TOUR CODE

PL5

ADVENTURESABROAD

POLAND & THE BALTIC STATES with Helsinki

Poland, Lithuania, Latvia & Estonia

19 days

Updated 06/01/2013

Day 1 *Arrive in Warsaw*

Arrival in Warsaw.

After WWII, a reconstruction campaign by its citizens resulted in today's meticulous restoration of Warsaw's Old Town with its churches, palaces and market-place. It is an outstanding example of a near-total reconstruction of a span of history covering the 13th to the 20th century.

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

Day 2 *Warsaw: City Tour*

Warsaw has shrugged off its dour Eastern Bloc image, and is finally showing its true colours. The vibrant heart of the largest country in "New Europe", Warsaw is now poised to make is presence felt as a business and cultural hub.

We begin our sightseeing today with a drive along the Royal Route and a brief orientation drive around the city before beginning our walking tour of the Old Town, a UNESCO protected site. We visit Castle Square, the Uprising Monument, and then drive over to the Praga area for a view of the river. From there go to the Jewish Ghetto area and to Umschlag Platz (unfortunately, some of the monuments in the Ghetto are blocked by the construction of a new museum).

A highlight of our day will be a visit to the Warsaw Uprising Museum, dedicated to the Warsaw Uprising of 1944. The museum sponsors research into the history of the Uprising, and the history and possessions of the Polish Underground State. It collects and maintains hundreds of artefacts, ranging from weapons used by the insurgents to love letters, in order to present a full picture of the people involved. The museum's stated goals include the creation of an archive of historical information on the Uprising and the recording of the stories and memories of the still living Uprising participants.

Overnight in Warsaw. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Warsaw - Czestochowa - Oswiecim (Auschwitz) - Krakow*

Our first stop today is at Czestochowa, the "spiritual home" of Poland, where pilgrims from every corner of the country come to Jasna Gora (Luminous Mountain) Monastery to revere the image of the Black Madonna, Poland's most important icon. Legend says that the icon was painted by St Luke the Evangelist on a piece of cypress wood from the table used by Mary in Nazareth. The icon was brought from Jerusalem and installed in the monastery around 1384.

We then continue to the Oswiecim (Auschwitz) and Brzezinka (Birkenau) Nazi concentration camps preserved as memorials to the 1.5 million people of 28 nationalities who perished here, the overwhelming majority of whom were Jewish.

We finish our day in Krakow, one of the most beautiful cities in Europe. It was originally the home of the Polish royalty (between 1038 and 1596), before the capital was moved to Warsaw. The cobblestone streets, majestic churches (almost 100!), and old world charm make Krakow an unforgettable destination.

Overnight in/near Krakow.*

* NOTE: Krakow, and most of Poland, is enjoying a tourist renaissance and is currently experiencing a shortage of hotel accommodation in some locales. Accordingly, we cannot promise that our Krakow hotel will be central.

Overnight in Krakow. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Krakow: Walking Tour*

Krakow is very compact, and the whole central region with its cobblestone streets is full of well-preserved architecture, Gothic churches and splendid museums. On our sightseeing tour (largely on foot at a leisurely pace) we visit Wawel Hill with the Royal Castle, Market Square, and the 16th century Renaissance Cloth Hall. We continue onward to Jagiellonian University and St Mary's Church with the Wit Stwosz altar. This was designed in 1489 by Wit Stwosz of Nuremburg and is the finest sculptural work in Poland.

We then stroll down the hill from the castle complex and enter the Old Town, one of the most famous old districts in Poland and the center of Poland's political life from 1038 until King Sigismund III Vasa relocated his court to Warsaw in 1596. The entire medieval old town is among the first sites chosen for the UNESCO's World Heritage List. The district features the centrally located Rynek Glowny, or Main Square, the largest medieval town square of any European city. There is a number of historic landmarks in its vicinity, such as St. Mary's Basilica (Kosciol Mariacki), Church of St. Wojciech (St. Adalbert's), Church of St. Barbara, as well as other national treasures.

During your free time in Krakow, we suggest a visit to the Czartoryskis Museum / Muzeum Czartoryskich, world-famous for Leonardo's painting Lady with an Ermine,* the museum has other old masters' splendid works as well, a dramatic landscape by Rembrandt among them.

* Ongoing renovations from 2012 may mean that some exhibits are closed or moved to an alternate site.

Overnight in Krakow. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Krakow: Wieliczka Salt Mines*

This morning we visit the Wieliczka Salt Mines. On our 5km (3 mile) journey below the earth's surface we will see the salt-formed caves and grottoes, a subterranean lake and a chapel with statues carved from salt. The mines' 11 levels of galleries stretch 300km (186 miles), and some 20,000,000 tonnes (22,000,000 tons) of rock salt were extracted over 700 years. According to local legend, the deposits were discovered in the 13th century by a Hungarian princess named Kinga, whose lost ring was found in a block of salt extracted here.

We also visit the Oskar Schindler's Factory Museum. The story of Oskar Schindler and his employees is one which has been well-known since the book and film by Thomas Keneally and Steven Spielberg (whose film Schindler's List was shot almost entirely in Krakow). Individual histories of Krakow's wartime inhabitants guide visitors through the exhibit which covers the war of 1939, everyday life under occupation, the fate of the Jews and the city's underground resistance using vast archival documents, photos, radio and film recordings, period artefacts and multimedia installations.

Balance of the day at leisure.

Overnight in Krakow. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Krakow - Torun*

We continue our journey north to the picturesque medieval town of Torun, a beautiful medieval city in northwestern Poland, situated on the Vistula River. Torun's architecture managed to escape bombing, and as such represents one of the only examples of true gothic architecture in Poland.

At warm times of year Torun's old town is full of street cafes and restaurants where you can eat or drink outdoors and enjoy the medieval atmosphere.

Overnight in Torun. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Torun: Nicolaus Copernicus Museum - Gdansk*

This morning we enjoy the sights of Torun. Its Old Town has been included in UNESCO's list for its impressive 13th century Town Hall, superb churches and historic streets preserving Torun's past glory. A highlight of our tour today will be the Nicolaus Copernicus Museum, Copernicus House. The museum collects materials about the life and work of Copernicus: a library, old prints and books from the time of Copernicus, various editions of his work, "Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres," and models of the astronomical instruments he used.

We continue to Gdansk, an absolutely charming place with its tall, narrow buildings, peaked roofs and decorative facades that combine perfectly with the cobblestone streets. The famous Gdansk Shipyards are visible from most parts of the city. During our time in Gdansk we'll visit the marvellous Old Town and its main street -- Dlugi Targ (Long Market).

Overnight in Gdansk. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Gdansk Area Tour*

Its position on the Baltic has historically made Gdansk one of the most important port cities in Northern Europe, and tragically also the scene of a rather disturbing past. World War II was ignited by a dispute over the control of the city. By the end of the war the city lay almost completely in ruins. The German population was expelled and replaced by Poles as the city came under Polish rule and changed its name to Gdansk. However, the impact of its former German ties is still evident. Although most of the old buildings were damaged or destroyed in WWII, they have been painstakingly restored or rebuilt.

This morning we head out of town a short distance to visit the Oliwa Cathedral. This Holy Trinity, Blessed Virgin Mary, and St Bernard's Church was first erected as a Cistercian shrine back in the 13th century. Reconstructed in 1350 after a great fire, it re-emerged in the Gothic style, but many of the new fixtures were to be relatively short lived. The Gothic interior was extremely damaged in a 1577 fire and was replaced with the Baroque fixtures we admire today for their beauty and intensity.

The Oliwa Cathedral is perhaps best known for its massive, splendid organ. The organ is comprised of over 7,000 pipes and is decorated with movable angels and brightly painted stars. When built, the instrument was the largest in Europe. The main alter is also very impressive, and if the organ is in use, you're sure to be riveted by its magnificent sound!

We return to Gdansk for a free afternoon of independent exploration. Gdansk is sometimes called the Amber Capital of the World. The surrounding area is the richest known source of this semi-precious stone, and the product can be found in many of the city's shops.

Overnight in Gdansk. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Gdansk - Malbork - Olsztyn*

After breakfast, we drive to Olsztyn. En route, we stop at the Teutonic Knights Castle in Malbork. It is the largest brick building in Europe and one of Poland's greatest tourist attractions. In the
afternoon, we continue to Olsztyn, a town located in a region of lakes and forests. The most attractive part of the city is the old town, encircled by a set of fortified walls.

Overnight in Olsztyn. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Olsztyn - Olsztynek - Warsaw*

After breakfast, we return to Warsaw. On the way, we visit the Ethnographic Park in Olsztynek, site of the Museum of Folk Architecture, one of the oldest open-air museums in Europe. The museum contains many interesting examples of folk architecture, including houses, barns, windmills and other traditional buildings. A particular attraction of the park are the interiors of old houses, the evangelical church, a blacksmith, a pottery stand, a windmill as well as various temporary displays representing items of traditional craftsmanship and modern folk art and handicraft from the region.

Overnight in Warsaw. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Warsaw, Poland - Vilnius, Lithuania*

Today we fly* from Warsaw to Vilnius and transfer to our hotel.

"Narrow cobblestone streets and an orgy of Baroque: almost like a Jesuit city somewhere in the middle of Latin America," wrote the author Czeslaw Milosz of pre-war Vilnius. Soviet-era satellite suburbs aside, it's a description which still rings true today. Despite being the capital of the medieval Lithuanian state, Vilnius was occupied by Poland between the wars and was inhabited mainly by Poles and Jews who played such a prominent role in the city's life that it was known as the "Northern Jerusalem". Vilnius is still a cosmopolitan place -- around twenty percent of its population is Polish and another twenty percent is Russian -- though with just 543,000 inhabitants it has an almost village-like atmosphere, making it an easy place to get to know.

* NOTE: Depending on final group size and flight schedules (which can be erratic), this journey may take place overland (by private bus). If so, we apologize for the backtracking and inconvenience.

Overnight in Vilnius. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *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 13 *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 14 *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 15 *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 16 *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 17 *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 18 *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 19 *Departure from Helsinki*

Today we depart from Helsinki.

NOTE: If you would like to extend your time in Helsinki, please let us quote you rates for extra accommodation at the hotel used on tour.

HYVAA MATKAA!! Meal plan: Breakfast.