there are numerous shipwrecks in the coastal waters around the island. This tiny island has a rich coastal Swedish history, as well as a military one. The Osmussaare Landscape Reserve was established in order to preserve the geological features on the island, as well as its bird population and history.



# Vormsi

The name of the fourth-largest island in Estonia originates from its Swedish name, Ormsö ('Snake Island'). Historically, Vormsi has been populated by coastal Swedes. During the Soviet period of occupation, the island was a restricted area and could not be visited out of simple curiosity. The main historical and cultural monument on the island is St Olav's Church, with its cemetery next to the church which holds the world's largest preserved collection of slate and sandstone sun crosses. The Vormsi Landscape Protection Area includes areas

of species-rich nature, natural and semi-natural landscapes and communities, and a wealthy heritage culture. Hullo and Sviby bays and the strait of Hari Kurk with its maritime pastures and islets along Vormsi's coast are avian habitats of international importance. The area has been designated a research area by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in the United Kingdom. Vormsi Island can be accessed from the mainland all-year-round by means of the ferry from Rohuküla Port.



# Ice roads

During a proper winter, the coastal sea is covered in ice and it is possible to experience a unique drive across the frozen sea around Haapsalu. The ice roads from Haapsalu to Noarootsi and from Rohuküla to Vormsi are not just for adventurers who are seeking out extreme activities, they are also of vital

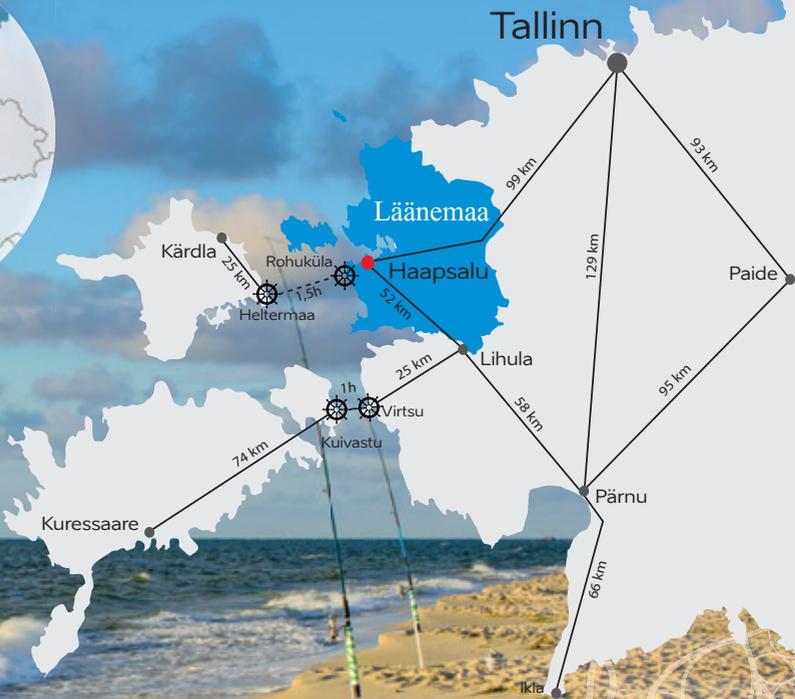
importance for the locals. The Noarootsi ice road over Haapsalu Bay shortens the trip for the people of Noarootsi to the county centre by dozens of kilometres and the ice road to Vormsi gives anyone living on the island the freedom to travel to the mainland without having to depend upon the ferry schedule.



# Delicious local food

As is appropriate for a seaside region, the people of Lääne County have always been eating a large amount of fish, although growing vegetables and farming animals have also been popular. It's becoming increasingly popular among the cafes and restaurants here to use local raw materials, and food made using local raw materials from Lääne County can be enjoyed in high-quality cafes and restaurants in Haapsalu as well as elsewhere in Lääne County.





## Haapsalu Tourist Information Centre

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