

VIKING LINE

“A link between two homes” – maritime route between Helsinki and Tallinn celebrates 60 years

The scheduled passenger ferry service that links Finland and Estonia will celebrate its 60th anniversary on July 7. The route between Helsinki and Tallinn has become one of the busiest in the world, and that growth is expected to continue in the future. Viking Line has sailed to Estonia since 1989 and is now planning the world's biggest electric car ferry for the route.

There were already scheduled ferry links between Finland and Estonia during the inter-war period, but due to Soviet occupation it was only possible for scheduled passenger service between Helsinki and Tallinn to begin in 1965. On Tuesday, July 7, 1965, MS Vanemuine departed from Tallinn for Helsinki. Some 4,000 people sailed on the vessel during the first month.

Today, about 7.5 million passengers sail between the two countries each year, and the route is one of the most heavily used maritime links for passengers in the whole world. The Baltic Sea link has also become one of the most important maritime shipping routes for Finland's imports and exports.

“Sixty years ago, Finland was Estonia's window to the world. Even today, in an era of global mobility, it is the first destination abroad for many Estonians. For tens of thousands of people, the Tallinn–Helsinki route is more than a journey – it is a vital link between two homes,” says the Ambassador of Estonia to Finland, **Sven Sakkov**.

“Both Estonia and Finland are export-driven economies that are highly dependent on sea links for their flows of goods and services as well as their supply chains. The Tallinn–Helsinki route is a strong symbol of our countries' close friendship, our shared ambitions and the freedom of mobility that connects us.”

Catamaran summers opened up a new market

Viking Line joined the Helsinki–Tallinn route in 1989, when Viking Cinderella began sailing to Estonia. The vessel did not dock quayside; instead, customs clearance took place when it was moored in Tallinn. That way, it was possible to have duty-free sales on board. One year later, Isabella also began to serve the Estonia route.

During the summer season of 1994, Viking Line launched daily passenger service between Helsinki and Tallinn with the catamaran Viking Express. The high-speed ferry, with space for 450 passengers, crossed the Gulf of Finland quickly.

“Even the first summer was a great success for us, and we transported more passengers than any other high-speed ferry on the route. We gained invaluable experience from a brand-new market,” says Viking Line's Senior Vice President of Corporate Communications, **Johanna Boijer-Svahnström**.

After three summers of catamaran service, Viking Line decided to give up high-speed ferries, and planning began for a new, high-speed vessel that would be suitable for the Estonia route.

Viking XPRS was an immediate success

In 2004, Estonia joined the European Union, and conditions for ferry traffic across the Gulf of Finland changed completely. When duty-free sales on vessels were discontinued, Finns were keen to start making shopping trips to Tallinn, and many people travelled there for work as well. Viking Line added Rosella on the route, with the vessel making two daily return trips.

A new vessel was ordered from Aker Yards shipyard in Helsinki in 2005. The vessel combined the good qualities of high-speed catamarans and car ferries. Viking XPRS, which was the name of the new vessel, launched service in the spring of 2008. Capacity on each sailing was 2,500 passengers and 230 passenger cars.

“Viking XPRS was really popular with passengers right away, and already the first year we took one quarter of the passenger market for the Estonia route even though we only had one vessel in service,” Johanna Boijer-Svahnström recalls.

In 2023, Viking XPRS was reflagged under the Finnish flag, which strengthened Viking Line’s position as the largest employer in Finnish maritime transport. The vessel’s interiors underwent an extensive refurbishment in early 2025.

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