





The Port Briefing Series

Landfall

Saaremaa

Estonia's great Baltic island - a moated castle, windmills, a meteorite crater and a quiet, wooded calm



Saaremaa in a Nutshell

Estonia's largest and gentlest island - sealed off as a Soviet border zone until 1991, so its windmills, junipers and thatched farms survive almost untouched, crowned by the best medieval castle in the Baltics



Port Day

Sunday 26 July 2026

A short orientation before you step ashore

Provisional Timings for the Day



0900
Alongside

>



0930
Gangway Open

>



1700
All Aboard

>



1730
Departure



40 km to Town
Coach or Taxi

the harbour is remote - no walking to Kuressaare



Sights Are Spread
Plan a Route

the island is large - a tour makes the most of it



About 6.5 Hours
Time Ashore

enough for the north coast and the run to town



The Euro
No Change Needed

Estonia is in the eurozone - cards everywhere



Watch For - Around the Ship



Panga cliff - the island's highest sea cliff runs along the coast just east of the harbour



Windmills - the wooden mills of Angla, the very symbol of Saaremaa, lie on the road south



Juniper and pine - a low, wooded, thatch-and-stone island, sealed and unspoilt for decades



Time Ashore

About 7.5 Hours

a fair day - but distances are long, so a coach or tour earns its keep



Next Port of Call Riga

Mon 27 Jul, 0900 - the Latvian capital, on the mainland

Where in the World



Estonia's Largest Island

off the west coast, guarding the mouth of the Gulf of Riga - flat, wooded and thinly peopled, about 30,000 souls



Sealed for Fifty Years

a closed Soviet military border zone until 1991 - which is exactly why its old rural world survives so well



Local Time - Eastern European

Two hours ahead of the UK - follow the ship's daily programme for all-aboard

+3h

vs GMT

+2h

vs UK

+7h

vs New York

The Facts at a Glance



1.3 Million People

in Estonia - one of the EU's smallest nations; Saaremaa itself holds about 30,000



The Euro

Estonia joined the eurozone in 2011 - no need to change money



The Digital Nation

the world's most advanced e-state - online voting, e-residency, government in an app



A Finnic Tongue

Estonian is a cousin of Finnish, not a Baltic or Slavic language - and quite unlike them



Free Since 1991

the last of the Baltics sealed by the USSR - now proudly in the EU and NATO



Forest and Bog

half of Estonia is forest - a land of woods, wetlands, islands and clean, quiet air



The Estonian Flag

blue for the sky, sea and loyalty; black for the soil and past hardship; white for snow, birch and the striving for freedom

What Estonia Is Known For



The Digital State

The world's most advanced e-society - online voting, e-residency and paperless government



A Finnic Language

Estonian is a cousin of Finnish, unrelated to its Baltic or Russian neighbours



The Singing Revolution

Estonians sang their way to freedom - vast song festivals are a national institution



Medieval Tallinn

The mainland capital's old town is one of Europe's best-preserved, and a UNESCO site



Forest and Bog

Half the country is woodland, threaded with wetlands, lakes and more than 2,000 islands



A Tech Powerhouse

Skype was built here - a tiny nation that became one of Europe's start-up capitals

What Saaremaa Is Known For



Kuressaare Castle

The best-preserved medieval castle in the Baltics, moated and complete on its island



The Kaali Crater

A field of Bronze Age meteorite craters - the most accessible impact site on Earth



The Windmills

The wooden mills of Angla, the very emblem of the island's old farming life



Juniper and Dolomite

Juniper wood and pale dolomite stone - worked into crafts and the island's field walls



A Spa Island

Kuressaare has taken curative mud and spa cures since the 1820s - Estonia's spa capital



Home-Brewed Beer

Saaremaa keeps a living tradition of farmhouse ale, brewed as it has been for centuries

A Famous Son of the Island



Bellingshausen

1778 - 1852

Born on this island, the Baltic German admiral Fabian von Bellingshausen led the Russian expedition that, in January 1820, became the first to sight the continent of Antarctica - a feat of navigation to rank with Cook



He Found Antarctica

On 27 January 1820, aboard the sloop Vostok, he was first to sight the white continent



A Master Navigator

He twice circled the globe and charted the far Pacific - an admirer, and equal, of Cook



His Name on the Map

The Bellingshausen Sea, off Antarctica, carries the name of this Saaremaa-born sailor

Three Things They Will Not (Normally) Tell You

1



You Are Far From Town

The deepwater harbour sits on the empty north coast, about 40 km from Kuressaare, with nothing walkable nearby - a coach, taxi or ship's tour is essential, not optional

2



Euros, and Good Value

Estonia is in the eurozone, so no money to change; cards work everywhere, even at rural sites, and the island is gentle on the purse

3



The Island Is Large

The sights are strung across a big, quiet island - pick a route (the north coast, or the run to town) rather than trying to see it all in a short day



Don't Mention... the island was a sealed Soviet military border zone until 1991, its recent past still tender; and Estonians are Nordic and Finnic in spirit, emphatically not 'Russian'

Money - What It Buys



The Euro

Estonia joined the eurozone in 2011 - the same notes and coins as much of Europe

£1 buys about **€1.18**

£1 buys about **\$1.35**

The island is good value - your pound stretches further here than at home



Cards work everywhere - even rural sites and the smallest cafes take contactless

Indicative mid-market rates, late July 2026

What You Might Reasonably Pay



Coffee

€3.00

about £2.60



Water

€1.50

about £1.30



Island Ale

€5.00

about £4.30



Castle Entry

€15.00

about £12.95



Top Tips to Save



Panga cliff, the island's finest sea view, is free to walk



The Kaali crater is free to see - only the small museum charges



The castle moat and grounds are free; a ticket (about 15 euros, at the gate) is for inside



Kuressaare's old town, park and beach cost nothing to enjoy

Why Here? The Founding



1380s

The Bishop's Island Castle

The wild Oeselians - feared Baltic sea-raiders - were subdued in the Northern Crusades. The Bishop of Osel-Wiek then raised a stone castle at Kuressaare (KOO-reh-saar-eh), and a town grew up in its shelter



The Oeselians

The pagan islanders were dreaded pirates who even sacked Sigtuna in Sweden in 1187



The Bishop's Castle

Raised in the 14th century by the Bishop of Osel-Wiek; the town won its charter in 1563



A Border Fortress

Stone and dolomite, moat and bastions - guarding the island and its trade for centuries

Kaali, c. 1500 BC

The Sun That Fell From the Sky

Around 1500 BC a meteorite broke over Saaremaa and struck with the force of the Hiroshima bomb, blasting out a ring of nine craters and setting the forest alight for miles around. To the Bronze Age islanders who lived through it, it must have looked like the sun itself falling to earth - and that memory may echo still in the old sun-myths of the north



Iron from this very impact travelled far - a Bronze Age arrowhead made of Kaali meteorite metal was found in Switzerland



Two Hundred Years Ago



1820s

The Cure and the Continent

Two centuries ago Kuressaare was reinventing itself as a fashionable mud-bath spa under the Russian Empire - just as one of the island's own sons was thousands of miles south, discovering Antarctica

The spa is born

From the 1820s Kuressaare's curative sea-mud made it a genteel Russian-era health resort

Baltic German manors

The island's land lay with a Baltic German gentry, its villages Estonian-speaking farmers

Antarctica, 1820

The island-born Admiral Bellingshausen sighted the white continent - Saaremaa's finest hour at sea

A Century to Now



1918

A Free Estonia

The republic is born - Saaremaa joins an independent Estonia after centuries of foreign rule



1944

The Sørve Battles

Bitter fighting on the southern peninsula as the Soviets retake the islands from the Germans



1945-91

The Closed Zone

A sealed Soviet border area, entered only by permit - which quietly preserved its old world



Today

Reborn

Free Estonia's tranquil holiday island, in the EU and the euro, its heritage intact

Where You Berth - Remote



Alongside, but Remote

We dock at Saaremaa Harbour, the deepwater quay on the empty north coast - no town, and no tender - about 40 km from Kuressaare



Everything Needs Wheels

Take the ship's coach or a pre-booked taxi - there is nothing to walk to at the pier, so plan your transport before you step off

The Best View - and the Walk



The Best View

Panga Cliff

The island's highest sea cliff, a wooded escarpment dropping to the Baltic - and, conveniently, the nearest great sight to the ship



Panga Cliff - the highest sea cliff on the island, just along the coast from the harbour



The Castle Tower - climb the ramparts at Kuressaare for the town, the bay and the flat green island



Big Island Skies - wide, wooded horizons, stone walls and clean Baltic light, all across the drive



Walking Kuressaare

The town square to the castle

0.6 km / 0.4 mi · 8 min · flat, pretty

The castle, moat and park

on its island · linger · the great sight

The seafront and the beach

0.5 km / 0.3 mi · 7 min · calm and shallow

The old wooden town

in the centre · wander · cafes, craft shops

Once the coach has brought you south, Kuressaare itself is small, flat and a pleasure to walk - the castle, the square, the wooden streets and the shore, all close together

Two Ways to Shape the Day



The Full Island Run

North to South, the Classic Tour

- Panga cliff on the near north coast
- The wooden windmills of Angla (AHNG-lah)
- The Kaali meteorite crater and its museum
- On to Kuressaare and its castle - a full, rewarding day



Straight to the Castle

Make for Kuressaare and Linger

- Go directly to Kuressaare by coach or taxi
- The moated Bishop's Castle and its museum
- The old wooden town, the square and the cafes
- The seafront, the park and the spa - unhurried

Saaremaa on a Budget



Panga Cliff

The island's finest sea view - a wooded clifftop walk, free to all



The Kaali Crater

Walking the rim of the great meteorite crater costs nothing - only the museum charges



The Castle Grounds

The moat, ramparts and green island setting are free; a ticket is only for the museum inside



Kuressaare Old Town

The square, the town hall and the pretty wooden streets are free to wander



The Seafront

Kuressaare's promenade, park and shallow beach are open and free



Juniper and Dolomite

Browsing the island's craft stalls of juniper wood and pale stone costs nothing

Landfall · Saaremaa

For the Cultured

Ashore



Saaremaa Museum

Island history from the middle ages to the Soviet years, inside Kuressaare Castle



Angla Windmill Park

Five restored wooden mills and a heritage farmstead - the island's emblem (about 6 euros)



Kaali Museum

The meteorite and limestone museum beside the great crater, telling the impact story



Mihkli Farm Museum

An eight-generation thatched farmstead in the west, kept as island life once was



Valjala Church

The oldest stone church on Saaremaa - a fortress-like medieval survivor (VAL-yah-lah)



Bellingshausen Manor

A memorial to the Antarctic admiral at his family manor in the island's west

If You Do One Thing

Tour the Bishop's Castle

Make the trip south to Kuressaare and its castle - the best-preserved medieval stronghold in the Baltics, standing whole on its own island within a broad wet moat, its towers and vaulted halls now the Saaremaa Museum. It is worth every kilometre of the drive



Short on time? Panga cliff, close to the ship, is the easy and lovely alternative

One Drink, and One Dish



If You Have One Drink

Island Ale

Saaremaa keeps a living tradition of home-brewed farmhouse ale (koduolu, KOH-doo-oh-loo) - malty, cloudy and quite unlike factory lager. The island also makes a well-regarded vodka and gin, if ale is not your measure



If You Eat One Thing

Black Bread

Dark, dense Estonian rye bread (leib, LAYB) is the heart of the island table - had with butter, or with smoked Baltic fish. For something heartier, seek out Saaremaa's juniper-grazed island lamb

With Fair Winds

Saaremaa in a Slide



Stand on Panga cliff - the island's highest sea view



Peer into the Kaali crater - where the sky once fell



Tour the Bishop's Castle - the finest in the Baltics



All Aboard 1630 - Sail 1700 leave time for the drive back to the ship - then on to Riga

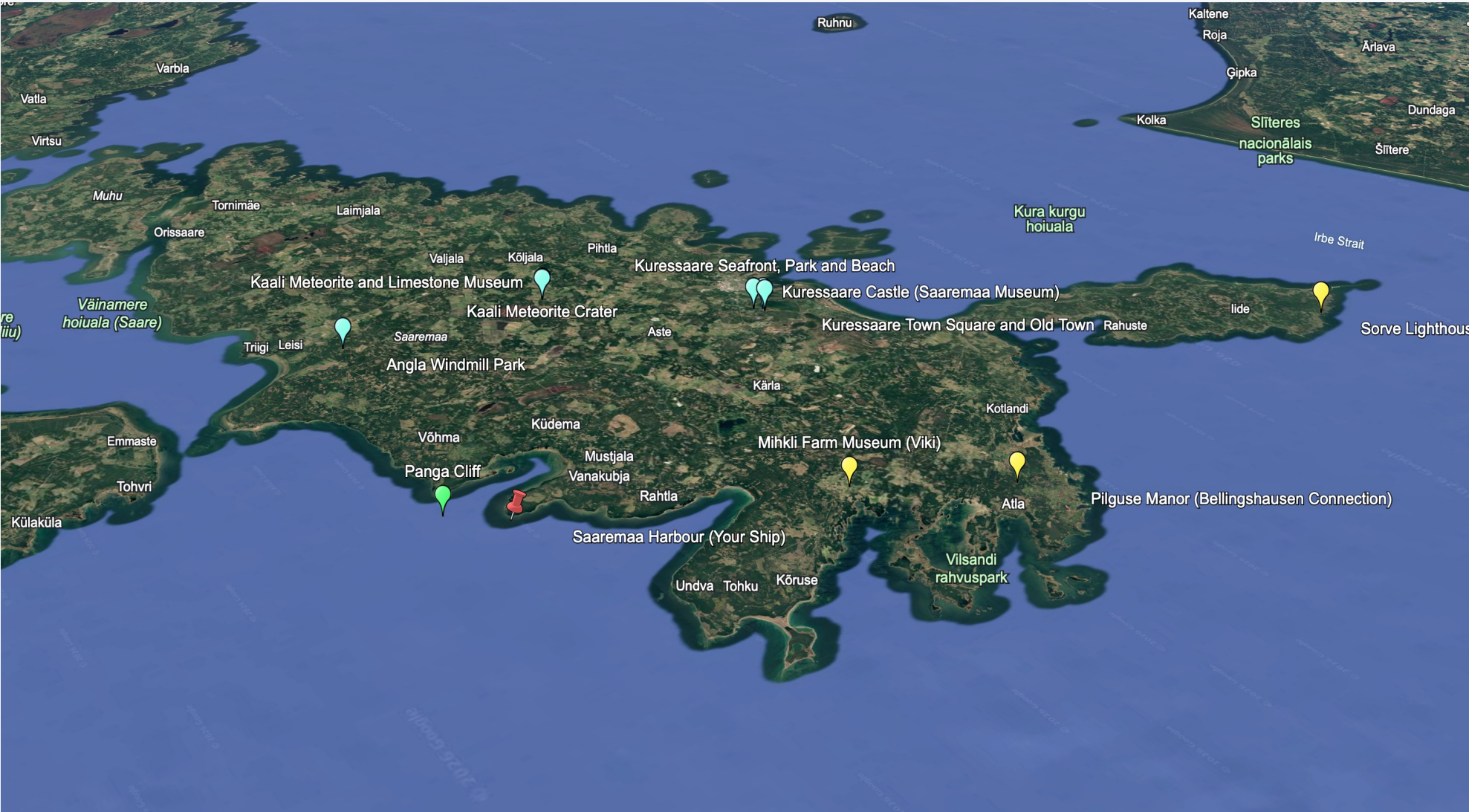


Saaremaa in Motion



[Destinations Europe's 7 Things To Do In Saaremaa](#)

The Lie of the Land - Saaremaa



The Sensible Choice Here

Let a Coach Do the Distance

With the town 40 km off and the sights spread wide, a ship's tour is the easy way to see Saaremaa. The favourites take in the island run - Panga cliff, the Angla windmills and the Kaali crater, ending at Kuressaare Castle; or focus on the castle and old town; or head south to the Sorve peninsula, its lighthouse and its wartime history



Book at the Shore Excursions Desk

Apps Worth a Download

A few apps to smooth and enrich your day ashore - grab them on the ship's wi-fi before you step off



Google Maps

Pin the harbour, Panga, Kaali and Kuressaare - and save the island to use offline



Bolt

Estonia's own ride app - the best way to get a taxi; pre-book, as cars are few out here



Google Translate

Estonian is a tricky Finnic tongue - the camera and phrase tools are a real help



Your Cruise App

The all-aboard time in your pocket - vital when the ship is 40 km from town

Forecasted Weather

Local time	12 AM	03 AM	06 AM	09 AM	12 PM	03 PM	06 PM	09 PM
Wind direction								
	12	13	15	14	12	13	5	11
Wind speed (kts)								
Wind gusts (max kts)	17	21	23	19	15	17	6	14
Cloud cover								
Precipitation type								
Precipitation (in/3h)								
Air temperature (°F)	64	63	64	65	68	69	68	68

