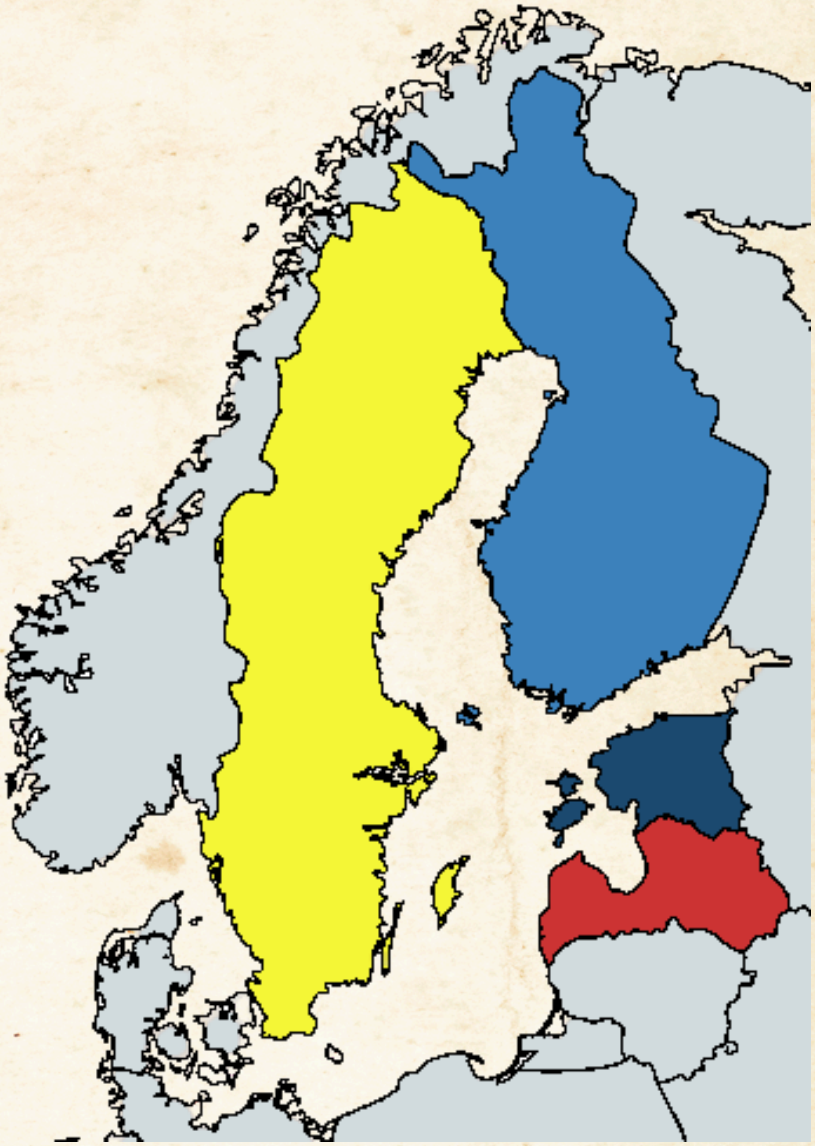

Tell me culture

Nordic-Baltic culture stories

Introduction

Your key to Nordic Baltic culture

Are you a traveler? A passerby? A local enthusiast? Or maybe just looking for an adventure? Stop by this story collection and dive into exciting stories that might be tips for your next travel to Sweden, Finland, Estonia or Latvia.

What regions will you find here?

The land of vikings and moose - **Sweden -** introduces the region of Skåne, in particular, **Bromölla and Sölvesborg**.

Finland uncovers more than the well known Moomin trolls - discover the richness of the surroundings of **Helsinki and Tampere**.

While enjoying silence and SPA centres in **Estonia**, do not forget to stroll around **Pärnu** on the waterprints route.

Are you wondering, why **northern Latvia** is a good idea for your next travel? Nature, active leisure, food and local breweries will convince you to return to **Valmiera region**!

Learn the stories and look for the interactive "GooseChase" scavenger hunt games in our activity book!

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Sweden



Minas Chocolate studio

A visit to Minas Chocolate studio in Fjälkinge is a must for all chocolate lovers who like to discover "new yummy ways to get your cocoa on".
If British author Roald Dahl had made a sequel to "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory", it could easily be called Mina and the Chocolate Studio – because the house where the chocolate queen Amina lives looks so sweetly fairytale-like from both the inside and the outside. It smells of chocolate, cocoa, buns, pralines, homemade pastries, waffles and home comforts.

On shelves, tables and counters you can buy everything you can imagine in the way of chocolate – lots of pralines, chocolate chips, “breakfast chocolate”, crispbread with cocoa. Even mustard made with dark chocolate.
If you have coffee on site, there are chocolate drinks with milder and stronger flavors and sweetness, coffee and tea with chocolate in different blends, freshly baked waffles, homemade ice cream, juicy buns and various chocolate-flavored cakes.
Overall, a visit to Mina is a fairy tale story minus the horror that sometimes appears in Roald's stories.
A must-visit for anyone who is simply childishly fond of chocolate.

What is Mina's Chocolate Studio?

Minas Chokladstudio is a private company whose activities include conducting chocolate courses, seasonal café, organizing festivals in its own premises, renting out production kitchens to other food businesses, and producing pralines. The chocolate factory started in 2007.



Birdwatching crane

Kristianstads Vattenrike is an ideal place to observe birds. White-tailed eagles can often be seen around the River Helge å in winter, and thousands of cranes rest near the Pulken visitor site each spring. There are lots of birdwatching towers dotted around Kristianstads Vattenrike. Make sure you take your binoculars or hire a pair from the Naturum Vattenriket visitor centre.

At the turn of the month March-April, thousands of cranes rest in Vattenriket on their way to nesting sites further north. At Utemuseum Pulken, it is easy to see them dancing in spring when they rest after the flight over the Baltic Sea. Here you can spend the night in the wetland and feed when the farmers' sowing has started.

Pulken is a nature reserve by the Helge River, just west of Yngsjö in eastern Skåne.

The cranes gather here in the evening for an overnight stay in March-April. Periodically, the cranes are fed in a field at Pulken. Then you can see cranes here both during the day and in the evening. The sled is one of Vattenriket's places to visit and there is a large bird tower that is also an outdoor museum.

Spring

The large number of cranes arrives in the spring at the turn of the month March-April. It varies a bit depending on the weather and wind. A few cranes that will breed in the area will arrive as early as February. On crane day, 25 March, the cranes are usually here. If the arrival of the cranes coincides with the spring sowing, the cranes are fed in a field at the Outdoor Museum Pulken. Then they stay away from newly sown fields and are easy to see for anyone who wants to enjoy the spectacle.

Autumn

At the beginning of autumn, the cranes fly south. The number of people who sit down to take a break in Vattenriket is fewer than in the spring. Walking in the autumn does not cause as much damage to agriculture. Therefore, the cranes are not fed in the fall. However, the number of autumn resting cranes has increased in our area in recent years. They mainly eat waste grain in threshed fields, but there has also been damage to newly sown grain fields and unharvested potato fields.



Iföverken's industrial history

The geology of the area has provided opportunities since the Bronze Age to manufacture ceramic products from clay and to mine limestone for both agriculture and industry. At the end of the 19th century, geologists were sent out from Swedish universities to map deposits, and Skåne turned out to have large resources of clay and limestone that could be used in industrial activities. Such deposits were found, among other places, on Ivön, and this began an industrial era in Bromölla. Iföverken's industrial history can be divided into different eras from 1887 to the present and is documented in Iföverken's industrial museum and on this website.

Iföverken Industrial Museum

Iföverken's Industrial Museum opened in 1996 and depicts the history of the mill from its founding in 1887 to the company it is today. The museum shows the working methods used and a selection of the products that have been produced during different eras. Adjacent to the museum is a ceramics workshop where artists work in collaboration with the museum to bring parts of the historical production process to life. Part of the museum also serves as an exhibition space for temporary art exhibitions.

Ivö Klack's open-air museum

Ivö Klack offers experiences for both young and old. Here you can enjoy the peace of the forest, the blue glimmer of the lake or the view from the top of Klacken. Ifö Klack also has an exciting industrial history with the mining of limestone and kaolin clay during much of the 20th century. In the quarry you can look for fossils of marine creatures that have been discovered in connection with the mining. To deepen your experience of Ivö Klack nature reserve, there is now an open-air museum. Along the paths in the nature reserve you can take part in the history of the quarry, learn more about plant and animal life and take a journey back in time to the time of the crofters.

Bromölla



The two giant lizards Scanisaurus have been resting on the square in Bromölla for 50 years. A long time ago, swan neck lizards lived in the Bromölla area. This knowledge gave Gunnar Nylund – a sculptor who was in Bromölla to make a work of art in the town hall – the idea of a stoneware fountain in the square, depicting two swan-necked lizards.

Fossil hunt in the northeast of Skåne

For 80 million years ago, when the dinosaurs were still alive, giant sea living reptiles were swimming around in a big ocean where Bromölla is today. Therefore, skeletons of them and other sea living animals can be found in the ground we walk on. It can be difficult to find fossils from animals that lived many millions of years ago – but not in Bromölla. It is Sweden's most dinosaur dense place and here you will find the only field station that is open for guided tours.

Do you find it exciting with dinosaurs, reptiles, and fossils Bromölla is the right place to visit! Here you can become a fossil hunter for a day and sift out your own fossils that are 80 million years old. The station is open with a knowledgeable fossil guide that can help you to determine the species of your findings.

The Fossil Hunt tour starts with a visit to The House of the Sea Dragons – an exhibition showing some of the quantities of fossils that has been found in Bromölla. Here you can learn a little more about the marine reptiles – sea dragons, dinosaurs, sharks, and many other animals that lived at that time. After the introduction, we drive up to the Field Station for fossil hunting.

Armed with bucket and shovel, you will then get to search your own fossils – and the knowledgeable guide will help you determine the species the fossils you found.

During the Creatceous period

About 80 million years ago, our surroundings were covered by a hot and shallow sea very much like an archipelago. Our little part of the world was then located roughly where the Mediterranean is located today.

The often-gigantic dinosaurs walked around on land and the sky was crowded with Pterodactyls and birds of that time. The sea was buzzing with life. Most conspicuous were of course the large marine reptiles – the sea dragons.

Deposits from this period and remains which bear witness to the inhabitants of this sea are preserved under our feet in a large contiguous limestone section of bedrock called the Kristianstad Basin.

The Exhibition

The exhibition materials have been collected from the Bromölla-Kristianstad area over a period of about 25 years.

The goal has been to produce an exhibition that would be entertaining, clear, and of interest to the public.



Ifö Center Art Hall in Bromölla

Ifö Center Art Hall is an art exhibition space located in Bromölla, in southern Sweden. It is part of the Ifö Center, which also includes a cultural centre, shops, and other businesses. The art gallery is a place where artistic works and exhibitions are shown to the public. It can present a wide range of art forms, including paintings, sculptures, photographs, installations, and more. The goal of the art gallery is to promote artists and their works, as well as to offer a cultural space for society to appreciate and engage with art.
The project has 43,000 m² at its disposal in an old ceramics factory and has opened the previously completely closed industrial area of Iföverken for culture and tourism. The collective builds everything itself and organizes courses, workshops, and guided tours. On the factory's facades, a world-class outdoor gallery is gradually emerging, with works by internationally renowned street artists. For craftsmen and professional artists, it is possible to use collective workshops with different specialisations. There is also two Artist in Residence programs. Ifö Center works to promote ideas, unexpected meetings, experiences, and constructive collaboration effects.

Ifö Center Outdoor Gallery consists of gigantic murals and works by internationally renowned street artists on the old factory buildings and around central Bromölla. The outdoor gallery started in 2014 and has since received new additions annually! Also included in the gallery is Gunnar Nylund's fountain Scanisaurus, which has adorned Ifotorget since 1971.
Most of the works have QR codes that you can scan for more information about the work and the artist, as well as behind-the-scenes images from the creation process!



The Sölvesborg bridge

An architectural masterpiece by the sea

Like a sparkling ribbon across the water, Sölvesborg' s spectacular pedestrian and bicycle bridge stretches between the historic centre and the modern district of Ljungaviken. At an impressive 756 metres, it is not only one of Europe's longest of its kind – it has also become a beloved landmark, attracting visitors from near and far.

Since its inauguration in 2013, the bridge has been transformed into something more than just a connection. The innovative design and lightning, which was awarded second place in the Swedish Lighting Award in 2014, has made it one of the world's most interesting bridges. As dusk falls, the structure transforms into a luminous work of art reflected in the water below, a motif captured in countless Instagram photos and shared all over the world.

The Sölvesborg Bridge as a postage stamp

On March 17, 2016, PostNord released a stamp booklet containing images of five different Swedish bridges. One of them was the Sölvesborg Bridge.

Design: Bertil Skov Jørgensen Engraver: Lars Sjööblom

PostNord writes the following about the choice of bridges: "The five bridges chosen for stamp motifs represent several different eras, building techniques and architectural design. The construction of bridges has always been associated with major challenges. Before iron, steel and concrete began to dominate as materials, bridges were built of stone and wood. In the past, designers were also forced to resort to large margins to ensure strength, but with today's computer programs, it becomes more precise and slenderer."

Ice cream boat in the harbor

The area around the bridge has developed into a popular recreational area where locals and visitors meet. On the inviting wooden deck at the bridgehead, you can sit down with a thermos of coffee and enjoy the view over the water and the rich birdlife. For those who are craving something delicious, the Ice Cream Boat is conveniently located, where local delicacies such as herring sandwiches are served together with refreshing ice cream.



The castle ruins in Sölvesborg

The ruin of what was once the pride of Sölvesborg, the castle dating back to the 1200s. It was the largest and most important of the medieval fortifications in eastern Denmark.

Today, the castle ruins and the lovely castle park are well worth a visit and a walk! The old castle was by far the largest and most important of the medieval fortifications in Eastern Denmark and created the conditions for extensive trade. In 1332, Denmark lost the Scanian lands to Sweden. Denmark's Valdemar Atterdag once again gathered the country under the central power and in 1360 Sölvesborg once again came into the Danish empire.

Sölvesborg Castle began to be built in the 13th century, but its heyday did not begin until around 1360.
In 1452, Karl Knutsson burned the castle, and in 1525-26 it became a retreat place for Sören Norby during his pirate voyages.
In 1564, the castle's military importance was all but over.
During the 1600s, the core became a quarry and around 1750 everything was in ruins.
In modern times, archaeologists have found remains of bones from animals and grain in the ruins, this allows them to map what people ate and what animals lived with them in the castle.



The history of the estate

From the Middle Ages to the present

The properties on the land on which Trolle Ljungby is located have kept the farm relevant and thriving over time. The character of the farm has changed over the centuries. Not only through ownership, but also through the construction of buildings and the change of nationality. The castle as it looks has not always looked the same, but it has always been the focus of the activities associated with it. The development of the business over time creates the foundation on which the castle stands. Over time, the castle has become the subject of myth and folklore. Read more about the castle's history here.

1900 to the present

Today, Trolle Ljungby is still in the private ownership of the Wachtmeister family and is not open to the public. However, the famous horns and pipes are displayed in a window in the castle every Wednesday and Saturday from June 1 to August 31 each year. At these times, visitors are also welcome to visit the gardens.

The Game Shop – Viltboden

In the shop you will find an assortment of the estates' game meat and local produce. The assorted cuts of game include pheasant, mallard, goose, wild boar, fallow deer, red deer, and mouflon. Aside from cuts you will also find charcuteries sausages for the grill, beer sausage and salami as well as seasonally made baskets of hot-smoked pork. Ready for the grill.

All game put down on Trolle Ljungby estate is treated with respect. In the game slaughterhouse all meat is managed, hanged, cut up and packaged. The charcuteries that are further processed like hot- or cold-smoking are done by local entrepreneurs. The Game Shop is also a place where staff gather, and it adds much to the unity and culture of the company.



Viby Stork center

At the Stork Centre in Viby, there was for many years one of the Scanian stork project's breeding enclosures. Storks raised in the enclosure now breed freely on the farm buildings and the old fence roof.
The storks start nesting as early as the beginning of April with nest building and mating. At this time, you can often hear the characteristic beak claps of the storks echoing across the yard. The chicks hatch in May after about 30 days of incubation. After just under ten weeks of development, the great kings are ready to fly.
The Scanian stork project started in 1989, and the main goal is for the stork to become part of our Swedish bird world again. Today there are both breeding enclosures and free-living birds. Here at Viby, there have been storks since 1993. Sometimes other project storks come to visit and on a couple of occasions wild storks, which usually lack rings on their legs, have visited.
The great kings born from the free-nesting birds are allowed to be free. The plan is for the chicks to return to breed when they are mature enough, and in this way a wild stork population will be established.

Our stork history

Stork centre is a visitor station in Kristianstad's water kingdom and is part of the stork project. Today there is no stork enclosure left, but there are several free-flying storks nesting on the roofs.
Every year we eagerly await our feathered friends when they return to our lands to breed. We are proud to be a part of their habitat and work hard to ensure that they have a safe and comfortable place to build their nests.
We are happy to have them as neighbours and to be able to contribute to their survival and well-being.



Finland



The Pälkäne Ruined Church and Luopioinen Village

The Pälkäne Ruined Church, also known as the Church of St. Michael, is the ruin of a medieval grey stone church located in the parish of Onkkaala in Pälkäne. According to estimates, the church was designed and built between 1495 and 1505. During the Reformation in the 16th century the whole interior of the church was renovated. The images of the saints were removed, and the church was given a pulpit, benches and balconies. However, the exterior remained largely unchanged. During the Battle of Kostianvirta in the Great Northern War, the church suffered near-total destruction. By the 1740s, its foundations, which were set on sandy soil, had begun to sink, causing cracks to form in the walls. After the new church in Pälkäne was completed in 1839, the old church was abandoned. A storm in 1890 caused the roof to collapse. Despite its ruined state, church services have been held there since the 1920s. Wooden sculptures of Saint Laurus and Saint Olaf, once housed in the church, were relocated to the National Museum. In 1949, a monument dedicated to the printer Daniel Medelplan was unveiled in the churchyard.

The church and its surroundings were the site of the Battle of Pälkäne, also known as the Battle of Kostianvirta, fought on October 17, 1713. In the battle, the Russian army, led by Admiral Fyodor Apraksin, face the Finnish forces of Sweden under General Carl Gustaf Armfeldt. Although the Russians were victorious, General Armfeldt managed to withdraw his troops peacefully.

In the village of Luopioinen, located in the Pälkäne region, you will find the Luopioinen Local History Museum. Originally a parish granary used as a loan grain store, the building was transformed into a museum during the 1950s. Once a dark, two-floor warehouse, it was renovated into a charming three-floor museum space. The museum's collection spans from the Iron Age to the 1970s, with most items dating from the 19th and early 20th centuries. Among the oldest artifacts are stone axes crafted between the 19th and 17th centuries BCE. The diverse exhibits include everything from historical medical tools like tourniquets to everyday items such as toothpicks.



Sarvikallio and Vanhankylä Manor

Sarvikallio, on the western side of Lake Tuusula, has been a popular viewpoint for centuries. It's a year-round destination where visitors can picnic while enjoying stunning lake views. The cliff rises 25 meters above the water, with old villas visible on the opposite shore, reminding visitors of the area's cultural history.The top is a nature conservation area, andthere is a campfire site, a woodshed, and an eco-toilet. Walking paths lead both to the cliff and down to the lakeshore, and the nearest parking area (Sarvikalliontie 35) is 600 meters away along a straight gravel path. For a longer adventure, the 3.7 km Seitteli Trail winds through the forests and cultural landscapes of the area. You can even reach Sarvikallio by stand-up paddleboard or boat.

Sarvikallio was an important excursion spot for the Tuusula artists' community from the 1860s to the 1940s, and many historical paintings have been created there. During the Finnish Golden Age of art, painters Venny Soldan-Brofeldt, Pekka Halonen, and Eero Järnefelt often painted the landscapes of Lake Tuusula there. Sarvikallio also served as a picnic spot for the artists' community during the summers. In addition to painters, the social artists' community of Lake Tuusula included the composer Jean Sibelius with his wife, as well as the writer Juhani Aho. They lived and worked around Lake Tuusula, sharing ideas, collaborating, and drawing inspiration from the natural surroundings.

Nearby, about 7 kilometers toward Järvenpää center, is Vanhankylä Manor with its cozy café on the Vanhankylä peninsula – perfect for a coffee break during a bike ride. The manor dates back to the 17th century, when Nils Stålhana acquired local farms to form the estate. The Stålhan family managed Vanhankylä Manor for nearly 200 years with varying degrees of success. Later, Johan Henrik Åström, once abandoned on the manor steps as a baby, became its owner. He was in fact the biological child of the manor owner, born from a relationship with a woman who later left the village. He finished the main building in 1852 together with his wife, Wilhelmiina Tallgren, in time for their wedding.

Their daughter, Anna Natalia, later managed the manor. She studied nursing and had knowledge of the medicinal use of herbs. She cared for both animals and people, founded a temperance society, and performed on the society's stage.

Today, the manor houses a café, and in the adjacent building is Pytingin Craftsmen's shop. The Vanhankylänniemi nature trail starts from Vanhankylä Manor. A local summer theatre is also located nearby.



The history of Louhisaari Manor

The history of Louhisaari Manor is closely intertwined with the histories of its owning families, the Mannerheims and the Flemings. The manor was long ruled by the Fleming family, who obtained it through marriage alliances. Among the most famous Flemings were Councillor of State Herman Persson Fleming, who served as Governor-General of Finland in the 16th century, and his grandson, Councillor of the Realm, Governor-General of Stockholm and Admiral Clas Larsson Fleming.

Clas Fleming's son, Admiral and Governor-General of Finland Herman Classon Fleming (1619–1673), built Louhisaari Castle on the estate in 1655. The manor represents an early Swedish-style Baroque architecture, of which few examples exist in Finland. During the Great Northern War (the "Greater Wrath"), Louhisaari Castle was nearly abandoned, but in the 18th century the Flemings restored the manor. In 1795 the restored manor passed into the hands of the Mannerheim family.

Among the Mannerheims who lived there were a count, a governor, and an entomologist-businessman. Most famously, Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim, later president and marshal of Finland, was born at Louhisaari on June 4, 1867. He spent a happy childhood at the manor as one of seven siblings. Eventually, like the Flemings before them, the Mannerheims were forced to sell the manor due to debts caused by their luxurious lifestyle.

The manor and the nearby Askaisten Church represents Finland's history during Sweden's era as a great power. While nobility enjoyed splendor, common people suffered famine and conscription. Today, a long birch-lined avenue, planted by Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim's grandmother Vendla Sofia Mannerheim, leads up to the manor's front yard. At the back of the garden stands a structure resembling a small palace from antiquity, originally the private seaside bathhouse of Mannerheim's grandfather, later converted into a guesthouse.

The manor is filled with unusual and historical details. The Biedermeier and Neo-Rococo furniture belonged to the Mannerheim family. The staircase is particularly sturdy and impressive. The manor's walls are adorned with magnificent paintings reflecting the owners' love of the arts. The great hall, with its splendid ceiling paintings, is one of the most luxurious ballrooms of its time in Finland.

Askaisten Church is located near Louhisaari Manor, also built during Sweden's era as a great power in the 17th century. A bell tower was built next to the church in 1779. The current appearance dates back to renovations commissioned in 1653 by Governor-General Herman Fleming. The church's history is closely tied to the owning family of Louhisaari Manor, as it was originally built as the manor's chapel church.



The Serlachius Museums

The Serlachius Museums in Mänttä (Mänttä-Vilppula) trace their origins to the entrepreneurial spirit of G. A. Serlachius, who in 1868 founded Mänttä's first pulp mill and over time built a forest-industry empire that included sawmills, paper and cardboard production.
By the early 20th century, under Gösta Serlachius (his nephew), the business had grown significantly, and Gösta also became a passionate art patron. In 1933 he established the Gösta Serlachius Fine Arts Foundation to manage what would become one of Finland's most important private art collections.
The foundation's manor home, Joenniemi Manor (commonly "Serlachius Manor" or "Art Museum Gösta"), was completed in 1935, designed by architect Jarl Eklund, as Gösta Serlachius' private residence. In 1945 the first floor of the manor opened as a museum, and by 1984 the whole building had been adapted for exhibition purposes. In 2014 an award-winning wooden pavilion extension was added, greatly expanding exhibition space and facilities (restaurant, festival hall, shop, conservation spaces).
The park around Serlachius Manor (Joenniemi), by Lake Melasjärvi, has featured sculptures since the 1930s, as part of its designed landscape. Many of the works come from the collection of Harry Kivijärvi.
Another museum site is the former headquarters of G. A. Serlachius Ltd ("Museum Gustaf"), built in 1934 in the centre of Mänttä (classicism / functionalism by architects Valter & Bertel Jung), which opened as a museum in 2003.
Today the Serlachius Museums house around 10,000 artworks, combining masterpieces from the Finnish Golden Age, European old masters, plus contemporary art, as well as cultural-historical collections documenting the Serlachius family, the company history, and local Mänttä heritage.



The history of Lammassaari island

Lammassaari is part of the Viikki–Vanhankaupunginlahti nature reserve and a popular recreational island owned by the City of Helsinki. The area's birdlife and plant life are protected.

Koitto ry, founded in 1883, manages the island and owns the larger, historical buildings located there. Pohjolan Pirtti, built in 1905, is available for rent for events, while Lepola, built in 1904, is currently being renovated. Today, there are around one hundred smaller summer cottages on the island, owned by private individuals. The area remains very close to nature.

Koitto ry was founded by Dr. Aksel August Granfelt, a member of Parliament. Granfelt wrote for newspapers and advocated for total abstinence from alcohol. The temperance society was founded by university students who wanted to establish a local branch of a national society called Friends of Moderation in Helsinki. Over time, Koitto became part of the growing workers' movement. In addition to temperance activities, the organization arranged study circles, women's and youth sections, a library, and a sports club and even political party activities. Beyond politics, Koitto also debated whether it was appropriate to host plays or dances during its events. A theater group was eventually formed on Lammassaari, laying some of the groundwork for what would later become the Helsinki City Theatre.

Walking paths and duckboard trails connect it to nearby islands, and in summer, sheep graze freely on the island - the name lammas means “sheep” in Finnish.

Bird enthusiasts can observe the area’s diverse bird species, including the white-tailed eagle and the American wigeon. Alongside the original Lammassaari birdwatching tower, a new photography and observation hide has been built by the bird-rich waters of Vanhankaupunginlahti. Accessible via a boardwalk, it offers seating for about 40 people and features information about local bird species.



Estonia



Raeküla beach meadow

The entire beach of Raeküla is - spacious, with nice flowing grassy paths. Adventurous and romantic at the same time.
The beach reed here is a nesting and stopping place for reed bird species - various Warblers, Bearded tits, Common Reed Buntings. Ducks can also be found at the ponds. Here, as elsewhere above the reeds, Barn swallows and House martins can be seen catching insects. Along the coast, Herring gulls, Great black-backed gulls, Pewits and Common gulls often rest here. Redbilled oystercatchers search for food in shallow water
In the Raeküla bird observation tower, it is mainly possible to observe birds feeding and nesting in the meadow in spring and the first half of summer. It is good if you have binoculars or a viewing tube with you. Here you can see Gray heron, Western marsh harrier, Sea eagles, Meadow pipits, Yellow wagtails, various redshank. From the tower you can also see the birds and animals that stop on the river. From all the bird watching towers in Pärnu, you can get a good overview of the birds migrating along the coast in spring. The bird towers also have information boards introducing the more frequently encountered bird species. The Beach Meadow is nowadays part of nature protection area.

Pärnu river - Raeküla sandy beach

The sandy beach is mainly a swimming place, it has been used all the time. Now you can get there through a tunnel. A pleasant place – trees that provide shade and a sandy sunny spot. The Pärnu river is one of the largest in Estonia – it is 144 km long from the lake to the mouth of Roosna-Alliku Allikajärv and up to 300 m wide at its lower reaches in the city of Pärnu. Pärnu river is a primeval waterway with many old settlements (the oldest in the village of Pulli, approx. 11,000-10,000 years ago). The river, which now, to the delight of residents and tourists, makes a long course parallel to the bay border before flowing into the sea, flowed directly into the sea below the current Raeküla.



SINDI - the story of four dams

When choosing the location of the factory, the most important thing was the drop of water for the construction of the dam. The 1st tower was completed in 1834 and was 2.2 m high. The 2nd dam was completed in 1883 and collapsed in 1919 during the ice movement. The 3rd dam was completed in 1922 in one year. 3.4 m high and 200 m long. 4m was completed in 1977. The 4.3 m high 151 m long dam was completed in almost 3 years. A fish ladder with 15 steps, 65 m long was also built on this dam, which did not work. The dam was demolished in 2018.

The rapids

Before the establishment of the factory, there was a rapid instead of Sindi. In 2019, the circle came full circle and there are rapids again in Sindi. In the 1990s, the dam no longer had a direct function and fish stocks dwindled. Thus began the saga of the demolition of the Sindi Dam, in which there are many interested parties, both on the side of the dam's conservationists and those who dismantled it. Currently, the destruction of fish stocks by cormorants is often reported on TV. In February 2015, the Estonian state acquired the dam; in September 2018, demolition work began and the 130- meter rapid was completed by August 2020.



Old Pärnu - Siimu bridge

The first bridge across Pärnu river was built in 1803. The building of the floating pontoon bridge (known coloqually as the „leather bridge“) was led by local merchants.
A couple of decades later a similar bridge, also known as the leather bridge, was built across Sauga river and this was called Siimu bridge after the Siimu Inn nearby. Before the mouth of the river was deepened the river was even crossed by horse and carriage during the low tide and in winter. Building the bridge across Pärnu river marked the beginning of a direct road to Tallinn.
On August 6th 1937 the new reinforced concrete arch bridge was opened. However, the bridge did not last long – on September 23rd 1944 it was blown up together with the main bridge of Pärnu. A wooden floating bridge was built to replace the concrete one. Today’s arch bridge that resembles the original one was opened in late 1957.



Pärnu Rowing Club

The rowing sport in Pärnu started in 1884. By that time Pärnu was a lively harbour town. Pärnu River with its location in the centre of the town and wideness provided excellent opportunities for water sports. Thus, on August 16th 1884 the local Germans gathered and together established the association of rowers in Pärnu, full German Pernauer Ruder Club. The club had its ups and downs, networking mainly with the Riga rowing club until World War I (1914). The rowing club restored its activities in 1919. The period between two world wars is characterized by a diverse development. Pernauer Ruder Club was finished in 1940 when the Soviet government ended all clubs in Estonia. The third attempt to start a rowing association in Pärnu was in the autumn of 1948.

Since rowing was popularized among pupils, many talented young people who later on played a significant part in further development of the sport were drawn to rowing. In 1952 a new place for sport club was found in 1952 on the right bank of River Pärnu – next to today's Pärnu Rowing Club's base.



Stone Age Settlement Sindi-Lodja at Paikuse

Sindi Lodja (Reiu) settlement area consists of three Stone Age settlements close to each ohter on the left bank of the Pärnu River not far from the mouth of the river Reiu. Remains of two settlements, named Sindi-Lodja I and II, are preserved close to Paikuse. The age of those is 7100-6600 BC.

Especially unic among the finds from those settlements are tools made of bones and horns. Lot of archaeological finds like tools of hunting and fishing, also axes and hammers have been found there as well as one small human figure. The oldest findings of seal bones in Estonia come also from this settlement.

Mostly local rocks have been used as the material of tools, but there have been also found firestone from Southern Lithuania. Also there has been found a pendant made of amber. Those finds refer to close contacts of human groups from Reiu settlement and Southern Lithuania.

As about the settlements of the early period it is supposed that the inhabitants mostly moved from one place to another whereas the Sindi-Lodja people could live in one place a year around. The finds of wild animal bones show that people here hunted seals, mooses, foxes, white hares and fished codfish.



Latvia



Valmiermuiža

Valmiermuiža is currently well known for its craft beer brewery, however it has been recognized as an important part of Valmiera's history for centuries.

The name of Valmiermuiža can be found in historic timelines since the 14th century when there was an impressive tavern that belonged to Valmiera castle. Patrons could purchase beer brewed by the Lord of the Manor. Originally, Valmiera Manor was located near Valmiera castle, but around 1624 it was moved to the location where now Valmiermuiža brewery is based.

Moravian church (created in the 15th century in Czech Republic) had its first mission to Valmiera in 1729 where Elisabeth von Hallart, who later becomes a significant name in history, had invited them to create an educational institution for the church members and establish a teacher's seminary.

During different times the manor has been destroyed several times and has experienced different uses of it. In the 18th century it was an exquisite hunting residence. Now only a park and a minuscule tower reminds of old times.

In 1980's local government asked permission to destroy the tower, luckily it was not allowed as it had architectural value. Currently it is not open for public, however it keeps essential time evidence in form of ceiling paintings.

The main building of the complex was burnt down during German occupation in 1918. Later in the 20th century the territory has been a place for war prisoner camps twice and also for elementary school. It has burnt once more and again only the tower survived.

In 2006 a local entrepreneur Aigars Rungis decides to restore brewing tradition in Valmiermuiža. The first country where the beer was exported was Estonia. Since then Valmiermuiža brewery, born from ashes to success, has established several Beer embassies in Riga (Latvia). In 2025 it became a part of "Cesu alus".



Kokmuiža

Kokmuiža is now a very well-known architectural landmark in the Valmiera region, but it holds an immeasurable amount of history, which has been the foundation for the Kokmuiža region and the Valmiera district.

The name Kokmuiža was first mentioned in historical records in 1582. Initially, the manor was owned by the Swedish government, but during the Great Northern War in 1702, the Russian army plundered and burned down the manor.

After the war, the manor was rebuilt as a stone structure, which was later acquired through an auction by the Schröder family. Theodor Schröder rebuilt the manor in the neo-baroque style and created an English-style park.

On the manor grounds, there was the Kokmuiža brewery and distillery. Beer had been brewed since the 17th century, but in the 19th century, beer production began for industrial purposes. The manor brewery became the most powerful rural brewery in the Vidzeme province and later across all of Russia. Today, "Valmiermuiža Brewery" has also created Kokmuiža beer, restoring the unique taste of the old brewery's beer.

In modern times, the grand manor house of Kokmuiža has been transformed into a school, where students still study today.

It is no secret that the second floor of the Kokmuiža building is inhabited by a ghost, who can scare anyone who finds themselves there, especially on cold, dark evenings. People have experienced unexplained phenomena, such as sudden overturning of objects, unexplained sounds, and the appearance of mysterious shadows.

However, despite the eerie events, today Kokmuiža is a place where people have the opportunity to educate and improve themselves by visiting the Kocēni Elementary School, the horse stable, and the floorball club.



Dikļi

Dikļi is nowadays one of the most beautiful places in the Valmiera region — a place where the past meets the present, and every corner is filled with stories from history. Dikļi is the birthplace of the Latvian Song Festival tradition and a place where the spirit of Latvian culture can be felt at every step.

It was in Dikļi, on the morning of the third day of Pentecost in 1864, that Pastor Juris Neikens gathered six male choirs and around 120 children from nearby parish schools in the park of the Dikļi parsonage. The choirs spent the day singing together, beginning around noon and concluding in the evening with a torchlight procession. This event is considered the beginning of the Latvian regional Song Festival tradition.

Dikļi was also the site of the first-ever theatrical performance in the Latvian language, which took place in 1818. The play was translated by Jānis Peitāns, the clerk of the Dikļi manor. The chosen play was Friedrich Schiller's *The Robbers*, translated from German. The actors were the manor's own servants.

One of the main attractions in Dikļi today is Dikļi Palace. The name Dikļi first appeared in historical records in 1456, then referred to as Pāle Manor. The current palace building was constructed in 1896. Another significant structure of the manor complex is the granary, which is even older than the palace.

The last owners of the manor were the von Wolf family, who held it until 1919. Afterwards, the estate was taken over by the Valmiera County Board and turned into a children's shelter. In 1937, the manor became a sanatorium run by a municipal cooperative association. After World War II, the building was used as a tuberculosis sanatorium, later transformed into the Dikļi Rehabilitation Hospital for Traumatology and Orthopedics.

But Dikļi is not just about history! Today, the palace operates as a four-star hotel with a restaurant and spa. Dikļi is a place where one can relax or host special events such as weddings or concerts.

You'll also find the Viks Fairy Tale Park in Dikļi, where you can meet twenty-eight characters from the fairy tales of Latvian writer Viks. Whether it's a walk through the park, a swim in the pond, or dinner in the historic hall — there's something here for everyone.



Mazsalaca

Mazsalaca is a small but beautiful town in the Vidzeme region, located by the Salaca River. It has been inhabited since the Middle Stone Age, around 5000 BCE. One of the largest burial sites in Northern Europe was once located here, with approximately 330 graves, indicating the presence of an ancient community along the Salaca. Later, Livonians settled in the area, and many of the region's place names are derived from their language.

One of Latvia's most notable bicycle manufacturers, Gustavs Ērenpreiss, was born in Mazsalaca. In his honor, a celebration called "Ērenpreiss Rolls into Mazsalaca" was held in the town.

A popular tourist destination is the "Āža krogs" (The Goat's Tavern), located just beyond the bridge. Originally the site of a ferry crossing, a wooden tavern already stood here in the 17th century. After a fire around 1900, it was rebuilt, and in 1902 a tearoom with a small hotel was opened. The name "Āža krogs" came from an impressive drawing of a goat behind the bar. Today, this building houses the cultural space and café "Būda".

The Salaca River flows through Mazsalaca and is one of Latvia's most well-known rivers, a favorite among kayakers and fishermen. Along its banks, reddish sandstone cliffs form striking shapes against the shifting currents, creating a view that is both awe-inspiring and calming. Caves line the riverbanks, including the Angel and Devil Caves.

A linden, maple, and oak alley leads from the town to Valtenberģi Manor, with some of the linden trees reaching monumental size. Today, the manor's main building houses preschool groups and primary school classes. The manor's first floor has been renovated and now hosts the Mazsalaca Regional Museum. Here, visitors can see a collection of wooden sculptures by Valters Hirte, hunting trophies, an ancient family tree display, and a bell collection.

In the park next to the manor house, you'll find two baroque gardens created at different times. These transition seamlessly into a 19th-century landscaped forest park that stretches along the banks of the Salaca River.



Strenči

Strenči is a small town in the Valmiera region, notable for its rich natural diversity and significant cultural heritage.

Strenči first appeared on maps in the 17th century, but its rapid development as a populated area began around 1889 with the opening of the Riga–Pskov railway line. In the following years, forestry and timber rafting became increasingly important industries in Strenči.

The Gauja River served as the main route for transporting logs, and local residents developed exceptional skills in building and navigating timber rafts. These skills were passed down from generation to generation, forming a unique cultural heritage that we now know as the Gauja Raftsmen Festival. To preserve and promote this tradition, the festival is held annually. The event features various activities such as raft building, rafting on the Gauja, craft markets, concerts, and dance performances.

Strenči also owes much of its cultural legacy to the photographer Dāvis Spunde. Without his photographs, we would not know the history of Strenči as we do today. To honor his memory, a special monument has been erected at the Strenči cemetery, featuring a camera and his words: "I photographed Strenči and preserved evidence for history." He lived in a building with his student, Jānis Krauklis, better known by his poet's pseudonym "Jānis Ziemeļnieks." A photography studio was located on the second floor of their home.

Today, Strenči continues to develop its identity by providing education to local residents, fostering cultural life, and preserving its historical values.



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Conclusion

Are you ready for your next getaway?

You do not have to be a millionaire to travel well, however, keep in mind that each travel makes your more than a millionaire. Exploring culture, places, history builds tolerance, understanding and empathy - human qualities that no money can buy.

Culture is the manager of communication, relationship and values. And it is up to you if you choose this kind of liberty for yourself. This is a form of democracy and freedom - to travel, discover and cultivate values that keep our national identity alive and growing.

Project partners

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Learning for Integration (Finland)
Raeküla Old School Center (Estonia)

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