TOUR CODE

BS3

ADVENTURESABROAD

A NORDIC ODYSSEY

Highlights of the Baltics & Scandinavia

21 days

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Day 1 *Arrive in Vilnius*

Arrival in Vilnius, capital of Lithuania.

In 1994 the Old Town of Vilnius was included on UNESCO's World Heritage list. With its diverse architecture and colourful history, Vilnius is a cosmopolitan place, though with just 543,000 inhabitants, it has an almost village-like atmosphere, making it an easy place to get to know.

A NOTE ON SUITABILITY: Though we do not rate this tour "strenuous", it is a busy programme with numerous city / town walking tours featuring uneven surfaces, inclines and / or stairs. You must be able to spend several hours on your feet per day, walking at a leisurely pace. There may not be porters available in all locations. We also make use of public transit in some cities in order to maximize sightseeing where vehicles are impractical (most people quite enjoy this insight into daily life). If you are unsure of your suitability for this trip, please contact one of our destination specialists.

Overnight in Vilnius. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *Vilnius & Trakai*

This morning we travel to Trakai, a former capital of Lithuania. The town, situated on the shores of several lakes, has two prominent castles built to fend off German knights in the 14th century. Trakai is famous for its population of Kara-Kalpak people. Brought to Trakai from the Crimean Peninsula by the Grand Duke Vytautas in the late 14th century, the Kara-Kalpak still hold their Jewish religious services in the yellow Kinessa, built in 1812. Our tour here includes a visit to the Trakai Historical Museum, housed within the main rooms of Trakai's island castle.

We return to Vilnius for a lunch break and town tour.

Sweden, Poland, France and Russia have all ruled Vilnius in the past, and this afternoon we will witness the influences that this has had on this beautiful city. The Old Town is one of the largest in Europe, with nearly 1,500 historic buildings of note built over several centuries creating a splendid blend of many different architectural styles.

Our walking tour will take us to Cathedral Square in the heart of the city. Inside the cathedral we see the famous chapel of Saint Kazimieras, considered an architectural gem. Rising in the distance behind Cathedral Square is the Gedimino Tower, once part of the 14th century defense system. We will also see the baroque Peter and Paul Church, originally built in the 14th century. The Gates of Dawn, on the eastern side of the Old Town, were one of the original nine gates into the city. The original Gothic defensive wall was once over 2 km (1.5 miles) long. From this remaining gate we will walk down through the streets of the old town. Nearby is the Jewish Quarter, with its cobblestone lanes and hidden courtyards.

Overnight in Vilnius. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Vilnius - Kaunas - Siauliai, Lithuania - Riga, Latvia*

Today we travel to Riga via Kaunas to see the Castle and Old Town at the confluence of the two largest Lithuanian rivers, the Nemunas and the Neris. We see the Town Hall Square, lined with 15th-16th century merchants' houses, and the 17th century baroque Town Hall dominating its center. Nearby Kaunas Cathedral and Gothic Vytautas Church dominate the riverbank. After our visit we continue north to Riga.

En route we stop at the Hill of Crosses, located just north of the small industrial city of Siauliai. Siauliai is the Lithuanian national pilgrimage center, and a city of famous cultural traditions and legends. On a small hill stand thousands of crosses that represent Christian devotion and act as a compelling resistance memorial to the German and Soviet occupation. Today newlyweds often come here after their wedding ceremony to ask for God's blessing.

After our stop we will proceed to the border and continue on to Riga.

Overnight in Riga. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Riga: City Tour*

Riga, founded in 1201 by the German bishop Albert, is the largest of the three Baltic capitals and boasts an impressive kaleidoscope of various architectural styles.

We start with a panoramic drive taking in some of the most famous sights of Riga. Our route along the embankment of the River Daugava provides us with wonderful views of the city. Our route takes us to the center of town to the Jugendstil District and Alberta Street, an open-air architectural museum and one of the best collections of Art Nouveau buildings in Europe. We then drive through the modern part of the city, observing the university building, National Opera, Academy of Arts and central train station. We will then leave our bus at the entrance to the Old Town.

Our walking tour of the Old Town will include Riga Castle, Dome Cathedral, St. Peter's Church, Swedish Gates, Large and Small Guild Houses, and the Freedom Monument. During your free time, we recommend a visit to the Museum of the Occupation, dedicated to information about Latvia and its people under two occupying totalitarian regimes from 1940 to 1991 (entrance by donation).

Overnight in Riga. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Riga: Rundale Palace*

This morning we travel about 90 minutes to a region known as Bauska, where we visit Rundale Palace, an architectural pearl created by architect Francesco Bartolomeo Rastrelli, designer of the Winter Palace in St Petersburg. Construction of the palace was completed only in 1768 and now it is a magnificent sample of baroque style with elements of classicism, with crystal chandeliers, rich stucco moulding, silk wallpaper, collection of paintings, and frescoes by Italian artists. This is the place where leaders of the state, wishing to receive high guests with really regal honours, hosted the royal couple from Denmark when they visited in Latvia.

The balance of the day is yours to further explore this beautiful, compact city on your own.

Overnight in Riga. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Riga, Latvia - Parnu - Tallinn, Estonia*

This morning we depart Riga for Tallinn, visiting Parnu en route. There was a trading settlement in Parnu before the German crusaders arrived, but recorded history of the city dates back to the 13th century. From the middle of the 19th century, Parnu developed as a resort town with its good beaches and relatively good weather. During the Soviet era, Parnu's guesthouses, inns and hotels were converted to sanatoria. We will do a stroll through parts of the Old Town, including the town's oldest building, the Red Tower.

We continue to Tallinn, the capital of Estonia.

Historically, Tallinn has been attacked, sacked, razed and pillaged on numerous occasions. Although extensively bombed by Soviet air forces during the latter stages of World War II, much of the medieval Old Town still retains its charm. The Tallinn Old Town became a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site in 1997.

Overnight in Tallinn. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Tallinn: City Tour*

Today we have a guided WALKING tour of this important Baltic Sea harbour city. We begin with a visit to the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, built in the nineteenth century. The cathedral dominates the Lossi Plats, and is an imposing testament to the Russian imperialist influence. We also visit the Dominican Monastery, which played an important role in bringing Christianity to Estonia. We have the opportunity to visit the Toompea Castle site, a 13th century castle where the current parliament of Estonia holds its sessions. In the immediate area we will also visit the Toomkirik Lutheran cathedral, founded in 1233, with its impressive carved tombs inside.

This afternoon you will have some free time to stroll through the picturesque Old Town with its jumble of medieval buildings, turrets and walls.

Overnight in Tallinn. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Tallinn, Estonia - Helsinki, Finland*

This morning we take a fast ferry from Tallinn to Helsinki (HAVE YOUR PASSPORTS HANDY!) and embark upon a tour of this sophisticated capital. Affectionately known as the 'Daughter of the Baltic', Helsinki is sited at the arrowhead of a peninsula, surrounded by an archipelago of 315 islands, perfectly placed between its two great trading cousins, Stockholm and Moscow. From a European perspective, Helsinki is relatively young (450 years), yet it is Finland's sixth-oldest town. The Swedes, who extended their empire into Finland in 1155, founded the city of 'Helsingfors' (the name still used by the Swedes) in 1550 when King Gustav Vasa needed a site for a strategic, competitively placed trading port. It languished as a coastal backwater until Imperialist Russia invaded in 1809.

We will enjoy a comprehensive walking tour taking in the most important and interesting parts of Helsinki, such as the historical centre and the diplomatic quarters, the Presidential Palace, City Hall, the Parliament building, Finlandia Hall and the Opera House. We stop at Senate Square, and, if possible, Temppeliaukio Church. During the afternoon you can explore the busy market place or the many souvenir shops close to the harbour.

Overnight in Helsinki. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Free time in Helsinki / Ferry to Sweden*

Today you will have a free day to explore Helsinki. Helsinki is small and intimate; lively but not bustling. Its size makes it easy to walk around and cafes, markets, and the nearby islands are just a few of its summer delights.

This evening we will board our overnight ferry to Stockholm.

Overnight ferry. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Stockholm: City Tour*

After our morning arrival we check into our hotel before commencing with our walking tour of the Old City. With its location on the east coast of Sweden at the mouth of Lake Malaren, by the Stockholm archipelago, it is widely renowned for its beauty

Three islands make up the oldest part of Stockholm -- Riddarholmen, Staden and Helgeandsholmen -- the whole history-riddled mass a cluster of seventeenth- and eighteen-century Renaissance buildings backed by narrow medieval alleys.

It takes only a matter of seconds to cross the bridge onto Riddarholm, where the Riddarholmskyrkan is located. Originally a Franciscan monastery, for over six centuries the church has been the burial place of Swedish royalty.

Our walk around the island will take us to the back of the church for stunning views of Stadshuset, the City Hall and Lake Malaren. Nearby is the island Langholmen where in the winter people skate and even take their dogs for walks on the ice, as the water freezes solid right up to the bridges and beyond.

We will continue to the City Hall, where we will view both the controversial Blue Hall and the Golden Chamber with its 18 million mosaic tiles, known to the entire world from the annual traditional Nobel Prize banquets. Our tour will take us to Djurgaarden and a visit to the Vasa Ship Museum. The Vasa warship left the pier by the Old Town in 1628 for her maiden voyage, but sank right in the harbour of Stockholm after just a few minutes of sailing. In 1961, after 333 years at the bottom of the sea the ship was salvaged, and the museum was established.

Overnight in Stockholm. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Stockholm: Boat Tour*

This morning we enjoy a sightseeing tour by boat, taking us around some of Stockholm's 14 islands. The boat passes through the narrow and picturesque canals. We will see the island of Djurgarden -- a huge park area originally intended as royal hunting grounds. The canal leads to the sea, offering us a glimpse of some of the islands in Stockholm's inner archipelago -- the Fjaderholm islands. On the way back, the boat passes a number of beautiful villas and museums, as well as the Old Town with the Royal Palace. The tour also passes the world's first National City Park, "Ekoparken", founded in 1995.

The balance of your day is free day in Stockholm. Stockholm is, without doubt, one of the most beautiful national capitals in the world. The Old Town is particularly spectacular, and walking around the city's waterways and parks is a glorious way to spend your afternoon.

Overnight in Stockholm. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Stockholm, Sweden - Copenhagen, Denmark*

Today we fly to Copenhagen. Depending on flight schedules, you'll have free time in either Stockholm or Copenhagen.

Overnight in Copenhagen. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Copenhagen: City Tour*

Today we take a walking tour the historical Copenhagen. We will start with a one-hour canal boat tour that provides an excellent introduction to our day. The trip includes a visit to the statue of the Little Mermaid on the Angelina promenade. The 1913 statue commemorates Hans Christian Anderson's lovelorn creation, and is the subject of hundreds of travel posters. Donated to the city by Carl Jacobsen, the son of the founder of Carlsberg Breweries, the innocent waif has also been the subject of some cruel practical jokes, including decapitation and the loss of an arm, but she is currently in one piece.

After the boat tour we will continue our walking tour to the National Museum. After a brief orientation provided by our guide, you will be free to explore this excellent museum, with its permanent collections pertaining to Danish history as well as several very good ethnological rooms.

After lunch we continue to Christianborg Castle. Surrounded by canals on three sides, the massive granite castle is where the queen officially received guests. Even though the first two castles on the site were burned, Christiansborg remains an impressive Baroque compound, even by European standards.

This evening we visit the famous Tivoli Gardens. This is much more than a mere fair; among its attractions are a pantomime theatre, open-air stage, elegant restaurants (24 in all), and frequent classical, jazz, and rock concerts. Fantastic flower exhibits colour the lush gardens and float on the swan-filled ponds. At night 100,000 coloured lanterns illuminate the Chinese pagoda and the main fountain. The park was established in the 1840s, when Danish architect George Carstensen persuaded a worried King Christian VIII to let him build an amusement park on the edge of the city's limits.

NOTE: The order of Copenhagen sightseeing may depending on weather and other logistical considerations.

Overnight in Copenhagen. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Copenhagen: City Tour - Overnight Ferry*

Today we will continue with our city tour, starting with a walk to the City Cathedral, also called the Lady's Church, with its impressive collection of statues of the apostles in classical style. The building in the square that faces the side of the cathedral is part of the university.

We continue our walk to Rosenborg Castle, the home of the builder-king Christian the Fourth. We pass through some beautiful gardens en route and see a statue of Hans Christian Anderson. At Rosenborg Castle there are three floors to visit, as well as a basement vault where the Danish Crown Jewels are kept. After our visit here and a break for lunch, we walk to the Carlsberg Glyptotek Art Museum.

This is one of Copenhagen's most important museums, thanks to its exquisite antiquities, Gauguins and Rodins. Surrounding its lush indoor garden, a series of nooks and chambers houses works by Degas and other Impressionists, plus an extensive assemblage of Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and French sculpture, not to mention the best collection of

Etruscan art outside Italy and Europe's finest collection of Roman portraits.

After a brief orientation (floor plans on the wall in the entrance atrium), you will be free to explore on your own.

This evening we board our evening ferry for the overnight journey to Oslo.

Our route takes us along the coast of Denmark and the body of water that separates the North Sea from the Baltic and into Norwegian waters. Our cabins are small but comfortable with en suite facilities. These vessels are large and well appointed with amenities that include restaurants, shops, maybe even a cinema and swimming pool.

Overnight ferry. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 15 *Arrival in Oslo*

In the early morning we will enter the Oslo fjord and the last 1.5 hours before arrival should be enjoyed on deck with cameras ready to go. The scenery is enchanting, with the old fortress at Droebak and the scattered islands full of summer homes enjoyed by the Norwegians. The ship will dock right down town and a short transfer will bring us to our hotel.*

* Please note that our Oslo hotel rooms may NOT be ready for us this early in the day. Your large baggage will be securely stored; you might want to prepare your daypack ahead of time.

This morning we visit the Holmenkollen Ski Jump, the Vigelands Park and Edward Munch's Museum. Our tour will take us up in to the hills of Oslo, and past the lovely homes to Oslo's most famous landmark--Holmenkollen Ski jump arena. The fantastic view of the Oslo fjord and the harbour of Oslo is at its best from here. The ski jump has been a landmark since 1892, rebuilt for the 1952 Olympics and the arena for an annual International Ski Festival every February. We are at the gateway to Oslo ‘s backyard -- the expanse of hiking and cross-country ski trails, greatly loved by the locals at all seasons of the year. We will return down the hill to the green expanse of Frognerparken (Frogner Park) incorporating one of Oslo's most celebrated and popular cultural targets, the Vigelandsparken, an open-air sculpture park which, along with the Vigeland Museum, commemorates a modern Norwegian sculptor of world renown, Gustav Vigeland (1869-1943).

This afternoon is yours to spend at leisure, strolling down the main street of Carl Johan, enjoying the activities in a city that comes alive during the summer months.

Overnight in Oslo. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 16 *Oslo: City Tour*

On today's tour we will walk through the center of Oslo, visit Akershus Castle/Fortress, still today protecting the harbour of Oslo. King Haakon V Magnusson built one of the oldest historical monuments in Oslo, Akershus Castle in 1300. It was a fortress and a royal residence for several centuries. A fire in 1527 devastated the northern wing, and the castle was rebuilt and transformed into a royal Renaissance palace under the Danish-Norwegian king, Christian IV. It is open to the public for a stroll around the grounds, and we will also find the Resistance Museum located within its grounds.

We continue past the impressive City Hall with its twin red brick towers, and down the harbour to travel by local boat to Bygdoey Peninsula, the home of several museums and estate homes. We will visit the Viking Museum, housing the 3 ships found buried along the Oslo fjord, all of them nearly 1200 years old. A short stroll next door takes us to the

Norwegian Folk Museum, where a collection of city homes, farm buildings, one of the famous Stave Churches gives you a birds eye view of Norway and its history. Further along the Peninsula passing the Canadian Ambassador's home we come to the Kon-Tike and Fram Museum that houses the balsa raft used by Thor Heyerdal and his international crew in 1962. They sailed from Peru to Polynesia to confirm his theory that the first Polynesians originally came from Peru.

We return to the city by boat.

Overnight in Oslo. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 17 *Oslo - Flam - Gudvangen - Stalheim*

An early departure takes us to Oslo's train station where we will catch an +/- 08:00 departure to Flam via Myrdal where we connect to the Famous Flamsbana, the Flam Railway, one of the world's most spectacular rail journeys.

In 1923 work was started on the separate railway line from Myrdal down sheer cliffs to Flam. Since the tunnels were done by hand, the first of the track wasn't put down until autumn 1936. By 1940 the line was opened and run first by steam engines. Electric engines took over in 1944. It takes about an hour to cover 20 km (12 miles) of track on the Flamsbana train. Eighteen of the 20 tunnels were chiseled out by hand which took one month of hard labour for each meter excavated. To avoid risk from avalanches, the railway criss-crosses the river and the bottom of the valley three times. Then, instead of building bridges, the river was routed through a tunnel under the railway line. Nowhere else in the world do adhesion rail cars on normal tracks have a steeper journey. Almost 80% of the railway line has a gradient of 5.5% (1:18).

At the bottom, we will enjoy the scenic landscape of the Flam valley and admire the lovely Aurlandfjord, an offshoot of the Sognefjord, the longest in the world.

We will enjoy a break for lunch in Flam and then board a leisurely 2-hour cruise along the narrowest arm of the Sognefjord and Aurland Fjord. Here we are surrounded by the dramatic West Coast fjord landscape of steep snow-capped mountains (up to 1800 m / 6,000 ft) and tumbling waterfalls, sheltered hamlets and high mountain farms. After this journey we will catch a bus at Gudvangen and continue on to Stalheim, located at the very heart of Western Norway's beautiful fjord region.

Overnight in Stalheim. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 18 *Stalheim - Bergen*

This morning we will visit the Stalheim Folk Museum for a glimpse of everyday life on a Norwegian farm and manor house, from the Middle Ages to today. Departing Stalheim, we travel by windy mountain road to the train station at Voss. From Voss we journey by rail once again via the famous Bergen/Oslo railway line arriving in Bergen followed by a bus transfer to our hotel.

Bergen is widely regarded as one of the more beautiful cities of Norway, and is an ancient city that looms large in Viking sagas. Until the 14th century, it was the seat of the medieval kingdom of Norway. Later the Hanseatic merchants established a major trading post here, holding sway until the 18th century, when the locals reclaimed their trading rights. Bergen has survived many disasters, including several fires and the explosion of a Nazi ship during World War II. It is a town with important traditions in shipping, banking, and insurance, and its modern industries are expanding rapidly.

The oldest part of town overlooks the busy harbour; along the harbour's edge are myriad shops, boutiques and the famous open-air fish market. We enjoy three nights in this lovely Norwegian city by the sea; your afternoon is at leisure.

Overnight in Bergen. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 19 *Bergen: City Tour*

Our tour starts in the center of town at Torget, also called Fisketorget or the fish Market, where fishermen and farmers deal their goods. Next we walk over to Bryggen, the wharf on the northeast side of Bergen's harbour. The gabled wood warehouses lining the docks mark the site of the city's original settlement. We take time to walk the narrow passageways between buildings; shops and galleries are hidden among the wooden facades.

Our walk continues down the wharf, past the historic buildings to the end of the Holmen promontory and to Bergenhus festning (Bergenhus Fort), which dates from the 13th century; the nearby Rosenkrantztarnet is a 16th century tower residence. Bergen's oldest cathedral is located behind the fort, the 12th century church called Mariakirken. Walking around the back of the church down four blocks to Floybanen, the funicular that runs up and down Floyen, one of the city's most popular hiking mountains -- the view is like no other. At the base of the funicular is an area of crooked streets and hodgepodge architecture where you'll find most of Bergen's antiques shops.

A midday stop at the Fish Market where you can enjoy fresh caught prawns right of the fishing boats, sit down on the quay and enjoy them like the locals do -- peel and load them onto fresh bread, add a bit of lemon and locally made mayonnaise.

In the afternoon we travel to the suburbs of Bergen by coach to Troldhaugen, beloved local composer Edward Grieg's home, before returning to town.

Overnight in Bergen. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 20 *Bergen: At Leisure*

Today is yours free in Bergen. What has made Bergen known around the world is its charm and atmosphere. Bergen is worth exploring on your own. Just to browse around the old streets and alleyways is an experience. Bergen looks its best from the seaside, so you may want to join a guided boat tour through Bergen's harbour area.

Overnight in Bergen. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 21 *Depart*

Today we depart from Bergen.

BON VOYAGE ! Meal plan: Breakfast.