

18 WALKING FOREST TRAILS IN LATVIA AND ESTONIA



LATVIA AND ESTONIA

Itinerary: RĪGA – INČUKALNS – SIGULDA – LĪGATNE – KĀRĻI – CĒSIS – VALMIERA – VALKA / VALGA – CIRGAĻI – ALŪKSNE – VECLAICENE – HAANJA – VĀRSKA – TARTU – LAKE PEIPSI – KURTNA – TOILA – VALASTE – KĀSMU – TALLINN

Hiking route length:   ~85 km;  ~890 km

Duration: **12 days**

Difficulty level: 

Practical info:  Rīga  Tallinn

This is the longest of the Forest Trail tours, where you will hike on many beautiful forest nature trails in Latvia and Estonia. These nature trails are part of the Forest Trail and this tour is suitable for self-drive tourists, who wish to hike different sizes of trails and get an impression of the forest diversity in both countries. You have the possibility to see the northern coniferous forests with spruces and pines, broadleaf forests, wet floodplain forests and picturesque forests growing on slopes and ravines. You will also see the most interesting tourist sights in Latvia and Estonia, which are close to the Forest Trail. In Latvia you will visit Sigulda, the historic Līgatne papermill village, medieval Cēsis, the River Amata valley, which is located in Gauja National Park. Then you will drive to the less populated eastern part of Latvia – the Northern Gauja protected landscape area, Aluksne Town and hike in the Kornei-Peļi subglacial depression, one of the most impressive ravines in Latvia. You can climb to Drusku castle mound – the highest and steepest of all the castle mounds in Latvia. When entering Estonia, you will see the highest point of the Baltics – Suur Munamagi Hill, where the observation tower is built. Further on, the tour will lead you to the River Piusa valley, Obinitsa, with the culture of Seto people. You will hike in the historic Varska resort town, which is very close to the Russian border. Then you will reach Tartu and Lake Peipsi, which is the 5th biggest lake in Europe. You will hike in the Kurtina landscape reserve, see the Ontika limestone cliff, Valaste waterfall – the highest in Estonia. Finally you will hike in one of the beautiful wooded areas in Estonia – Lahemaa National Park. The tour ends in Tallinn, where you can enjoy the medieval Old Town and many other attractions.



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DAY 1

Arrive in Rīga.

Pick-up the hired car at the airport.

Accommodation in Rīga.

DAY 2



Rīga – Inčukalns

→ ~41 km



Inčukalna Devil's cave trail

→ ~3 km

En route you can see the Inčukalns hunting palace and Devil's Cave. It is said that the Devil used to live in this cave, but was banished by the God of Thunder. The cave features a massive dome-shaped ceiling and a spring said to possess healing powers.



Inčukalns – Sigulda

→ 19 km



Hiking in Sigulda from the centre of town till Paradīzes Hill

→ ~5 km return

You will see the ravine of the River Vējupīte, Kraukļu Gorge –Paradīzes Hill with excellent views to the ancient valley of the River Gauja.

In Sigulda you can also visit the Sigulda Castle ruins, Gutman's Cave, Turaida Museum Reserve.

Accommodation in Sigulda.

DAY 3



Sigulda – Līgatne

→ 19 km



Līgatne Nature Trails

→ 5.5 km

Līgatne Nature Trails will reveal many wildlife species typical to Latvia. Here one can see the wild animals of Latvia – stags, roe deer, wild boar, bears, foxes, lynx, and two species of birds.



Līgatne – Kārļi

→ 21 km



Hiking Forest Trail: Amata Veclauču bridge – Zvārtes Rock

→ ~3 km

The Amata Trail in Gauja National Park is an excellent place for walks and nature discovery, exploring one of Latvia's deepest river valleys. At the end of the tour you will see Zvarte Rock. The height of the vertical red rock top reaches 35 m. It is located on the left bank of the River Amata and is one of the most picturesque rock exposures in Latvia.



Private transfer to hotel.

Accommodation in Kārļi.

DAY 4



Kārļi – Cēsis

→ 11 km

Option 1:



Cīrulīši Nature Trails

(3 trails of different lengths 2.7 km, 3.5 km and 6.2 km).

Option 2:



Hiking the Forest Trail section from Cēsis to the Ērģeļu Cliffs

(6 km in one direction, can organise a transfer back to town).

Sightseeing in Cēsis. Walk in the charming Old Town, the ruins of the Livonian Order Castle and the New Castle.

Accommodation in Cēsis.



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DAY 5



Cēsis – Valmiera – Valka – Cirgaļi

→ ~110 km



Hiking in the Northern Gauja protected landscape area

→ 5-6 km

You will see the Cirgaļi inland dunes and observation tower, which is 27 m high and offers an excellent view of the River Gauja, fields and forests.



Cirgaļi – Alūksne

→ ~78 km

We suggest exploring this beautiful town of Alūksne, situated in the north-east of Latvia, in the Alūksne highland, on the shore of Lake Alūksne. It is worth visiting the Temple Hill – an old Latgalian castle mound and place of the Old Town, the Sun bridge, the Castle manor park, Alūksne Lutheran Church and the Bible Museum.

Accommodation in Alūksne.

DAY 6



Alūksne – Veclaicene

→ ~24 km



Pelļi and Paganamaa Trail

→ 7 km

Trail along 7 lakes, which crosses the Latvian/Estonian border twice. It is recommended to climb to the Drusku castle mound near Korneti – an impressive terrain for Latvia, and here you will see as far as the Hanja highlands of Estonia.



Veclaicene – Haanja

→ 32 km

Accommodation in Haanja or surroundings.



DAY 7

On this day you will see the highest point of the Baltics – Suur Munamagi (318 m above sea level). It provides its visitors with a splendid 50 km range view of the Estonian nature. A viewing tower is built on top of this hill. In Haanja there is also the National Geographic yellow window, which draws guests' attention to special places, historical events, traditions, culture and nature in South-Estonia.



Haanja – Vana Vastseliina

→ ~25 km



**Hiking the River Piusa Trail:
Vana-Vastseliina – River Piusa valley – Lindsa – Obinitsa**

→ ~15 km

The Forest Trail section starts at Vastseliina Episcopal Castle ruins and goes along the primeval valley of the River Piusa to Obinitsa. There is also the highest sandstone outcrop wall in Estonia – Härma Walls, and several sites of former mills. We recommend to visit Obinitsa Museum, which offers an opportunity to learn about the unique history and culture of Setomaa through exploring the family life, traditions and customs of Seto families.



Obinitsa – Vana-Vastseliina

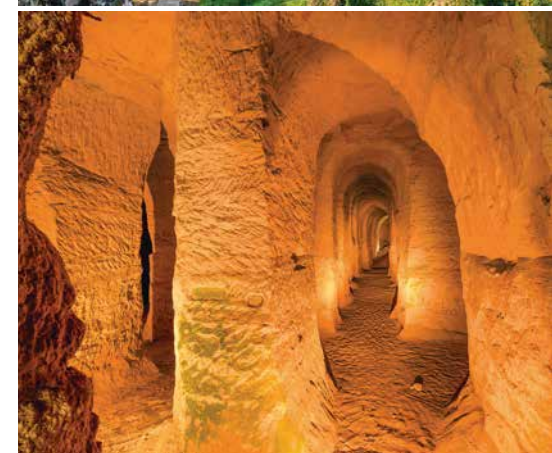
(~15 min., bus only operates on working days).



Vana-Vastseliina – Värskä

→ ~42 km

Accommodation in Värskä.



DAY 8



Hiking the Pikalombi nature trail in Värskas

→ 3.8 km shorter trail,
9.1 km longer trail

On these trails you can enjoy pine groves, birch groves, meadows and the Velna bog that emerged during the ice age. The trails give you a wonderful opportunity to explore the scenery of Värskas Bay and Lake Peipsi and the surroundings of the old Setomaa villages.



Värskas – Järvelja

→ ~50 km



Hiking the Järvelja Primeval Forest Nature Study Trail

→ 1-5 km

It is one of the oldest protection areas in Estonia. In Järvelja primeval forest it is all up to nature – both the birth and death of the trees. And this is the perfect place to observe how new life begins from a dead tree. The primeval forest offers a good overview of an ancient virgin forest and of the forest's lifecycle without mankind interrupting the evolution. Here, you will see the King's Oak (Kuningamänd), which is over 360 years old, as well as spruces that are more than 40 metres high – making them one of the highest trees in Estonia.

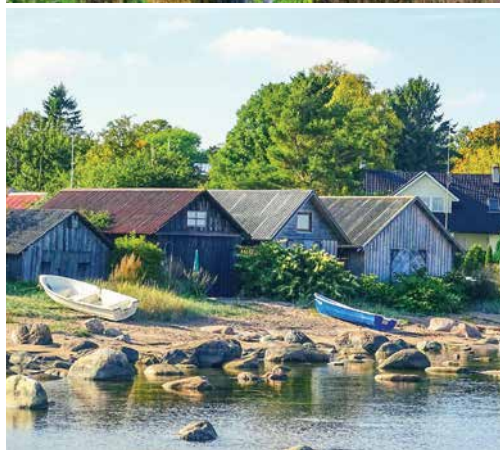


Järvelja – Tartu

→ 45 km

Sightseeing in Tartu.

Accommodation in Tartu.



DAY 9



Tartu – Alatskivi – Avinurme – Kurtna

→ 153 km

Explore the coast of Lake Peipsi, Alatskivi Castle, Avinurme crafts centre.



Hiking the Kurtna trail

→ 4.5 – 5.5 km

It starts and ends at a car park with a fireplace site near Lake Martiska. A marked trail forms a part of the Kurtna Landscape Conservation Area and introduces a variety of plants, landscapes, and lakes. Along the way, you will pass 12 interesting locations and lakes.



Kurtna – Toila

→ 25 km

Accommodation in Toila.

DAY 10



Toila – Valaste

→ 11 km

Explore the beautiful Valaste waterfall. It is located on the Ontika limestone cliff, and is more than 30 m high, making it the highest waterfall in Estonia. The waterfall can be admired from the side as well, which offers a lovely view of the layers formed over 400,000 million years.



Valaste – Käsmu

→ 102 km

Leave the car in an accommodation place.



Oandu – Vosu

→ 10 km

The trail goes through a beautiful, wooded inland dune area, where hikers can see cuts

on pine trees, used to extract resin from the trees. In autumn, mushrooms and blueberries adorn the edges of the trail.



Private transfer to the start point and back to the accommodation.

Accommodation in Käsmu or surroundings.

DAY 11

We recommend to visit the Käsmu captains' village and Marine Museum.



Käsmu – Eru

→ 9 km

This part of the Forest Trail passes through the fairy tale-like Käsmu Peninsula with its wooded dunes and moss-covered rock fields.

Private transfer back to the accommodation.

Accommodation in Käsmu or surroundings.

DAY 12



Käsmu – Tallinn

→ ~80 km

Sightseeing in Tallinn.

Accommodation in Tallinn.

