Tour Code
PL10

ADVENTURESABROAD

POLAND & THE BALTIC STATES

Resilience Across Four Nations

20 days

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Day 1 Arrive in Krakow

Welcome to Poland, where over a thousand years of tumultuous history have forged one of Europe's most resilient cultures. Today we arrive in Krakow, a city that served as Poland's royal capital for over five centuries before Warsaw claimed the crown in 1596. Nearly 100 churches pierce the skyline of this enchanting medieval city, their spires rising above cobblestone squares that have witnessed coronations, invasions, and the quiet persistence of Polish identity through centuries of occupation.

Tonight we gather with our fellow travellers for our first dinner together, settling into the old-world charm that has made Krakow one of Europe's most beloved destinations.

Overnight in Krakow.

Included Meal(s): Dinner

Day 2 Krakow: City Walking Tour

We begin atop Wawel Hill, where the Royal Castle commands sweeping views over the Vistula River. This limestone outcrop has witnessed Poland's most pivotal moments—from coronations to royal funerals, from Renaissance splendour to Nazi occupation. Our exploration unfolds largely on foot through Krakow's compact, well-preserved centre, where cobblestone streets connect architectural treasures within comfortable walking distances.

Descending into the heart of the Old Town, we enter Europe's largest medieval market square—the magnificent Rynek Glowny, where merchants have traded for over 700 years. The haunting trumpet call echoes from St. Mary's Church towers above us, a tradition dating to the 13th century when a trumpeter's warning saved the city from Mongol invasion. Inside, we marvel at the Wit Stwosz altar, carved in 1489 by the master craftsman from Nuremberg—Poland's finest sculptural masterpiece.

Our journey continues through cobblestone streets to Jagiellonian University, one of Europe's oldest institutions, where Copernicus once studied the stars that would revolutionize our understanding of the universe. We conclude in Kazimierz, the former Jewish Quarter that has transformed from medieval independent town to vibrant cultural district, where centuries of Jewish heritage blend with contemporary cafe culture.

Overnight in Krakow.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Oswiecim (Auschwitz-Birkenau) & Oskar Schindler Museum

Our journey takes a solemn turn this morning as we transfer to Oswiecim, arriving at Auschwitz-Birkenau, where preserved barracks and railway ramps bear witness to humanity's darkest chapter. Here, 1.5 million souls from 28 nations perished, their stories now preserved as an eternal reminder of the importance of tolerance and human dignity. Our guide shares personal testimonies that transform statistics into human faces, ensuring these voices are never forgotten.

After and included lunch in Oswiecim, we transfer back to Krakow for a visit to the Oskar Schindler Factory Museum, where individual histories of Krakow's wartime inhabitants guide us through exhibits covering the war of 1939, everyday life under occupation, the fate of the Jews and the city's underground resistance. The story of Oskar Schindler and his employees -- made famous by Thomas Keneally's book and Steven Spielberg's film, shot almost entirely in Krakow -- unfolds through archival documents, photos, radio recordings and multimedia presentations.

Given the fullness of today's schedule an dour included lunch, dinner this evening is on your own, leaving you free to explore Krakow's restaurant scene at your own pace.

Overnight in Krakow.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 4 Krakow - Wieliczka - Czestochowa - Lodz

This morning we transfer to Wieliczka for a truly unique adventure: a descent into the renowned Wieliczka Salt Mines. Prepare to journey 5 kilometres beneath the earth's surface, exploring a world sculpted entirely by salt. We wander through a labyrinth of salt-formed caves and grottoes, each with its own character and charm. A mesmerizing subterranean lake reflects the glow of mine lamps, while the most awe-inspiring sight awaits -- a chapel adorned with intricate sculptures, all carved entirely from surrounding salt.

The scale of this operation staggers the imagination: 11 levels of galleries stretching an incredible 300 kilometres in total. Over 700 years of continuous mining have yielded a staggering 20 million tonnes of rock salt. Local legend tells of Princess Kinga, a Hungarian princess whose lost ring was miraculously found within a block of salt mined here in the 13th century -- said to be the very origin of the mines themselves.

From this underground world, we travel to Poland's spiritual heart -- Czestochowa. After time for lunch on your own, we visit the Jasna Gora Monastery, where within its sacred walls resides the Black Madonna, Poland's most venerated icon, believed painted by St. Luke himself and brought from Jerusalem in 1384. Pilgrims have journeyed here for centuries, drawn by the mysterious power of this darkened image that has survived Swedish invasions and Nazi occupation.

Our day concludes in Lodz (pronounced "Wooj"), the city that rose from humble village to Europe's textile powerhouse in just one century. Once known as "the promised land" and "city of many cultures," this multicultural marvel welcomed Germans, Russians and Jews who together wove the fabric of industrial prosperity.

Overnight in Lodz.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Lodz - Warsaw: City Tour

Today we continue to Warsaw, a city that rises before us like a phoenix from ashes—refusing to surrender its soul to destruction. After being systematically razed during World War II, Warsaw's citizens embarked on one of history's most remarkable reconstruction projects, rebuilding their beloved Old Town brick by brick, using paintings and photographs as their guide. Today's UNESCO-protected historic centre stands as testimony to Polish determination and cultural pride.

We begin along the elegant Royal Route, where kings once processed to their coronations, then dive into the meticulously restored Old Town. Castle Square pulses with life while the Uprising Monument honours the heroes of 1944. Crossing the Vistula River to the Praga district, we gain panoramic views of this resilient capital that has shed its Soviet-era persona to emerge as Central Europe's dynamic business hub.

In the former Jewish Ghetto area, we visit the poignant Umschlagplatz memorial before exploring the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. Through innovative multimedia exhibitions, we discover the thousand-year story of Poland's Jewish community—once Europe's largest—whose vibrant culture flourished here before the Holocaust forever changed this landscape.

Overnight in Warsaw.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Warsaw Sightseeing - To Torun

The morning begins at the Warsaw Uprising Museum, housed in a former tram power station where artifacts tell the story of the city's 1944 rebellion. Love letters, weapons, and personal belongings of the insurgents create an intimate portrait of ordinary citizens who chose extraordinary courage. These exhibits reveal how 200,000 Warsaw residents fought for freedom during 63 days that would define their city's character forever.

Leaving Warsaw's complex history behind, we journey north to medieval Torun, a UNESCO World Heritage gem that time forgot to destroy. Nestled on the Vistula River's banks, this enchanting city miraculously escaped World War II bombing, preserving its Gothic architecture in pristine condition. The warm glow of red-brick buildings reflects centuries of Hanseatic League prosperity, when merchants from across Northern Europe gathered in these cobblestone squares.

As evening approaches, Torun's outdoor cafes come alive with the aroma of local delicacies. The majestic St. Mary's Church towers above us, its bells calling across centuries of Polish history while we settle into the timeless rhythm of medieval life.

Overnight in Torun.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Torun: Nicolaus Copernicus Museum - Gdansk

We begin in the very house where Nicolaus Copernicus was born in 1473, the man who revolutionized our understanding of the universe. The museum's collection of rare astronomical instruments, ancient star charts, and original manuscripts reveals how this Polish genius challenged centuries of accepted wisdom. Standing in his birthplace, we appreciate how medieval Torun nurtured the mind that would prove Earth revolves around the Sun.

The imposing 13th-century Town Hall dominates our morning explorations—one of Northern Europe's most magnificent civic buildings. Its Gothic towers have overseen seven centuries of commerce and culture, while surrounding streets preserve the medieval urban planning that made Torun a Hanseatic League powerhouse.

Our journey continues to Gdansk, the "Maritime Pearl of Poland," where narrow, peaked-roof buildings create one of Europe's most photogenic skylines. This Baltic port city carries the weight of momentous history—World War II began with disputes over Gdansk's control, while decades later, Lech Walesa's Solidarity movement launched from its famous shipyards. Tonight we stroll the iconic Dluga Street, past Neptune's Fountain and into St. Mary's Church, one of the world's largest brick churches, as Baltic sea breezes carry stories of merchants, warriors, and revolutionaries.

Overnight in Gdansk.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Gdansk Area Tour

Gdansk's strategic Baltic position has made it one of Northern Europe's most coveted ports for centuries, a blessing that became a curse when competing powers tore the city apart. By 1945, the German population had fled and Polish settlers renamed the ruins "Gdansk," beginning the painstaking reconstruction we admire today. Though most buildings rose from rubble, master craftsmen ensured every Gothic detail matched the original splendour.

We venture to nearby Oliwa Cathedral, where Cistercian monks first built their shrine in the 13th century. Fire destroyed and transformed this sacred space multiple times—the Gothic interior gave way to magnificent Baroque fixtures after a devastating 1577 blaze. The cathedral's crowning glory awaits: a massive organ with over 7,000 pipes, decorated with movable angels and painted stars. When constructed, this instrument was Europe's largest, and today its thunderous voice still rivals any concert hall.

At the European Solidarity Centre, multimedia exhibits chronicle how electrician Lech Walesa sparked a movement that would topple communism across Eastern Europe. The story of Solidarity—from shipyard strikes to Nobel Peace Prizes—unfolds through personal testimonies and artifacts from this pivotal chapter in modern European history.

The afternoon belongs to you in this "Amber Capital of the World," where shops display fossilized treasures from the Baltic's ancient forests. In order to maximize your free time in this fascinating place, we do not include dinner this evening.

Overnight in Gdansk.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast

Day 9 Gdansk - Malbork - Olsztyn

Our morning begins with Europe's largest brick building—the magnificent Teutonic Knights Castle at Malbork. This 13th-century fortress stretches along the Nogat River like a medieval city unto itself, its towering walls and Gothic halls testament to the military might of the Crusading order. UNESCO protection ensures future generations will witness the architectural genius that once commanded the Baltic trade routes. Our two-hour guided tour reveals the massive scale of this complex, and afterwards we cross the footbridge for spectacular panoramic photographs of the entire structure.

As we continue southeast, Poland's landscape transforms into the pristine beauty of the Masurian Lake District. Rolling hills give way to sparkling waters and dense forests that have remained largely unchanged since the Ice Age carved this terrain. Olsztyn emerges like a fairy tale town, its medieval walls encircling narrow cobblestone streets where Gothic churches and Renaissance townhouses create perfect architectural harmony.

The fortified walls surrounding Olsztyn's old town whisper tales of Swedish invasions and Napoleonic campaigns, while cozy cafes and artisan shops invite us to experience the gentle rhythm of lake district life. Tonight we rest in this charming sanctuary where nature and history exist in perfect balance.

Overnight in Olsztyn.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 10 Olsztyn - Olsztynek - Warsaw

Our final morning in the lake district begins with a walking tour through Olsztyn's medieval quarter, where we explore the Gothic cathedral and the castle where Nicolaus Copernicus once lived and worked as a canon and administrator. On the very walls of his chambers, you can still see the schematics he drew—astronomical calculations that helped him develop his revolutionary heliocentric theory, proving that Earth revolves around the Sun rather than the reverse.

We then journey to the Museum of Folk Architecture in Olsztynek, one of Europe's oldest and most comprehensive open-air museums. Wooden houses, rustic barns, and historic windmills transported from across the region create a living timeline of traditional Polish life. These structures, saved from demolition and lovingly restored, preserve centuries of craftsmanship and cultural memory. We explore the interiors of beautifully restored farmhouses, where traditional furniture and household items reveal the daily rhythms of rural Polish families. The evangelical church, blacksmith workshop, and pottery stands demonstrate how entire communities once functioned as self-sufficient units.

After lunch at the museum, we journey back through the Polish countryside toward Warsaw. Wooden windmills and thatched-roof villages dot the landscape like scenes from a living museum, reminders of a way of life that persists even as Poland embraces its European future. Tonight we return to the nation's dynamic capital carrying memories of traditions preserved and stories that span centuries.

Overnight in Warsaw.

Overnight in Warsaw.

Included Meal(s): 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.

Day 12 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 13 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 14 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 15 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 16 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 17 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 18 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 19 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 20 Departure

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

SAFE TRAVELS!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast