

24. By the source of River Emajõgi, on Rannu-Jõesuu recreation area, there is a house built of green building materials (wood, wood chips, clay, straw) – the **Võrtsjärv Visitor Centre**. It provides information on recreation and accommodation opportunities in the Võrtsjärv area, and you can also arrange sailing boat trips on Lake Võrtsjärv and buy souvenirs made by local craftsmen. There is an **observation tower** near the Centre.

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Soomaa

is worth visiting in every season.



Soomaa National Park was founded in 1993 for the protection of untouched bogs, flood meadows with rich plant and animal life, wooded meadows and forests. The varied nature of Soomaa, its unique culture featuring suspension bridges and dugout canoes and its five seasons have made the area popular among nature-loving travellers as well as weekend visitors.

20 kilometres from Viljandi towards Pärnu, before entering Kõpu, there is a sign directing to the right, to Soomaa National Park. Here you begin a journey from the Sakala upland down to Pärnu lowland.

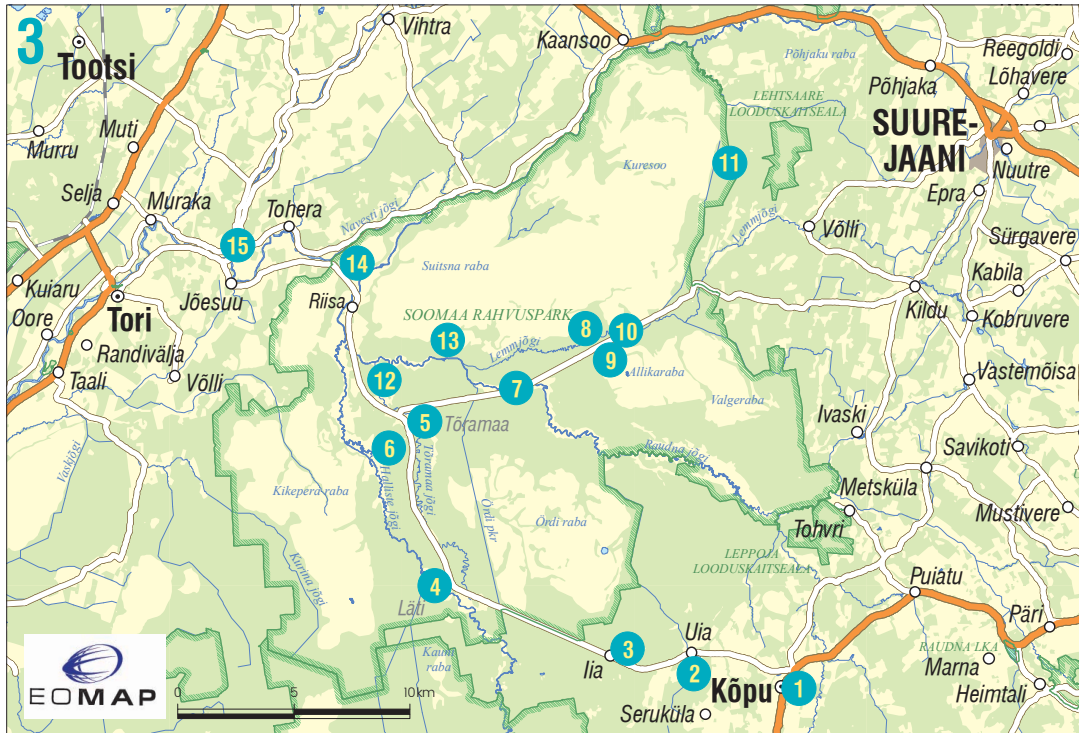
1. Before you take the turn towards Soomaa, you could stop by in Kõpu. The smallish classicist **Kõpu St. Peter's Church** (built in 1821-1825) has a brick floor and a sturdy historicist-style tower. The altar wall inside the church is decorated with half-pillars with antique form and beams. The altar painting by an unknown artist, "Let the Little Children Come to Me", has a unique narrative content. Some epitaphs of the patron family von Stryk are preserved. The **wall paintings in Suure-Kõpu Manor**, unique in Estonia, are also worth seeing. You can get more information about the Kõpu area and Soomaa at the Kõpu Visitor Centre.

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Canoe trips and bog hikes can be ordered:

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2. At **Uia village**, about three kilometres from Kõpu intersection, the terrain evens out. You have reached Pärnu lowland. The change in heights can be perceived both when driving and when riding a bike.



3. A couple of hundred metres before Iia village, a sign points to **Õõrdi study trail**. The trail begins from a campsite with a forest hut and a campfire site. The study trail follows a forest ride and leads to **Lake Õõrdi**.



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4. Continuing your drive, you will arrive to the **recreation site of Lätõ observation tower**. It's a comfortable spot for a short rest and for enjoying lovely views, especially at sunset. The tower is over six metres high and offers picturesque views of the flood meadow. During the flood, this is one of the few places in Soomaa where one can watch the flood from dry land.



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5. **The Soomaa National Park Centre** is located in Kõrtsi-Tõramaa. The building from 1998 stands at a crossing of old winter roads, on the land of the former Tõramaa-Kõrtsi farm. The permanent exhibition helps every visitor to learn more about the national park. Information materials and souvenirs can be bought. Next to the centre is the beginning of the **Beaver Trail** where you can get various information about the life of



beavers and see the signs of their activity. 0,6 km of the 1,8 km long trail is accessible in wheelchair. The visitor centre has a playground where children can play and climb. You can also camp and make a campfire at Kõrtsi-Tõramaa.

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6. Across the main road near the centre is the beginning of a study trail leading to the beautiful **Tõramaa wooded meadow**.

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7. If you drive towards Pärnu along the Kõpu-Tipu-Jõesuu road, the road turns to Kildu after a couple of hundred metres. After approx. six kilometres, the road crosses Raudna River. During the flood, the bridge is the only dry spot in the vicinity where the owner of Kuusekäära farm can keep his car. Flood makes many roads in Soomaa inaccessible for cars, so it's more sensible to use a canoe or a boat to get around. **Lemmjõe study trail** is located right after the bridge, to the left.

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8. When you continue towards Kildu, there is a sign to the left after a couple of kilometres – to **Mulgi meadow**. The picturesque sparsely wooded meadow is beautiful in every season. You can also see an original arch bridge with iron structure and wooden cladding.

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9. When you return to the road and drive one kilometre further, you arrive at **Kuuraniidu study trail**. There is a boardwalk to the right from the road, leading to the detritus-rich wetland forest.

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10. After a few kilometres, you can enjoy the view of Oksa flood meadows. **Oksa recreation areas** provide arranged campfire sites and allow you to relax in the beautiful wooded meadow. If you hike upstream along Lemmjõe River, you can see the ruins of an old inn with a preserved mantel chimney.

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11. When you drive on towards Ärma Farm, a sign points to the left indicating **Hüpassaare study trail**. After 7,4 kilometres from the intersection, you arrive at the 4,4 kilometres long Hüpassaare study trail which presents one of the largest raised bogs in Soomaa, the especially picturesque Kuresoo Bog. The house-museum of composer Mart Saar is located near the beginning of the trail.



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If you drive back to Tõramaa and then towards Jõesuu:

12. **Meiekose study trail** follows an old road. The bridge at the end of the trail has a wonderful view of Raudna River and its surroundings. Just after the bridge, the road turns to the right and leads you to the Meiekose recreation areas, with campfire sites and good fishing opportunities. There is also a forest hut for sleeping. This is one of the areas where driving on the main road is impossible during the flood: the river expands approx. twenty metres from its usual bed and floods the otherwise decent road.

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13. The narrow road leads you further to **Ingatsi study trail** that in its turn leads you to the highest (8 m) bog slope in Estonia (and in the whole Europe, according to some estimates). There is an observation tower and a boardwalk to bog ponds.



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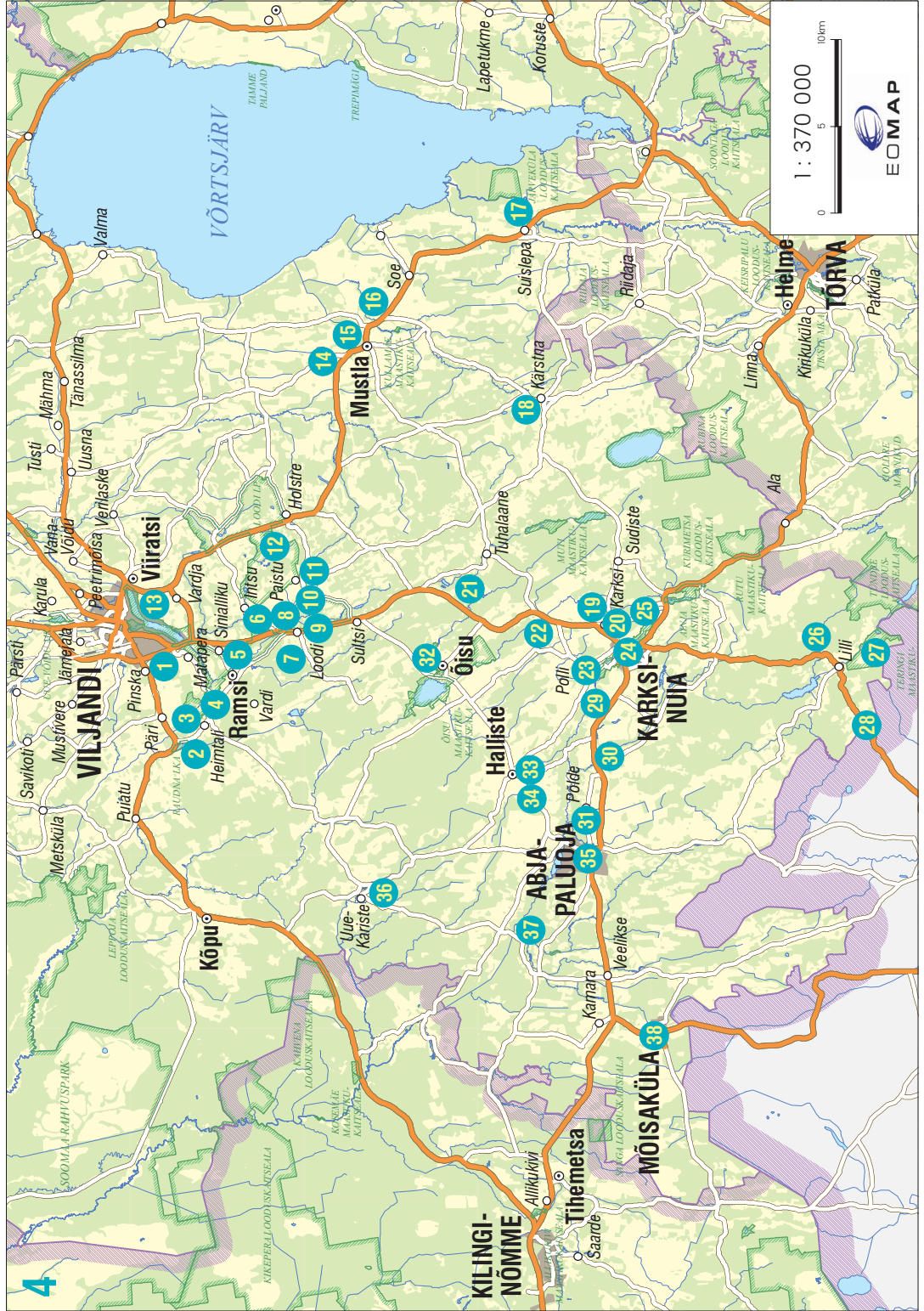
14. When you drive on along the main road, you will see a parking lot to the right, at the beginning of the approx. 5 kilometres long boardwalk to **Riisa bog** which is one of the smallest bogs in Soomaa but outstandingly beautiful. A 1,2 km long section of Riisa study trail is also accessible in wheelchair.

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15. **Jõesuu** at the border of Soomaa has got its name (Rivermouth in English) from the junction of two rivers. Navesti River flows into Pärnu River here. Behind the little Jõesuu shop, you can walk on the longest **suspension bridge** in Estonia and look down into the waters.





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