



BICYCLE ROUTE

THE SLĪTERE CIRCLE

Welcome to Slītere!

In the Slītere National Park, except for restricted areas, you may walk freely through it to look for plants, animals and landscapes, to pick mushrooms and berries, to go swimming (except at Kolkastrags, where it is dangerous), to get a suntan, to ride a bike or a boat. While doing it, let's respect the nature values!



The Slītere National Park (established in 1999 as a strict nature reserve) is known, with good reason, as an open-air museum which shows the historical development of the Baltic Sea. Nowadays evidence of geological events is seen in the Blue Hills of Slītere, which stand 20 to 30 metres high above what was the shore of the Baltic lake of ice 10,000 years ago. The Stiebri hills were former 8,000 or 9,000 years ago, while the Littorina Sea formed Europe's largest set of dune ramparts and damp hollows between those ramparts. This occurred between 4,000 and 7,000 years ago. The gentle climate of Northern Kurzeme is the reason why so many rare plants are found in the park – some 860 in all including Common Yew (*Taxus baccata*) and Baltic Ivy (*Hedera helix* var. *baltica*). Of certain value in the preservation of these treasures was the Soviet military machine, which has left behind army bases and other military objects in the area. The presence of the military meant that the area of what is now the Slītere National Park remained largely undisturbed for 50 years. The park includes one of the most popular tourist destinations in Latvia – the Cape of Kolka, which is visited by more than 50,000 travellers each year. During the spring migration of birds, tens of thousands of birds fly over the cape within one hour. Along the shore of the Baltic Sea is the so-called Livonian coast, which stretches from Kolka to Sīkrags and Oviši. Fishing villages and other cultural objects established by the world's smallest ethnic minority, the Livonians, can be found here. Tourists will enjoy interesting four nature trails, bicycling routes, viewing tower, and the Slītere lighthouse which is open for visitors.

THE ROUTE

This route is appropriate for active tourists who are interested in coastal landscapes and the culture of the Liv people. The old forest road passes through five Liv villages: Mazirbe, Košrags, Pitrags, Saunags and Vaide. Some trace of the old days and fishermen lifestyle is still found here. From Košrags the route takes the "Apakšceļš" – a lonely old forest road between Košrags and Dūmele passing the Bažu bog. After Dūmele the route returns to Kolka by paved road.

Season: May-September
Distance: ~50 km – one day or two days, spending the night at tourism facilities
Duration: ~1-2 days
Type of bicycle: Mountain bike
Difficulty: Medium
Route: Kolka-Vaide-Saunags-Pitrags-Košrags-Dūmele-Ezermuiža-Melnsils-Kolka

Road cover: Forest roads along approximately 2/3 of the way, paved roads elsewhere
Beginning: Kolka (car park or other location)
End: Kolka (car park or other location)
Markings: The "Apakšceļš" part is color marked. The Kolka – Košrags part is marked by green signs with cycling symbol. Alternatives: You can ride the route in any direction, or start at Košrags or Melnsils, because it is a circular route.
Distance from Riga: 150 km
Logistics: A circular route which ends where it started
Note: The forest roads, particularly between Košrags and Dūmele, can be a mess, particularly after spring rains. There are a few sandy areas which will be more difficult to traverse.
Emergency services: Ring 112

TOURIST SERVICES

Nearby accommodations:
🏠 Pitagi 29327228, www.pitagi.lv
🏠 Purvziēdi 63200179, 29395624
🏠 Jauntilmači 29412974
🏠 Krūmiņi 29452512
🏠 Uši 63276507, 29475692, www.kolka.info
Resting place: In Kolka, at the Vaide pond in Vaide
Shops: In Kolka, Mazirbe and Melnsils
Dining: At the Pitagi guest house in Košrags (only for groups, by prior arrangement) and in Kolka (only during the season)
Bicycle rentals: At the Uši, Pitagi, Mazirbes Kalēji and Jaunlidumu guesthouses
Information: www.talsurajons.lv 63224165; www.kolkasrags.lv 29149105; www.ziemeļkurzeme.lv 63232293, 29444395; www.countryholidays.lv 67617600; www.livones.lv

The Slītere National Park features several other hikes, as well as bike, water and auto routes. Look for a list of routes on www.countryholidays.lv and for markings out in nature.



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THE MOST INTERESTING DESTINATIONS

1 The Kolkasrags Visitor Centre. Here you can have some hot coffee or tea, buy souvenirs, and obtain valuable information about historical events in the region. Information stands are there to provide that information.

2 Kolkasrags is the most distinct horn along the Latvian seashore, and it is the place where the Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Riga come together. The horn extends under the sea for another five kilometres and up to the Kolka lighthouse. The sun rises and sets in the sea at Kolkasrags, and those are some really fantastic views. Swimming is not recommended here because of shifting currents and sand. A monument by the sculptor Ģirts Burvis, "Those Taken by the Sea," has been installed in the dunes at Kolkasrags. The monument represents a gate through which the Kolka lighthouse can be seen. Other points of interest include a wrecked ship, a rock marking the centre of Europe, information stands dedicated to the founder of Latvia's maritime industry, Krišjānis Valdemārs, and a former Soviet military base which is used today by the Latvian Coast Guard and which can be viewed only from the outside. During spring migration, there are lots of birds at Kolkasrags, and this is of interest to bird watchers. There is a convenient car park, benches with tables, a visitor centre, and, during the summer season, a small café where you can have a delicious meal.

3 The old Kolkasrags lighthouse is just a set of ruins right now. The lighthouse at the tip of the horn was built in the 16th century and renovated several times. The ruins are slowly decaying because of storms and ice during the winter. They had been standing well away from the shoreline once, but now are slowly disappearing under water.

4 The Kolka lighthouse is on an artificial island which was created between 1872 and 1875. The original lighthouse was made of wood, and its light was first lit in June 1987. As the island settled into the sea, the current tower was built. It began operations on July 1, 1884. Today the lighthouse is six kilometres from Kolkasrags at the end of its sandy shallows (back when it was built, it was just five kilometres away). The island still has the building for the lighthouse supervisor, as well as several outhouses. The metal lighthouse which is there now was built in St Petersburg. It has been an automated lighthouse since 1979.

5 The Kolkasrags Pines trail is made up of wooden pathways along which you will view an interesting pine forest that at one time was partly covered by sand from the dunes. There is a massive pine tree that is partly covered by sand, as well.

6 A shooting range which isn't really there anymore, but it was once used for training purposes by the Soviet military. Right now you will see an overgrown area of land which stretches from the seashore to the Kolka-Ventspils road. That's where the shooting range was located.

7 Vaide – a village in the middle of the forest known for a Horn collection – Museum at the Purvziedi homestead, as well as the Vaide Pond. There is a beautiful and massive oak tree in Vaide, as well.

8 Saunags is an extensive fishing village with many buildings for travellers, both old and new. The name Saunags was first mentioned in documents in the 14th century. The **Nigliņas linden tree** is very impressive in size.

9 Pitrags is a former fishing village with many legends about sea pirates and sunken ships. The **Pitrags Baptist Church** is at the centre of the village – built in 1902.

10 Košrags is the most interesting of the Liv villages in terms of architecture, the cultural landscape, and accessibility. The names and history of the various buildings are posted on outer walls, and there is a central information stand, as well.

11 The Apakšceļš road – a lonely, forested and ancient road between Košrags and Dūmele, with lots of interesting stories about the old Pitragupe windmill, which never did grind any grain (the foundations are still there), and about the boiler of a wrecked ship which a local baron used to produce tar. This used to be a horse path which crossed the Bažas swamp. The great rock of Dūmele is impressive, indeed.

12 The Bažas swamp is the largest swamp in the Slitere National Park and is entirely off limits to visitors.

13 The Dūmele lake meadows – a legendary location which is said to have been the site of a lake which, in 1838, was poured into the sea. When the water was gone, remnants of ancient tree stumps and ships were found at the bottom of the lake.

14 Melnsils is an ancient Liv village where ships were built at one time. There is a legend about Trommel, the robber.

15 The Ēvaži shoreline. The 0,3km long trail leads to the steep bank which is 8-15m high. It's worth it – the view of the Gulf of Riga is magnificent here.

16 Ūši – a campsite and guesthouse in Kolka where, if you apply in advance, you can see how the traditional carrot buns known as "sklandu rauši" are baked.

17 Kolka is the only Liv village in which intensive fish processing and other business activities were preserved even after the imposition of the Soviet regime in Latvia. The population of Kolka increased even as the population of other local villages decreased.

18 The churches of Kolka – **Lutheran** (built in 1886), **Orthodox** (built in 1890 and used as a graveyard chapel in Soviet times before returning to its status as a proper church), and **Catholic** (built in 1997).



The Kolkasrags Visitor Centre



The Cape of Kolka



The ruins of the old Kolkasrags lighthouse



The Kolkasrags Pines trail



The Kolka lighthouse



The shooting range



The Pitrags Baptist Church



The forest road between Liv villages



The Dūmele lake meadows



The Ēvaži shoreline



Open farm "Krāces" in Kolka



The Kolka Lutheran Church



The Kolka Orthodox Church



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