



Muhu *the island where time takes a rest*

Introduction to Muhu Island

The islands off the Estonian coast are virtual dreamlands, unlike anything in Europe. There are more than a thousand of them lining the Estonian coast. They are retreats from fast-paced city life. The islands have a laid-back, friendly air about them. The landscape is considered quintessentially Estonian, with many windmills, thatched cottages and sleepy fishing villages. Muhu is among the smaller islands, with a definitive character of its own. More secluded than the two larger Estonian islands, yet easily accessible.

Muhu island has gradually been formed on three coral rings; the present day remainders of warmer times. Nowadays about 2000 inhabitants live on the island.

The first people inhabited Muhu around 2 500 years B.C. Today's witnesses of those ancient times are the various stone burial sites, and the strongholds in Linnuse and Päelda.

In 1227 a heavy battle was fought on Muhu by the Order of the Brethren of the Sword. This battle is considered to have been decisive in bringing Estonia for the centuries to come under foreign rule.

Shortly thereafter, the St. Catherine's church was built.

St. Catherine's is one of the oldest in Estonia. Built in the 13 century it is a splendid example of early-Gothic style with harmonious proportions and Byzantine-influenced mural decorations. Worth noting are the trapezium-shaped tombstones with pagan symbols. The most intricate tombstone depicting the pagan Tree of Life is presently located in the frame of the door leading to the wall staircase. The church has been erected on a sacred site of the ancient Muhu inhabitants.

Muhu is an island that has developed over the centuries at its own pace, its traditions are well known all over Estonia and the famous Muhu patterns are a refined expression of folk-art. So are its dance and songs.

When talking to Muhu people one can feel the soil as well as the soul of a very proud community that weathered times.

Nature has largely been left undisturbed in the past fifty years. Muhu is the natural habitat to 23 species of very rare orchids. They prosper in the rich bio-diversity still found on Muhu. The swamps, fens and Juniper forests provide a healthy and fragile environment for their survival.

Muhu is home to many migrating birds, which take temporarily shelter in the various bays.

Villages on Muhu are even today still headed by traditional village aldermen who take up the role of voluntary counsel. Many of the villages are charming in their simplicity.

In terms of tourism, Muhu has remained rather untainted so far. There is a small luxury hotel, and there are guesthouses and tourist farms that offer good value for money. In line with the spirit of the local community not much revolutionary will probably be happening on Muhu in the coming years.

Such is the nature of the small and charming island of Muhu - the island where time takes a rest.

For more information on Muhu visit www.muhu.info or contact the Muhu Tourism Association at: info@muhu.info