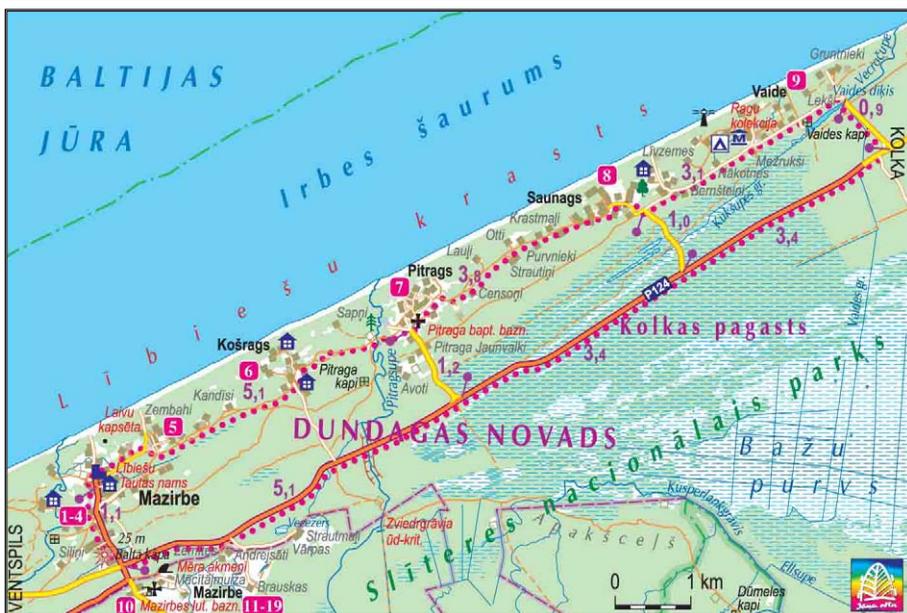




BICYCLE ROUTE LIV VILLAGES

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 Kolkasrags, 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 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. Returning by the Ventspils – Kolka road (P124), which is paved and marked in the route map. It is possible to start touring the villages at any point.

Season: April-October

Length: ~28 km, doable in one day

Time: ~5 h if you stop and look at the villages

Type of bicycle: Mountain bike

Difficulty: Medium

Road cover: Approximately half of the route is paved, while roads in the forest are gravelled in some places and paved in others

Beginning: Mazirbe, Liv People's Hall

End: Mazirbe, Liv People's Hall

Route: Mazirbe-Košrags-Pitrags-Saunags-Vaide, then the P 124 road back to Mazirbe

Markings: Between Mazirbe and Vaide, the route is marked with poles and green signs with cycling symbol

Alternatives: You can ride the route in the opposite direction or continue along the Kolka-Mazirbe-Sikrags bike route that has been established by the Slītere National Park (passing through the forest back to Kolka, this will add 11 km to your route). Because this is a circular route, it can be started or finished anywhere.

Distance from Riga: 170 km

Logistics: A circular route which returns to where it began

Note: The forest roads between the Liv village can be in poor shape – they're sandy and can have big puddles when it rains, and tree roots on the surface.

Emergency services: Ring 112

TOURIST SERVICES

Nearby accommodations:

🏠 Upeskalni 29259510, 🏠 Dzintariņi 26173009

🏠 Mazirbes Kalēji 63248374, 29213412

🏠 Pītagi 29372728, www.pitagi.lv

🏠 Jauntilmači 29412974

🏠 Krūmiņi 29452512

🏠 Purvziedi 63200179, 29395624

Resting place: At the Vaide pond in Vaide

Shops: In Mazirbe

Dining: In Mazirbe, in Košrags, in Pītagi guest house (only groups, by prior arrangement)

Bicycle rentals: The Pītagi and Mazirbes Kalēji guest houses

Information:

www.talsurajons.lv 63224165;

www.kolkasrags.lv 29149105;

www.ziemeļkurzeme.lv 63232293, 29444395;

www.countryholidays.lv 67617600;

www.livones.lv



Liv people on the seashore at Mazirbe



In Košrags village



The sea

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 Sikrags 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 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 Mazirbe was first mentioned in documents in 1387, and it was once the largest Liv village on the Kurzeme shoreline. Even recently it was an important centre for fishing and shipping. Today we know of Mazirbe as the site of the Liv People's Hall and the annual Liv festival that is held in the town.

2 The Liv People's Centre – a building erected in 1939 which represents the identity of the Liv people and houses a photographic exhibition devoted to the Liv people.

3 Kalši is a home that was built in the early 20th century. It has been restored, preserving the bricks that came from the Brauskas kiln at Mazirbe in the wall of the building.

4 Sepi – this granary, made of logs, was built in the 1920s and 1930s by an Estonian called Jēkabs Jaga.

5 The former Maritime School (1894-1914) trained more than 1,000 students. During Soviet times, a border guard facility was housed here, and the border guard tower has been preserved. Along the road to the school are forested shoreline dunes with small buildings which create an interesting coastal landscape. The road between the Maritime School and the sea was once known as the Captains' Road.

6 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.

7 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.

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

The **location of a former pub** at the edge of the Mazirbe-Cirste road in Ūbeles.

11 The Mazirbe Lutheran Church. Built in 1868. In its time, the church has been useful to sailors as a landmark. This church has suffered much damage over the course of time, particularly after World War II. It was restored in the early 1990s. Worship services in the Liv language were held here at one time. The so-called cross of cross, which is a unique symbol, can be seen in three places on the building's façade.

12 The old burial mound. This is a Medieval and contemporary graveyard. Legend has it that a holy place existed here in ancient times. There are several interesting objects here (13-16).

13 A pine tree. This impressive secular tree has a circumference of 3.17 metres. According to one story, a guest worker in Soviet times cut a hole in the tree with a motor saw (it can be seen from the side of the cemetery) so as to access honey that was inside.

14 The Old Tazelis monument. This monument is dedicated to the fisherman Nīks Freimanis (1845-1908), who served as the prototype for the character Old Tazelis in stories and a play written by Marģers Zariņš.

15 The werewolf's grave. A place full of legends and ghost stories – the grave which is ancient and covered with rocks is reputedly the only resting place in Latvia for a werewolf.

16 A monument to the parents of A. Bertholds. This is the grave of the parents of Captain A. Bertholds with an unusual grave monument.

17 The Black Plague rock at the church. The surface of the rock once contained text about the destruction of local Livs by Swedish King Charles IX and by the Black Plague (the rock is on a spot where victims of the plague were buried, and the text has been erased over the course of time). The smallest rock on the top, which also used to have an inscription, has been brought here from the Pakalni homestead.

18 The former parsonage. Built in the 18th century and rebuilt in the mid-19th century, the parsonage was the place where the Liv flag was first consecrated. Renovations of the parsonage are underway at this time. Since September 2009, it has been used by the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church as a rest home for its Recollection Centre.

19 The great Black Plague rock, which has engraved text that can still be seen to a certain extent – it tells future generations about the local pastor who died from the plague, about how the parsonage was established at Sikrags and then moved to Mazirbe. The rock is also a monument to six pastors of the nearby congregations. All the three stones tell about the horrors of the Black Plague in 1710, the texts have been engraved during the parson Peterson in 1711-1734.



The Liv People's Centre



The former Maritime School



The Pitrags village signpost on the seashore



The Nigliņas linden tree



The secular oak tree at Lāžas, Vaide



The Lutheran Church of Mazirbe



The old burial mound



The Old Tazelis monument



The pine tree



The werewolf's grave



The Black Plague rock at the church



The great Black Plague rock



The former parsonage dwelling house



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Photo: Lauku Ceļotājs (Juris Smaljniskis), Jānis Mednis, from the archives of the Talsi Tourist Information office

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