



**Good Practice Story Title:**

**GETTING GREENER BY BIKE AND BUS.**

**A Triumph in Sustainable Tourism: Enhancing Accessibility to Lahemaa National Park**

**Destination:**

**LAHEMAA**

**Country:**

**ESTONIA**

**Submitting Organization:**

**NGO LAHEMAA TOURISM ASSOCIATION (VISIT LAHEMAA)**

**Category:**

- X Destination Management
- Nature & Scenery
- Environment & Climate
- Culture & Tradition
- Thriving Communities
- Business & Marketing

**Destination description:**

Lahemaa is a small magic place in the far north where nature and humans live in harmony. It has deep forests, stormy seas and huge rocks, but most of all, people with old stories and runic songs.



Lahemaa, the oldest national park of the former Soviet Union, is home to the best that Estonian nature has to offer. In the space of 725 km<sup>2</sup>, you'll find lush native forests, wetlands stretching to the horizon, and both rocky and sandy beaches. Lahemaa is one of Europe's most important forest conservation areas and has the largest deposit of erratic boulders in Europe. It is home to many wild animals— moose, wild boar, bears, and lynx. The northern coast attracts a large number of migratory birds every year.

Lahemaa is also a place with rich cultural heritage of Estonia's coastal areas. 71 villages of the national park with its more than 3000 inhabitants form an active community with lively national culture and welcoming spirit.

Since 1971, when Lahemaa national park was established, organisations and the local community have worked together to save the values of this magic place.

### Summary of Good Practice Story:

*Foreign visitors in Tallinn frequently ask how to reach Lahemaa by public transport. Now, it's not just possible, but also incredibly easy! This is a fantastic achievement!*

Katrin, an employee at the Tallinn tourism information centre expresses her joy at the steps taken by Visit Lahemaa to make transportation to the park more sustainable.

### Issues faced:

Lahemaa, Estonia's oldest national park, is a renowned haven for nature enthusiasts. Located just a 45-minute drive from Tallinn, it's a popular destination for day-trippers. Viru bog, a highlight within Lahemaa, attracts nearly 50,000 visitors annually. Despite receiving a sustainability quality label from the Europarc Federation and being a platinum-level Green Destination, a significant 84% of visitors arrive and travel within the park by car (according to State Forest Management Centre's survey:

<https://media.rm.ee/files/Lahemaa%20rahvusparki%20%C3%BChianne.pdf>).

The Lahemaa Tourism Association (Visit Lahemaa), a voluntary NGO of local entrepreneurs and residents, identified key obstacles for those wishing to use public transport and bicycles. These included:

- Difficulty in finding appropriate bus stops, as there were no stops explicitly named "Lahemaa" or "Viru bog."
- Challenges in navigating the park without a car.





## Solution:

To address these issues, Visit Lahemaa undertook several initiatives:

- **Collaboration with Tallinn’s Tourism Information Center:** Now, visitors are guided to buses heading to Loksa and Viru bog.
- **Mobile Infocafé and Bike Rental at Loksa Bus Station:** Easily accessible from Tallinn, this service, run by local students, provides information, maps, catering and bike rentals.
- **Promotion of Public Buses and Bike Rentals:** Many attractions now offer bike rentals, and events are scheduled according to bus timetables.
- **Biking Events:** These events start at Loksa bus station, encouraging exploration of the park by bike.
- **Lahemaa Lines:** A pilot hop-on-hop-off bus service that stops at key tourism attractions.
- **Renaming the Viru bog Bus Stop:** The stop previously named “Loksa tee (Loksa road)” was changed to “Viru raba (Viru bog)” for easier identification.

## Methods, Steps, and Tools applied:

The core strategy for addressing these issues involved multi-level collaboration and comprehensive communication.

1. **Initial Discovery:** The predominance of car usage by visitors to Lahemaa was identified during the fulfilling of Green Destinations criteria. Additionally, the number of groups arriving by excursion buses significantly declined post-COVID-19 pandemic.
2. **Analysis and Consultation:** The Lahemaa Tourism Association initiated an analysis to understand the root causes of this issue. Discussions were held with staff at Tallinn’s tourism information center, where it was frequently reported that tourists struggled to find suitable public transportation options to reach Lahemaa due to inadequate last-mile coverage.
3. **Stakeholder Engagement:** Subsequent discussions at Lahemaa tourism forums included all local stakeholders. These discussions led to the organization of biking events, the promotion of public bus usage, and the piloting of a hop-on-hop-off bus service. Recognizing the shortage of bike rentals, Visit Lahemaa, with funding from Enterprise Estonia, purchased 25 bicycles. A bike rental facility and a tourism information center were established at Loksa bus station.
4. **Practical Adjustments:** Observations revealed that tourists found it challenging to reach the popular Viru bog via public bus, primarily due to the bus stop name. Changing the bus stop name proved to be a straightforward process requiring an application to the local government, which led to new signs being installed within weeks.
5. **Outcome:** These efforts have facilitated easier access for tourists to Lahemaa via public bus, where they can rent bicycles and explore the national park sustainably. This sustainable travel trend is gaining increasing popularity.





### Achievements and Results:

- **Improved Visitor Guidance:** It's now easier for staff at the Tallinn visitor center to advise tourists on how to reach Lahemaa.
- **Successful Infocafé:** Nearly 1000 visitors used the infocafé over two summers, many arriving by public bus.
- **Bike Rental Popularity:** Almost 100 visitors rented bikes from Visit Lahemaa in two summers.
- **Increased Public Bus Usage:** Foreign visitors find it easier and cheaper to access Viru bog by public bus, with tickets costing around 3 euros one way.
- **Positive Feedback on Hop-on-Hop-off Bus:** Approximately 50 people piloted the service, all of whom expressed their intention to use it again.
- **Economic Benefits:** Local entrepreneurs benefit from bike rentals, and students gain summer employment at the infocafé.

### Lessons Learned and Advice:

- **Be Proactive:** Act when you see a need; don't wait for others.
- **Simple Solutions:** Often, solutions are simpler than expected. Communication is key.
- **Collaborate:** Partnering with others is essential for success.

### Recognitions and Additional References

Visit Lahemaa continues to promote public transport and bike rental through engaging reels and other media. Their efforts exemplify how targeted actions can significantly enhance sustainability and visitor experience in protected natural areas:

<https://www.facebook.com/reel/1099278210671333>

<https://www.facebook.com/reel/1063054981013261>



