TOUR CODE

JHBF

ADVENTURESABROAD

THE BALTICS, BELARUS, UKRAINE & MOLDOVA

with Jonathan Hodgson

25 days

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Day 1 *Arrival in Tallinn, Estonia*

Arrival in Tallinn, 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: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *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 3 *Tallinn - Parnu, Estonia - Riga, Latvia*

This morning we depart Tallinn for Riga, 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.

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 - Siauliai, Lithuania - Klaipeda - Curonian Spit (Nida)*

Today we travel to Nida on the Curonian Spit via Siauliai. At Siauliai, we will stop en route 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 Klaipeda, the former capital of Prussia, Memel. The city was originally founded by the Teutonic Order, who also established its first castle. It came under Prussian rule after the Napoleonic Wars and stayed so until the end of WWI when it was deemed to be international territory until Lithuanian troops occupied it a few years later. We will have a brief city tour of Lithuania's third largest city before continuing on to the Curonian Spit.

Overnight in Nida (or Klaipeda). Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Curonian Spit Tour*

The Curonian Spit is a National Park designated area set up in the early 1990's to protect this unique environment formed by the wind and waves of the Baltic Sea, coupled by massive deforestation stemming from a couple of centuries

before. Dunes shift along a narrow band of land, bordered by the crashing surf of the Baltic Sea to the west, and the calm Curonian Lagoon borders to the east. Local fishing villages survive now due to both their famed smoked fish and to the growing interest in tourism to the region.

During our time on the Curonian Spit, we will have the opportunity to visit the bizarre Witches Hill, covered in sculptures resembling creatures of fairy tale and fantasy; visit a viewing platform to spot Cormorants and Grey Herons; the 1888 Evangelical-Lutheran Church; Thomas Mann Memorial Museum; the Ethnographic Fisherman's Museum; the Amber Gallery Museum; and the Neringa History Museum, amongst other sights. We will also be able to appreciate the dunes that dominate much of the Spit. For those who are keen walkers, your tour leader will provide an option to go on one of the many walks that abound to take advantage of the beautiful landscape.

Overnight in Nida (or Klaipeda). Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Curonian Spit - Kaunas - Vilnius*

Today we travel to Vilnius 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 Vilnius.

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.

Overnight in Vilnius. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *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 10 *Vilnius, Lithuania - Minsk, Belarus*

Today we depart for the border between Lithuania and Belarus. Hopefully, our border crossing will be reasonably fast, though this may be subject to the still strict protocol of Belarusian officials.

After completing border formalities, we will drive onward to Minsk, the capital of Belarus.

Belarus, part of the Newly Independent States, (N.I.S.) is a vast country with stretches of unbroken birch groves, large forested marshlands and gently sloping green fields amidst wooden villages that time forgot in the 18th century. Belarus borders Russia in the north and east, Poland in the west, Latvia and Lithuania in the northeast and Ukraine in the south. Minsk is the capital of Belarus and was completely rebuilt after the Second World War.

Overnight in Minsk.

Day 11 *Minsk: City Tour*

In a country rich in war memorials, Minsk is the greatest of all testimonies to the atrocities of the Great Patriotic War. It's estimated that nearly half of the city's population perished during WWII. Today, Belarus is striving to balance the preservation of its independence with the need for economic partnership with neighbouring Russia.

Today we have a city tour including Independence Square with the House of Government and "Red" Krasny Roman Catholic Church; Victory Square with its tall grey obelisk and eternal flame honouring the heroes of World War II; Troitskoye Predmestye (Trinity Suburb) -- restored buildings of the 19th century, Holy trinity Cathedral and St.Catherine's Church -- architectural monuments of the 17th century.

This afternoon we travel 60 km (37 miles) north to the city of Katyn. This village was burned to the ground by the Nazis in 1943 and all of its residents, save one, perished. The site is now a memorial centered around a sculpture of the only known survivor, Yuzif Kaminsky. Located nearby are the Graveyard Villages, commemorating 185 other Belarussian villages annihilated by the Nazis; and the Trees of Life, commemorating 433 other villages which were destroyed and rebuilt; and the Memory Wall listing the Nazi concentration camps in Belarus and their victims.

Overnight in Minsk.

Day 12 *Minsk - Brest*

This morning we'll visit the Museum of the History of the Great Patriotic War -- the largest of its kind in the world, containing over 1000 items relating to the Second World War.

After lunch we travel by coach to Brest.

Brest was first mentioned in 1019 as Bierascie. It is believed that ancient city's name comes either from the word "bierast" -- a species of elm, or from the word "bierasta" meaning birchbark. The city's name was changed several times during its history. In the beginning of the 18th century the city's ancient name was changed into Brest-Litowsk. New name lived till the beginning of the 20th century when its second part was discarded and the city has become simply Brest.

The town arose in a little island, in a crossing through the Boog River. In 1340 Brest was included into the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and after that into Rzechpospolita (the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth). In 1490 the town got the

right for its self-government and later it became the centre of the region. The unification of Catholic and Orthodox was proclaimed in Brest at the end of the 16th century in the territory of Rzechpospolita under supremacy of Catholic, "The Brest Uniya". In 1795 Brest was returned to Russia, the town was transformed into a fortress for defence of the western boards of Russia in 1836 and it was transferred from the banks of the Boog to the Muhavets River. At the middle of the 19th century Brest was famous as a trade town.

Overnight in Brest.

Day 13 *Brest, Belarus - Lviv, Ukraine*

A highlight of our visit to Brest will be a morning tour of the Brest Fortress, founded on the 1st of June in 1836. The territory of the old town was given for its construction. The Citadel is the main fortification of the fortress. It was placed in the central island and the Volyn, the Cobrin and the Terespol fortifications surrounded it. The fortress isn't merely a remarkable military construction; it is also an interesting architectural complex. The Brest fortress got universal fame during the Great Patriotic war and one of the most important Soviet WWII war monuments marking the heroic resistance of the Red Army against the surprise German attack on June 22, 1941. "We were three. It was difficult for us but we die as heroes", a soldier scibbled on the wall before his death. The Kholmskie Gate is riddled with bullet holes. The ruins of the White Palace are visible from the fortress and mark the site where the 1918 Brest-Litovsk treaty was signed. The fort, built between 1838 and 1842, was destroyed in the fighting of 1941 in a matter of hours.

Later we depart for Lviv, Ukraine. Crossing the border we arrive in the "capital" of Western Ukraine and one of the country's most impressive cities. The Ukrainian Catholic Church, forced underground by Stalin in 1946, re-emerged with Glasnost in the late 1980s to play a significant role in a new Ukrainian independence movement.

Overnight in Lviv.

Day 14 *Lviv: City Tour*

Lviv, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, has a rich and impressive history. Numerous historical events are concerned with the city. The walls of old Lviv buildings still keep the spirit of past centuries; cozy streets and fascinating monuments make it a unique attraction among the Ukrainian and Eastern European cities.

Lviv's architectural landscape joins the monuments of numerous styles and different epochs. From the gothic 14th century Latin Cathedral, to the baroque of St. George (Sviatoho Yura) Cathedral. Renaissance-style Bernardine Monastery and Chapel of Boimes coexist with the strict simplicity of Armenian Church.

We have a city tour including the following major sites: the High Castle or Prince Hill, where the fortress used to be, with the panorama lot; the Church of St.Nicholas (13th century); the Church of Assumption and the Kornyakt Belfry (16th century); the Church of St.Parasceve (17th century) and its unique 70-icon iconostasis; the Cathedral of Dominicans (18th century); the Old Pharmacy; Market Square (over 40 14th -- 18th century buildings; St.George's Cathedral (18th century); St.John's Cathedral (14th century); the "Vienna-like" Prospekt Svobody (Liberty Avenue); the magnificent Opera House (exterior). You may wish to take in an optional performance at the Lviv Opera if schedules permit.

Overnight in Lviv.

Day 15 *Lviv - Ternopil - Kyiv*

Today we travel by coach from Lviv to Kyiv ("Kiev" in Russian) via Ternopil.

Arriving into the hospitality of Ternopil, we find ourselves in the very heart of sunny Podillya, another of Ukraine's historical regions. This boisterous city rich in historical traditions is a lakeside vacation spot for many Ukaranians. We will enjoy a brief city tour before continuing on to Kyiv, arriving late afternoon.

Overnight in Kyiv.

Day 16 *Kyiv: City Tour*

Today we have a busy day touring Kyiv, including the cathedral of Hagia Sophia, the oldest cathedral in Ukraine. Founded in the early 11th century, and largely rebuilt during the 17th and 18th centuries, it is now a museum with beautiful Christian frescoes. St Sophia Cathedral is inscribed on the UNESCO list of the most important monuments of the world's cultural heritage.

We also see the Golden Gate, St Andrew's Church, designed by Rastrelli, the famous architect who built the world famous Winter Palace in St.Petersburg; St Michael's Monastery, monuments to Yaroslav the Wise, Princess Olga, monument to Prince Vladimir, who converted Rus' to Christianity. We also visit the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra Monastery where we will be able to see the famous caves, one of the most sacred places of Orthodox Christianity; unique museums of precious historical items, and collections of ancient books and icons.

This afternoon we head to the suburbs of Kyiv to the sobering memorial at Babi Yar. Kyiv had a Jewish population of 175,000 on the eve of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. The Nazi forces captured the city in mid-September; within less than a fortnight, on the 29th and 30th, nearly 34,000 Jews of the ghetto were brought to a suburban ravine known as Babi Yar, near the Jewish Cemetary, where men, women, and children were executed over two days. In subsequent months, most of the remaining population was exterminated.

Overnight in Kyiv.

Day 17 *Chernobyl Excursion*

Today we embark on our full day tour to the site of Chernobyl. Of course, Chernobyl is well known for the nuclear accident that occurred there on April 26th, 1986 at the power plant that was under the jurisdiction of the U.S.S.R. This is considered to be one of the worst nuclear disasters in history as the contamination spread across much of Europe and the Western USSR.
Our tour will include access to the 30-kilometre Exclusion Zone where we will get a briefing on the practices used to de-contaminate the zone and to visit the town of Chernobyl, including the Wormwood Star Memorial, the St Ilya Church, and the Memorial to “Those Who Save The World”. Our tour will proceed to the 10-kilometre zone where we will take in the remains of Kopachi Village and Pripyat town and a close view of Reactor Number 4.

Tours have now been running to the Chernobyl site for some time and we will be given a briefing on the site visit with regards to safety issues, but there is no reason to be alarmed for one's safety provided we follow their instructions on how to conduct the sightseeing.

We will return to Kyiv after a full day.

Overnight in Kyiv.

Day 18 *Kyiv - Simferopol - Yalta*

Today we fly from Kyiv to Simferopol and continue by road (a couple of hours) to Yalta.

Yalta is a seaside resort on the Crimean Peninsula, long a favoured spot for Russian and Ukrainian elite, who constructed palatial homes here.

Overnight in Yalta.

Day 19 *Yalta & Sevastapol*

We visit the magnificent Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, with its intricate Byzantine adornment, and Anton Chekhov's house and museum commemorating this esteemed writer. Our coastal drive brings us to Livadia Palace, summer home of Tsar Nicholas II, built in 1911 in elegant renaissance style. Livadia later hosted the 1945 Yalta Conference when Churchill, Stalin, and Roosevelt met at the end of WWII to carve Europe into spheres of influence.

We transfer to Sevastopol where we will visit the site of the Crimean War (1864-1865) and the scene of the famous "Charge of the Light Brigade". We also have an excursion to the ancient Greek town of Khersones, before transferring back to Yalta.

Overnight in Yalta.

Day 20 *Yalta - Odesa*

Today we enjoy a full day scenic drive to Odesa ("Odessa" in Russian). Our journey takes us north and crosses over the Crimean Peninsula and onto ‘mainland’ Ukraine. We will cross the famous Isthmus of Perekop and later cross over the Dnieper River before arriving in Odesa.

From the ancient times the area was inhabited by Scythians, Sarmats, Greeks, and Slavs. In the times of Kyiv Rus it was a part of this huge Slavic state. In the 13th century it was annexed to the Tatar-Mongol Empire, "The Golden Horde". At the beginning of the 15th century it was annexed to Lithuania, and in some 50 years, to Turkey. In 1791 the territory became a part of the Russian Empire.

Overnight in Odesa.

Day 21 *Odesa City Tour & Catacombs*

Today we have a city tour, including many architectural sfamous architects and engineers. Most notable are the Opera House famous architects and engineers. Most notable are the Opera House (resembling the Vienna Opera and the Dresden Court Theater) built in 1884-87; the Marine (Potyomkin) Stairway (1837-41) -- one of the largest stairways in the world; and the heart of Odessa and immortalized in Sergei Eisenstein's 1925 film, Battleship Potemkin; Deribasivska [Deribasovskaya] Street with plenty of shops and pubs. We will visit the five-domed Uspensky Cathedral, visit Shevchenko Park with views of the Black Sea, and the Fine Arts Gallery (formally Count Pototsky's Palace), now housing Russian and Ukrainian paintings dating back to the 15th century.

In the afternoon, we will visit the underground tunnels (catacombs) of Odesa. They were created nearly 200 years ago during mining of building materials that were used to build the city. Currently it is a maze of 2,500 kilometres with

hundreds of entrances, exits, caves, and tunnels.
During World War II, in 1941, when the German and Romanian armies occupied Odesa during the war, the Soviet Military Headquarters gave the order to organize the partisan resistance. The Odesa catacombs were chosen as the camp for the unit of partisans. The provisions and weapons was enough there so the unit could stay underground for half a year. The partisan units were fighting against the Nazi and Romanian armies during the whole period of occupation.
We will walk in underground tunnels where the conditions of the partisan camp are reconstructed and we will learn of the history of the struggle.

Overnight in Odesa.

Day 22 *Odesa - Belgorod-Dniestrovsky, Ukraine - Chisinau, Moldova*

Today we depart Odesa and travel to Belgorod-Dniestrovsky and visit the impressive fortress on the banks of the Dnister River. Stefan II of Moldavia founded the 13th century fortress, one of Ukraine's largest, on a strategic spur of land overlooking the Dniester estuary. The drive to get here is picturesque, taking us through a rural region of quiet villages, farmland, rural communities, and providing us with an occasional view of the Black Sea.

We cross into Moldova. Although not well-known, Moldova offers some attractions that would surprise even the most seasoned traveller. Little Moldova has a landscape covered with vineyards, pristine forests and lakes, medieval monasteries and fortresses, wine caves stretch for miles, a rich history, and eight ethnic nationalities.

A chronicler once called Moldova "a country on the way of all disasters". The territory of Moldova is located on the boundary of Eastern and Western Europe and has been populated from ancient times. The earliest leavings are of the post-Paleolithic times, then the Chernyakhovskaya culture, and the treasures of the Romans, to the 4th century AD, the Slavonic settlements in the 8th-9th centuries. The ancient Romans and wandering tribes that used to migrate over this territory left vestiges of their stay.

Our journey today traverses the valley of the Dniester River with its orchards and vineyards. The first town, Tiraspol, was founded as a stronghold by General Suvorov in 1792, but named after the ancient Greek colony of Tiras. Built in the grid pattern of 18th century "new towns", Tiraspol retains traces of the original fort. Some of the older houses, with their traditional Moldovan balconies, betray a Turkish influence.

A little further we pass Bendery, which has been the site of a fortress commanding the Dniester crossings since the second century BC. The original 12th century fortress was built by the Genoese, who traded actively with the Black Sea ports. It fell to the Turks in the 16th century. The rectangular fort and citadel was built by the Turks in the 1530's. It was besieged several times by the Russians in the 18th century as part of their drive for Bessarabia, and was all but destroyed by the German retreat of 1944.

Overnight in Chisinau.

Day 23 *Chisinau: City Tour & Wine Country*

The history and life of Moldova through the centuries is best presented in the History and Regional Lore Museum, a beautiful Turkish-style complex, which we will visit along with the Fine Arts Museum, which houses good examples of Russian, West European, and Moldovan paintings, sculpture and applied arts.

A visit to Moldova would not be complete without a trip to the Moldovan wine country. We visit Cricova, the world's largest wine cellar. It is actually a subterranean city with winding streets extending for 60 kilometres (37 miles). The

street names orient visitors toward Str Cabernet, Str Pinot or Str Merlot. There are over one million bottles of white wines -- 648 types are stored in the cellars at a uniform temperature of 12 C (54 F). A tour of Cricova is one of the best ways to sample the wide variety of Moldovan wines and champagne which are gaining great popularity outside Moldova's borders, including Western Europe and North America.

Overnight in Chisinau.

Day 24 *Chisinau: Orheiul Vechi Monastery*

Among Moldova's greatest wonders are in its monasteries, and we visit the most famous, the cave monastery in Orhi Vechi.

En route to Orheiul Vechi we stop at Ivancea and the excellent ethnographic museum housed in a 19th-century stately mansion on beautiful grounds. Its eight halls are filled with traditional Moldovan costumes, musical instruments, pottery and folk art.

This 13th-century church of Orheiul Vechi was excavated from a limeston cliff by Orthodox Christian monks who believed that the cave would be resilient against invaders. Archaeologists have recently discovered ruins of Turkish baths and a protective wall built in the 15th century, which surrounds the religious complex. Stefan the Great erected a fortress in Orhei Vechi in the 14th century, destroyed by Tatar invaders in 1499. The Cave Monastery was inhabited until the 18th century. Closed during the Soviet times, it was re-opened in 1996, and services are now held regularly.

Return to Chisinau.

Overnight in Chisinau.

Day 25 *Departure from Chisinau*

Departure from Chisinau.

BON VOYAGE!