Lake Peipsi
THE LIVING ROOM OF LAKE PEIPSI

“The Living Room of Lake Peipsi” is a permanent exhibition about the natural conditions of Lake Peipsi and gives an overview about life at the lake. An artificial three-dimensional model (4m x 1,4m) shows main settlements around the lake, as well as many other sights of interest for tourists, students and other visitors – like accommodation, museums, panorama towers etc.

The exhibition thoroughly introduces all types of fish living in Lake Peipsi, including miniature mock-ups of all fish with information texts in Estonian, Russian and English.

“The Living Room of Lake Peipsi” was completed in 2005 as a cooperation project of Peipsi Koostöö Keskus (Peipsi Center for Cooperation) and MTÜ Studio Viridis Loodusharidus (NGO Studio Viridis Nature Education). Over 80 people and a dozen of companies were involved.

Initially “The Living Room of Lake Peipsi” was opened in the city government building in Kallaste, but in the fire of 2006 the exhibition suffered extensive smoke and water damage. The exhibition was restored and reopened in the Emajõe-Suursoo Nature Centre in Tartu county.

In cooperation between Kasepää municipality and Peipsi Infokeskus the exhibition was again reopened on May 9th in Kasepää, Jõgeva county.

“The Living Room of Lake Peipsi” is located directly at Lake Peipsi, in Kasepää, Jõgeva county. Sõpruse 84, 49508 Tiheda village, Kasepää parish, Jõgeva county.

Information: info@peipsi.ee, tel: 602 0105

Exhibition with tourist centre is opened in the winter period (Sept. 1st to – April 30th) from Tue-Thu 10-14 o’clock and in the summer period (May 1st – August 31st) Tue-Sat 11-16 o’clock

LAKE PEIPSI

Lake Peipsi is the biggest lake in Estonia, situated at the border to Russia – it’s the fourth largest lake in Europe (3555 km²). Only Lake Ladoga, Lake Onega and Lake Vanern are larger. It’s the biggest border lake in Europe – 44% of it belongs to Estonia and 56% to Russian Federation.

Lake Peipsi consists of three distinct parts:

1. The northernmost part is the biggest and deepest – the actual Lake Peipsi (also Big Lake, Cold Lake, илама озеро /ilama ozero/ in Russian) has an area of 2611 km².

2. The southern part is called Lake Pihkva (Пихви озеро /pikhvi ozero/ in Russian), with an area of 708 km². Talaba and Kulpino islands are located in Lake Pihkva.

3. The above two are connected by the narrow but deep Lake Lammjärv: the warm lake (Леммежерв /lemmejerv/ in Russian). Its narrowest part is 3 km wide and it has an area of only 236 km². However, the deepest point of Lake Peipsi is located there, at Mehiokorna harbour with 15,3m.

In total 240 rivers, streams and channels flow into Lake Peipsi. The biggest of them is Suur Emajõgi, – the only out-flowing river is River Narva, rich in waters. The biggest entering river is Velikaja in Lake Pihkva, on the Estonian side it’s Suur-Emajõgi. Due to its size Lake Peipsi has a considerable influence on local climate: in autumn the weather stays warm for longer, but spring comes up to two weeks later.

Peipsi’s largest island is Kolpino, belonging to Russia (11,1 km²). On the Estonian side, the swampy and shallow part of Pinnsaar is the second-biggest (7,5 km²). The area of the island is decreasing due to the northern shore’s landrise. The rising of the land surface in the northern region of Estonia is slightly bigger (2–3mm a year) and almost non-existing on the southern side. Because of this, the lake slowly ‘drifts’ towards south – this causes the water level to rise, which in turn covers some lower parts of Pinnsaar with water.

There are in total 35 islands in Peipsi. As Lake Peipsi is a common responsibility of the two neighbouring countries, a shared Estonian-Russian commission for the defence and usage of border water was established. The commission normally meets once a year, but most of the daily work is done on specialists level in workshops (complex management and surveillance system of water resources), as well as in thematic science seminars.

The story of Peipsi is an interesting one. Lake Peipsi was formed into a shallow ‘crater’ created by sheet glaciers. The withdrawing of glaciers was a complex process and it took part differently – in some parts even temporarily reforging. The withdrawing ice rims left huge banks of isolated ice, which (partially) under earth could preserve for thousands of years. Ponds that were left behind by the ice were temporary and it’s difficult to determine the coastal line of these. Bigger changes came if the ice withdrew to the Gulf of Finland and the water level sunk drastically – iso-
lated lakes were left behind into and around the valley (crater) that started to grow over quickly.

As the northern part of Peipsi valley rise quicker than the southern part, the water of Small-Peipsi started spreading south and so the lake grew on its own. The Little-Pihkva lake was formed, later it and the Small-Peipsi united – Lake Peipsi took its approximate shape as we know it today.

Even today the northern and southern parts of the lake are very distinct. The northern shore is widely sandy with appealing nature. It's a highly popular holiday region, mostly covered by old pine forests and picturesque sand beaches with a length of ~40km. The southern part is overgrown and swampy.

Peipsi derives its water from rivers, creeks and rainfall. Its water level is not stable, it can vary between +1,5m and –0,5m. The water exchanges in roughly two years. The area of Peipsi can therefore significantly vary year by year. The water is mostly greenish during the vegetation period and on average transparent (1,8–3,6m), and very transparent during winter season (3,2–5,0m). During rainy summers the water is red-brownish and not too transparent. The lake is not layered, the water blends fully during ice-free period.

Flood water is a concern. Main flood-area is the mouth of Emajõgi River (over 200km² between Varnja and Meeraplalu) and the eastern part of Lake Lämmijärv (over 130km²). High water level lasts from April to June and from November to December, low water level from January to March and from August to October. Over time such floods have caused severe damage to coastal areas, on top of the hummocks of ice on Peipsi. Ice normally lasts from December until the end of April with average thickness of 50–60cm.

During summer months, Lake Peipsi is a popular vacation region, since beautiful sandy beaches offer water temperatures of up to 26°C in coastal areas, and up to 22°C on open lake. In the autumn, strong winds occur which create sharp, short waves. In Lake Lämmijärv winds can create currents.

A characteristic natural phenomenon is the Peipsi lowland. Over 7000 years ago the surface started turning into swampland, as in the northern part the land started to rise and the lake started filling up with water. This has created a unique landscape, the central part at the banks of River Emajõgi is thereby called Suursoo (the Great Swamp). Its surface is even and barely a meter over Peipsi’s water level – which causes it to be flooded over each year during high tide.

Based on historical data it’s possible to say that the surrounding areas of Peipsi were inhabited by the predecessors of Estonians and other Finno-Baltic peoples, who Russians called the Chudes – already after the last ice age. In the cultural context there’s a key role to one significant fact: At the end of the I. Millennium, Slavic tribes coming from the River Dnepr reached the shores of Lake Peipsi, some of whom moved towards the western shore.

Apart from that Peipsi has seen several other waves of migration. One that has a significant effect until nowadays, was the emigration of the Old Believers from Russia at the end of the 17th and beginning of the 18th century. Peipsimaa is historically a crossroad of three cultures – as next to Estonians and Russian Old Believers, the region was strongly influenced by Baltic-Germans. The unique combination of these three cultures has in a way survived to modern days, when it’s being valued more and more.

**General data:**

- Elevation (from sea level): 30m
- Mineral salinity 0‰
- Length of beach over 30km (Estonia’s longest beach)
- Transparency of water based on Secchi disk method 2 – 3m
- Lake’s area 3555 m²
- Length 152km
- Max. width 47km
- Max. depth 15,3m (in Lake Lämmijärv)
- Average depth 7,1m
- Total coastline: 520km
- Lake Peipsi borders on four Estonian counties: Ida-Virumaa, Jõgevamaa, Tartumaa and Põlvamaa.
Lake Peipsi’s flora

Life of flora and fauna in the lake is determined by the amount of nutrition and oxygen in the water, sunlight and water temperature. If there’s food and oxygen in the water, life is abundant too. Great Peipsi, a wide gigantic lake with relatively strong waves, doesn't have too much flora. Bigger aggregations of plants can be found on coastal areas, in loughs and near islands. Richest in flora is the region south of Varnja – Raskopel, the eastern side of the lake – the bay of Raskopel, in Lämmijärv and in the loughs of Lake Pihkva. There’s almost no significant flora on the wide northern and north-western areas with many fine sand beaches.

Nevertheless, the flora of Lake Peipsi is abundant in species – with 122 species of greater plants. Around 20 species can be added to this as coastal- and swamp-plants that grow on flooded areas. In Lake Peipsi we can find 70% of all Estonian fresh water species.

Coastal flora is diversified. There are numerous thickets of reeds, which have spread during the last decades across the coast and towards water-side. Reed grows as a wide belt of tens and hundreds of meters on rhizome surface, which normally does not allow many other plants to grow there freely. In the coastal area there’s also a lot of Sagittaria, Common Water-plantain, Butomus, water horsetail etc.

A lot of the species are amphibian due to changing waterline, including many rare species like Alisma gramineum, Potamogeton pusillus, Subularia aquatica, Elatine hydropiper, Potamogeton rutillus, Isoetes echinospora, Sparganium gramineum etc. Many plants like the swampy, moist temperatures around Peipsi – normally they grow on land relieved from water (e.g. Eleocharis palustris).

Lämmijärv and Pihkva Lake have more of Schoenoplectus lacustris. Lake Lämmijärv has, due to its narrowness, a lot of plants which are normally typical for rivers, like Butomus umbellatus and Sagittaria sagittifolia.

Because of its isolation and different hydrological and chemical conditions, the bay of Raskopel has the richest flora. Most common plants are Polygonum amphibium, Agrostis stolonifera, Nuphar lutea, Potamogeton perfoliatus and Charophyta. Peipsi has an abundant algae flora (over 1000 species). There are a lot of organisms in the water, which are carried around just by the movement of water. Such microscopic organisms make up the phytoplankton, or the autotrophic component of the lake. They often make up larger aggregations, which can be seen with bare eyes. Phytoplankton is mostly in the surface water where there’s more light. Copious algae is the main producer of oxygen and organic material.

Phytoplankton is also nutrition for plankton and fry, so it is the first link in lake’s food chain.

Algae which is fond of salty conditions has quite a significant importance, as well as numerous arctic species that are fond of colder temperatures.

Most important algae are:

- Cyanophyta (blue-green algae)
- Cryptomonads
- Dinoflagellates
- Diatoms
- Green algae

If there's too much plankton, it causes water blooming. Massive vegetation of Gloeotrichia echinulata causes such water blooming, which has been typical for Peipsi for a long time. First records about water blooming date from 1895 and the mentioned species dominates Peipsi’s phytoplankton to date. Tiny pellets of Cyanophyta can be seen with bare eyes in the midsummer period, as the biomass can reach quite far from the shore.

Next to Gloeotrichia echinulata other types Cyanophyta cause water blooming in Peipsi. These are more microscopic, but if they build bigger bundles, these can be seen with bare eyes as well. They create large blue-greenish spots or stripes. Due to algae’s pigment, the water takes a different colour during water blooming. The algae mass flushed to the coast, which starts to decompose, turns the stones and soil into blue.

Massive blooming of Cyanophyta is also supported by low levels of nitrogen and phosphor in the water, giving Cyanophyta and advantage compared to other algae. Small concentration of nitrogen compounds does not limit the growth of Cyanophyta, many of them can bind air nitrogen. Temporary proliferation of phytoplankton (water blooming) caused by human activity, is becoming more and more of an environmental issue.

Algae blooming can cause an extensive fluctuation of oxygen concentration in water, which blocks other vital processes of other living organisms. Proliferating plankter can also exudate toxins, which are dangerous to animals.

Most important plants in Peipsi are:

1. Pondweed Potamogeton perfoliatus
2. Shining pondweed Potamogeton lucens
3. Common reed Phragmites
4. Fennel pondweed Potamogeton pectinatus
5. Arrowhead Sagittaria sagittifolia
6. Common tule Schoenoplectus acutus
7. Variable-leaf pondweed Potamogeton gramineus
8. Water knotweed Persicaria amphibia
9. Lesser bulrush Typha angustifolia
10. Common water-plantain Alisma plantago-aquatica
11. Rushes Juncus
12. Cowbane/Northern Water Hemlock Cicuta virosa
13. Narrowleaf water-plantain Alisma gramineum
14. Flowering rush Butomus/Butomus umbellatus
15. Yellow water-lily Nuphar lutea
16. Spikechedges Eleocharis parvula
17. Eurasian watermilfoil Myriophyllum spicatum
18. European white water-lily Nymphaea alba

Green algae

Diatoms

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Lake Peipsi’s fauna

Lake’s size is also a precondition for a rich fauna. Whereas Estonia is relatively poor in fish species (ca. 75), then Lake Peipsi is home to whole 37 of them. Fish and rich fish stock has always determined life around Peipsi – fishing has been one of the main activities and old fishing tradition linger on until today.

Still the composition of fish stock has changed a lot over time. Many of these changes are caused by the change of the general condition of Peipsi. Warm, prolonged summers with other factors deteriorated the condition of fish and especially some fish, e.g. vendace (European cisco), cannot cope with ice-free winters as their eggs require peace during winter.

The changes have caused more algae blooming and thus led to deterioration of water quality. The situation has deteriorated the condition of fish and especially causes dying of young fish. Some fish, e.g. vendace (European cisco), cannot cope with ice-free winters as their eggs require peace during winter.

Protected species are: grayling, asp, catfish, loach, weat- erfish and bullhead.

Main fishing species are smelt, vendace, roach, pike, bream, zander, perch, burbot, whitefish etc. Total volume and composition of fishery varies year by year, depending on the situation of the stocks and general fishing conditions.

Semi-aquatic mammals are also found: Eurasian water shrew (Neomys fodiens), Northern water vole (Arvicolamammius), Eurasian beaver (Castor fiber), European otter (Lutra lutra) and Muskrat (Ondatra zibethicus).

Amphibians are represented by 9 species: common newt (Lissotriton vulgaris) and warty newt (Triturus cristatus), common spadefoot (Pelobates fuscus), European green toad (Bufo viridis), common toad (Bufo bufo), European common brown frog (Rana temporaria), Moor frog (Rana arvalis), Pool frog (Pelophylax lessonae) and Edible frog (Pelophylax kl. esculentus).

Reptiles are represented by 5 species: Sand lizard (Lacerta agilis) and Common lizard (Zootoca vivipara), Slow worm (Anguis fragilis), Grass snake (Natrix natrix) and Common European viper (Vipera berus).

Shore side is a stopover for a number of bird species. 226 species of birds have been counted. 180 of these are nesting species, 71 are only flying through to feed and 15 are errant visitors. In spring greater scaup (Aythya marila), tufted duck (Aythya fuligula) and common goldeneye (Bucephala clangula) are the most frequent visitors. During autumn it’s (common) teals (Anas crecca), widgeons (Anas penelope) and diving ducks – such as oldsquaws (Clangula hyemalis), goosanders (Mergus merganser) and red-breast- ed merganser (Mergus serrator).

Freshwater animals that are most widespread in Lake Peipsi’s drainage basin, are semi-aquatic mammals, birds and amphibians:

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1. Eurasian beaver Castor fiber
2. Muskrat Ondatra zibethicus
3. European otter Lutra lutra
4. American mink Neovison vison
5. European common brown frog Rana temporaria
6. Moor frog Rana arvalis
7. Edible frog Pelophylax kl. esculentus
8. Grey heron Ardea cinerea
9. Black stork Ciconia nigra
10. Mute swan Cygnus olor
11. White-tailed eagle Haliaeetus albicilla
12. Eurasian coot Fulica atra
13. Red-necked grebe Podiceps griseogena
14. Little gull Hydrocoloeus minutus
15. Black-headed Gull Chroicocephalus ridibundus
16. Black tern Chlidonias niger
17. Wood sandpiper Tringa glareola
18. European goosander Mergus merganser
19. Mallard/Wild duck Anas platyrhynchos
20. Eurasian kingfisher Alcedo atthis

Lake Peipsi’s fish

1. European bullhead Cottus gobio
2. Eurasian pike Esox lucius
3. Zander Sander lucioperca
4. European perch Perca fluviatilis
5. Ninespine stickleback Pungitius pungitius
6. Three-spined stickleback Gasterosteus aculeatus
7. Burbot Lota lota
8. Wels catfish Silurus glanis
9. Stone loach Barbatula barbatula
10. European weatherfish Misgurnus fossilis
11. Spined loach Cobitis taenia
12. Crucian carp Carassius carassius
13. Vimba vimba Vimba vimba
14. Silver bream Alburnus bjoerkna
15. Common bream Abramis brama
16. Common bleak Alburnus alburnus
17. Gudgeon Gobio gobio
18. Doctor fish/Tench Tinca tinca
19. Belica Leucaspius derelates
20. Common minnow Phoxinus phoxinus
21. Asp Aspius aspius
22. European chub Squalius cephalus
23. Idre/Golden arle Leuciscas idus
24. Common dace Leuciscus leuciscus
25. Common nash Rutulus rutulus
26. Common rudd Scardinius erythrophthalmus
27. Common carp Cyprinus carpio
28. European eel Anguilla anguilla
29. Northern pike Esoc lucius
30. Peipsus Smelt Osmerus eperlanus spirinchus
31. grayling Thymallus thymallus
32. Peipus whitefish Coregonus lavaretus maraenoides
33. Vendace Leuciscus idus
34. European bream Abramis brama
35. Common brown frog Rana temporaria
36. Moor frog Rana arvalis
37. Prussian carp Carassius gibelio
38. Anguilla anguilla
39. European common brown frog Coregonus albula
40. Brown trout Salmo trutta
41. European brook lamprey Lampetra planeri
42. European chub Aspius aspius
43. Common rudd Carassius carassius
44. Common roach Abramis brama
45. Common dace Leuciscus leuciscus
46. Common bleak Cyprinus carpio
47. red-eyed newt Lissotriton vulgaris
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69. Mallard/Wild duck Anas platyrhynchos
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Peipsi’s zooplankton is rich and there are quite a few rarities. Popular species are water fleas (Cladocera), rotifers (Rotifera or wheel animals), Maxillopoda and zebra mussels (Dreissena polymorpha). Zooplankton mostly feeds on phytoplankton, and is itself food for numerous water animals and insects.

The zoobenthos of Lake Peipsi’s open waters is dominated by two large groups: Chironomidae and Oligochaeta.

**Lake Peipsi’s zoobenthos:**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Chironomidae</th>
<th>Chironomidae</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Zebra mussel</td>
<td>Dreissena polymorpha</td>
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<td>3. Mussels</td>
<td>Anodonta</td>
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<td>4. Swollen river mussel</td>
<td>Unio tumidus</td>
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<td>5. Oligochaeta</td>
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<td>6. European fingernail clam</td>
<td>Sphaeronium corneum</td>
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<td>7. Great pond snail</td>
<td>Lymnaea stagnalis</td>
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<td>8. Mayflies</td>
<td>Ephemeroptera</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Leeches</td>
<td>Hirudinea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Lister’s river snail</td>
<td>Viviparus contectus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Water hoglouse</td>
<td>Asellus aquaticus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Caddisflies</td>
<td>Trichoptera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Malacostracan crustaceans</td>
<td>Amphipoda</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Peipsi’s food chain is traditional: Predatory fish – bottom feeders and omnivore fish – zooplankton – phytoplankton.

**Take care of the nature!**

Surroundings of Peipsi and the lake itself is a beautiful region of recreation for hikers, travellers, tourists and other visitors. However, human activity has also done its damage. As a result of agricultural activity too much nitrogen and phosphor has been exuded to water, which has caused too high levels of nutrients. This in turn has deteriorated the water quality, the ecological balance of the lake has been disrupted. The rising number of visitors is a great benefit for local employment, tourism and business – but for nature it’s an additional challenge.

Nature preservation and environmental-friendly behaviour are becoming a more and more popular topics, including recycling, energy saving, waste sorting and consumption reduction. However, words do not make a difference – but our knowledge and attitude.

**If you are in nature, keep this in mind:**

**How to plan a trip, how to follow applicable instructions and limitations?**

- Familiarize yourself with local opportunities, in order not to encumber the environment unnecessarily!
- For hiking equipment, ask your friends – you do not have to buy everything yourself!
- For transportation, use buses and trains, a car can be shared for a group of people!
- To reduce unnecessary waste, pack any food to reusable bags or boxes – avoid plastic plates and cups!
- Familiarize yourself with local instructions and limitations – follow these! In nature reserves, courtyard areas, on hiking trails additional limitations can apply and following these is mandatory!
- If you bring a pet (e.g. a dog) along, always keep them on a leash while walking in hiking trails or nature paths!

**What to do with waste?**

- Take any waste along – you will do nature a favour!
- If taking along any leftovers is complicated, sort the organic waste (food leftovers etc.) separately and throw these into the closest waste bin!
- Burnable waste can be burned, but in no case you should burn plastic bottles, pampers or other plastic items! Such toxic gases pollute the air.
- Leaving plastic waste into nature damages the environment forever as plastic never decomposes! Take any plastic waste with you and recycle it.

**Save water**

- In order not to pollute natural water, wash your hands in a washing bowl and pour the water into the ground!
- Use a washing bowl if you need to wash yourself – try to avoid washing gels, shampoos etc.!
Peipsi Information Centre (Peipsi Infokeskus), founded in 2000, a non-profit organization based on civil initiative, is carrying out different programs to develop and foster local life of the Lake Peipsi region. It joined the Mustvee Ecological Tourism Union (Mustvee Ökoturismühing) in 2009 and the Estonian Centre of Volunteers (Eesti Vabatahtlike Keskus) in 2010.

Since its beginning, the Peipsi Information Centre has been an organization which is involved in a wide range of activities – starting with the functions of a tourist centre, to engagement of youngsters and the unemployed, up to development of a civil society. Peipsi Information Centre is member of Jõgeva County Cooperation Chamber (Jõgevamaa Koostöökoda).

**Our vision** is a reasoned civil society based on active involvement, where people have the wish, the possibilities and the skills to carry our positive changes.

**Our mission** is to universally support the development of life at Lake Peipsi, to activate local self-initiative and civil society.

One of our tasks is to help introduce the life, the environment and the culture of the Peipsi region – as well as a wider presence and knowledge of local tourist services.

**Peipsi Information Centre coordinates four different programs in the Lake Peipsi region:**

**INFORMATION AND TOURISM PROGRAM**
- Information about accommodation and catering facilities, sights and events in the Peipsi region, via phone as well as in the Internet (Peipsi Info Server); issuing printed information; guided services.

**ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAM**
- Distributing the principles of ecological tourism;
- Nature conservation in Peipsi region and environmental programs.

**SOCIAL AND INTEGRATION PROGRAM**
- Youth activities and organizing camps;
- Work with different risk groups (national minorities, elderly, the disabled, street children, unemployed etc.).

**CITIZEN INITIATIVE PROGRAM**
- Distribution of principles of a good citizen and ethics codex;
- Involvement of volunteers and locals into projects and events;
- Organizing citizen initiative events and trainings to the three sectors of the region;
- Launching and developing community services for Peipsi region.