



## 2021 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

**Title of the Story:** How a small Estonian museum in Vargamäe turned lockdown into a success story

**Destination Name:** *(include any state, province or region)*

Järva county

**Country:** Estonia

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**Position:** Coordinator of tourism network in Järva county

**Nomination Category:** *(Please check the boxes that indicate the focus of your story)*

*Please find detailed information for the categories below in the Top 100 training module 'Good Practice Story'.*

- Localizing the destination supply chain
- Decarbonizing the destination supply chain
- Culture & Communities
- Environment & Climate
- Nature & Ecotourism
- Tourism Reset & Recovery

*Find detailed instructions for submitting good practices in the Top 100 training module "Good Practice Story".*

*Should you have any questions on your submission please refer to our FAQ page or contact [top100@greendestinations.org](mailto:top100@greendestinations.org)*

# DESCRIBE YOUR GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Address each aspect of your good practice story in the different sections being specific including relevant quantitative and qualitative information.

## Issues faced

*What was the problem/issue solved with the good practice? Click to add your text*

Tammsaare Museum in Vargamäe is a must-visit-destination for educational purposes as the birthplace of Anton Hansen Tammsaare, Estonia's most influential writer and the author of the iconic Estonian novel "Truth and Justice". The museum has traditionally had a large number of school groups among their visitors, but not as many individual guests as they would like. For 2020 a major annual exhibition "Objects are more truthful than people" was prepared, targeting especially the segment of individual visitors. The exhibition featured 12 practical yet significant daily objects that belonged to Tammsaare's family, such as his father's bible, a wooden bench made by the writer himself, his sister's iron, a window of the family's old farmhouse etc, all of which resonate with the story of "Truth and Justice". The annual exhibition opened on 1 March 2020, its clear goal was to increase the number of individual visitors. On 13 March 2020 the government of Estonia declared emergency situation and the country went into lockdown. The exhibition and indeed the whole museum was closed until further notice.

## Methods, steps and tools applied

Emergency situation pushed the museum staff onto the path of innovation. With the new exhibition and the whole museum closed, they still wanted to tell the stories and in order to accomplish that in the new reality, the museum staff in cooperation with their partners created a virtual exhibition featuring 3D photographs along with descriptive translation. Initially intended for the blind and partially sighted, in the context of shutdown the virtual exhibition became relevant and interesting for all audiences. Thus the descriptive translation was also put together in a more emotional manner than it usually is, in order to draw people's attention to some details that otherwise might go unnoticed. The aim of the virtual exhibition was to tell the stories related to the historical objects as much as to keep in touch with the public and also to gain new audiences – people with special needs, among them the blind and visually impaired.

## Key success factors

Good quality of the virtual exhibition – 3D photos of the historical objects were taken by a professional agency; descriptive translations were created with the help of the Estonian History Museum and Ms Kai Kuusk, a blind blogger who has done much in Estonia to create awareness of the true challenges experienced by the blind and partially sighted; also additionally attractive for the general public thanks to the connection with a major film – virtual exhibition featured readings from "Truth and Justice" by Maiken Pius, one of the leading cast members of the recently screened epic drama "Truth and Justice" which was shortlisted for foreign language Oscars in 2020.

Bold marketing decisions at the end of the lockdown – while it was not clear how people will act and if or how ready they will be to travel even in their home country, the museum launched an advertising campaign to build on the success of the virtual exhibition.



### Lessons learned

With the museum closed, there was more time to focus on the back-office-work including marketing – a set of separate visuals was created for the annual exhibition and used across different channels, including social and traditional media (print as well as outdoor).

Unexpected situation can be turned around into a success story – at the time of lockdown, the museum put more effort into keeping in touch with the public.

Visitors appreciate the effort, in this case especially the communities of people with special needs.

Virtual exhibition did not replace the actual museum experience but instead became a marketing channel that brought people to the museum – many visitors during the summer mentioned that they had watched the virtual version beforehand.

Last not least, at the time of lockdown thanks to the general drop in overall advertising, the museum could afford more for their money and create more publicity than ever before for the same budget.

Virtual exhibition spurred a lot of interest this time, but next time it should be even more advanced and technically innovative.

### Results, achievements and recognitions

With the publishing of the free virtual exhibition on its website, Tammsaare museum in Vargamäe projected an image of a modern museum which was a surprise to many Estonians, given its rural location and the well-known setting on a traditional farm.

Overall traffic to the website increased as did the number of unique first-time visits.

Once the museum re-opened in June 2020, the amount of individual visitors increased by 43% compared to previous summer season. The number of visitors with special needs increased as well.

Visitors to museum created added value for the whole region – Tammsaare museum in Vargamäe is located in a remote area of Järva county, so once there, people visited also the local church at Järva-Madise, Albu manor and park, Tammsaare's monument by the village hall etc.

The museum's connection with the local community became tighter and more active; local people increasingly recognized the museum as an attraction they can be very proud of.

The project was a nominee for the marketing awards of Estonian tourism in 2020.

### Additional references

Tammsaare Museum in Vargamäe: <https://www.vargamae.ee/en/>

Virtual exhibition: <https://www.vargamae.ee/en/story/annual-exhibition-things-are-more-real-than-people/>

3D photos of the virtual exhibition published on the museum's Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?vanity=vargamaemuuseum&set=a.3071982836174160>

News article about the virtual exhibition in the local paper (in Estonian only):

<https://jarvateataja.postimees.ee/6987878/vargamae-muuseumi-aastanaitust-saab-uudistada-virtuaalselt>

News story about the virtual exhibition on Estonian national radio (in Estonian only):

<https://www.err.ee/1097928/anton-hansen-tammsaare-muuseumis-saab-tutvuda-uee-naitusega>

