

Saaremaa & Hiiumaa

Overview:

Saaremaa is located in the Baltic Sea, south of Hiiumaa island, and belongs to the west Estonian archipelago. Saaremaa County comprises the islands of Saaremaa (the second biggest island in the Baltic Sea with an area of about 2,700 km²), Muhu (206 km²), Ruhnu (11.4 km²), Abruka (10.6 km²) and Vilsandi (8.9 km²), which are inhabited, as well as more than 500 smaller islands and islets. Saaremaa County has a population of approximately 40,000.

Territory:

Saaremaa, literally 'Island's Land', the second largest island in the Baltic Sea, lies in the Gulf of Riga. Saaremaa is also the biggest island of the Republic of Estonia, situated close to the western or mainland coast of Estonia. Saaremaa consists of low-lying plains resting on limestone, with an average elevation of approximately 15 metres above sea level. These plains have become denuded in many places, resulting in cliffs, pits and quarries. Total Land Area: Saaremaa 2,922 km²; Hiiumaa 1,019 km²; EEZ: limits fixed in coordination with neighboring states; territorial sea: 12 nm;

Location:

Baltic Sea, Northern Europe

Latitude and Longitude:

58 28 N, 22 55 E

Time Zone:

GMT +2

Total Land Area:

2922

EEZ:

12

Climate:

The winter's mean temperature is 0°C or below, and in the summer the mean day temperature is 20°C. Precipitation: 24-28 inches. Because of its mild maritime climate, and a variety of soils, Saaremaa is rich in flora, with 80% of the plant species found in Estonia being found here.

Natural Resources:

The major mineral resources of Saaremaa County are dolomite, limestone, curative mud, peat and mineral water. Fish are the most important sea resource. Gravel, sand and ceramic clay are also of local importance. Saaremaa is a real botanical Mecca, protected by both international conventions for scenic preservation as well as those of the Republic of Estonia, and even more so by the love of the islanders themselves. Altogether 1,200 species of vascular plants can be found in Saaremaa, of which 120 are rare species. The best known plant reserve is at the Viidumäe Nature Reserve. An area amounting to about 50% of Saaremaa is covered by forests, another feature being the wooded meadows and alvar (limestone areas covered with thin soil and stunted vegetation).

ECONOMY:

Total GDP:

Per Capita GDP:

% of GDP per Sector:			
	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary

% of Population Employed by Sector			
	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
2001	28%	31%	41%

External Aid/Remittances:

Growth:

Saaremaa is changing from a relatively closed economic structure based on local natural resources, to a more open economy affected by events in Estonia and the Baltic Sea. There is an increasing number of tourists visiting the island. Economic volumes and their importance in Saaremaa County (Turnover TEEK), % of the Turnover: Trade: (1997) 873,897, 34.4%; (1998) 912,500, 34%; Industry (1997) 785,612, 30.9%; (1998) 704,700, 26%; Transport, communications (1997) 236,477, 9.3%; (1998) 197,700, 7%; Construction (1997) 245 995, 9.7%; (1998) 332,700, 12%; Agriculture and forestry (1997) 109,479, 4.3%; (1998) 123,000, 5%; Real estate and business services (1997) 81,071, 3.2%; (1998) 62,700, 2%; Catering, accommodation (1997) 62,974, 2.5%; (1998) 41,100, 2%; Fishing industry (1997)64,855, 2.6%; (1998) 196,800, 7%; Energy sector, gas and water supply (1997) 40,864, 1.6%; (1998) 39,300, 1%; Other services (1997) 40,259, 1.6%; (1998) 98,600, 4%; TOTAL (1997) 2,540,399; (1998) 2,709,100. Hiiumaa Sector turnovers in 2003(millions of EEK); Total Share; Increase compared to 2003; Retailing 275, 21%, 9%; Industrial Production 592, 46%, 11%; Food 184, 12%, -6%; Timber 235, 18%, 19%; Plastic 159, 12%, 26%; Other 13, 1%, 1%; Fishing 71, 6%, -2%; Transport 138, 11%, 19%; Construction 80, 6%, 56%; Tourism 25, 2%, 9%; Agriculture 48, 4%, 12%; Other 60, 5%, 10%; Total 1,290, 100%, 13%; Source: Hansapank 2003. Those industry, transport and construction related companies marketing their services not only in the county but also on the mainland or outside Estonia, are clearly more successful. The customers of trading companies vary seasonally. In connection with the increase of the turnover in the tourism industry, the customers from outside Saaremaa play an increasingly important role in the summertime. The turnover of companies in local authorities shows a high concentration of business activity in Kuressaare and its nearest surroundings. The number of jobs in the West Estonian Archipelago has constantly decreased during the transformation period. For instance, the employers registered in Saaremaa County have decreased the number of jobs

from over 16,000 in 1993 to 11,000 in 1999. The percentage of those islanders having a job is considerably lower in comparison with our neighbouring islands in the Baltic Sea. A new and a very rapidly growing trend is that many islanders have jobs on the mainland, mainly in Tallinn. In 1999 already about 1,500 islanders from Saaremaa were commuting between work and home. At the same time the numbers of islanders officially registered as unemployed or job seekers have not followed these major changes. A steady increase in official unemployment in Saaremaa over the last four years can be observed; the number of job seekers and unemployed has risen from 1,906 people in 1996 to 2,696 in 1999, in other words an increase of 790. In the course of the economy reform, the employment rate has fallen in Saaremaa County as elsewhere in Estonia. During 1995-1998 the number of employed people decreased from 17,700 to 16,600, i.e. by 6.5%. In agriculture 15%, in industry 6% and in trade 5% of population has lost their jobs. Out of the working age population, men and women together equal 50%. Out of the job seekers, registered with the Employment Agency, men equal 40.6%. Women are more active in the labour market and they look for a job near home while men go to work outside the county as well. The crisis in Russia had a strong impact on the labour market of Saaremaa. Many people lost their jobs but by the autumn of 1999, the situation had recovered.

Labour Force:	
1993	16,000
1999	11,000

Unemployment	
Year:	Unemployment Rate (% of pop.)
1999	7%

Industry:

% of Population Employed per Sector: Agriculture, fishing 28%; Manufacturing 15%; Construction 9%; Public services 17%; Private services 10%; Transport, communication 7%; Others 14%; The changes in Europe and Russia 10 years ago threw the island's society into a new geopolitical situation, unique for the last three generations of islanders, who have lived under Soviet power. For fifty years Hiiumaa lay just behind the "iron curtain", having been virtually closed to visitors from outside. In a way, the sea was the edge of the world and the only direction in which one could move was eastward. In the independent Estonia the island of Hiiumaa is turning to face the west, and the sea is becoming a connector, instead of separating the peribaltic countries. In the near future, the Baltic Sea is expected to become the northern Mediterranean, in which case the island of Hiiumaa will have an advantageous location. About 45% of the 38.5 Million of Euros yearly turnover of Hiiumaa's enterprises (in 1998) and about 25% of the jobs are directly related to fishing and fish processing. The major enterprise Hiiu Kalur (with a yearly turnover of 16.3 Million of Euros) is the island's biggest employer. During the 1998 "Russian Crisis", Hiiu Kalur survived and became the biggest of its kind in Estonia. In the commercial sector Hiiumaa Consumers Union has a 50% share of the market. In the industry sector there are about ten enterprises with a turnover of approximately 0.3-1.3 Million of Euros engaged in wood, plastic, food processing and transportation. In addition to these, there are large numbers of small entrepreneurs in the rural areas. The public sector has a yearly turnover of approximately 12.8 Million of Euros and covers about 30% of existing jobs on the island. This makes it an important factor modelling the social-economic environment.

Niche Industry:

food processing, fish processing, timber, textile industries.

Tourism:

Saaremaa is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Estonia and the number of visitors here is about 250,000 yearly of which 70% are domestic and 30% are foreign tourists. The biggest group of foreigners are visitors from Finland with 60%, followed by visitors from Latvia, Germany, Great Britain and Sweden. About 80% of the domestic and 50% of the foreign tourists visit Saaremaa several times. Saaremaa is a popular place to spend holidays with the whole family. Different target groups, like bird watchers, hunting tourists, people interested in ethnology, visitors to Kuressaare Sanatorium for mud treatment, bikers, etc., find their special interests met in Saaremaa. The main engines for developing the recreational industry on Saaremaa are its nature which displays a great diversity, as well as a number of historical and cultural sights. Saaremaa County is a part of the Biosphere Reserve of the West-Estonian Archipelago that is an area included in the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme. The Vilsandi National Park, rich in bird species and the oldest nature reserve in Estonia, established back in 1910, is located in the county. Another popular place to visit here is the Viidumäe Nature Reserve that has been established to protect different landscapes and associations. Another of the main attractions of Saaremaa is the Kaali meteorite craters, the most easily accessible craters in Europe. The mediaeval Kuressaare bishopic castle-fortification, a unique one in the Baltic countries, and well-preserved villages with their traditional architecture and cultural landscape attract many visitors. Health tourism is another important tourism sector. There are substantial curative mud reserves on Saaremaa. The mud is of high quality and the history and traditions of its use are 160 years old. The tourist high season is from May to August. The county is interested in investments in health and conference tourism but also in other undertakings that would enable an extension of the tourist season. There are 147 accommodation facilities with about 2,500 beds in Saaremaa County. 69% of these facilities are of B&B type, 8% are hotels, whereas 25% of beds are in hotels. Most of the accommodation places are located in Kuressaare (38%) or at the distance of 20 km from the town (32%).

Imports and Exports:

Turnover of goods exchange in Saaremaa County (TEEK): (Year) Export Import Balance
 (1996)Export 298 149.3; Import 258 347.2; Balance 39 802.2; (1997)Export 352 354.9; Import 361 862.6; Balance -9 507.7; (1998)Export 360 262.8; Import 274 147.6; Balance 86 115.2. Those processes, which have an impact on the economy of Estonia on the whole can also be observed in the export-import dynamics of Saaremaa. The consumption boom in 1997 increased imports considerably. The crisis in Russia that closed the Eastern markets for half a year had a negative impact on the economic indicators for 1998 and the beginning of 1999. In the summer of 1999, exports to the Eastern markets gained their former volumes.

Tot. Value of Imports	0.00 ()
From Eu:	
Import Partners (EU:)	
Partners Outside EU:	
Import Partners:	
Tot. Value of Exports	()
To Eu:	



Export Partners:	
Partners Outside EU::	
Export Partners:	
Main Imports:	
Main Exports:	

TRANSPORTATION/ACCESS

External:

Number of Airports:

Hiiumaa is served by Kärdla Airport that is licensed by Estonian Aviation Board as an international instrumental airport.

Number of Main Ports:

Hiiumaa: Most important ports and harbors are Heltermaa, Lehtma, Orjaku, Suursadam and Sõru.

Internal:

Air

Saaremaa: The local airline Air Livonia also connects Kuressaare to Tallinn, Põlva and the island of Ruhnu.

Road:

Saaremaa: Regular buses depart from Tallinn to Kuressaare about ten times daily. The trip takes just over four hours, including a 30-minute ferry ride from Virtsu to Kuivastu, on the island of Muhu. Muhu is connected by a land bridge to Saaremaa proper. Kuressaare lies about 76 km inland, along a well-maintained paved road.

Sea:

Other Forms of Transportation:

Economic Zones:

Energy Policy:

The production of primary energy is based on fossil fuels, imported into the county. Oil products, solid fuels (except timber and peat) and liquid gas are imported. With regard to secondary energy sources, electricity is imported, thermal energy is produced locally on the basis of heavy oil for heating (imported) as well as coal, peat and wood chips. The tendency is to reduce the amount of imported fuels. The average volume of fuels consumed in businesses have been as following: petrol 2,900 t, diesel - 11,000 t, heavy oil for heating - 17,000 t, briquetted peat - 3,000 t, coal 8,000 t.

		Type			Sector					
Year	Total Energy Production (Mwh)	Thermic (Mwh)	Geothermic (Mwh)	Other (Mwh)	Total Energy Consumption (Mwh)	Domestic (Mwh)	Commercial (Mwh)	Public Service (Mwh)	Industry (Mwh)	Public Lighting (Mwh)

Official Currency:

Estonian Kroon (EEK)

Banking and Insurance:

Number of Banks and Credit Unions:

Number of Agricultural Credit Unions:

Number of Insurance Companies:

Banking is one of the most rapid developing economic sectors in Estonia during the years since independence. The level of customer service and other services rendered as well as the technologies used are comparable to those offered by the banks in developed countries. The explosive growth of electronic banking does not attach the customers to any geographically located bank office. The two biggest commercial banks in Estonia, Hansapank and Eesti bhispank, have their branches in Kuressaare. Hansapank has, in addition, a number of offices in bigger villages countywide. Both banks provide a full range of banking services. Both domestic and international remittances travel quickly and without failure. The most widespread credit cards are accepted as payment facilities. Banks accept cash cheques. Bankers' cards are accepted in most shops and service companies. Banks have co-funded most of the local projects. The conditions for granting credits are similar to those in other countries. The interest rates are rather high (10-11%) currently but they are dropping in relation to the general economic improvement. The overriding ownership of both above-mentioned banks belongs to major Swedish banks and that has brought an increase of equity ratio as well as favourable development perspectives in the international labour distribution. In 1999, the National Bank of Estonia established its reserve-operating centre in Kuressaare, functioning also as a training centre for bankers.

Financial Services:

There are five insurance companies currently represented on Saaremaa. Three of them- Leks, Eesti Kindlustus and Bico are oriented towards small and medium sized enterprises and private individuals. The biggest market share in Estonia is with Eesti Kindlustus (22%) and the second largest local insurer is Leks with 18% of the market. The two companies, having similar target groups, are leading the market in Saaremaa County and have nearly equal positions here. Both companies have a strong capital basis and long experience in dealing with their specific customer groups. This comes from their Western and Northern European owners and reinsurance partners. About 50% of Leks belongs to the second largest bank in the Baltics - Eesti bhispank and the other big shareholder, with nearly 20% in the share capital, is Swiss Re, the second largest reinsurance company in the world with an S & P, rating of AAA, which is the highest. Eesti Kindlustus belongs 100% to Sampo, the biggest insurance company in Finland. The products sold and services rendered by the local insurers are highly similar to the ones provided in North and Central Europe.

Communications/E-Commerce:

There are 6 post-offices on Hiiumaa. The County has telephone network and GSM mobile network. Several optical communication cables connecting Estonia and Sweden pass via Hiiumaa. There are 16 Open Internet Points in Hiiumaa. Island is wired with communication lines suitable for data processing. All local authorities and schools have Internet connections.



Public Ownership:

There are 4 nature and 11 landscape reserves. These reserves cover about 11% of county's territory. The entire county is part of West Estonian Archipelago Biosphere Reserve. About 800 single points of interest are under protection.

Land Use:

The real estate market has clearly developed during the 7-8 past years. The development has been most rapid in Saaremaa County. By the summer of 1999, 25% of the land area in Saaremaa had been returned to its former owners or privatised, 75% is still state-owned.

Agriculture/Forestry:

Social problems are most severe in the rural areas of Hiiumaa. According to data from the Hiiumaa Farmers' Union, 700 people are currently (in 1999) employed in agriculture. 200 of them are working on a permanent basis and have social and health care securities, and an additional 200 people are connected with them as family members. This means that about 300 people need alternative means of employment in rural areas. The official rate of unemployment (according to the data from 1st April 1999) is 6.1% (5.2% in 1998). One-third of income taxes comes from salaries earned on the mainland. According to surveys and analysis, Hiiumaa needs at least 1,000 new jobs in the very near future, including 665 for current job seekers, 200 for today's high school and university students, 100 for disabled people and 100 for currently dependant people. In the long term, the restructuring of agriculture will create a need for an additional 300 jobs.

Marine Activity:**Fishing:**

The bodies of water in the county are suitable for and have good preconditions for the development of crayfish breeding.

Marine Life:**Critical Issues:****JURISDICTIONAL RESOURCES****Capital:**

The capital of Saaremaa is Kuressaare, which has about 16,000 inhabitants.

Political System:

Saaremaa is one of the 15 counties in Estonia. In Estonia a two-level system of government has been established, comprising a state and a local level. At state level a regional body, the County Government has been set up, which is the State representative in the County. The County Government supervises the local authorities – Municipalities, and on the other hand is responsible for the balanced development of the region. The Governor, who is nominated by the State Government and approved by the Association of local authorities, leads the County Government. In Saaremaa there are 16 local authorities: the town of Kuressaare and 15 rural Municipalities. Today State Government is conducting a process of administrative reform. This means that the responsibilities of County Government and Municipalities would be shared out again in a different way. The tendency is to give more power to the local level. The other problem is that Municipalities are too small to be efficient, and therefore a reduction in the number of local authorities has been envisaged. Also the number of Counties could probably be reduced down to nine or ten. It would appear that the West Estonian islands could become one County, this means that Hiiumaa (990 km², 11,700 inhabit.) and Vormsi (92 km², 330 inhabit.) could be associated with Saaremaa County. Saaremaa County Government has set up the idea of a common economic space of Estonian islands. This means using all the existing potential of the West Estonian archipelago in order to integrate the region into the Baltic Sea area. The first step is to create maritime communications both between each other and also towards the other Baltic Sea regions. Common industries and trade institutions should be set up in order to reduce expenses. The tourism industry will have much to gain from the implementation of such ideas. A cruise harbour in the Northwest of Saaremaa is a key issue in the development process of the West Estonian Islands. The harbour building project is under preparation. Concerning the autonomous status of Estonian islands, it would seem that there is still a lack of independence. Saaremaa has been active presenting proposals to the Estonian Parliament to set up a special Islands law. No results have been achieved yet, but it is still under discussion. As far as State support for islanders is concerned, there are only maritime transport communications partly subsidised by the State. From the islanders' point of view, more supportive measures should be carried out for the creation of entrepreneurship and business development. Special taxation measures should also be set up. Saaremaa County is divided into 17 municipalities, each with its own local authority, the largest, Kuressaare having had municipal rights since 1563. The municipality Councils (7-17 members), are elected for a period of four years. Saaremaa County Government is the governing body, recognised by the State Government. The County Governor is nominated by the Estonian Government, and confirmed by the representatives of the municipality Councils. In Hiiumaa, there are 5 local authorities as well as Association of Hiiumaa Local Authorities. Central government is represented by Hiiumaa County Government and more than 30 different regional state institutions.

Political Parties:**Important Legislation:****Principal Taxes:****Associated Power:**

Estonia

Citizenship:**Paradiplomacy:**

The Estonian islands have been active over the last 10 years in making contacts and finding partners in the West. Saaremaa and Hiiumaa are working in close cooperation here, representing Estonia in various international organisations. The three organisations in which it is most important for the Estonian islands to participate are the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR), B7 and Eurohouse. Since 1989 the largest islands in the Baltic Sea have formed a common interest group, "The Islands of the Baltic Sea", also called Baltic Sea Seven Islands, (B7). The islands that have been involved from the beginning are Bornholm (Denmark), Gotland (Sweden), Hiiumaa (Estonia), Saaremaa (Estonia), Åland (Finland), Åland (Sweden), and Rügen (Germany). The geographic position of the islands, in the middle of the Baltic Sea, has made them especially aware of the emerging new opportunities and this has prompted the beginning of collaboration between the islands. In 1995-1996 the seven Baltic Sea islands jointly compiled a programme of action: The Baltic Sea Islands – a common strategy for the future. The aim of the programme is to increase the Baltic Sea islands' possibilities of utilising their development potential. Another aim of the programme is of course that it should be an integral part of endeavours towards stable development in the Baltic Sea region. The overall goal in the common strategy of action is to create the basis for more jobs, long-term sustainable development, as well as mutual enrichment of the islands and the world around them. In 1997 B7 opened a permanent office in Brussels in order to have better and closer access to EU institutions and programmes. The International Partnership Center Eurohouse was founded in February 1995 to forge links and create opportunities between the members of the organisation, these being the subregions around the Baltic Sea. The main aim is to promote cooperation between the Western Estonian regions of Hiiumaa, Saaremaa and Lääne- ja Saaremaa, the Uusimaa and Varsinais-Suomi regions from Finland and Norrtälje Municipal Council from Sweden.

HUMAN RESOURCES

In 2004, the population density in Hiiumaa is 10.9 people per sq/km. Hiiumaa (2004) 11,087. There are approximately 40,000 inhabitants in Saaremaa.

Island	Area (km sq.)	Population	% of Total Population
Hiiumaa	0	11,087	%
Saaremaa	0	40,000	%

In 2003, 182 EEK of social support per person was paid (average in Estonia 227 EEK).

Population:	
Year	Resident Population

Age of Population:	0-14	15-24	25-49	50-64	65 and up
		0	0	0	0

Migration:

There are approximately 40,000 inhabitants in Saaremaa. There is an increasing trend towards urbanisation, at present 41% of the population, some 16,500 are resident in the capital town of Kuressaare. The larger rural centres are KÄrila (1,500) and Orissaare(1,400). Saaremaa is one of the most homogeneous districts, with 98% of the islanders being ethnic Estonians. There are more women than men, in the ratio of 11 to 1.

Crude Birth Rate:

Life Expedctancy:

Crude Death Rate:

Ethnicity:

98% Estonian, 1,2% Russian, 0,24% Finn, 0.22% Ukrainian, 0.34% other

Class Division:

Languages:

Saaremaa has its own distinctive dialect of the Estonian language, with a slightly Swedish pronunciation.

Religion:

Main religions predominantly Protestant (Lutheran), also Eastern Orthodox and Baptist.

Literacy:

Education System:

According to data from the last census, carried out in 1989, the standard of education on Saaremaa was roughly the same as that in the rural counties on the mainland where the percentage of Estonians aged 15 and above with professional secondary and higher education was 26%. According to our life-quality research in 1997 the number is now even higher - 33%. These figures reflect the standards of education achieved during the Soviet period. Saaremaa's economy needs retraining for the local labour force. Of particular importance is the need for improved skills in foreign languages, computer technologies, etc.

Total Pre-schools:()	
Total Primary Schools	
First Level:	
Second Level:	
Third Level:	
Total Secondary Schools:	
Total Professional Schools	
Universities:	

Number of Schools per Island:										
	Pre-school		Elementary			High-school		Prof.	University	
	Pub	Priv	1	2	3	Pub	Priv		Pub	Priv

Students Enrolled:					
Year:	Pre-School	Elementary	High-school	Prof.	University



Teachers							
Year	Pre-School	Elementary			High-School	Prof.	University
		1	2	3			

Medical Services:

Hiumaa 24-hour medical care is provided by the county hospital. In addition there are 6 family doctors offices, 5 dental offices and 6 drug stores. The county's social care institution for old people is Tohvri Care Home.

HISTORY AND CULTURE

History:

According to archeological finds, the territory of Saaremaa has been inhabited for at least five thousand years. In old Scandinavian sagas, Saaremaa is called Eysysla which means exactly the same as the name of the island in Estonian: the district (land) of island. This is the origin of the island's name in German and Swedish, Åsel, and in Latin Osilia. The name Eysysla appears sometimes together with Adalsysla, 'the big land', perhaps 'Suuremaa' or 'Suur Maa' in Estonian which refers to mainland Estonia. Sagas talk about numerous skirmishes between islanders and vikings. Saaremaa was the wealthiest county of ancient Estonia and the home of notorious Estonian pirates, sometimes called the Eastern Vikings. The Chronicle of Henry of Livonia describes a fleet of sixteen ships and five hundred Osilians ravaging the area that is now southern Sweden, then belonging to Denmark. In 1227 Saaremaa was conquered by the Livonian Order, but remained a hotbed of Estonian resistance. When the Order was defeated by the Lithuanian army in 1236, Saaremaa islanders rebelled. The conflict was ended by a treaty that was signed by the Osilians and the Master of the Order. Part of Saaremaa was ruled directly by the Order, while another part was ruled by the semi-independent Bishopric of Åsel-Wiek. On 15 April 1560 the bishopric and Saaremaa were sold by the last prince-bishop to Denmark. In 1645, Saaremaa was ceded from Denmark to Sweden by the Treaty of Bråmsebro. In 1721, along with the rest of Swedish Estonia, Saaremaa (then known by its Swedish name of Åsel) was ceded to Imperial Russia by the Treaty of Nystad, becoming a part of the Russian governorate-general of Estonia. In the 20th century, Saaremaa was twice occupied by German forces. In World War I, the Estonian islands were conquered in October 1917 and occupied (Operation Albion) until the end of hostilities. Estonia became independent after the October Revolution and the collapse of Imperial Russia. The new state was pressured into incorporation into the USSR in June 1940, as a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Nonaggression Pact. The Germans once again occupied the islands in 1941 (Operation Beowulf) and remained there until expelled by the Red Army in November 1944. Estonian independence was regained on August 20, 1991 in the collapse of the Soviet Union. Hiumaa Culture: There are 3 bigger culture centres, 8 public libraries, 8 museums and 25 athletic centres. There are 208 registered NGO-s, of which 39 sports-clubs and 18 are religious congregations.

Referenda:

Recent Significant Events:

Music, Dance, Handicraft and Patrimony:

Living under different powers and countries with different cultures has influenced the beliefs, education and broader outlook of the people, which has created the peculiar culture of Saaremaa. This culture is reflected in the characteristics of the people themselves. who are modest, hard-working, tough, hospitable and with a sense of humour. The islanders are bright-minded people, they worship fire, and love singing. The folk costumes are very rich and diverse, and are still worn today at public festivals. The local song and folk festivals have always been popular.

Sources:

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