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THE GUTMAN'S CAVE AND SCENIC VIKMESTE TRAIL

Description

The route leads through the finest viewpoints and natural landmarks of the Gūtmaņala (also known as "The Gutman's Cave"). To appreciate them fully, walkers must be prepared for the steep ascents and descents characteristic of the Gauja's ancient river valley. The exposed strata of the Gauja Formation sandstone form a natural geological record, revealing Devonian-period deposits laid down when the territory of today's Gauja National Park lay beneath a shallow sea. Around one million years ago, advancing glaciers left boulder clay, gravel and erratic stones, while the last major landscape changes occurred 12–13 thousand years ago as glacial meltwater carved the present-day valley. Discover the sequence of natural and cultural landmarks along the banks of the ancient Gauja river valley!

Best time to go

April–October, especially during the bird cherry blossom and autumn foliage. Early spring and winter are also suitable, when leafless trees reveal unobstructed valley views.

Duration

Half-day or full-day

Route surface

Surface includes forest paths, gravel tracks and wooden steps.

Signposting

The route is not marked on the ground; only directional signs to individual attractions are provided at certain points.

Length – approx. 5 km

Route

Gauja National Park Information Centre "Gūtmaņala" – "Sigulda" Water Tourism Camp – Bridge over the Gauja (no crossing) – Krimulda Manor – Princesses' Spring – Vikmeste Trail – Taurētāju Hill – Rata Hill – Viktor's Cave – Gutman's Cave – Bundulītis – Gauja National Park Information Centre "Gūtmaņala".

Difficulty level

Moderate to difficult. Sections along valley slopes and ravines are demanding due to steep gradients.

Starting point / destination

57.17633 24.84699

Gauja National Park Information Centre "Gūtmaņala"

Distance from Rīga 55 km

Public transport

City buses operate up to ten times daily between Sigulda bus station, Turaida and Krimulda. The "Senleja" stop is located 150 m from the Gauja National Park Information Centre "Gūtmaņala".

Worth to knowing!

Wear suitable walking footwear and carry a map of the Gutman's Cave area. Wooden steps may be damaged or slippery in wet conditions. Respect all site information signs! Sandstone outcrops are protected geological monuments, exercise particular care around them. Visitors are responsible for their own safety. Emergency services: 112.

We recommend!

At the "Sigulda" water tourism campsite, a designated picnic and campfire area is available on the Gauja riverbank! Please be reminded that overnight stays and campfires within Gauja National Park are permitted only in designated areas.

SIGHTS

1. BRIDGE OVER THE GAUJA

57.165588, 24.840987

The first bridge was built in 1937 as a technically advanced structure but was destroyed during the war. For nine years, Sigulda remained without a bridge, and a river ferry provided the only crossing, although it was limited by seasonal conditions such as winter and the spring ice break-up. During peak tourist seasons, it also could not carry all travellers quickly enough. A decision was therefore taken to commission a new bridge in 1950, and after nearly eight decades of service, this unique reinforced-concrete arch bridge was reconstructed in 2017.

2. KRIMULDA MANOR

57.167765, 24.829883

Built in 1822 in the Classical style as the residence of the Prince von Lieven family, the estate includes the steward's house, coach house, barn, smithy and a Swiss-style villa with distinctive woodcarving. Today it houses a certified rehabilitation centre. In addition, visitors may explore the manor's winemaking traditions alongside the winemaker and sample fruit and berry wines.

3. AIR CABLE CAR OVER THE GAUJA RIVER

57.169975, 24.830568

The only aerial cable car in the Baltics, spanning 1,020 metres and rising 42 metres above the Gauja valley, linking Sigulda and Krimulda. It offers panoramic views of the ancient Gauja river valley and three legendary medieval castles of Sigulda, Turaida and Krimulda, as well as

the Sigulda Bobsleigh and Luge Track.

4. SERPENTINE ROAD

57.169975, 24.830568

This historic road between Sigulda and Krimulda, illuminated at night, today is a popular place for romantic walks. It was upgraded in 1862 for the visit of Tsar Alexander II, when the first wooden summer bridge across the Gauja was also constructed.

5. KRIMULDA CASTLE RUINS

57.170626, 24.832070

In the 1860s, the ruins regained significance not as a military fortification but as part of a romantic landscape park created during Prince Lieven's tenure. It was here that one of the area's most beautiful viewpoints, known as "Bellevue", was established, offering a sweeping panorama of the ancient Gauja river valley.

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SIGULDA
AIZRAUJ

The route is also available
in the Sigulda mobile app!

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6. THE LINDEN TREE OF LOVE

The large linden tree earned its name from the romantic atmosphere of events once held at the Krimulda castle ruins. In the 1960s, a viewing platform with a spiral staircase was built for visitors who admired the scenery of the meandering Gauja and the surrounding forests. Today, a new linden tree grows in place of the original, while the former platform survives only in memory.

7. PRINCESSES' SPRING

57.17105, 24.83064

A small spring near the Swiss House in Krimulda, feeding a tributary on the left bank of the Vikmeste creek.

8. VIKMESTE TRAIL

57.171995, 24.836245

An approximately 3 km trail running along a tributary on the right bank of the Gauja and the small but picturesque Vikmeste creek, also known as Trout Creek due to its importance as a spawning ground for trout and its close relative – brown trout. Historically, the creek formed the natural boundary between the lands of Turaida and Krimulda. Downstream, small sandstone outcrops of the Gauja Formation rise to about 4 metres, while the western side of the ravine offers a fine view of the forest-covered Vikmeste Hillfort.

9. VIKMESTE HILLFORT

57.175563, 24.830540

Located on the right bank of the Vikmeste creek at the junction of a side ravine, less than one kilometre northwest of Krimulda castle ruins. Its slopes are enclosed on three sides by steep ramparts approximately 26 metres high, partly shaped by human activity.

10. TAURĒTĀJA HILL

57.17303, 24.83724

The point where the deep ravines of the Vikmeste creek meet the right bank of the ancient Gauja river valley. A wooden staircase leads to the summit. According to legend, Taurētāja Hill once served as an ancient lookout point from which guards sounded horns (*"taures"* in Latvian, hence the name) to warn of approaching enemies.

11. RATA HILL

57.177428, 24.835614

The highest point in the area (93 m above sea level, approx. 81 m above the Gauja), wooded and situated above Gutman's Cave. It is both a hillfort and a former medieval place of punishment.

12. VIKTOR'S CAVE

57.17602, 24.84256

A man-made niche a few metres from Gutman's Cave, said to have been carved by Viktors Heils, gardener of Sigulda Castle, for his fiancée Maija – Turaida's Rose – so she could look towards Sigulda's gardens. The cave measures 5.9 m in length, 6.8 m in width and 4.8 m in height at the entrance.

13. GUTMAN'S CAVE

57.17609, 24.84259

Gūtmaņa ala, also known as Gutman's Cave, is the largest grotto-cave formation in the entire Baltic region, stretching 18.8 meters in length, 12 meters in width, with its ceiling soaring to a height of 10 meters. The cave is carved over thousands of years by the flowing currents of the Gauja river and an underground spring. A small stream flows from the grotto into the Gauja. 17th-century inscriptions survive on the walls, including "GEORG CO(N)RAD

VON VNGEREN ST(E)RNBERG 1688" and "ANNA MAGDALENA VON TIESENHAVSEN ANNO 1677". The name of the cave derives from Baltic German travellers, who called a nearby living healer, who treated people with spring waters and herbs, a "gut Mann" (the German meaning for a "good man"). Legends include that of chieftain Rindaugs's unfaithful wife, from whose tears a spring arose, and the well known tale of Turaida's Rose – Maija – and her tragic love for Viktors Heils.

14. BUNDULĪTIS

Locally nicknamed "Bundulītis", a former milk pavilion built in 1910 to serve refreshments to visitors of Turaida and Gutman's Cave. It continues to offer snacks and drinks to walkers exploring the ancient river valley.

The Nature Conservation Agency maintains the trail; any maintenance issue you notice, you can report to vidzeme@daba.gov.lv or via the "Dabas tūrisms" app.

SERVISS

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