Accessible Hiking Guidelines for Foreigners and Cross-Cultural Social Groups

Tested with ~40 international participants on a pilot hike Lilaste-Carnikava, Latvia, 28.09.2024.

Within project "Accessible Hiking Trails"

By NGO "Movement Spontaneous"

Introduction

The **Accessible Hiking Trails** initiative aims to open up the natural landscapes of Latvia and Estonia to social groups of foreigners living temporarily in these countries. These groups include international students, international employees, refugees, and tourists. Through simple, accessible hikes this project promotes an inclusive environment where people from different cultural backgrounds can enjoy nature, connect with locals, and build new relationships.

These guidelines have been created to help **hiking organizers, service providers, NGOs, and local authorities** successfully plan and carry out hikes that are accessible to foreign participants. They provide practical, step-by-step instructions on how to:

- Engage and motivate international participants,
- Plan and lead inclusive and safe hikes,
- Overcome language barriers and cultural differences,
- Ensure all participants, regardless of their experience or knowledge of the local terrain, feel comfortable and welcome.

These guidelines will help you organize inclusive hikes that connect locals and foreigners, enriching the social and cultural environment of Latvia and Estonia. Whether you're experienced or new to leading hikes, you'll find tips for planning, preparation, participant engagement, and safety to create accessible, memorable experiences.

You can watch an educational film in addition to these guidelines - https://youtu.be/2rUlZgjUdcU .

1. Overview and Objective

- **Project Goal**: Make hiking accessible for foreigners living temporarily in Latvia or Estonia (students, workers, refugees, tourists) through simple, organized hikes.

- **Purpose**: Provide tourism organizers, NGOs, and hiking leaders with practical guidelines on how to engage international groups and ensure a fun and inclusive experience for all participants.

2. Identifying and Engaging Your Target Audience

- **Who to Engage**: Foreign students (e.g., Erasmus exchange students), international employees, refugees, tourists.

- **How to Engage**: Use social media platforms like Facebook Groups, Instagram, and WhatsApp (e.g., Erasmus Network) to promote your hike. Also ask local universities and NGO's to share information within their international audience. Influencers and content creators within the target group can be great promoters.

- **Key Motivators**:

  - Free participation and free food are key to attracting participants.

  - Good weather and a simple packing list will help avoid dropouts.

  - Keep hikes short and beginner-friendly (10-15 km is ideal).

  - Using international languages like English for advertising and communication will be more welcoming than relying on local languages.

3. Organizing the Hike

- **Planning**:

  - **Route**: Use tested and safe routes to avoid issues. Choose easy and short to medium length routes, 10-15 km is perfect for new hikers. Use websites such as Baltictrails.eu to find and download GPX files for the chosen route.(A GPX file is a standard file format used to store GPS data, such as routes, waypoints, and tracks. It's commonly used for outdoor activities like hiking or cycling, allowing users to share and follow pre-planned routes on GPS devices or apps.

  - **Group size**: Group size will depend on the popularity of the event and engagement of foreign communities. Make sure you create a registration form and also mention if there are any limits to the group size. Expect 50-80% of registered participants to show up. If the weather forecast is not favorable, expect a larger dropout rate. If numbers of the group exceed 50 people, make sure to contact the local municipality for approval and additional guidance.

  - **Pre-event communication**: Create a public event.

    1) Facebook is currently a great platform to create a public event, reaching a wide audience and attracting diverse participants. Ensure the event page is engaging and informative, with details about the hike's purpose, meeting point, schedule, and level of difficulty. Use accessible language, primarily in English, and add vibrant images of past hikes or the landscapes participants will experience to spark interest and excitement.

Figure 1, Example of a vibrant promotional photo

Movement Spontaneous, Boards You un 3 citu rīkotie pasākumi

Lilastes stacija, Carnikava, LV-2163, Latvija

Ilgums: 5 h

Publisks pasākums · Ikviens Facebook tīklā vai ārpus tā

❤️ It's time for a student hike! Celebrate the beginning of the warm autumn season by staying active and joining international students for a 10-15 km morning hike through forest trails near Lilaste beach. Expect some community building activities and a tasty pizza at the end of the hike!

🎒 Be prepared – bring a fully charged smartphone, plenty of water, your favorite snacks, comfortable shoes, an extra set of clothes and socks (for the activities at the end) and see you on the trail!

📍 Meeting point: Starting location will be announced in the participants' WhatsApp chat after registration. Each participant is responsible for purchasing their own public transport ticket. Tickets can be bought in advance online at vivi.lv or via the Mobilly app.

✍️ Participation is free of charge. Registration close on Thursday at 18:00. To register, click "Going" and fill out the form:
https://airtable.com/appSPk0ipeE0cUBQ1/shrUVTjvy9r1kAWqV . Anyone can join the hike, you don't have to be a student to join.

🌲 This activity is part of the project "Forest and Coastal Hiking Trails' accessibility improvement for different social groups (Accessible Hiking Trails)" (EE-LV00013),The project is implemented with the financial support of the European Union's Interreg Estonia-Latvia 2021-2027 program. For more information about the project, visit:
https://letshike.co/projects .

❗ NB! This event might be photographed or filmed. By participating in the activity, you consent to photo, video and audio recording of you and their release or reproduction to be used for promotional purposes, advertising, inclusion on websites, or for any other purpose unless noted differently.

Q&A - 26368790 Andra, 20227957 Anna

Lilastes stacija, Carnikava, LV-2163, Latvija
57,182160, 24,335310

Viesi   Skatīt visu

| 17 | 30 |
| Went | Interested |

Privātums · Noteikumi · Reklāma · Reklāmu izvēle ▷ · Sīkfaili · Vairāk · Meta © 2024

Figure 2, Example of the public Facebook event

2) Create a registration form, with questions / fields such as:

- Name and surname
- Phone nr. with country code (If you plan to create a WhatsApp group chat)
- E-mail (If you plan to send information via email)
- Your Nationality
- Instagram or other social media (if a participant wants to be tagged in the photos and videos)
- I accept that event will be photographed and filmed (Tick-Box)
- I acknowledge and accept that my data will be processed in accordance with applicable data protection regulations (Tick-Box)
- Please provide any relevant information, such as dietary preferences or accessibility requirements
- Space for comments or questions

3) Include a link to the hike's WhatsApp group to stay in touch with participants. Message practical info about the hike including transport departures, length of the hike, trail route, weather forecast packing list etc. If planning is done by a team of people consider creating a separate communication channel for organizers only.

4) Ensure you promote your event across various platforms, such as LinkedIn, interest groups, local community centers (via physical posters), and others, as some people may not use Meta products like Facebook, Instagram, or WhatsApp.

- **Roles and Responsibilities**:

  - **Team Leader:** Coordinates the hike, leads the group from the front, and manages communication, must be able to make quick and educated decisions to ensure the safety and enjoyment of all.

  - **Support Lead:** Helps guide the group during the hike and ensures that all necessary equipment (e.g. including at least three radios) is available for effective communication, assist with navigation, monitor the group's pace.

  - **Activity & Food Lead**: Manages food distribution (snacks or a light meal during the hike), coordinates with service providers or sponsors to deliver the food on site if necessary, and plans any extra activities (games, cultural exchanges).

  - **Trail End Coordinator:** Ensures that all participants are accounted for at the end of the hike and communicates with the Team Leader about the group's progress.

  - **Communication specialist**: Creates publicity for the event, answers frequently asked questions.

4. Communication and Inclusivity

- **Overcoming Language Barriers**: All information should be in English (or another widely spoken language), but some participants may still face language barriers. To ensure inclusivity, use visual aids like signs, symbols, and maps with clearly marked routes and important stops to help everyone follow along easily. Apps with GPS trail maps and added landmarks are an excellent solution for providing detailed, accessible information. If further assistance is needed, tools like Google Translate, Siri, or Microsoft Translator can offer real-time voice-to-text translations, ensuring effective communication throughout the hike.

- **Inclusivity**: Avoid separating foreigners from locals; mixed groups foster new connections and experiences.

- **Group Dynamics**:

  - **Introduction Circle**: At the start, have everyone say their name, where they're from, and what they expect from the hike. It breaks the ice and fosters cross-cultural exchanges.

  - **Tracking Participants**: Have a sign-in sheet at the start of the hike to ensure everyone is accounted for. Signing the sheet can also serve as confirmation that participants are responsible for their own safety and as consent for organizers to take photographs of them.

  - **Buddy System:** Pair participants up to foster interaction and ensure no one gets left behind during the hike, enhancing both social dynamics and safety.

- **Group Roles:** Assign specific roles like "Helper with Food," "Team Exercise Leader," or "Support Lead" to keep the group organized and to encourage teamwork.

- **Conversation Prompts:** Throughout the hike, suggest simple conversation topics to encourage discussions, such as asking about favorite hiking experiences or cultural differences.

5. Equipment and Packing List

- **Simple Gear**: Send a packing list ahead of time to participants. Essentials should include:

  - Comfortable walking shoes or hiking boots (suitable for coastal, forest, or uneven terrain)

  - Weather-appropriate clothing:
    - Waterproof jacket or poncho
    - Layers for warmth (sweater or a thermal shirt for colder days)
    - Light, breathable clothing for warmer weather

  - Sun protection:
    - Sunscreen
    - Hat or cap
    - Sunglasses

  - Hydration and snacks:
    - Water bottle (at least 1–2 liters, especially for longer hikes)
    - Energy-rich snacks (e.g., nuts, dried fruit, granola bars)

  - Comfortable backpack to carry essentials comfortably

  - Personal items:
    - Any necessary medications (especially for allergies or health conditions)
    - Basic first aid items (band-aids, blister pads)

- **Optional**:

  - Lightweight blanket or mat for resting

  - Trekking poles (for added stability on rough terrain)

  - Bug spray or repellent (particularly in forested areas)

  - Power bank for charging phone etc. (especially for longer hikes)

  - Camera or smartphone for photos

- **Additional Tip:** For those participants who don't own hiking gear, consider offering advice on affordable rental options or local stores where they can purchase essentials at reasonable prices.

  See an Example of a packing list in Appendix Nr. 10.

6. Food and Activities

- **Motivational Factor**: Food is a big motivator for foreigners and students with tight budgets. Offer free, simple food like sandwiches, fruit, snacks or meals that can be prepared by adding hot water

(couscous, buckwheat flakes, corn flakes, pea flakes, potato porridge with milk powder and much more) [see Appendix 10]. Try to include dietary options to cater to various preferences (vegetarian, lactose free, halal, etc.).

- **Where to Eat**: Plan to stop for lunch midway through the hike. It gives participants a chance to rest and socialize. Benches or dry wood logs will be suitable for sitting, but if there are none on the way, you can ask participants to bring sitting pads.

- **Introduction circle:** Takes place at the beginning of the hike and serves as an icebreaker for participants to meet each other. The Team Leader initiates the conversation by gathering everyone into a physical circle and posing introductory questions. They also outline the day's agenda, including when breaks will occur. A useful tip is for the Team Leader to use a megaphone to ensure everyone can hear each other clearly.

- **Team-building exercises:** Promote collaboration and enhance connections among participants. Activities can include fun challenges along the way that require teamwork, encouraging communication and interaction. Additionally, shared meal preparation, such as cooking together over a fire, or a sauna break, fosters a friendly atmosphere and strengthens relationships among group members.

- **Feedback circle:** Occurs at the end of the hike, providing participants with an opportunity to reflect on their experience. The Team Leader leads this session by gathering everyone into a circle again and encouraging each person to share what they enjoyed the most. They also outline any next steps or plans for future hikes. Again, having a megaphone is beneficial.

7. Transport and Service Availability

- **Logistics:** Provide clear transportation details well in advance, including public transport routes, schedules, and the exact address of the main transport hub (e.g., train station or bus station). Be sure to clearly specify where participants should meet at the start of the hike and the time to gather. Finding the right place can be very frustrating for those who are not familiar with the local transportation system and language.

- **Transport and Schedule:** Share links to local transportation schedules for Latvia and Estonia. Baltictrails.eu provides a comprehensive summary of available routes and schedules for hikers, covering all types of transportation, including air, car, bus, and train, specifically tailored for the Baltic region: Baltic Coastal Hiking: Getting there & around and Baltic Forest Hiking: Getting there & around.

- **Accommodation:** If the hike is longer or involves multiple days, it's important to inform participants about nearby accommodation options. Hiker-friendly accommodations are often available along the Baltic Trails route. This label is awarded to service providers in the Baltic States that cater specifically to hikers by offering relevant services and amenities. This label is not tied to any specific pathway or route. Find more details about hiker-friendly accommodations here: Hiker - friendy Sign: Meaning and Hiker - friendly Accommodation: Providers list .

- **Cancellations:** In the event of a cancellation (e.g., due to severe weather), inform participants as early as possible. However, we advise against canceling for mild bad weather; instead, provide free raincoats or encourage participants to bring appropriate clothing. Ask all participants to notify you if they can't attend. Knowing the exact number of attendees helps organizers better plan activities and meals.

8. Safety and Risks

- **First Aid**: Always carry a basic first aid kit and have a team member responsible for health and safety.

- **Local Hazards**: Provide brief information on local flora/fauna if participants are unfamiliar with them (e.g., ticks, mosquitos, stinging plants).

9. Post-Hike Feedback and Follow-Up

- **Gathering Feedback**: Use a simple questionnaire or poll to gather feedback on the hike's organization, inclusivity, and participant satisfaction.

- **Data gathering:** With previous consent from the questionnaire, record data from the participants (the number that registered vs the number that actually showed up, their nationalities, etc.) to evaluate the success of each event and identify areas for improvement in future hikes.

- **Communication:** Use the participants' chat in e-mail list to inform them about upcoming events, share photos, and provide feedback. Be sure to keep the chat focused and avoid sending spam messages.

10. Additional Tips

- **Adapt to Group Size**: For larger groups (over 50), check with the municipality for permits and have atleast 3 persons guiding the goup, one in the front, one in the middle and one in the back. For smaller groups 1-2 guides are sufficient.

- **Cultural Exchange**: Plan additional activities (e.g., cultural storytelling, games) that encourage participants to share their backgrounds. You can do interviews to better know the participants, you can ask questions such as

- **Be Flexible**: Hiking may take longer than expected, especially if the group is large and diverse in skill level. Plan for extra time. Better promise that the event will be longer, rather than squeezing everything in only a few hours.

Appendices

1. Trello Board for planning a hike and event management

Screenshot of an example Trello board for planning a hike in Finland.
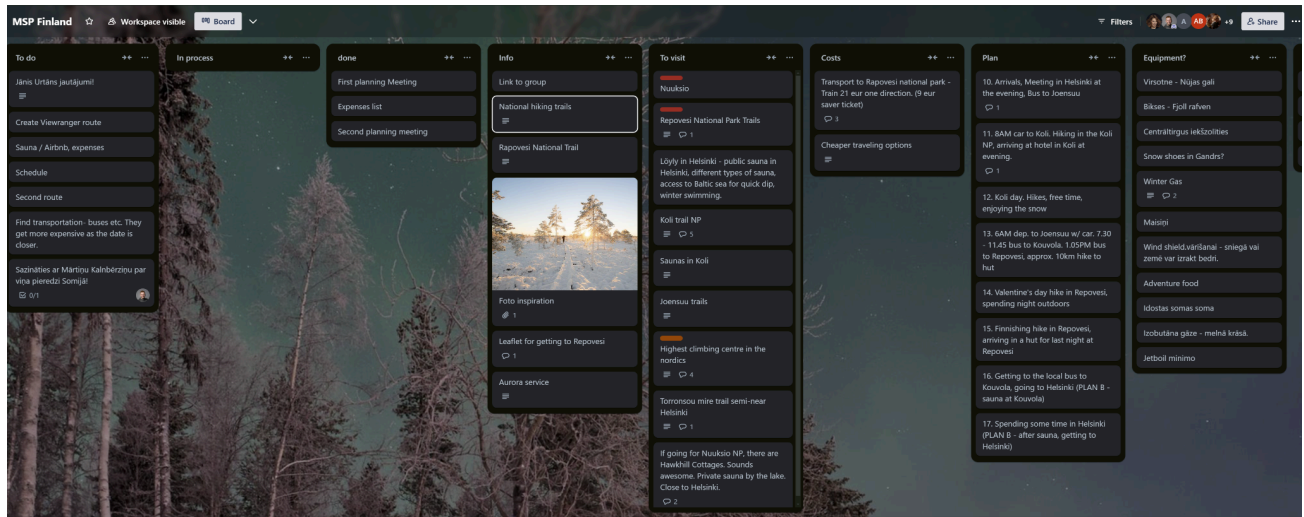
2. Sample Registration Form
Screenshot of the Student Pizza Hike event registration form made in airtable.com

3. **Creation of a Facebook event or other public event platform**
   Screenshot of making a [Facebook event](#). Some tips for creating events are adding co-hosts, setting clear location and time, adding registration link, and organizing content into themed paragraphs with visual aids like emojis. Also, consider other platforms beyond Facebook for event promotion.

4. **Promotional Channels and Posts**

Example of a promotional post shared by RTU International Student Department on Instagram.
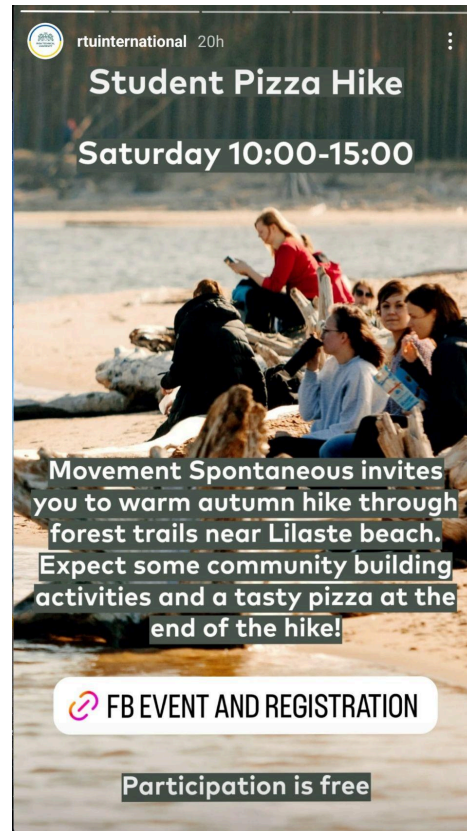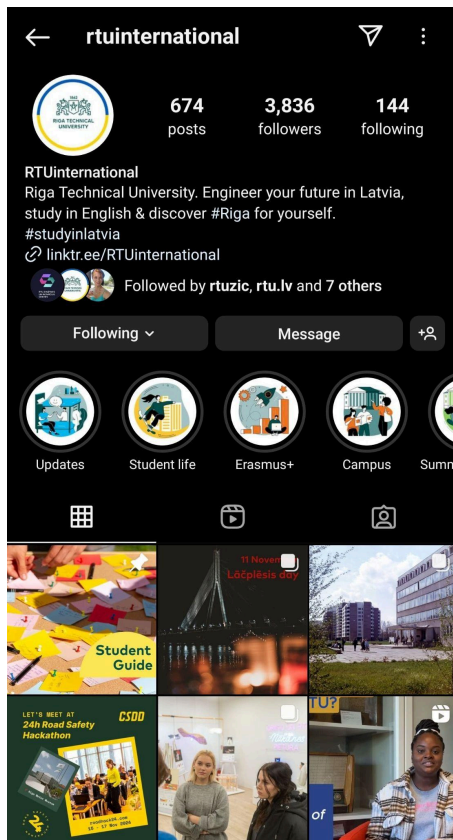
5. **Participant WhatsApp Chat**

Screenshots of relevant or helpful conversations, such as coordinating transport schedules, sharing weather forecast, packing list or other key details. The chat was used also to share a real life location, when one of the participants missed the train and joined later and continued the hike by making a shortcut provided by the Hike Leader in order to catch the rest of the group.
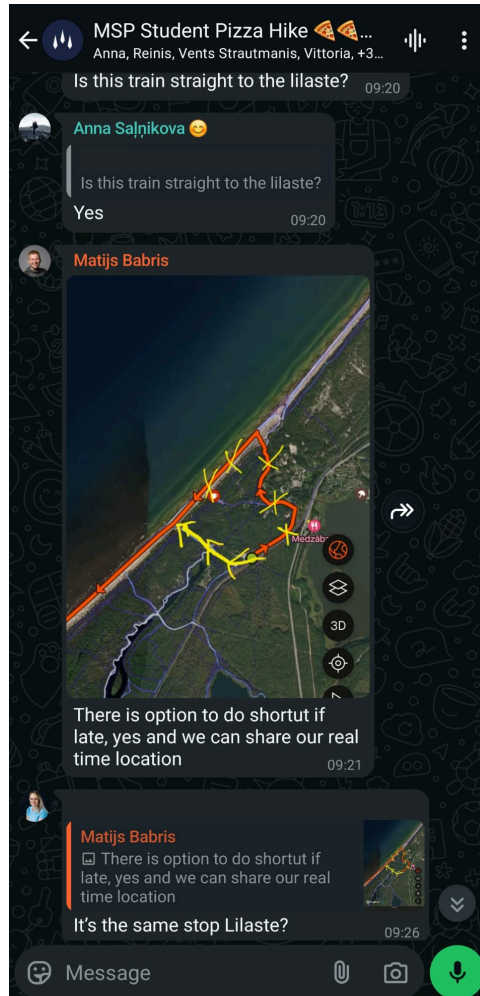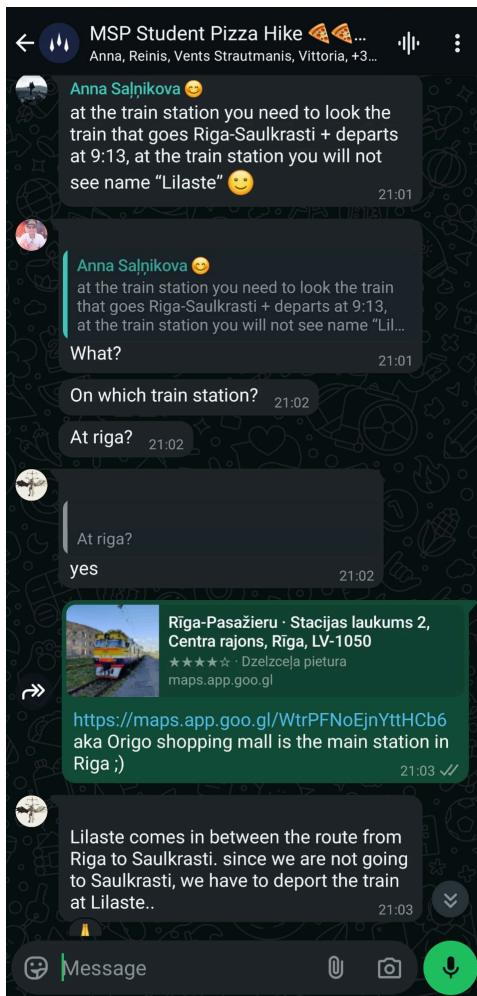
6. **Hiking Route on Strava**
   Screenshot of a Student Pizza Hike event Strava route, link to the route - https://strava.app.link/85w7QRQMcNb
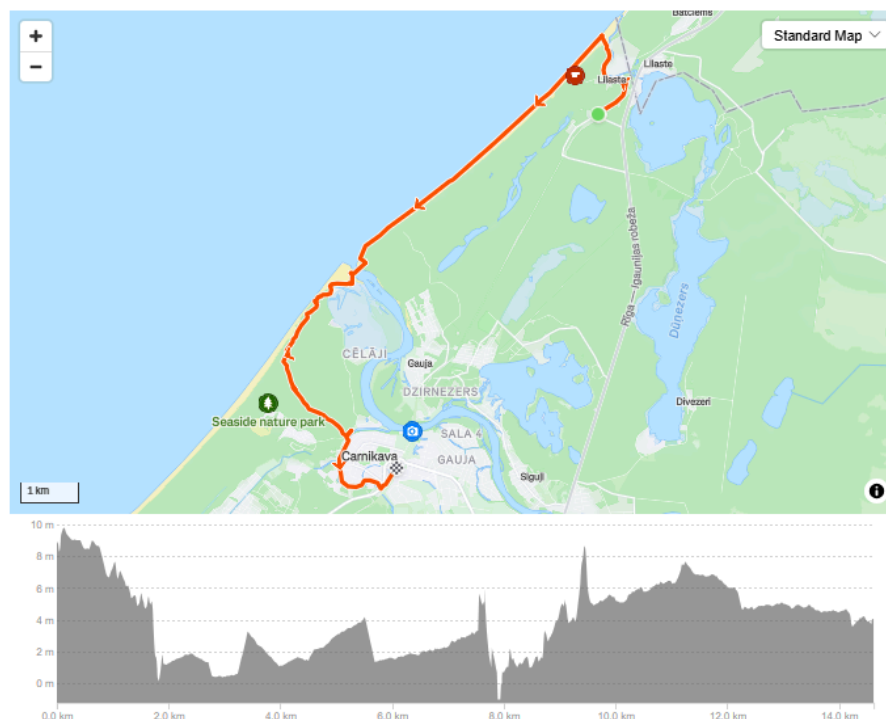
7. **Simple Packing List and a following message**

Hey! Please read the information about the event below and don't hesitate to ask if you have any questions.

📍 Meeting Point: 10:01 AM at Lilaste Train station on September 28th.

🚈 The train from Riga Central Station departs at 9:13 AM. Each participant is responsible for purchasing their own public transport ticket. Tickets can be bought in advance online at Vivi.lv or via the Mobilly app. Of course, you're welcome to arrive by bus, car, or any other preferred transportation.

📱 During the hike, you'll need to complete an activity using your phone, so please ensure it's fully charged or bring a power bank.

🧳 Don't forget to check the packing list to make sure you have everything you need!

🗺️ Please make sure you check out and download the route - https://strava.app.link/85w7QRQMcNb

8. **Introduction Circle**
   Photo of participants joining an ice-breaking activity called "introduction circle" and also the Hike Leader briefing the group about the event.

9. **Team Building Activity**
   Photos of a team-building exercise with river crossing for participant engagement. All 40+ participants had to cross the river with a single raft + 10-15 safety vests and sup paddles. The group had to make a strategy on how to transport everyone over the Gauja river.

10. **Lunch Preparation**

Image with ingredients for hiking lunch recipes used for the Student Pizza Hike and printed out as stickers (recipes file here). Additionally large thermos with hot water was provided. One recipe consists of a base of 3tbs., some flavor for creaminess and additives, like dills or sun dried onion, etc.

Griķu pārslas 3 ēd.k. Buckwheat flakes 3 tbs.	Čili un mango pulveris ½ ēd.k. Chili & mango powder ½ tbs.
Kukurūzas pārslas 2 ēd.k. Corn flakes 2 tbs.	Vegānu mērces 3 veidi ⅓ ēd.k. Vegan souce 3 types ⅓ tbs.
Zirņu pārslas 3 ēd.k. Pea flakes 3 tbs.	Buljona kubs 3 veidi ¼ kuba bouillon cube 3 types ¼ cube
Kartupeļu pārslas 3 ēd.k. Potato flakes 3 tbs.	Dilles Dill
Piena pulveris 1 ēd.k. Milk powder 1 tbs.	Saulē kaltēti sīpoli Sun-dried onions
Ķiploku un zaļumu pulveris ½ ēd.k. Garlic & herbs powder ½ tbs.	Ķiploku granulas Garlic granules
Ranch pulveris ½ ēd.k. Ranch powder ½ tbs.	Garša un krēmīgums / Flavor and creamieness
Bāze / Base	Piedevas / additives

Bāze / Base

Griķu pārslas 3 ēd.k.
Buckwheat flakes 3 tbs.

Kukurūzas pārslas 2 ēd.k.
Corn flakes 2 tbs.

Zirņu pārslas 3 ēd.k.
Pea flakes 3 tbs.

Kartupeļu pārslas 3 ēd.k.
Potato flakes 3 tbs.

Garša un krēmīgums / Flavor and creamieness

Piena pulveris 1 ēd.k.
Milk powder 1 tbs.

Ķiploku un zaļumu pulveris ½ ēd.k.
Garlic & herbs powder ½ tbs.

Ranch pulveris ½ ēd.k.
Ranch powder ½ tbs.

Čili un mango pulveris ½ ēd.k.
Chili & mango powder ½ tbs.

Vegānu mērces 3 veidi ⅓ ēd.k.
Vegan souce 3 types ⅓ tbs.

Buljona kubs 3 veidi ¼ kuba
bouillon cube 3 types ¼ cube

Piedevas / additives

Dilles
Dill

Saulē kaltēti sīpoli
Sun-dried onions

Ķiploku granulas
Garlic granules

Photos of participants preparing their lunch.

11. **Visual Overview of Sea and Forest Trails**
    Photos of trail markers, seascapes, and forest landscapes.

12. **Use of GPX trail file on a smartphone and a smartwatch**
    Photo of participants navigating using Strava GPX route.
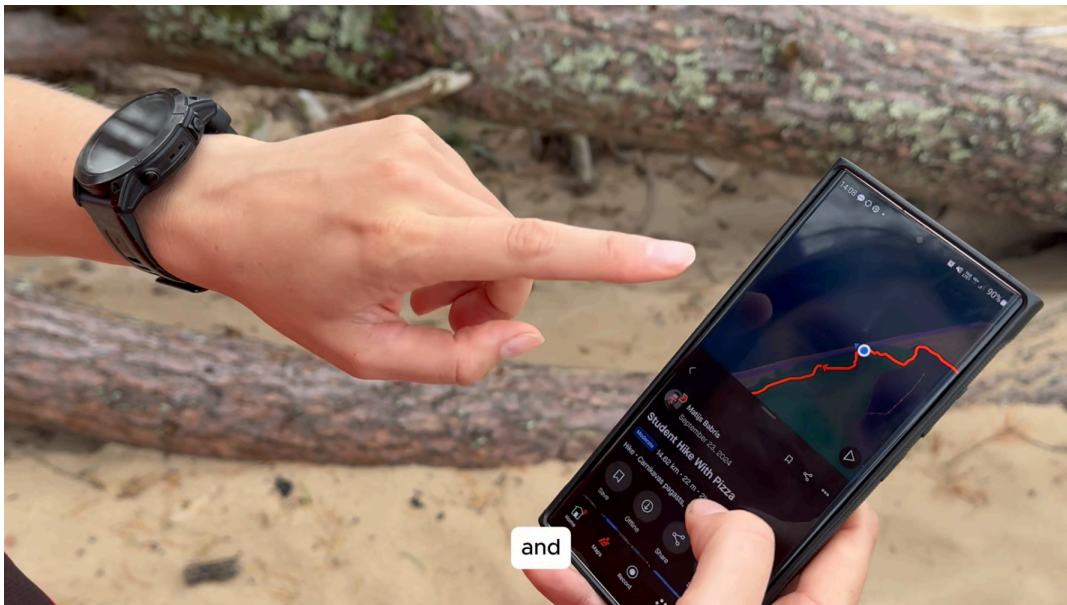
13. **Feedback Circle Activity**
    Photo of an end-of-hike sharing reflections and favorite parts of the hike during the "Feedback circle" using a megaphone. Each participant gets a badge (token) for the hike with a symbol or logo that represents the hike. Participants can collect these tokens during MS hikes.

14. **Final Event Activity with a Pizza-Making workshop**
    Photo of the Pizza making activity

15. **Post-Event Social Media Update**
    Screen capture of a post-event summary on LinkedIn.

Movement Spontaneous
122 followers
1mo • Edited • 🌐

🌿 Student Pizza Hike: Enhancing Accessibility and Connection Through Nature 🟢

During the World Walking Day on 28.09, over 40 participants, both locals and internationals, joined a 15 km hike along the Baltic Coastal Trail as part of the Accessible hiking Trails project. This initiative focuses on making hiking more accessible for foreign language and cross-cultural social groups residing temporarily in Latvia and Estonia.

Key moments included:
 ◆ Team-building challenge: Crossing the Gauja river on a raft, fostering teamwork.
 ◆ Cultural exchange: Participants from diverse backgrounds connected through shared outdoor experiences.
 ◆ Methodology testing: Practical considerations like transportation, necessary gear, and rural area navigation were piloted to refine the hiking accessibility methodology.

The hike concluded with a reflection circle and oven baked pizza, highlighting the value of inclusive outdoor activities. This project, supported by the European Union Interreg Estonia-Latvia Program 2021-2027, will result in a methodology for organizers working with diverse social groups, produced in digital format.

Stay tuned for more initiatives as we continue fostering accessibility and connection through outdoor education! 🌲

Andra Marta Babre, Anna Salnikova, Matijs Babris, Vents Strautmanis, Interreg Volunteer Youth Rīgas Tehniskā universitāte (Riga Technical University) Erasmus Student Network Latvia

16. **Event Photo Gallery**
    Screen capture of a photo gallery from the event shared via failiem.lv.

17. **Useful Resources**
    List of local and international community groups (e.g., Expats in Latvia and Estonia, RTU, ESN).

Facebook Groups:

- *Expats in Latvia* / *Expats & Foreigners in Estonia* – Communities where members share information on local events, meetups, and other useful info.
- Latvian groups like Pārgājieni. Par un Ap. / Dodies dabā – Groups dedicated to sharing hiking routes, tips, and organizing group hikes across Latvia.
- Estonian groups like Matkasõbrad

Foreign Student Networks:

- *Erasmus Student Network e.g. ESN Latvia* and *ESN Estonia* – Both organizations announce outdoor events, hikes, and excursions for exchange students.
- RTU International Student department – they are active on social media @rtuinernational, and will be happy to share your event!
- RTU Science And Innovation center chat "RTU jaunie inovatori" with around 500 active members – also a great place where to post info about events to a larger international audience
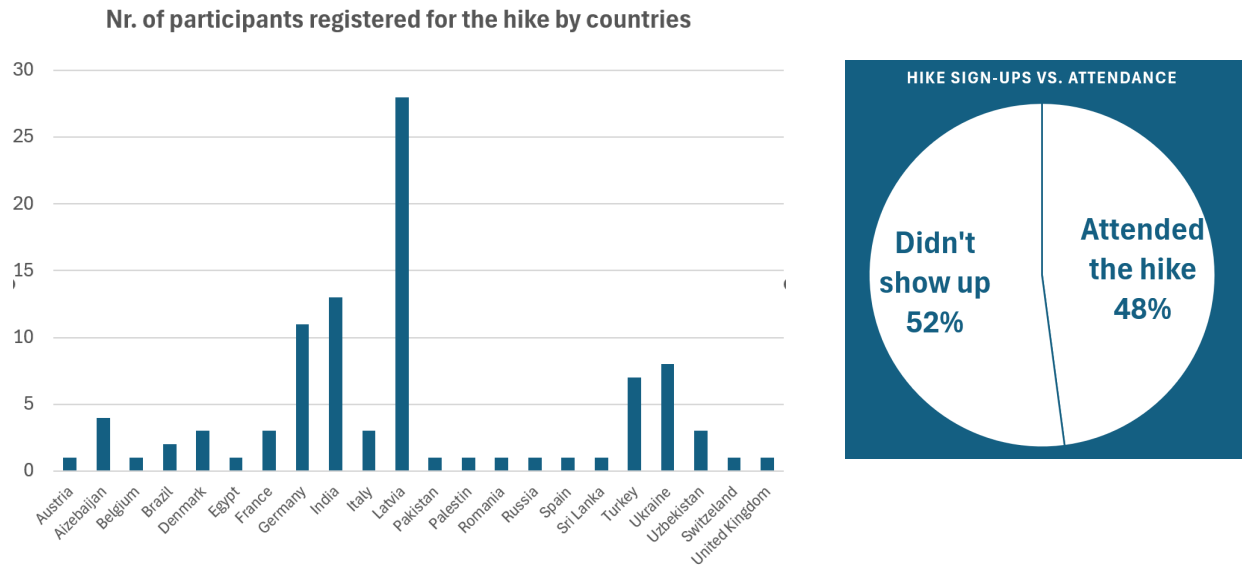- RSU Student council and other universitie's councils and foreign student departments

Outdoor Adventure Portals:

- *Baltic Hiking Trails* (Facebook Pages and Website) – Shares information on cross-border hiking trails, including the Forest and Coastal Hiking Trails in Latvia and Estonia.
- Baltic Nature Tourisms (Facebook Page, Instagram and Website)
- *Komoot* – An app and online community where members can find and share hiking routes in Latvia and Estonia.

18. **Data Summary Charts**

Charts showing event stats (e.g.,nationalities of registered participants, sign-ups vs. attendance,, etc.).

Nr. of participants registered for the hike by countries

HIKE SIGN-UPS VS. ATTENDANCE

Didn't show up 52%

Attended the hike 48%

Guidelines developed in 2024 by NGO "Movement Spontaneous" in collaboration with Riga Technical University Science and Innovation Centre and International Student Department as part of the European Union's INTERREG Estonia-Latvia program project "Forest and Coastal Hiking Trails' accessibility improvement for different social groups" No. (EE-LV00013). The pilot test for the student hike was conducted on September 28, 2024.

Interreg

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Estonia – Latvia

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