

Sustainable Product Development and Marketing

By Marika Mann, Executive Manager, Estonian Nature Tours

“There is a lot of talk about developing sustainable tourism entrepreneurs. But we have to teach customers as well how to use sustainable tourism. If we want to have everything for free, we are not sustainable anymore. It is nice to contribute to and support the local communities. It shows appreciation. Cheap is not always best for those whose home you visit. With no income, people cannot live here and then everyone is forced to move to the city, which would be a tragedy. Therefore, I encourage everyone to use local services...”

— Marika Mann (Lusaka, Zambia, May 2011)



Männikjärve bog in Endla Nature Reserve. © Sven Zacek.

Introduction

Estonia is a land of great natural beauty. With its Siberian-like forests, Scandinavian peat bogs, water meadows full of geese and waders and a fascinating coastline, together with a low human population, empty roads and excellent infrastructure, Estonia has rapidly become a favorite wildlife destination in Europe. Even though Estonia now takes its place as part of the modern world, Estonians have always enjoyed a close affinity with the

natural world, a relationship that is evident in the traditions, culture and language proudly passed from one generation to the next. This respect for the elements of nature and adaptation to living in a climate of seasonal extremes, has given Estonians a unique perspective on the natural world, which is demonstrated by an enlightened attitude toward the all-important issues of conservation in the 21st century.

Facts About Estonia

- Estonia stretches 350 km from east to west and 240 km from north to south.
- Sea islands form one tenth (10%) and lakes about one fifth (20%) of Estonia's territory.
- Forests and woodlands cover almost half of the Estonian territory.
- Total area of Estonian fens and bogs is about 140,000 ha.
- An admirable 17% of the country is afforded protection within nature reserves that vary in size from the large national parks to the smaller, locally protected reserves.
- With an area of 45,000 km², Estonia is larger than, for example, Slovenia, Holland, Denmark or Switzerland.
- Conversely, Estonia's population ranks among the smallest in the world; as of January 2000, an estimated 1,361,242 people live in Estonia – a population density of only 30.2 people per square kilometer.

Estonian Nature Tours

Estonian Nature Tours (ENT) is a tour organizer specializing in bird-watching, botanical and mammal-watching tours. ENT's individual and specialized approach to tourism was developed throughout a number of years, and by organizing local travel services in Matsalu National Park, before broadening operations in the spring of 2004 to include visits to a wide variety of nature reserves throughout Estonia. The principal aim of these trips is to introduce visitors to the unique natural heritage and wildlife of Estonia, which have fortunately been preserved at many places thanks to enlightened attitudes toward conservation, and a deep-rooted tradition of respect for the natural world. A skilled Estonian leader with the necessary local expertise escorts each trip. Tour leaders are often professional biologists or nature-reserve employees. Services can also include the reservation of accommodation, meals and transport or an all-inclusive tour in accordance with the specifications of clients.

Mission

Their mission is to introduce Estonia's natural heritage, preserved by moderate human activity; to promote ecological thinking and awareness of nature; and to improve local tourist services.

Philosophy

Estonian Nature Tours considers cooperation with the local community an essential part of organizing nature trips. Lunch at a gourmet restaurant cannot compare with the direct experience that guests receive having conversations with locals at a farm picnic or buying handicrafts and farm products. When a trip tour guide neglects to count minutes or hours, the guest comprehends that the guide was able to give something back by making contact with locals, thereby valuing them and leaving warm feelings in the hearts of all the guests... And that gratitude toward the tour organizer is experienced over and over again.



According to data from the Environmental Board, the peak number of Common Cranes occurred here, in 2006, when 23,000 birds were counted in Matsalu area, and 55,000 as the total in Estonia. © Remo Savisaar.



Thirty-six species of orchids (including the Lady's Slipper shown here) have been found in Estonia. © Anneli Palo.



Black Stork. © Sven Zacek.

Products

- Bird watching
- Botanical tours
- Mammal watching holidays
- Butterfly and dragonfly holidays
- Nature study tours
- Wildlife photography
- Matsalu Ticket

The Matsalu Ticket is a very new and environmentally friendly brand meant for anyone who wants to travel in a sustainable way and knows how to respect nature as well as local people. The project teaches about wildlife and coordinates visits to the Matsalu National Park, helping to avoid excess disturbance of both animal and plant species, as well as the local population. Bus tours and canoe trips are lead by local Estonian- and English-speaking guides.

The Matsalu Ticket benefits several companies, including about 20 different service suppliers – tour guides, transportation companies, boatmen, tourist farms, caterers, museums, nature centers and many local craftsmen.

Sustainable Tourism Development

Estonian Nature Tours has been a pioneer in developing nature and bird tourism throughout Estonia, by mentoring and encouraging tourism entrepreneur beginners (local networks) and organizing hiking days in Matsalu National Park (2000-2004) as well as pan-national seminars, “Does Estonia need bird watching tourism?” (2005, 2007); these are just some examples of ENT’s contribution to the development of sustainable tourism in Estonia.

Natural-history tourism, and especially bird watching, is a highly specialized area of tourism that demands a high level of professionalism and an intimate knowledge of the subject matter from the ground agent. Estonia enjoys increasing recognition as an attractive bird-watching destination, which each year brings more birdwatchers from all over Europe in search of its many interesting bird species. Estonia (and ENT) is proud of

this interest in its natural attributes but are also aware of the potential dangers that uncontrolled tourism can pose to the fragile ecosystems supporting the birdlife; the organization of “Responsible Tourism” through liaisons with the management of national nature reserves is the ethos that dictates actions at Estonian Nature Tours.

ENT Product Development

Estonian Nature Tours has long-term experience in organizing botanical and bird-watching tours and other wildlife holidays, and the feedback from clients has always been good to excellent. Every year, ENT develops one or two new tour packages.

- In the autumn of 2007, ENT introduced a new offering “Estonia in Early Spring,” which has proved very popular among clients.
- In autumn of 2009, ENT came out with totally new opportunities in Estonia, including “Estonia in Summer“ (wild flowers, birds and butterflies), and, in spring 2010, “Mammal-watching in Estonia” (mammals and birds).
- In autumn 2011, the first in Estonia, ENT came out with “Butterfly Holiday“ and “Dragonfly Holiday.”
- In spring 2008, the oldest tour, “Estonia in Spring,“ and, in autumn 2011, the “Matsalu Ticket” were accredited with the brand EHE (Quality System Pure and Interesting Estonia).

Marketing Project (2008-2011)

Estonian Nature Tours was allocated a grant for marketing by Enterprise Estonia in August 2008. The marketing project (2008-2011) totals were about 82,600 €. The result of the marketing project during three years has been a huge increase in visitors to the ENT website. There is also more and more interest being shown in Estonia by foreign naturalists and birdwatchers. At the moment, ENT has 18 agents all over the world who sell tours to their clients.

Why Estonia?

What is special in Estonia? Why should nature enthusiasts from around the world visit Estonia? Do we have something that others do not? Who is our target group? Where are the target markets?

Estonia is a small and wonderful place to see wildlife, at any time of year, with fantastic bird watching, including Steller’s Eiders, Ural Owl, Pygmy Owl, Great Snipe, Nutcracker, Citrine Wagtail, Lesser Spotted Eagle, eight species of woodpeckers, sea ducks, Hazel Grouse and massive numbers of birds on migration. Estonia is locked between the Finnish Gulf, the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea and Lake Peipsi near the



Estonian forests are renowned in Europe for their healthy populations of mammals, with around 700 to 800 lynx, more than 150 wolves, 500 to 600 brown bears and almost 20,000 beavers – tremendous numbers for such a small country.
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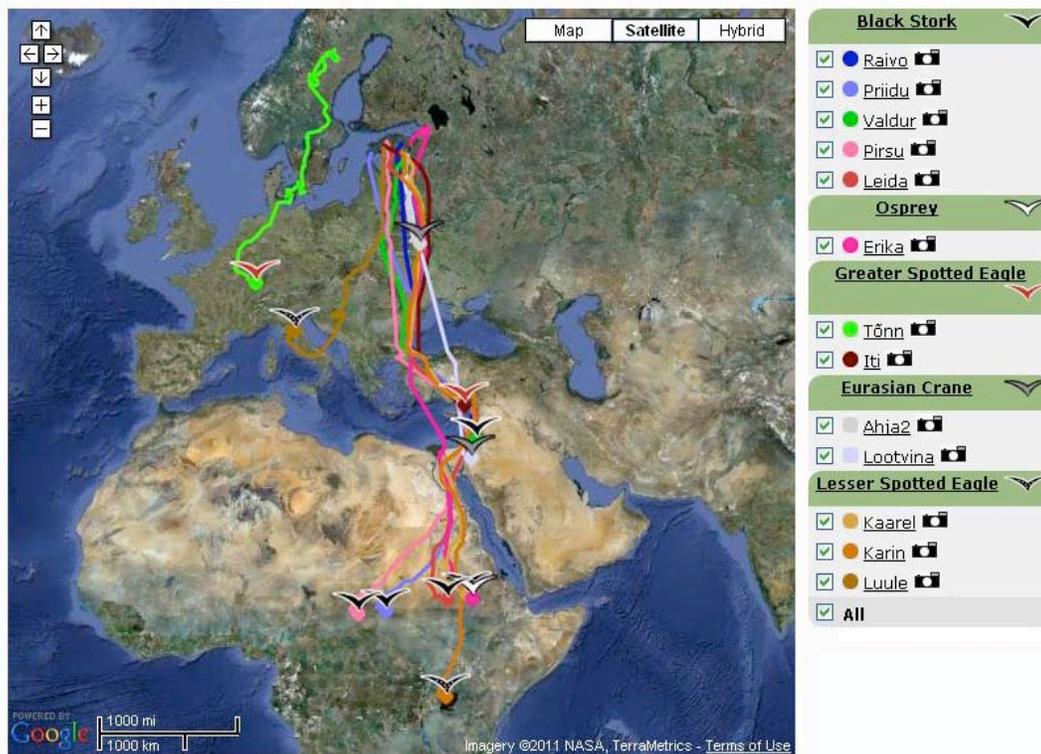
Russian border. In this respect, geographically, the Estonian waters and coastline are the natural stepping-stones, the most natural flyway, between breeding and wintering areas for millions of Arctic water birds, making bird watching in Estonia fabulous.

Butterflies, dragonflies and flowers are equally exciting, and the country is renowned for its large number of mammals, with more than 150 wolves, 500-600 brown bears and almost 20,000 beavers plus flying squirrels and an incredible number (700-800) of lynx, one of the strongest populations in Europe!

ENT clients are bird and nature clubs, mammal watchers, nature photographers, nature lovers, private groups, tour operators (agents) and individual travelers. Most of ENT's travelers are 50 to 80 years old, who prefer to buy all-inclusive holidays.

Project Activities

Within three years, ENT has developed a website, created a client database, compiled and distributed newsletters (four to five times a year) and bought advertisements to target destination bird-watching and nature interest (in all 55 times). ENT have organized three promotional tours to European tour agencies and journalists and attended the biggest bird and eco-tourism fair in the world, British Birdfair (2008-2011).



Climate Change: Peace through Tourism and Birds

Birds do not care much about frontiers. Many bird species that breed in Europe, winter in Africa. To achieve that, the passerines, many of which are weighing hardly 10 grams, must traverse the extensive Sahara Desert without any stopover.

Only the strongest ones survive this migration route – thousands of kilometers. Human activities have caused desert expansion in many countries of Africa and that is the reason why more and more migratory birds perish before reaching their wintering areas. A mere couple of decades ago, songbirds like Wood Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher, Barn Swallow, Red-backed Shrike, Turtle Dove and many others were common breeders in Europe, but now their abundance has abruptly decreased.

Due to the changes in agriculture caused by human impact, many bird species are endangered. The number of Barn Swallow has declined remarkably, due to a decrease in animal husbandry; Corncrake and Skylark are about to disappear due to intensive agriculture and concurrent cultivation of monocultures.

The most endangered birds are Spotted Eagles and Black Storks. In the breeding areas of Europe, their main threat is over-use of chemicals for fertilizers and insecticides and overgrowing of flooded areas, and in wintering areas of Africa, the diminishing of wetlands. On their migration, the birds are forced to traverse areas, where hunters shoot them down as a sport. Massive illegal bird hunting on the island of Malta in spring threatens Spotted Eagles and Black Storks and affects the abundance of tens of other species. To decelerate the processes that are causing declines in biological diversity all the countries of the world must contribute.

Since 2005, the Estonian Ornithological Society, www.eoy.ee, and the Eagle Club, www.kotkas.ee, have placed satellite and GPS receivers on seven adult birds and one young bird. Receivers are placed on the birds to research the species and organize its protection. Birds that have received valuable “backpacks” include Black Storks (3), Greater Spotted Eagles and Ospreys.

The migration route of Osprey, Black Storks, Lesser Spotted and Greater Spotted Eagles and Eurasian Cranes can be observed at the following site, <http://birdmap.5dvision.ee/en>.