

## Culture Tourism in South Estonia and Võru county - situation analysis -

In South Estonia, nature is quite different from that in the North and West as South Estonia is the land of lakes and hills. The highest peak, the deepest lake, the deepest valley and the longest river in Estonia are situated here. South Estonia is rich in forests, the towns are small, green and quiet. Villages and farms are scattered over the landscape, just like stones or trees.



Because of the intact nature and the traditional lifestyle in South Estonia, people are more sincere in this area. It is not unusual here that a complete stranger starts a conversation with you in the café or at a bus stop. The conversation may not be pleasant, however, because the economic problems here are more acute than on average in Estonia. But on the other hand, the talk is honest – totally opposite to the “keep smiling” attitude.

The Võru people are not a separate nation – although they speak a distinct variety. There are discussions whether the Võru language is a separate language or just an Estonian dialect and probably the discussions will continue. The Võru language is a variety that has survived the ancient South-Estonian language. The Võru language (which has about 70 000 passive and 15 000 active users) is the smallest language that has ever been used in the Eurovision song Contest (the song was entitled “Tii” (“Road”), 2004).

While the Võru people are definitely Estonians both in their mindset, history and culture, the Setu people were “made” Estonians only in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Up to 1920 the Setu lived in Pskov Province in Russia, were Orthodox, mostly illiterate and had no family names. Yet also the Setu had something to be proud of – singing. The greatest Setu women singers could memorise and perform more than 20 000 verses. Singing was for the Setu a substitute for the radio, newspaper and family chronicles.



Every year Võru Folklore Festival takes place, lasting for four days. It reaches its emotional climax when performers and the audience join to form a dancing line along the town’s main streets, there are more than 2000 dancers participating. Every year the organisers find a new dance with simple steps, which make the line move on a few metres. The most important cultural events in South Estonia first and foremost represent the folk and amateur culture.

Specimens of traditional Estonian handicraft cannot only be found in special shops, but also at fairs. Fairs were traditional places where Estonian country folk came together and traded. A wide range of handicraft items is offered at the fairs: knitted sweaters, wickerwork, jewellery, bags, ceramic and glass dishes, toys. However, on the counters you can also find folk medicines from sea buckthorn jam to bee poison.



(Information from: Genuine South Estonia Culture)  
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