

## POLAND & THE BALTIC STATES

### Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia & Helsinki

**20 days**

Created on: 17 Aug, 2025

**Day 1 Arrive in Krakow**

Today we arrive in Krakow.

For over five centuries, from 1038 to 1596, this enchanting city served as the seat of Polish royalty before Warsaw claimed the crown. Tonight, we step into a living fairy tale where nearly 100 churches pierce the skyline and medieval squares echo with the footsteps of history. As twilight falls over the old world charm that has made Krakow one of Europe's most beloved destinations, we settle into our accommodation.

Overnight in Krakow.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

**Day 2 Krakow: City Walking Tour**

We begin our exploration 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. Our sightseeing unfolds largely on foot at a leisurely pace through Krakow's compact, well-preserved centre, where cobblestone streets connect architectural treasures within comfortable walking distances.

As we descend into the heart of the Old Town, we enter Europe's largest medieval market square—the magnificent Rynek Główny, where merchants have traded for over 700 years. The haunting trumpet call 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 the cobblestone streets to Jagiellonian University, one of Europe's oldest institutions, where Copernicus once studied the stars.

We conclude in Kazimierz, the former Jewish Quarter that has transformed from medieval independent town to vibrant cultural district. Here, centuries of Jewish heritage blend with contemporary café culture, creating an atmosphere both poignant and alive with possibility.

□ Overnight in Krakow.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

**Day 3 Oskar Schindler Museum & Wieliczka Salt Mines**

This morning we 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 artifacts and multimedia.

After a break for lunch featuring Polish specialties,\* we'll embark on a truly unique adventure: a descent into the Wieliczka Salt Mines. This isn't your average mine tour. Prepare to be amazed as we journey 5 kilometers (3 miles) beneath the earth's surface, exploring a world sculpted entirely by salt.

We'll wander through a labyrinth of salt-formed caves and grottoes, each with its own unique character and charm. Our descent will lead us to a mesmerizing subterranean lake, its surface reflecting the eerie glow of the mine lamps. And, perhaps the most awe-inspiring sight of all, we'll visit a chapel adorned with intricate sculptures, all carved entirely from the surrounding salt.

The scale of this operation is truly staggering. The Wieliczka Salt Mines boast 11 levels of galleries, stretching an incredible 300 kilometers (186 miles) in total. Over 700 years of continuous mining have yielded a staggering 20,000,000 tonnes (22,000,000 tons) of rock salt.

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But the history of the Wieliczka Salt Mines goes beyond mere extraction. Local legend tells the tale of Princess Kinga, a Hungarian princess whose lost ring was miraculously found within a block of salt mined here in the 13th century. This discovery is said to be the origin story of the mines themselves.

Return to Krakow.

\* Because of the fullness of our day, and because past travellers indicated a desire for some independence for dinner while in Krakow (and an earlier night), we include a light lunch instead of dinner today.

Overnight in Krakow.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

#### Day 4 Krakow - Oswiecim (Auschwitz) - Czestochowa - Lodz

Our journey takes a solemn turn as we arrive at Owicim and Birkenau, where the 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.

From this profound experience, we travel to Poland's spiritual heart—Czstochowa and the Jasna Góra Monastery. Within these 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 ód (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. Tonight, we discover how this diversity created one of Europe's most fascinating urban tapestries.

□  
Overnight in Lodz.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

#### Day 5 Lodz - Warsaw: City Tour

Today our journey continues 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 Toru, 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, Toru's outdoor cafés 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 revolutionised 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 Toru 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 the surrounding streets preserve the medieval urban planning that made Toru a Hanseatic League powerhouse.

Our journey continues to Gdask, 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 Gdask's control, while decades later, Lech Wasa's Solidarity movement launched from its famous shipyards.

Tonight, we stroll the iconic Duga 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

Gdask'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 "Gdask," 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 Wasa 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 fossilised 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.

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 cafés 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 brings us 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. Temporary exhibitions showcase contemporary folk art alongside ancient handicrafts, proving these traditions continue to evolve rather than merely survive.

As we journey back through the Polish countryside toward Warsaw, wooden windmills and thatched-roof villages dot the landscape like scenes from a living museum.

Tonight, we return to Poland's dynamic capital carrying memories of a nation that has preserved its cultural soul while embracing its European future.

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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 12 Vilnius & Trakai

This morning we have a walking tour of Vilnius.

Sweden, Poland, France and Russia have all ruled Vilnius in the past, and today 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.

While in Vilnius we'll also visit the KGB Museum (aka the Museum of Genocide Victims). For Lithuanians, the KGB Museum symbolises the 50-year-long Soviet occupation. During World War II it was the site of Gestapo headquarters and later of the KGB. The museum building is as intact as it was in 1991, when the KGB left the premises. You will see KGB rooms authentically furnished and secret KGB spying equipment.

After a full morning and a break for lunch, we we'll 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.

\* PLEASE NOTE that the castle will be under renovation until 2027, during which time specific parts of the complex will have limited access and certain parts will be closed on a rotational basis. Parts of the exterior will also be under scaffolding. Though it is unpredictable, should a visit become impractical, we may substitute the visit with something else of interest in the city or the surrounds.

Overnight in Vilnius.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 13 Vilnius - Siauliai, Lithuania - Rundale Palace, Latvia - Riga

Today we travel to 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.

We then proceed to the border and continue on to Riga stopping at Rundale Palace in time for lunch. We then visit the 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.

We continue to Riga for dinner and overnight.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 14 Riga: City Touring

Today we will enjoy a walking tour of the Old Town of Riga, getting us to some of the top sights and giving us a real feel for the city.

Over the last decade Riga has been going through a restoration phase, revitalizing many of its faded art nouveau buildings into pristine gems. While these buildings can be found throughout the central downtown area, the best place to see them is in a neighbourhood of streets centered around Alberta Street. Riga literally has hundreds of buildings in this flamboyant style as it experienced a period of unprecedented wealth at the beginning of the 20th century when art nouveau was all the rage in Europe.

While exploring this part of the city we will visit the Art Nouveau Museum, which is a completely restored art nouveau apartment. Our walk will include a stop at the mighty Freedom Monument, dedicated to those who fought for Latvia's independence. We will pass by the Latvian National Opera House as well as the Powder Tower. Kalku Street is the main 'semi-pedestrian' thoroughfare, and it slices straight through Old Town leading us to Livu Square, created after the destruction caused by World War II. Today this is one of the Old Town's most bright and cheerful corners. Bastion Hill Park runs along the northeastern edge of the city. Once the old city's fortifications, Bastion Hill was replaced with this romantic park full of gardens, canals, and ornate bridges. The park makes a great transition space between downtown Riga and the historic center.

Working our way through the backstreets of the Old Town we come to a fixture of Riga's skyline, St. Peter's Church. The tallest church in the city, this large Gothic church dates back to 1209, although little of the original church is actually left. Another of Riga's enchanting city squares is the Dome Square which sits out below the impressive Riga Cathedral. Throughout the city of Riga there are a lot of exceptionally well-preserved buildings, but the Three Brothers are quite unique in that they are the oldest residential buildings in the city. These three adjoining buildings date from between the 15th to 17th centuries and are home to local craftsmen. We will pass by Riga Castle, which today houses the offices of the Latvian president.

One of the last remaining segments of the city's defenses is the Swedish Gate, a small gateway through what looks like a row of traditional residences. We will stop at the Town Hall Square to see the iconic House of the Blackheads where we admire the stunning design of its facade. Built for members of a merchant guild known as the Blackheads in the 14th Century, this is one of Riga's most picturesque landmarks.

This afternoon is yours free to explore.

Overnight in Riga.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 15 Riga: City Touring

Today we will get to some of the landmarks which lie outside the city's Old Town, including a drive through modern Riga.

We will start with a visit to the massive Central Market. This visit will help to give you a sense of what local life is like in today's Riga. This bustling indoor & outdoor market focuses on several large 1920s pavilions and the area around them. Here we discover plenty of local Latvian goods, from meats and fish to loads of other locally grown produce.

We continue with a panoramic drive around Riga that will take in some of the most famous sights. Our route along the embankment of the River Daugava provides us with wonderful views of the city, and we will drive through the modern part of the city where we see the University Building, the Academy of Arts and the central train station. Along Riga's riverfront we will come to the Riga Ghetto and Latvian Holocaust Museum which details the city's history of the Holocaust. Set inside an outdoor courtyard, this museum details what happened to the local Jewish population during the city's Nazi occupation. The exhibits here focus on individuals' stories and photographs.

Built during Latvia's period under Soviet rule, the towering figure of the Latvian Academy of Sciences is hard to miss. Here we will take the elevator up to its observation deck for great views of Riga with the church tower visible amongst the skyline.

You will have some free time this afternoon before our evening meal.

Overnight in Riga.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 16 Riga, Latvia - Tallinn, Estonia

This morning we depart Riga for Tallinn, making a lunch stop in Parnu, "the Summer Capital of Estonia." 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 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.

Included Meal(s): 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. The market in town is also very colourful and lively.

Overnight in Tallinn.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 18 Tallinn, Estonia - Helsinki, Finland

Today we take a fast ferry from Tallinn to Helsinki (HAVE YOUR PASSPORTS HANDY!).

Helsinki is situated 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.

On arrival we'll have a walking orientation tour of Helsinki.

Overnight in Helsinki.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 19 Helsinki: City Tour

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. In 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.

Today 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, and the Parliament building. We'll stop at Senate Square, and, if possible, Tempeliaukio Church.

During the afternoon you can explore the busy market place or the many souvenir shops close to the harbour. Fans of modern architecture and/or libraries may enjoy a visit to the Oodi Helsinki Library, which occupies a hugely significant site in central Helsinki: facing the steps of the Finnish parliament building. The upper surface of the canopy structure has been used to create a large public terrace, from which one can look directly over the square to the steps and main entrance of parliament. The terrace doubles the amount of public outdoor space provided for library visitors and creates a new destination where people can meet and observe the city below.

Overnight in Helsinki.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 20 Departure from Helsinki

Today we depart from Helsinki.

HYVAA MATKAA!!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast