

The Vastseliina pilgrimage is physically demanding, but equally uplifting if one participates with the appropriate spirituality. The physical exertion (we walk approx. 80 kilometers over three days) reflects the seriousness of our dedication. Below you will find answers to questions related to the organization and spirituality of the pilgrimage. It is very important to read this page carefully before you decide to register, so you know what to expect.

Arrival

On August 12th, arrival at the Urvaste student dormitory is between 17:00 – 18:30.

Car owners must take their car to the Vastseliina Castle parking lot beforehand. At 20:00, pilgrimage transport vehicles will depart from there to the overnight accommodation in Urvaste. (See more under the section “car owners”).

There will be no communal catering on the evening of August 12th. There is an opportunity to make tea on site.

If you arrive later or come directly to Urvaste Church on the morning of August 13th, please be sure to note this in the comments when registering. On the morning of August 13th, there will be an early wake-up, and a good night's sleep is important for the smooth running of the pilgrimage!

Accommodations

The night before the trek (Aug 12-13), accommodation will be at the Urvaste school student dormitory. Rooms are for 2-4 people, and each room has a toilet and shower. Additionally, there is an option to camp in the school park.

By the end of the first day (Aug 13th), we will reach Tsooru village and stay overnight at the Tsooru community center. We can use the community center's hall, a stage separated by a curtain, and two additional larger rooms. Men will sleep in the hall and on the stage, and women in two separate rooms. The community center has a total of four toilets and, if needed, one shower room. Camping is possible.

On Sunday (Aug 14th), we will stay overnight at the Haanja community center and youth center. At the community center, the hall and stage can be used again. Men/women distribution: men in the community center, women in the youth center. Additionally, there are smaller rooms that we can use if necessary. Between the two buildings, there are a total of 6 toilets and 2 showers available. Camping is possible.

After the pilgrimage ends in Vastseliina (Aug 15th), there will be a joint pilgrimage closing event and time for goodbyes.

Walking

We walk 27km on Friday, 28km on Saturday, and 22km on Sunday: a total of 77km. The walking pace is brisk, averaging 4-5 km/h. Breaks are approximately every 2-hour (or slightly shorter) interval. Familiarize yourself with the more detailed pilgrimage schedule in the next section “Approximate Schedule.”

This may seem like an effort of questionable feasibility. However, our distance is significantly shorter than, for example, the traditional pilgrimage from Paris to Chartres, which thousands of Catholics also complete in two and a half days each year.

For normally active adults, the pilgrimage should be manageable, but for children, older people, and less active pilgrims, completing the journey may be a challenge. Some physical preparation is recommended, such as walking more in the weeks leading up to the pilgrimage (with the shoes you will wear on the pilgrimage).

Adults who wish to participate in the pilgrimage in a way other than walking are asked to contact the organizers to inquire about opportunities to contribute in various support roles for the smooth running of the pilgrimage. (See also the section “volunteers”).

For safety, we walk in a single column on roads; it is important to stay together. For those who fall behind the column or have to stop walking for some reason, car transport to the next stop will be arranged by the support team.

Some rest stops will have public toilets, but as much of the journey is on forest paths, we ask for everyone's understanding in this regard.

Apart from short rest breaks at designated spots, no other stops will be made during the pilgrimage.

Recommendation: it is wise to bring several pairs of shoes. If one pair gets wet or starts to chafe, you can change shoes.

Food

A simple hot meal awaits pilgrims on the evenings of August 13th and 14th at the accommodation site.

On August 14th and 15th, breakfast will also be at the accommodation site (porridge, sandwiches, coffee, tea). There will be an opportunity to make a sandwich to take with you for lunch.

For the morning of August 13th, we ask everyone to bring something for a quick meal after Mass at Urvaste Church. Tea and coffee will be available on site.

Lunch breaks will take place on the trail. We will offer bread rolls and fruit, but we definitely recommend everyone to pack something extra. There will be no opportunity to visit a shop along the way, so you should prepare for the entire journey. Suitable food is easy to eat, keeps without refrigeration until consumption, and is securely packaged. For example, nuts, energy bars, as well as cheese in sealed packages, small canned goods. Please note that during the pilgrimage, it will not be possible to wash dishes or use hot water.

Every pilgrim must have their own water bottle (at least one liter). It will be possible to refill them at rest stops. Important! You need to bring your own dishes: bowl, cutlery, mug. These will be needed for morning and evening meals. During dinner, we will try to arrange vegetarian and gluten-free food for those who have requested it in advance when registering. In case of other food intolerances, please bring your own suitable food items.

Liturgy, Prayers

At the heart of the pilgrimage is the Holy Mass in the traditional Roman rite (*vetus ordo*). The Mass will be celebrated daily by the pilgrimage chaplain, Father Tomasz Materna, in Urvaste, Rõuge, and Vastseliina, respectively.

The order of Mass and texts are prepared for all pilgrims.

The Holy Mass is the unbloody renewal of the Sacrifice of the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. At the moment of Consecration, the bread and wine become the true Body and Blood of Christ. The Mass is the most precious treasure of the Catholic faith. St. Peter Julian Eymard said: “Know, O Christian, that the Mass is among the holiest acts of faith. You can do nothing that gives God more honor, or is more beneficial to your soul, than to devoutly attend Mass as often as possible.”

Only Catholics in a state of grace may receive Holy Communion at the traditional Mass, kneeling and on the tongue. However, anyone who wishes may come forward at the same time to receive a priest's blessing, for which they should place their right hand on their left shoulder.

During the pilgrimage, there will also be an opportunity to receive the sacrament of Confession.

Every day we will pray the entire Rosary and traditional prayers (e.g., Angelus, litanies) by reading or singing, in Estonian or Latin. The texts of prayers and hymns are also prepared for the pilgrims.

End of the Pilgrimage

The pilgrimage culminates with a procession for the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary (Rukkimaarjapäev) at Vastseliina Castle.

Afterwards, we will drive by car to Vastseliina Church, where the solemn Mass concluding the pilgrimage will take place.

What to bring on the pilgrimage?

You should bring one piece of luggage and one smaller backpack. Luggage will be transported by car to the next overnight location each day; each pilgrim will carry their backpack during the trek. The luggage bag must be securely closable so that items are not lost during transport. Tents and sleeping bags do not have to fit into the luggage bag, but generally, the fewer extra items, the better.

You should have:

- Luggage bag
- Small backpack (for daily necessities)
- Tent (for those who wish to sleep outdoors)
- Sleeping bag
- Sleeping mat/air mattress
- Towel
- Toiletries
- Hiking shoes*

- Comfortable, weather-resistant clothing suitable for long walks**
- Head covering***
- Sunscreen***
- Light food items, snacks for the journey
- Water bottle (at least one liter)
- Light rain poncho/waterproof jacket

* Comfortable hiking or sports shoes are, of course, very important. Blisters on feet develop easily. Well-broken-in and supportive hiking shoes help prevent this. We recommend bringing several pairs of shoes.

** However, keep in mind that clothing should be modest, regardless of weather and physical exertion, and suitable for visiting churches and attending Mass (knees and shoulders covered, not tight-fitting or transparent, etc.).

*** When walking for long periods, it is very important to protect yourself from the sun. Sunstroke and dehydration can occur unexpectedly. We ask everyone to keep a head covering and water handy.

Luggage

Pilgrims should have a small backpack for everything needed for the day's journey. Larger bags with everything else, tents, and sleeping bags can be placed in the minibus each morning before setting off, which will take the luggage to the next overnight location. There will be no access to these items during the day. The luggage vehicle can only take closed bags (not plastic bags), and no food items or liquids that might leak.

Children and Youth

Pilgrims under 18 are welcome with their parent(s).

Pilgrims aged 15-18 may also participate with another responsible adult, in which case prior written consent from a parent is required. Please contact us at info@viamariana.ee

Parents are asked to note that they are responsible for their children throughout the pilgrimage.

In previous years, several children have successfully completed the trek with their parents. However, it is worth considering that, generally, the physical load of the entire trek is quite difficult for children under 12.

Volunteers

The Via Mariana pilgrimage is only possible thanks to the help of volunteers. Depending on the role, some volunteers physically participate in the pilgrimage, some do not, but all helpers are participants in the pilgrimage and share in its fruits and grace.

Drivers transport pilgrims' luggage, Mass equipment, water, and, if necessary, pilgrims who have to stop walking.

The housekeeping team helps during mealtimes and is responsible for setting up and handing over the accommodation sites.

First-aiders keep everyone healthy, and photographers play an important role in capturing the beautiful moments of the trek.

Additionally, there are singers and altar servers who assist at Mass.

Offers of help in all these and other roles are very welcome. Please contact: info@viamariana.ee

Supporters of the Pilgrimage

There are many ways to participate in the pilgrimage. Traditionally, those who could not physically participate in the journey gave money to poor pilgrims, who in return prayed for the supporter's intentions. Thus, one could participate in the pilgrimage spiritually and, through support, enable others to do so physically.

You can also participate in our pilgrimage by supporting the journey and the pilgrims.

The pilgrimage involves certain expenses for food, accommodation, transport, equipment, and materials. These expenses must be covered by the participation fee. By supporting the pilgrimage financially, you can help pilgrims who might otherwise not be able to participate (young people, larger families).

All donations are gratefully welcomed and can be made to the SA Via Mariana account:
EE287700771006362084

If you wish to help in another way, please contact us: info@viamariana.ee

Drivers, Passengers, and Transport Logistics

On the day before the pilgrimage (Aug 12th), Father Tomasz Materna will celebrate Mass at Urvaste Church at 17:00. All are welcome to attend.

Drivers must note that cars not involved in the pilgrimage organization must definitely be taken to the Vastseliina Castle parking lot. At 20:00, pilgrimage transport vehicles will depart from Vastseliina Castle parking lot to Urvaste to ensure all drivers get back. The drive between Urvaste and Vastseliina takes approximately 1 hour (2 hours round trip).

Drivers are asked to specify during registration how many free seats they have in their car and from where and when they are departing. We will try to find car spaces for those arriving without a car if possible. Organizers will contact you for coordination.

On August 15th, after the procession at Vastseliina Castle, we will drive by car to Vastseliina Church for Mass.

After the trek, we will try to coordinate the return journey and find suitable car spaces for those who came without a car. We ask drivers again to indicate the number of free seats on their return journey and when and where they are driving.

Is this pilgrimage for me?

Everyone who wishes to come is welcome on the pilgrimage. The main components of the pilgrimage, as the name suggests, are prayer and journey (rännak). Therefore, one should consider in advance the duration, distance, and asceticism of the journey, which can be physically challenging. However, more important than the physical journey is the spiritual nature of the pilgrimage. It is primarily an opportunity for deepened prayer and repentance, but also an opportunity to partake in the joy and grace that a community united in Christ, of different ages and backgrounds, brings with it.

It is not necessary to belong to the Catholic Church to participate, but it is important to agree with the traditionally Catholic concept of this pilgrimage.

Registration and Questions

All pilgrims must register via the website. The registration deadline is August 1st.

Register: <https://viamariana.ee/registreeri/>

If you have questions, contact us: info@viamariana.ee

We will do our best to respond quickly by email.

Participation Fee

To register, you must select the appropriate category and pay the participation fee. If you are coming with family, it is important to register each family member separately by selecting the appropriate category.

- Adult — €130
- Student — €90
- Youth (12-19 years) — €70
- Child (under 12 years) — €15
- Family (from 3 members, 2 adults) — €175

Please pay as soon as possible, by August 1st at the latest, by transfer to the Via Mariana SA account.

Recipient: Via Mariana SA

Account no: EE287700771006362084

Description: names for whom you are paying

NB! Registration only becomes effective upon receipt of the participation fee. Payment in cash or on-site is not possible.

NNB! If participation in the pilgrimage is hindered by the amount of the fee, please be sure to contact us at info@viamariana.ee. We will find a solution.

Via Mariana and Personal Responsibility

We expect all participants in the Vastseliina pilgrimage to be responsible adults or minors accompanied by a guardian. Decisions made during the pilgrimage—what to do or not do, when to

push oneself or stop, how to ensure sufficient water intake, etc.—are made by each individual, knowing their own capabilities.

However, Via Mariana has responsibility for the pilgrimage as a whole – this concerns traffic on roads also used by others, upkeep at accommodation sites and churches that open their doors to us, etc. We expect reasonable and benevolent behavior from all participants and adherence to the instructions of organizers and group leaders. We reserve the right to remove individuals from the pilgrimage whose behavior contradicts the given instructions or the spirit of the pilgrimage.

As previously noted, parents or guardians are responsible for their children. Pilgrims under 15 must be accompanied by a guardian at all times.

For our part, we will do everything to care for pilgrims who encounter difficulties. We will pick up stragglers and those who fall behind by car, provide first aid and comfort if necessary. However, for the smooth running of the pilgrimage, we ask everyone for forbearance and a cheerful spirit!

Via Mariana SA

info@viamariana.ee

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