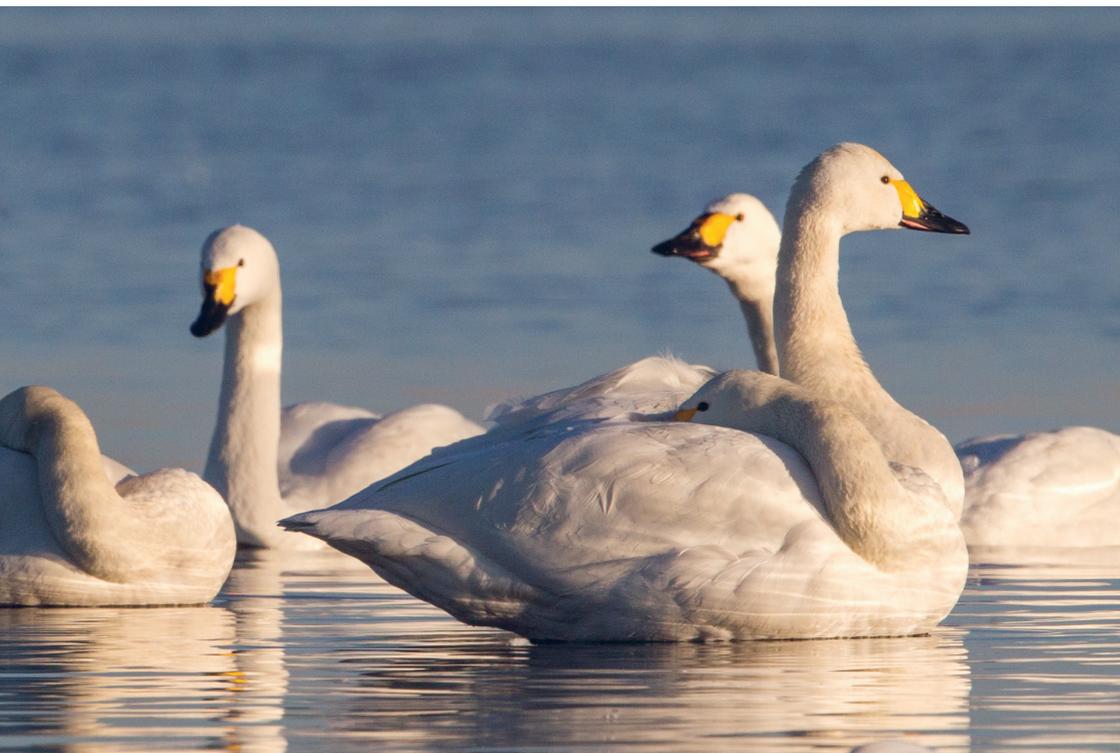
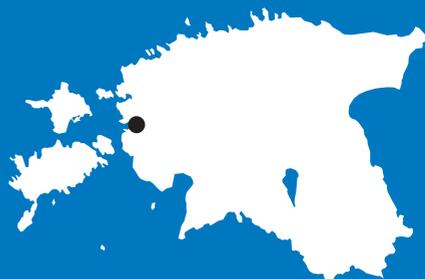




REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
ENVIRONMENTAL BOARD



Matsalu National Park



Matsalu National Park

Lääne County



Administrative authority of protected area

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WELCOME TO MATSALU NATIONAL PARK!

The predecessor of this national park, Matsalu Nature Reserve, was established in 1957 to protect birds and their nesting, moulting and stopover sites. In 1976, Matsalu was added to the List of Wetlands of International Importance, or the Ramsar List. The Ramsar Convention recognises nature reserves where wetlands are preserved and used sustainably. In 2004, the reserve was given the status of a national park.

Besides birds, Matsalu National Park aims to protect landscapes characteristic of Western Estonia and the cultural heritage of the Väinameri Sea region.

Matsalu National Park (surface area: 48,610 ha) incorporates the shallow Matsalu Bay, some 50 marine islands and islets, the surrounding portion of the Väinameri Sea, the delta and tributaries of the Kasari River, reed beds, various semi-natural communities and forest stands. A significant part of the national park features man-made landscapes (fields, parks, buildings and so on).

The national park spans the territories of four rural municipalities in Lääne County and in terms of management planning is divided into strict nature reserves, conservation zones and limited management zones.

The main sources of livelihood in the area include maintenance of semi-natural communities, agriculture, fishing and nature tourism.

Matsalu National Park has been awarded the European Diploma of Protected Areas by the Council of Europe in recognition of its efforts to protect biological, geological and landscape diversity in the area.



Tuudi River, Mati Kose

NATURAL VALUES

Meadows

In Matsalu, various types of meadow communities cover some 9,700 hectares. The most common are flood and coastal meadows. Other types represented in the area are alvar grasslands, wooded meadows, paludified meadows and dry grasslands.

A **coastal meadow** is an area of grassland which is subject to regular flooding by sea water and where vegetation is very low-lying due to livestock grazing. Coastal meadows often feature salt flats and halophilic plants.

In Matsalu National Park, coastal meadows cover approximately 3,000 hectares, being among the largest of their kind in Europe. The most representative coastal meadows in Matsalu are those in the village of Haeska on the northern shore of Matsalu Bay, the Põgari-Sassi coastal meadow by Topu Bay and the Salmi coastal meadow on the southern shore of Matsalu Bay.

Matsalu's coastal meadows are among its richest areas in terms of bird life, being particularly invaluable to *Charadriiformes* (waders), which need low-lying vegetation, puddles turned muddy by livestock and an open shoreline. During the migration period, the community serves as an important feeding and resting place for cranes and geese.

A **flood meadow** is an area of grassland beside a river which is subject to seasonal flooding by high waters and generally characterised by high vegetation. Flooded meadows remain open only when mowed or used for grazing livestock.

The easternmost part of Matsalu National Park is a 4,000-hectare flood meadow – the largest of its kind in Northern Europe – alongside the Kasari River and its tributaries.

During the spring floods, Kasari's flood meadow is transformed into an extension of Matsalu Bay, forming a huge field of water. The high waters typically do not subside for a couple of weeks until the ice cover in the bay has melted and the floodwater runs off into the sea. It is interesting to note that this meadow can be flooded as a result of storms coming in from the west or winds blowing persistently from the same direction, which can make the river flow backwards. A flooded meadow is an ideal spawning ground for fish. In spring, this meadow serves as a feeding ground for swans, geese and ducks, and later, once the water level has subsided, for species in the *Tringa* genus and the ruff. Kasari's flood meadow is also an invaluable nesting site for the corn crake, spotted crake and great snipe. In summer, roe deer and elk tend to gather in the area, while cranes use it as a moulting site.



Kasari's flood meadow, Toomas Tuul



Alvar, Arne Ader



Wooded meadow, Kaarel Kaisel

Natural conditions throughout the delta were profoundly affected by dredging operations carried out in the 1920s and 1930s with a view to promoting the mowing and gathering of hay on flood grasslands. To this end, straight channels were dug into the lower reaches of the Kasari River and its tributaries and extended so as to flow into the shallow Matsalu Bay. As a result, high waters subside more quickly in the flooded meadow and more sediment is carried off into the sea.

An **alvar** is a dry area of grassland on limestone bedrock covered with a thin layer of soil. It is characterised by low-lying vegetation, but is rich in plant species. Alvar grasslands feature shrubs such as juniper, hazel, hawthorn and honeysuckle. Such open areas dotted with shrubs host an unusual mix of bird species, providing an abundance of nesting sites (as well as a supply of berries and nuts in the autumn). Here you may spot the red-backed shrike, barred warbler, common linnet and common rosefinch. Alvars can gradually become overgrown – a process which causes the loss of their biodiversity. Alvars are quite common in Matsalu. The largest alvar grasslands are found in Puise, Rannaküla, Ullaste and Saastna.



Fly orchid, Kaarel Kaisal

Tree stands and wooded meadows

Traditionally, the forests in the national park have been used as wooded grasslands for mowing or grazing. Wooded meadows are among the plant communities with the highest levels of biodiversity. Here over 60 plant species can be found per square metre. Due to trees being sparsely scattered in wooded meadows, shade-loving and light-loving plants can grow side by side. The surface area of wooded meadows started rapidly declining in the 1950s when small-scale wooded grasslands and pastures were rendered obsolete by the transition to mass production. Wooded meadows, which once took up 4,500 hectares, now cover an area of just 50 hectares. A few clearings and lonely trees with broad crowns (typically twisted oaks) growing in the middle of forests stand witness to the former extent of wooded meadows. In Matsalu National Park the largest wooded meadows are those in Allika, Viita and Kiideva-Puise and in Matsalu forest itself. These meadows are home to various orchids, such as the common spotted orchid, lesser butterfly orchid, military orchid and early marsh-orchid.

Former wooded grasslands have evolved into boreo-nemoral forests, often found alongside the fen and mire forests characteristic of the region. Large, unfragmented forest areas include the Puise and Saardo forests on the northern shore of Matsalu Bay and the Võigaste and Matsalu forests on the southern shore of the bay. Alluvial forests, quite rare in Estonia, can be found in the delta of the Kasari River. These forests are very rich in bird species: over a hundred species use them as nesting grounds, and the density of bird populations is also exceptionally high. Among the more exotic bird species found here are the white-backed woodpecker, black woodpecker, grey-headed woodpecker and Eurasian golden oriole.



Short-billed dunlin, Kaarel Kaisel



Ruff, Kunter Tätte

Matsalu Bay, the Väinameri Sea and Islands

Matsalu Bay is the most important site on the coast of Estonia in which migrating ducks, swans, geese and cranes gather. Matsalu is situated on the East Atlantic Flyway and more than two million waterfowl pass over the national park annually. Of these birds, more than 230,000 stop in Matsalu for longer or shorter periods of time.

It is the shallow waters and large, well-maintained coastal meadows that attract the birds. The largest number of waterfowl and shorebirds flock here in spring (from mid-April to mid-May) and in autumn (from September to mid-October).

Matsalu Bay and the portion of the Väinameri Sea forming part of the National Park include around 50 marine islands and islets. The latter are a safe haven for nesting birds because of their inaccessibility to predators. Here, the density of bird populations is exceptionally high – the islets serve as nesting grounds for the great black-backed gull, European herring gull, common gull, common eider, velvet scoter, greylag goose, mute swan, tern, Eurasian oystercatcher, common ringed plover and many other bird species.

Reed beds

It is estimated that reed beds cover more than 20,000 hectares of Estonia's territory. The largest, approximately 2,000-hectare area of reed beds is located in the delta of the Kasari River, on the eastern shore of Matsalu Bay.

Reed beds are mostly formed from the common reed. In some places they include seaclubrush, reed mace, bulrush and others. Reeds favour shallow waters, but can grow on



Reed beds in Matsalu Bay, Mati Kose



Puise beach, 1926, Source: Haapsalu ja Läänemaa Muuseumid SA

dry land as well. The portions of reed beds exhibiting the greatest level of biodiversity and being otherwise highly valuable are found around pools of open water.

The reed beds in Matsalu serve as nesting grounds for the Eurasian bittern, Western marsh-harrier, greylag goose, great crested grebe, Eurasian coot, spotted crane, water rail, Savi's warbler, great reed warbler and many other birds. In late summer, when ducks moult and are unable to fly, the reed beds provide much-needed safety from predators and birds of prey. In autumn, large flocks of starlings and swallows use the reed beds as a resting site, while in winter they are inhabited by blue tits and lesser spotted woodpeckers.

High walls of reeds are also valued by mammals: elk and wild boar have been seen roaming the reed beds, while beavers, otters and American mink have been spotted on reeded shores.

CULTURAL HERITAGE

Throughout history, the landscapes of Matsalu have been shaped by human activity. In ancient times, farmers and those raising livestock readily used dry land that emerged from the sea. Over the centuries, human activity has given rise to open cultural landscapes and meadows rich in species. Culture as a factor affecting people's way of life also depends on the local natural conditions. Here, landscapes are enriched by old stone fences and low-lying farmhouses with thatched roofs made from reeds. Livelihoods come from fields, fishing, reed-gathering and crafts.

To attentive observers, the landscapes here tell many stories of times gone by. Ancient hoe-cultivated fields as well as settlements and burial sites are signs of early human activity. Slide, healing and sacrificial stones, as well as sacred trees and sites, speak of the worldview of former settlers. Remembering old work practices and types of land use helps us comprehend the co-existence of man and nature. The main purpose of protecting the national park's cultural heritage is to ensure that we recognise the value of human activity, give it meaning and are able to apply it in the modern world.

Visitors can learn about the region's cultural heritage at Hanila Museum (which is named after August Tampärg), Lihula Museum, Matsalu Nature Centre and Rõude Village Hall.

Traditional methods of farming and raising livestock. In the 20th century, the average size of farmsteads on manor estates was around 20 hectares, and there were typically a few cows, horses and pigs and up to 10 or so sheep and chickens. Farmers usually grew



Floral embroidery characteristic of Lääne County, Kaarel Kaisel

only enough food to feed themselves and their families. Fishing provided an additional food source and the little that may have been left over from a catch was sold. In spring, livestock usually grazed on the shore, after the hay-making period in hayfields and elsewhere; arable land was used to cultivate grain, potatoes and flax. Grain was milled locally, and village landscapes were dotted with post mills which have since perished. Modern-day cultural landscapes originate from the Soviet period, when agriculture was dominated by collective farms.

Fishing. Matsalu basin, significantly affected by fresh river water as well as salty sea water, has provided its inhabitants with a source of livelihood through fishing in rivers and reed beds, as well as offshore. In each area, slightly different fishing gear and methods were used.

Crafts. Simpler clothing and everyday items were typically made locally on farms. For more advanced designs, people would turn to specialised craftsmen in their own village or in nearby villages. In the southern part of Lääne County, an abundant heritage of textile items has been preserved – for example, folk costumes and carpets decorated with floral embroidery, and woven checked blankets.

Built heritage. All of the manor ensembles in the national park are of different styles and vary as to the degree they have been preserved. Threshing-room dwellings were built until World War II and a great number have survived to this day. Similarly to the farmers who migrated to Matsalu, builders were often from Muhu Island, which is why older architectural structures sometimes exhibit certain elements characteristic of said island. Another local feature is using timber from deciduous trees (especially oak) for making log walls.

Intangible cultural heritage. Also, the oral traditions of the inhabitants of the Matsalu region require preservation: documented work practices; skills; folk songs and stories; folklore and myths; place names; and more. This region stands out for its great number of healing trees and stones as well as natural sites to which a specific meaning was assigned.



Matsalu Manor, Kaarel Kaisel

SIGHTS

① **Matsalu Manor** was first mentioned in 1560 when it belonged to the order master of Lihula as an auxiliary manor. In the 1880s, the writer Eduard Bornhöhe (Brunberg) worked here as a private teacher. The building dates back to the second half of the 19th century, but may incorporate still older sections. Currently, the manor is privately owned.

② **Metsküla primary school** is the only school operating in the national park. Everyone in the school makes an effort to learn about and preserve natural environment and cultural heritage.

③ **Näärikivid** is a protected group of three large erratic boulders. The two larger stones are over 6 metres across, while the height of the largest stone is almost 2.7 metres. These boulders are associated with a number of local legends. There is a study trail leading to the boulders, but it is prohibited to use the trail during the nesting period of birds (from the breaking up of ice until July 1).

④ **Sauemeri and Lake Teorehe.** Where Saastna Peninsula joins the mainland there are two small coastal lagoons – Sauemeri (19.3 ha) and Lake Teorehe (6.8 ha). These are relics of a strait from when Saastna was an island (the 17th century). Sauemeri is for the most part overgrown with reeds. Various warblers of the *Acrocephalus* genus can be spotted here. The area between the road and the sea is called Lake Teorehe. Due to livestock grazing, the meadow has low-lying grass cover and serves as an ideal habitat for birds. When water levels are exceptionally low, both lakes dry up.

⑤ **Saastna Manor** was built on Saastna Peninsula in the second half of the 17th century. In the late 18th century, an impressive main building in the late Baroque style was erected. The manor was nationalised in 1919. In the 1950s and 1960s the building fell out of use and into ruin. Later, much of these ruins was demolished. Sadly, a small corner structure is all that survives to our day of this once-impressive building.

⑥ **Kirikuküla** is situated on a gently sloping coastal escarpment. Some 1,000 years ago, Matsalu Bay reached as far as here. Hundreds of years of livestock grazing have produced beautiful landscapes which survive to the present day. Old farmhouses with thatched roofs made from reeds can be seen by the road running alongside the Suitsu River and elsewhere. Tika farmstead, located in the former village of Äärenurga, is protected as an architectural monument under the Heritage Conservation Act.

⑦ **Kloostri Manor** was established in the Middle Ages as an auxiliary manor to a Cistercian nunnery. In the early 17th century it came under the ownership of Johann von Derfelden, who erected a two-storey main building from stone in Baroque style. The manor survived without major reconstructions until 1939, when the wooden parts of the building – which by then had fallen out of use – were demolished. Its ruined stone sections can still be found on the site. The ruins are in danger of collapsing.



Näärikivid, Kaarel Kaisel

8 Memorial stone to Professor Eerik Kumari. A memorial stone dedicated to Eerik Kumari (born Sits, 1912-1984), an advocate of nature protection and a professor of ornithology, is located on Kirbla escarpment. Here, as a young boy, Kumari would watch birds, and these vivid experiences instilled in him a keen interest in the natural world. He was the first to propose (in 1936) the establishment of a Matsalu bird reserve, but his suggestion was rejected due to opposition from the hunting community. Since 1989, the Eerik Kumari Award has been presented annually in recognition of individuals for their long-term and outstanding contribution to nature protection in Estonia.

9 The Church of St Nicholas in Kirbla was built in the 16th century. It is one of the smallest stone churches in Estonia (measuring just 30 metres by 11 metres). Characteristically of Western Estonia, it was built in late Gothic style. Its cemetery features grave markers dating back to the 18th century. In 2008, the remains of Jüri Uluots – the last prime minister of the pre-war Republic of Estonia – were reinterred in the churchyard.

10 Suure-Rõude Manor. The single-storey wooden building in Old Baltic style with its centrally-placed mantle chimney and hip roof dates back to the 18th century. The manor is privately owned and used as a dwelling.

11 Rõude cemetery is a burial site with a long history. The oldest stone cross bearing a date indicates 1460 as the year of burial. There was once a chapel in the middle of the cemetery; four old lindens grow in its place today. The boundaries of the cemetery were moved due to road-building operations in the 1950s, during which a mass grave of plague victims was uncovered.

12 Väike-Rõude Manor was established in the late 16th century. The main building was most likely erected in the late 18th or early 19th century. The building is unique due to the majority of rooms on the main storey being decorated with murals. After World War II the building was converted into flats, but was abandoned in the 1960s because of extensive dilapidation. The building collapsed in the 1970s. Today, only its side walls remain standing.

13 Haeska Manor was first mentioned in 1560. Its single-storey limestone main building was completed in 1805. The building was renovated in 1981 and hosted an exhibition on the bird species found in the Matsalu reserve. Today, the main building is privately owned and used as an accommodation establishment.



Kiideva Manor, Toomas Tuul

14 Kiideva Manor was separated from Haeska Manor in the early 17th century. Its two-storey main building is thought to date back to the 19th century. The walls of the building are lined with round-edged wooden shingles reminiscent of fish scales. Such a technique is very rare in Estonia. The building was last used as a schoolhouse.

15 Põgari chapel was used for the last session of Otto Tief's government on 22 September 1944. The chapel is still used by Baptists for sermons.

16 Breti's stones are one of the symbols of Ridala municipality. These were hewn by Breti (real name: Albert Kallasmaa), a solitary village artist whose life was marked by cruel twists of fate. The most well-known of the stones is in Puise, by the Kalasporidibaas bus stop. It bears the text: *"Oh, how beautiful a person is when the blood of love flows in his veins."*

17 Memorial stone to Sven Onno. Sven Onno (1932-1974) was an ornithologist who studied the birds breeding in Matsalu from 1957-1963. It was on his initiative that studies of the breeding ecology of the common gull, which continue to the present day, commenced in 1972 in Kakrarahu on Cape Puise. Onno perished in a storm, heading out to sea unaccompanied to do field work. The memorial stone was erected a year later by his colleagues.

HIKING IN MATSALU NATIONAL PARK

Hiking trails, observation towers and recreational areas

18 Penijõe Manor – the centre of Matsalu National Park. Penijõe Manor was built in the early 17th century. The single-storey stone country house was completed in the early 18th century. In the 19th century the manor was renovated in Classical style: one wooden storey was added and the middle section of the façade came to have a portico with four pillars two storeys high.

In the 1930s the manor was owned by the Ministry of Agriculture. A school for crop and livestock farmers was opened here in 1935. After the school was closed, the manor served first as the centre of the Lihula state farm and from 1958-1961 as the office of Matsalu Nature Reserve. Later the building was converted into flats. In 1998, Lihula municipality donated the manor to the Ministry of the Environment. The building was renovated in 2000 and is now used as the central offices of the Matsalu protected area.

Penijõe Manor hosts offices of the Environmental Board, the Environment Agency and the State Forest Management Centre (RMK). The Environment Agency also coordinates the operations of the Bird Ringing Centre located in the manor. Employees from the centre organise nature protection, research and monitoring efforts and promote nature reserves among the general public. Matsalu Nature Centre is on the first floor of the manor. Here visitors can take a look at an exhibition on the natural values of the national park. There is also a seminar room and study room where the Environmental Board and RMK host nature education programmes. An outbuilding hosts a rehabilitation centre for endangered species where efforts are made to reintroduce threatened animal and plant species to their natural environment.

19 Penijõe observation tower and hiking trail. Penijõe hiking trail starts at the centre



Penijõe observation tower, Kaarel Kaisel

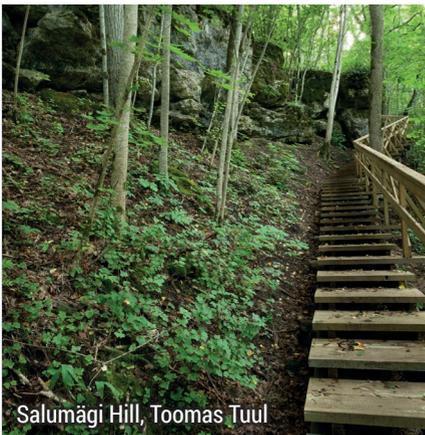
of Matsalu National Park. There are four routes to choose from (measuring 3.6 km, 4.7 km, 6 km and 7 km). There are signposts and information boards along the route, and additional information is available from Matsalu Nature Centre. The trail has an 8-metre observation tower and a 2.5-metre observation deck. The tower offers excellent views of reed beds, and on spring evenings you can enjoy the booming calls of the Eurasian bittern. The trail winds its way through wet meadows and forests and an alvar grassland. Viita wooded meadow is located on the trail, which goes through an area used for livestock grazing – you may come upon cows, horses and sheep.

20 Suitsu observation tower and hiking trail. The highest observation tower in Matsalu (21 metres) is in Suitsu. From here, visitors can enjoy great views over the forest, Matsalu Bay with reed beds, as well as a flood meadow along the Suitsu River and grasslands. The trail, which starts from the observation tower and ends in a flood grassland, is an 830-metre boardwalk winding its way through a mire forest of alders. In the grassland is a renovated hay barn. Here, on the fringes of a flood grassland, you can spot the Eurasian woodcock or common snipe. The bog violet, a protected species, blooms in early May in the mire forest of alders at the start of the trail.

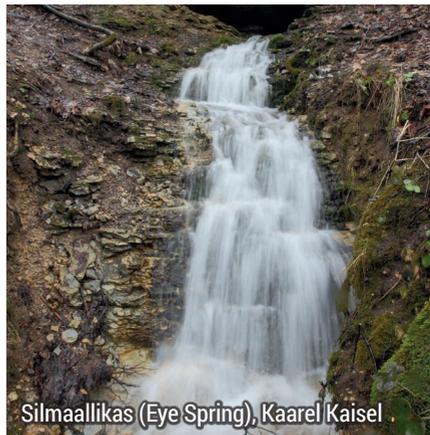
21 Kloostri observation tower. The 16-metre Kloostri observation tower is an excellent spot to gain an overview of the extent of the communities found in flood plain meadows. The tower offers the most impressive views during the season of spring high waters, which take a couple of weeks to subside. During this period you should be prepared to wade through the water to get to the tower. The observation tower is also worth visiting in late summer and autumn, when you can see roe deer and elk.

22 Keemu observation tower. The 6-metre observation tower located next to Keemu's harbour offers views over the islets in the centre of Matsalu Bay and the shallow middle part of the bay with its reed beds and coastal meadows. For those interested in ornithology, there are exciting species to watch from early spring through to late autumn, when ice cover starts to form. In spring, swans, waders, ducks and geese flock to Matsalu Bay. In summer, more exciting aspects of bird life converge on the small islands off the coast. From September, the corners of Matsalu Bay once again fill with geese, cranes and ducks. By the tower there is also a village square with a large swing.

23 Salevere hiking trail. This 1.5-kilometre trail winds its way through an alvar grassland and a broad-leaved boreo-nemoral forest growing along a 5-metre escarpment. At the foot of the escarpment is a klint forest and Silmaallikas (Eye Spring). According to legend, washing your eyes with water from the spring at midnight on Midsummer will restore



Salumägi Hill, Toomas Tuul



Silmaallikas (Eye Spring), Kaarel Kaisel

vision even to the blind. Also, on Salumägi Hill you can take a look at the remains of ancient fortifications, and at another point on the trail you will spot a low-lying bulwark.

24 Rannajõe observation tower. This 4-metre observation tower in Rannajõe is accessible to wheelchair users. Great views over a flood meadow open up from the tower. The best time to visit is during the spring floods and in autumn, i.e. September and October. Here you can watch cranes and geese passing overhead as well as wild animals roaming the flood meadow.

25 Haeska observation tower. Haeska observation tower (10 metres) offers excellent views over a coastal meadow and most of the inner part of Matsalu Bay. For those interested in ornithology, the best time to visit is in April and May or September and October, because these are the migratory stopover periods when birds abound here. However, summer is also a good time to watch birds and enjoy the views over the well-maintained coastal meadow. Nearby are two islands – known as Haeska rahud – where people once used to make hay. The tower is privately owned, but open to the public.

26 Kiideva observation tower and hiking trail. This observation tower and hiking trail were constructed on the initiative of locals. Cape Puise and Matsalu Bay can be seen from the harbour building and observation deck in Kalaküla. The hiking trail (5 km) follows an old wagon road between the villages of Kiideva and Puise. The trail winds its way through a boreo-nemoral forest and a restored wooded meadow. Halfway along the trail in Nurga is a restored hay barn where visitors can take a break. The trail ends at the Lõpre Oak, which is the oldest tree in the area.



Hiking routes

The best starting point is Penijõe Manor, where you can obtain additional information on various routes from the RMK information centre. The following routes include observation towers and hiking trails owned by the RMK as well as others that are privately owned, but open to the public. For each route, the indicated distance includes visits to all of the objects given in the description.

Penijõe and surroundings (ca 17 km).

Penijõe Manor and Matsalu Nature Centre, Kloostri Manor and observation tower, Penijõe hiking trail and observation tower, Viita wooded meadow, Kirikuküla village and Suitsu observation tower and hiking trail.

Southern shore of Matsalu Bay and Salevere (ca 23 km)

Matsalu Manor, Keemu observation tower, Metsküla village, Näärikivid boulders, Saastna, Lake Teorehe and Sauemeris and Salevere.

Northern shore of Matsalu Bay (ca 79 km).

Kirbla escarpment, Kirbla church, Suure-Rõude Manor, Rõude cemetery, Väike-Rõude Manor, Rannajõe tower, Haeska Manor and observation tower, Kiideva Manor and observation tower, Kiideva-Puise hiking trail, Põgari, Breti's stones and memorial stone to Sven Onno.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR VISITORS

Please note:

- You are in a national park. Familiarise yourself with the conservation rules of the protected area prior to visiting it.
- In conservation zones with restrictions on movement, moving around is only allowed with the permission of the manager of the protected area.
- When driving a motor vehicle, use the designated roads and car parks only.
- Moving around on private land is regulated by the Law of Property Act and the Nature Protection Act.
- Camping and making fires is allowed in specially arranged and designated places only. Camping and making fires in home yards is allowed with the permission of the owner.
- Fishing is only allowed in the territory of the national park with a fishing permit, which also serves as a permit to access the fishing areas designated thereon.

Hiking trails may run through grazing areas. As such:

- do not disturb the livestock;
- use the specially arranged places or crossings to pass grazing enclosures (if these do not exist, make sure you close all gates);
- keep dogs on a leash when in the national park and do not bring dogs onto trails crossing grazing land.

Upon leaving:

- do not leave any garbage behind – take it with you and place it in a garbage bin.

For additional information on the nature and cultural heritage of the national park, go to:

- www.matsalu.ee
- www.loodusegakoos.ee

If you become aware of activities that are potentially harmful to the environment or visitor facilities, call the Environmental Inspectorate hotline on 1313

For emergency services, call 112

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Did you know?

- The nature reserve, established in 1957, was given the status of a national park in 2004.
- The national park's surface area is 48,610 ha.
- The national park was established to protect birds and their nesting, moulting and stopover sites as well as landscapes characteristic of Western Estonia and the cultural heritage of the Väinameri Sea region.
- More than 780 species of vascular plants, 280 species of birds and 40 species of mammals as well as five species of amphibians and four species of reptiles have been recorded here.
- Rare species include the frog orchid, natterjack toad, short-billed dunlin, ruff, white-tailed eagle, Eurasian eagle-owl and lesser white-fronted goose.
- Matsalu is one of the most important nesting and stopover sites for waterfowl in Europe.
- In 2013, the first sighting of a jackal in Estonia was documented in the National Park.



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