Tour Code
BS10

ADVENTURESABROAD

THE BALTIC STATES

Three Nations, One Story

10 days

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Day 1 Arrival in Vilnius

Arrival in Vilnius, capital of Lithuania. The city's Old Town, included on UNESCO's World Heritage list in 1994, encompasses nearly 1,500 historic buildings spanning several centuries of architectural styles. With just over 500,000 inhabitants, Vilnius maintains an intimate, walkable character despite its cosmopolitan atmosphere.

This evening we gather with fellow travellers for our first meal together.

Overnight in Vilnius.

Included Meal(s): Dinner

Day 2 Vilnius: City Touring

Vilnius carries its complicated history on its sleeve — and our walking tour doesn't look away from any of it. We begin at Cathedral Square, where the chapel of Saint Kazimieras represents the ornate early Baroque that flourished here under Polish influence. Behind the square rises Gedimino Tower, remnant of the 14th-century defensive system that once protected a city already contested by German knights, Russian princes, and Lithuanian dukes simultaneously. The Gates of Dawn — last of nine original city gates — lead us into the Jewish Quarter, whose cobblestone lanes and hidden courtyards were once the heart of a community that made Vilnius one of the great centres of Jewish scholarship in Europe. The Soviet occupation ended that, as it ended much else.

The afternoon is free for independent exploration. The self-proclaimed republic of Uzupis — Vilnius's bohemian artistic district, which declared independence on April Fool's Day 1997 and has its own constitution, anthem, and cabinet ministers — offers a characteristically Lithuanian response to the idea of occupation: irreverence as resistance. The KGB Museum, known to Lithuanians as the Museum of Genocide Victims, offers the more direct version. The building stands exactly as the KGB left it in 1991 — interrogation rooms, cells, and execution chamber intact — a monument to fifty years of Soviet occupation that no reconstruction could improve upon.

Overnight in Vilnius.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Vilnius - Trakai - Kaunas - Klaipeda

We depart Vilnius for the coast, stopping first at Trakai, Lithuania's medieval capital. The town occupies a peninsula between several lakes, its island castle — built to defend against the Teutonic Knights — reflected in water on all sides. Trakai is also home to the Karaim, a Turkic people brought here from Crimea by Grand Duke Vytautas in the late 14th century, whose yellow wooden prayer house still stands and whose community still gathers, one of the smallest and most improbable surviving minorities in Europe.

We continue to Kaunas, Lithuania's second city and its interwar capital — a status thrust upon it when Vilnius was annexed by Poland between 1920 and 1939. The handsome Old Town square and its Gothic town hall speak to a city that made the best of an awkward situation and has been quietly underrated ever since. We stop here for lunch before continuing west to the coast.

By late afternoon we reach Klaipeda, Lithuania's only port city. Known as Memel until 1923 — and seized by Nazi Germany as late as 1939 — the city's Germanic past is written into its half-timbered Old Town architecture. An evening stroll through the cobblestone streets introduces a city that has changed hands more times than most, and worn each identity with varying degrees of willingness.

Overnight in Klaipeda.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Klaipeda & the Curonian Spit

This morning we take a ferry across the lagoon to Curonian Spit National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site. This narrow, 98-kilometre sand peninsula separates the Curonian Lagoon from the Baltic Sea, shaped over millennia by wind, waves, and human intervention.

The spit's massive sand dunes—some reaching 60 metres in height—have buried entire villages over the centuries. At Juodkrant we walk through the Hill of Witches sculpture trail, where wooden carvings depict characters from Lithuanian folklore. The village itself sits beneath forested dunes, its traditional fishermen's houses painted in distinctive colours.

The Russian border lies just beyond the spit's northern end at Nida. We learn about the region's amber industry—the Baltic coast has supplied this fossilized resin for thousands of years—with a visit to a local amber museum. The exhibits explain how amber forms, its historical trade routes, and its uses from ancient jewelry to modern applications.

We return to Klaipeda by ferry in late afternoon.

Overnight in Klaipeda.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Klaipeda - Hill of Crosses, Lithuania - Rundale Palace, Latvia - Riga

Leaving the coast, we travel inland to the Hill of Crosses near Siauliai — and arrive at the tour's most quietly devastating site. This is not a grand monument. It is a modest hill, unremarkable in scale, covered in crosses placed here over more than a century by ordinary people: pilgrims, grieving parents, resistance fighters, newlyweds seeking blessing. During the Soviet occupation authorities bulldozed the hill three times. Each time, the crosses reappeared. The hill today holds hundreds of thousands of them, and new ones arrive daily. It is one of the most eloquent arguments for the persistence of identity under pressure that exists anywhere in Europe.

Crossing into Latvia we visit Rundale Palace, designed by Bartolomeo Rastrelli — the architect of St. Petersburg's Winter Palace — and completed in 1768. The contrast with the Hill of Crosses is deliberate: this is empire at its most confident and decorative, crystal chandeliers and silk wallpaper and frescoes by Italian artists, built for the Duchy of Courland at the precise moment the Baltic nations were losing their independence to imperial Russia. We tour the state rooms before continuing to Riga.

Overnight in Riga.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Rigaâ€™s Old Town: Walking Tour

Riga's Old Town is a layered document of everything this city has been — Hanseatic trading post, Swedish garrison town, Russian imperial capital, briefly independent republic, Soviet industrial centre — and our walking tour reads it carefully. We begin at the Freedom Monument, erected in 1935 to honour those who fought for Latvian independence, and maintained through the Soviet decades as a quiet act of defiance by a population that placed flowers here at considerable personal risk.

Walking through the Old Town, we pass the Powder Tower — remnant of the medieval city walls — and St. Peter's Church, whose 123-metre Gothic spire has dominated the skyline since 1209. The Three Brothers, three adjoining houses from the 15th, 17th, and 18th centuries respectively, represent the city's oldest residential architecture and a compressed history of how building styles evolved as Riga changed hands. At Town Hall Square the House of the Blackheads — built for a guild of unmarried German merchants in the 14th century, destroyed in World War II, meticulously rebuilt — raises the question this city forces on you: when everything has been destroyed and reconstructed, what exactly is being preserved? The Swedish Gate offers a characteristically understated answer: a small archway through what looks like an ordinary row of houses, easy to miss, hiding in plain sight.

The afternoon is free to explore Riga independently.

Overnight in Riga.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Riga Touring Continued

We begin at Riga's Central Market, housed in five former Zeppelin hangars from World War I — repurposed with the pragmatic ingenuity that characterises this city — where vendors sell fresh produce, smoked fish, local cheeses, and traditional Latvian foods. The scale is extraordinary; this is one of Europe's largest markets, and it functions as a genuine cross-section of Latvian daily life rather than a tourist attraction.

From the market we walk to the Art Nouveau district centred on Alberta Street. Riga contains over 800 Art Nouveau buildings — the highest concentration in Europe — built during a period of extraordinary economic prosperity at the turn of the 20th century. The Art Nouveau Museum occupies a restored apartment that recreates those early years with unsettling precision: a world of elaborate organic ornament and bourgeois confidence that the events of 1914 would begin to dismantle and 1940 would finish entirely. Walking these streets knowing what came next gives the architecture a particular weight.

Our tour continues to the area where Riga's Jewish ghetto stood during the Nazi occupation. The outdoor Ghetto Museum documents this period through preserved structures and individual stories — faces and names rather than statistics. The contrast with the Art Nouveau streets a few blocks away is the point: the same city, the same years, two entirely different experiences of what it meant to live here.

We visit the Academy of Sciences observation deck — a Stalinist wedding cake of a building, Soviet ambition rendered in stone — for panoramic views across a skyline that tells the whole story at once: medieval spires, Art Nouveau facades, Soviet monuments, and the glass towers of the post-1991 republic, all visible simultaneously.

Overnight in Riga.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Riga - Sigulda - Cesis, Latvia - Tallinn, Estonia

This morning we depart Riga and travel north toward Estonia, stopping first at Sigulda in the Gauja River valley. Known as "Latvian Switzerland" for its forested hills and river gorge, the area contains several medieval castles. We visit the ruins of Turaida Castle, built by the Bishop of Riga in 1214, which offers views across the valley from its restored brick tower.

Continuing north, we reach Csis, a medieval market town with origins in the 13th century. The cobblestone streets wind between timber-framed houses and the imposing ruins of Csis Castle. The castle, constructed by the Livonian Order of knights, played a central role in the region's medieval history. We have time for lunch and a walk through the compact Old Town.

By late afternoon we cross into Estonia and proceed to Tallinn, the capital. The city's Old Town, remarkably preserved despite numerous invasions and fires over eight centuries, gained UNESCO World Heritage status in 1997. Its medieval walls, towers, and merchant houses remain largely intact, creating one of Europe's best-preserved historic quarters.

Overnight in Tallinn.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Tallinn Morning Walking Tour & Leisure Time

Tallinn's Old Town is the best-preserved medieval city in Northern Europe — and it knows it, wearing its UNESCO status with the quiet confidence of a place that has survived eight centuries of invasion, occupation, and transformation without losing its essential character. Our walking tour begins at the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, its Russian Orthodox onion domes deliberately placed atop Toompea Hill by Tsarist authorities in 1900 as a statement of imperial permanence. The statement proved premature by eighteen years.

We continue to Toompea Castle, where Estonia's parliament now meets in a building that has housed the governing authority of whatever

power happened to control Tallinn at any given moment — Danish, Swedish, Russian, Soviet, and finally Estonian. The pink Baroque facade was added in the 18th century; the foundations are 13th-century limestone. Nearby, Toomkirik cathedral dates to 1233 and contains the carved coats of arms of the Baltic-German nobility who once dominated the region — a reminder that occupation takes many forms, and that the most durable kind arrives with letters of introduction.

Descending to the Lower Town, we pass the Town Hall — completed in 1404, the only surviving Gothic town hall in Northern Europe — and the Holy Spirit Church with its 14th-century clock, still keeping time. At the medieval Town Hall Pharmacy, operating continuously since at least 1422, we see displays of historical remedies and instruments. The afternoon is yours to wander the Old Town's narrow lanes or venture to Kadriorg Park, where Peter the Great built a Baroque palace for his wife Catherine — another empire, another statement of permanence, another building that outlasted its ambitions.

Overnight in Tallinn.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Departure

Departure from Tallinn or continue to Helsinki to join our Nordic Europe tour.

SAFE TRAVELS!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast