

Setomaa



Yours authentically

SETOMAA

COUNTRY AND PEOPLE | CULTURE | HANDICRAFT | NATURE | MAJOR EVENTS



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www.visitsetomaa.ee



The Country and Its People

Setomaa is a unique cultural region located between two bigger neighbors - Estonia and Russia. Nowadays, we understand Setomaa to be located in the southeastern corner of the Republic of Estonia, but historically, Setomaa was much bigger: about three-quarters of Setomaa, or Petserimaa are now under the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation. Actually, for most of their history, Setos have lived within the Russian state and only became part of Estonia in 1920. In 1945, Setomaa was divided between the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic.

Setos are a Finno-Ugric people, closely related to the Estonians, that, despite mixture, have maintained their own culture. Setos are distinguished from Estonians by their language, which is a dialect of the South Estonian language. Their religion is also different: Setos are Orthodox Christians, though their folk customs contain many pre-Christian elements. In Estonian, Setos and Setomaa are often referred to as Setus and Setumaa. Both variations are correct, although Setos themselves use the 'o' form.

DID YOU KNOW THAT?

The part of Setomaa that belongs to the Republic of Estonia, or Seto Parish, comprises just 1 percent of the Republic of Estonia's territory? Though you can see and hear Setos very well here, you should also take into account that their homeland is actually significantly larger!



Culture

For thousands of years, Seto culture has been an oral culture, which is passed on through song. Setos are known first and foremost for their distinct song tradition - the *Seto leelo*. The *leelo* is more than a thousand years old. It's characterized by certain rules, though improvisation also forms an important component. In 2009, the *Seto leelo* was added to the UNESCO list of intangible heritage. Setos also like to dance: in almost every village there is a *tsura* (boy) who knows how to play the Russian garmon (*karmoška*) and get a party going. Seto dances are energetic and emotional, like the Setos themselves.

Seto cuisine is shaped by local nature, with influences from old Finno-Ugric cuisine, as well as Estonian and Russian traditions. Because of their Orthodox Christian faith, the Setos often fast and abstain from eating meat, meaning that meat is less prominent in Seto cuisine than it is in Estonian cuisine. The Setos eat lots of mushrooms and fish, as well as dairy products. Nowadays, the best-known Seto food is *sõir*, an unripened curd cheese that adorns every festive Seto table. You should also try the Seto pies (*piirak*), oven-baked porridges, and mushroom and fish dishes.

DID YOU KNOW THAT?

An estimated 80 percent of chanterelle mushrooms sold in Estonian markets are from the forests of Setomaa? Chanterelles are Setomaa's real gold.



Handicrafts and folk costumes

Seto women's red-black-and white traditional dress makes them very visible, while the Seto men's woolen white robes make them look especially dignified. Seto folk costumes are held in high regard in Setomaa to this day because they are worn with pride at every major event. The main colors are white and red. Red symbolizes life and protects the wearer against evil and sickness. Seto folk costumes are prepared completely by hand, and that's why they are so valuable, as well as expensive.

The most important part of the Seto woman's folk costume is its silver jewelry. It's said that one can hear a Seto woman coming before one even sees her, because her silver chains and dangling coins make so much noise. The emblem of a married woman is a great brooch: it shows she is of fertile age and protects the woman's most sensitive place, her soul, from the evil eye. Silver chains and coins are often added to the brooch.

DID YOU KNOW THAT?

A Seto woman's jewelry might weigh up to 5 kilograms? Of course, they don't wear so much jewelry every day, but there are plenty of festivities in setomaa and Seto women have plenty of opportunities to take out their *hõpõkraam* - silver stuff.



Architecture and Houses of Worship

Seto architecture is characterized by its compactness, simplicity and functionality. Seto farms are distinguished by a secure, closed plan, where buildings are constructed around a central yard or *moro*. These are called farm forts. Long ago, this kind of layout protected people from intruders as well as the gazes of curious passersby. It's still the same today.

The *tsässon*, or Orthodox chapel, is another important part of Seto traditional architecture. These small buildings, nearly hidden in the landscape, demonstrate the Seto building tradition. Smoke saunas also play a noteworthy role in the rural architecture and encompass traditions that are still alive.

Setos are Orthodox Christians, though their culture contains pre-Christian elements. Setos consider not only Miikse St. John's Rock, or the Silmaallikas Spring to be sacred, but also *Jumalamägi*, "God's Hill," from which, according to Eastern tradition, souls depart for heaven. The Seto's Peko cult is also unique. Peko is a pre-Christian God of fertility who is no longer worshipped but still lives on in the Seto subconscious.

DID YOU KNOW THAT?

Seto Orthodox Christianity has preserved some pre-Christian elements: to this day, sacrificial stones, trees, and springs are worshipped, and pre-Christian cemeteries are still in use. When one goes berry picking, the first berry is given back to the forest. This too is a kind of ancient sacrifice.



SETO
KOSTIPÄIU

Major events

There are a lot of holidays in the Seto calendar and Setos like to celebrate! Holidays are celebrated according to the old calendar, more or less two weeks later than in Lutheran Estonian. Holy days are usually followed by a *kirmas*, or village party, which are to this day important occasions for Setos to get together. For visitors, it's fun to take part in Easter festivities. In larger villages on Easter, people set up a sandy hill for rolling eggs, called a *munaloomka*, or "egg hill."

For Setos today, the most important event of the year takes place on the first Saturday of August. Called the Seto Kingdom, this event takes place at different villages. Kingdom Day is full of singing and dancing, good Seto food, handicrafts and shopping. On Kingdom Day, the Seto people choose their leader or *ülembsootska*, Peko's representative on Earth. In August, Seto's also celebrate *Kostipäev*, or Cafe Day, when farms open their gates and invite in guests for the best Seto food there is. The most important event in June is Seto Folk Festival, but Leelo Day - a day when leelo folk song singers gather and celebrate - is also held every three years.

DID YOU KNOW THAT?

The Setos have their own money? The Seto kroon was officially launched at the 2015 Days of the Seto Kingdom. This is a fully-fledged currency that one can use in most places in Setomaa as an equivalent to the euro. The Seto kroon is recognized by several firms outside of Setomaa as well. The Seto kroon is managed and sold by the Seto bank (pank.seto.ee).



DID YOU KNOW THAT?

Not all mineral water extracted in Värskä is drinkable? Some are so salty that you can't even taste them! Salinity or mineral content depends on the depth from which the water was extracted: the deeper the water, the stronger it is. Most Värskä mineral water is extracted at a depth of about 500 meters. Some of it is sold in stores as mineral water, while some is used for medicinal purposes in the Värskä sanatorium. In the foyer or the Värskä Water Park are different taps where you can try how different mineral waters taste.

Nature

Setomaa nature smells of pine forest, chanterelle mushroom sauce, and beach sand. The real sea is far from here, but Lake Pskov gives a maritime feeling. The majority of Setomaa is covered in sparse pine forests where blueberries, lingonberries, chanterelle mushrooms, and more grow, are harvested, and find their way to the locals' tables. The forest is also home to many rare plant species including dwarf everlasting, rolling hen-and-chicks, pasqueflower, heather and more. Setomaa is also famous for its mineral water and lake mud, as well as its red clay and limestone. The white sands of Piusa are also famous.

Nature lovers can hike in the Mustoja Landscape Protection Area. There are also hiking trails by Örsava Lake, the Piusa River, and Lake Pskov. The Piusa River area also hosts Estonia's highest limestone outcrop, the so-called Härma Wall (43 m).



Yellow windows

All around South Estonia, one encounters large yellow window frames, which remind one of National Geographic magazine covers. The idea started in Holland, where similar windows were erected to draw attention to certain landscapes that best illustrate the region's history. South Estonia's yellow windows demonstrate life on the border of two worlds. Setomaa's windows can be found in Obinitsa and Podmotsa. There are also National Geographic "yellow windows" in Räpina and by Vastseliina Episcopal Castle, both more or less on the border of Setomaa.

Põlvamaa

The motto of Põlvamaa is "Põlvamaa - A Greener Life," which not only describes the nature in this area, but the attitudes of its people. There is certainly a lot of pristine nature in Põlvamaa, few large towns, and there are many environmentally minded people here. Põlvamaa is very diverse, with rivers and lakes, forests and swamps, hilly and flat areas, picturesque countryside landscapes, manors and small farms. However, Põlvamaa is mostly known as a destination for nature tourism.

- Suur and Väike Taevaskoda
- Mooste manor complex
- Meenikunno trail
- Pikajärve manor/Cantervilla castle
- Historical postal route and Estonian Road Museum

Põlvamaa tourism info
www.visitpolva.ee





Võrumaa

Võrumaa is a special place. Numerous tourism farms, swimming, boating, hiking, horseback riding, fairs, saunas, ski trails, Võru language -- these are the words that characterize Võrumaa. For people from other parts of Estonia, Võrumaa and its people have always been a bit mysterious. They are like Estonians, but a bit foreign too, known and unknown. Old manners are preserved here and time seems to stand still. Vana-Võrumaa ("Old Võrumaa") is known for its scattered population and smoke sauna tradition: the smoke sauna tradition was even added to UNESCO's list of intangible heritage.

- Tamula beach, promenade and the Roosisaare bridge
- Vastseliina Episcopal Castle and Medieval Theme Park
- Suur Munamägi
- Tamme-Lauri oak
- Võhandu marathon

Võrumaa tourism info
www.visitvoru.ee



Peipsimaa

Peipsimaa winds around Lake Peipus (Estonian: Peipsi). The lake, with its beaches, fish, winds, and openness influences the lives of the people of Peipsimaa as well as the natural surroundings. Most people live on near the lake. In Peipsimaa, two peoples and cultures meet: Estonians and Russian "Old Believers." Often when one says "Peipsimaa," the Old Believers are the first to come to mind, but the region also offers lovely sandy beaches, large swamps and forests, manors and museums.

- Kauksi beach and nature center
- Avinurme wood barn
- The Onion Road
- Emajõe Suursoo swamp
- Räpina nature center

Peipsimaa tourism info
www.visitpeipsi.com





SETO

KÜLÄVÜÜ

The Seto Külävüü - literally, the “Seto Village Belt,” Setomaa’s main tourism route - winds like the undone belt of a traditional folk costume from one Seto village to another, leading to special people and exciting places. This is like the backbone or axis of Setomaa, to which are fastened villages, churches, cafes, museums, and the like. One end of the Külävüü is at Võõpsu, Setomaa’s northern gateway, and it winds through Värska and Saatse to Obinitsa and Meremäe, making knots through neighboring places - like Tsiistre in Võrumaa - and then ending at the Luhamaa border crossing.

When you come to the Külävüü by car, keep your eye on maps.visitsetomaa.ee, where all of Setomaa’s best attractions are marked, and you can easily make your own choices of which places to visit.



www.visitsetomaa.ee



Supermarket

in Mikitamäe, Värska, Saatse and Obinitsa.

Pharmacy

in Värska and there are pharmacies in nearby Räpina and Vastseliina.

ATMs

Swedbank (Pikk 12, Värska)
you can also take out money at A&O (Coop) stores.

Gas station

in Värska and there are gas stations in nearby Räpina and Vastseliina.



Setomaa with a guide

Since Setomaa is a special place, it's helpful to travel around with a local guide. Setomaa has a lot to experience that does not come immediately to the eye. The guides know how to explain why one site or another is important, and to bring visitors to the right people and places. That way one can have the experience of a lifetime.

A list of accredited guides can be found here: www.visitsetomaa.ee. For a successful trip, get in touch with a guide.



Setomaa tourism info

www.visitsetomaa.ee

maps.visitsetomaa.ee

Tourism info in Värskä

Pikk 12, +372 5682 1268



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www.visitsetomaa.ee
maps.visitsetomaa.ee



0 2,5 5 7,5 10km

RÄPINA

Võõpsu

Lübnitsa

Mikitamäe

VÄRSKA

Treski

Orava

Matsuri

Obinitsa

PETSERI

Meremäe

VASTSELIINA

Illi

Luhamaa

Misso

Irboska

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| 1 VÕÕPSU VILLAGE CHAPEL | 22 MAAGOKONÕ RESTAURANT AT TOOMEMÄE FARM | 42 MIIKSE ST. JOHN'S STONE AND SILMAALLIKAS SPRING |
| 2 LÜÜBNITSA VIEWING TOWER | 23 MUSTOJA LANDSCAPE PROTECTION AREA | 43 KIRIKUMÄE HIKING TRAIL |
| 3 LAOSSINA VILLAGE CHAPEL | 24 GOD'S HILL | 44 TSIISTRE FLAX MUSEUM |
| 4 PODMOTSA VILLAGE CHAPEL | 25 OLD JÜRI'S SOAP SHOP | 45 LUHAMAA CHURCH |
| 5 INARA VANAVALGÕ CAFÉ | 26 LÕUNALAAGRI HIKING TRAIL | 46 CAFÉ KIVITII |
| 6 MIKITAMÄE VILLAGE CHAPELS | 27 PIUSA CAVES VISITOR CENTER | 47 CAFÉ PIIRI |
| 7 VÄRSKA SPA | 28 PIUSA POTTERY | 48 NOPRI DAIRY FARM |
| 8 VÄRSKA NATURAL MINERAL WATER | 29 OBINITSA CHURCH AND CEMETERY | 49 PULLIJÄRV HIKING TRAIL |
| 9 SETO LINE | 30 SINGING MOTHER MONUMENT | 50 ANDRI-PEEDO GOAT FARM |
| 10 VÄRSKA CHURCH | 31 CAFÉ TAARKA TARÕ | 51 HINO LANDSCAPE PROTECTION AREA |
| 11 VÄRSKA VISITOR CENTER | 32 SETO STUDIO-GALLERY | 52 PSKOV-CAVES MONASTERY AT PECHORY |
| 12 THE NORTHERN CAMP | 33 HÄRMA WALLS | 53 PECHORY CITY HISTORY MUSEUM |
| 13 CAFÉ SETO TSÄIMAJA | 34 PIUSA RIVER VALLEY HIKING TRAIL | 54 PECHORY VARVARA CHURCH |
| 14 VÄRSKA FARM MUSEUM | 35 OBINITSA MUSEUM | 55 TAILOVO CHURCH |
| 15 ÖRSAVA LAKE HIKING TRAIL | 36 OBINITSA VILLAGE CHAPEL | 56 IZBORSK CASTLE |
| 16 VÄRSKA WATER COMPANY | 37 TOBROVA VILLAGE CHAPEL | 57 NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC YELLOW WINDOWS |
| 17 TRESKI VILLAGE CHAPEL | 38 SERGA VILLAGE CHAPEL | |
| 18 SAATSE "BOOT" | 39 MEREMÄE VIEWING TOWER | |
| 19 LASKEVÄLJA BIKE TRAIL | 40 VASTSELIINA EPISCOPAL CASTLE AND MEDIEVAL THEME PARK | |
| 20 SAATSE CHURCH | 41 MIIKSE CHURCH | |
| 21 SAATSE MUSEUM | | |



BORDER



ROAD