

Baltic Capitals Explorer

8 days | Vilnius to Tallinn



Take in the highlights of the three beautiful Baltic capitals, Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn on this 8 day small group tour of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Stroll around Medieval Old Towns, marvel at the revered Hill of Crosses and visit the Lithuanian port city of Klaipeda, with the option to explore the picturesque Curonian Spit.

HIGHLIGHTS AND INCLUSIONS

Trip Highlights

- Vilnius - Journey through the beautiful old town, making stops at the Cathedral, Gediminas Tower, Peter and Paul Church, St Anna's Church, the Old University and the Gate of Dawn
- Riga - Uncover the highlights of Riga, including the castle, Dome Cathedral, St Peter's Church, Swedish Gates, Three Brothers and much more
- Tallinn - Explore the enchanting old town and see Toompea Castle - now the home of the Estonian Parliament
- Klaipeda / Nida - Spend a night in Klaipeda in 2022 or Nida in 2023 and opt to explore the beautiful Curonian

Spit with its charming fishing villages, pine forests and endless sand dunes

- Hill of Crosses / Rundale Palace - Marvel at the Lithuania's revered Hill of Crosses in 2022 or enjoy a guided tour of Latvia's magnificent Rundale Palace in 2023
- Trakai (in 2022) - Stop to see the beautifully preserved Trakai Castle in 2022, scenically set on an island on Lake Galve
- Liepaja (in 2023) - spend a night in Liepaja in 2023, stroll around the attractive Old Town, visit Jurmala Park and the former Naval Port area

What's Included

- 7 nights in 4 star hotels
- 7 breakfasts
- Sightseeing tours of Tallinn, Vilnius and Riga.
- Sightseeing tour of Klaipeda in 2022. In 2023 this will be replaced with a tour of Liepaja and Rundale Palace
- Entrance to Peter and Paul Church in Vilnius and Great Guild Hall in Tallinn
- Escorted by a bi-lingual English and German speaking tour leader, with English speaking guides for city tours
- One arrival transfer on Day 1 and one departure transfer on Day 8 included per booking
- All relevant transportation in private modern vehicles

- Welcome meeting with champagne-cocktail or juice
- Note: This tour is operated in conjunction with our trusted partner and you will join travellers from different operators, not solely On The Go. Minimum group size 2 - maximum 16.

What's Not Included

- International flights and visas
- Items of a personal nature and additional meals
- Tipping - an entirely personal gesture

DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1: Vilnius

Welcome to Lithuania and the capital Vilnius. Upon arrival at Vilnius airport you'll be met and transferred to your hotel in the heart of the city. The rest of the day is at leisure. A welcome meeting will be held this evening, in the lobby, at around 7pm. **Overnight - Vilnius**

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Day 2 : Vilnius



Vilnius is known for its more than 1,200 medieval buildings and 48 churches. The morning sightseeing tour includes a panoramic tour of the city and a walking tour of the Old Town with Vilnius Cathedral, Gediminas Tower, Peter and Paul Church, St. Anna's Church, Old University and the Gates of Dawn. After the tour we continue to Trakai, the medieval capital of Lithuania and stop to see the well preserved Trakai Castle, beautifully located on an island in Lake Galve. Then we travel on to Klaipeda, where we arrive late afternoon.

2023 itinerary change: Please note there will be a change of itinerary for tours departing in 2023. After the Vilnius city tour we will travel to the Curonian Spit (not stopping in Trakai). Arriving late afternoon we will spend the night in Nida at Hotel Nerija*** or similar. In the evening there will be an optional authentic fisherman dinner at "Tik Pas Jona". **Overnight - Klaipeda in 2022 / Nida in 2023 (B)**

Day 3 : Optional Curonian Split Tour

The day is reserved for a full-day optional tour to the Curonian Spit, a thin, 100 km stretch of land between the Baltic Sea and the Curonian Lagoon with small fishing villages, pine forests and endless sand dunes. Our first stop is the Hill of Witches in Juodkrante. After that we continue to Nida, where we visit the High Dunes, Thomas Mann's summerhouse and get acquainted with the charming resort town before we drive back to Klaipeda. The evening offers an optional Lithuanian dinner at Restaurant 19th Century.

2023 itinerary change: In 2023 there will be an optional tour of the Curonian Spit in the morning. In early afternoon we will head towards Liepaja where we arrive early afternoon and spend the night at Hotel Promenade***** or similar. In the evening there will be an optional casual dinner at a beach café Red Sun Buffet, right on the wide sandy beach.

Optional Activities: Curonian Split Tour | Lithuanian Dinner (2022) Latvian dinner (2023)

Overnight - Klaipeda in 2022 / Liepaja in 2023 (B)

Day 4 : Klaipeda and the Hill of Crosses

Klaipeda - Riga (Latvia). Klaipeda first became a part of Lithuania in 1923 and had a long history as a German town called Memel. A short sightseeing tour takes us to the Old Town with its narrow, cobblestone streets and old guild houses and we visit the Theatre Square and the Aennchen von Tharau Fountain. We travel on to Siauliai and Hill of Crosses, one of the holiest sites of Catholic Lithuania. We head north into Latvia and reach Riga in the afternoon. This evening offers an optional organ concert at the Dome Cathedral.

2023 itinerary change: In 2023 we will start the day with a short stroll around Liepaja Old Town with its Trinity Church, visiting Jurmala Park and the former Naval Port area with its famous Orthodox Cathedral. Then we will continue through Southern Latvia to the magnificent Rundale Palace, the former summer residence of the Duke of Courland. Following a guided tour of the palace we travel through Latvia to reach Riga at late afternoon. The evening offers an optional organ concert at the Dome Cathedral.

Optional Activity: Evening Organ Concert

Overnight - Riga (B)

Day 5 : Explore Riga



Founded in 1201 by the German bishop Albert, Riga is the largest of the three Baltic capitals and boasts a true kaleidoscope of various architectural styles. The walking tour of the Old Town includes Riga Castle, Dome Cathedral, St. Peter's Church, Swedish Gates, Three Brothers, Large and Small Guild House and the Freedom Monument. The afternoon is reserved for an optional visit to Jurmala, the vibrant Latvian sea resort, famous for its wooden architecture and sandy beaches. In the evening enjoy an optional Latvian dinner at the stylish Restaurant Three.

Optional Activities: Jurmala Excursion | Latvian Dinner

Overnight - Riga (B)

Day 6 : Summer Resort of Parnu

Riga - Tallinn (Estonia). The tour continues along the coastal highway to the Estonian summer resort of Parnu. We have a short tour of the resort before we continue through the North Estonian land of forests and arrive in Tallinn early afternoon. **Overnight - Tallinn (B)**

Day 7 : Tallinn Tour



Tallinn is a charming blend of medieval tranquillity and modern urban life. The

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medieval Old Town is a busy place in the summer with its many shops, galleries, souvenir markets, outdoor cafés and restaurants. The sightseeing tour takes us around the old medieval city walls and into the Old Town where we see Toompea Castle, Dome Church, Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, medieval Old Town Hall and Great Guild Hall.

In the afternoon an optional excursion is offered to Kadriorg Park and visit to KUMU, the award-winning new Estonian Art museum, with its collections of classic and contemporary fine art. The evening offers an optional medieval dinner at Restaurant Maikrahv.

Optional Activities: Kadriorg park and KUMU Art Museum | Medieval Dinner
Overnight - Tallinn (B)

Day 8 : Tallinn

Our Baltic experience ends after breakfast this morning and hotel check out. A transfer will be provided to take you to Tallinn Airport. (B)

BEFORE YOU GO

Our partners

This tour is operated by a trusted partner and you will join travellers who booked through different operators, not solely On The Go.

The group may vary in size from 2 – 16 persons.

Optional Excursions

The following excursions are available to book locally, payable in cash or by debit/credit card.

- Klaipeda (in 2022): 4-hour excursion to the Curonian Spit in Klaipeda: EUR 80.00 pp
- Nida (in 2023): 4-hour tour of the Curonian Spit: EUR 45.00 pp
- Klaipeda (in 2022): Lithuanian dinner at Restaurant Frederiko Pasazas: EUR 35.00 pp
- Liepaja (in 2023): Casual fisherman dinner at Tik Pas Jona tavern: EUR 35.00 pp

- Riga: Organ concert at the Dome Cathedral: EUR 35.00 pp
- Riga: 4-hour excursion to Jurmala: EUR 40.00 pp
- Riga: Latvian dinner at Restaurant Three: EUR 40.00 pp
- Tallinn: 3-hour excursion to Kadriorg Park and visit to KUMU: EUR 45.00 pp
- Tallinn: Medieval dinner at Restaurant Maikrahv (2022) / Restaurant Peppersack (2023): EUR 45.00 pp

Accommodation

The hotels listed below are ones which we frequently use on this tour. We reserve the right to substitute these hotels with ones of a similar standard.

- Vilnius – Radisson Blu Lietuva
- Klaipeda in 2022 – Radisson Blu Klaipeda or Hotel National
- Nida in 2023 – Hotel Nerija
- Liepaja in 2023 – Hotel Promenade
- Riga – Radisson Blu Latvija
- Tallinn – Radisson Blu Olympia

Travel Style

This is a coach tour, operated by a trusted partner. The group size will vary from tour to tour and guiding may be in another language in addition to English.

Dinner Supplement

On a selection of our tours of the Baltics you may wish to purchase a dinner supplement. This supplement includes a 3 course dinner at your hotel for each night of the tour. Please ask your reservation consultant for more information and pricing.

Please note that should you wish to partake in any other optional dinner that is offered during your tour this will not be included in this dinner supplement and will therefore need to be paid for separately.

Keeping in Touch

Your tour leader will be able to point out internet cafes in all major cities and towns and Wi-Fi may be available in some hotels.

If you intend to take your mobile phone you should find out in advance from your network provider if your phone is set up for international roaming and if there is coverage in your destination. You may also find it considerably more expensive to send texts and receive calls if you are on a non European or British Network. A much cheaper option would be to purchase a telephone card and use local pay phones.

Pre-Departure Meeting

When you arrive on day one of your trip, you should find some local information at the hotel lobby. Your tour leader will be staying in the hotel and should have put up a welcome note to let you know what room they are in. A pre-departure meeting is usually held in the afternoon or early evening of day one.

Missing the tour departure

If you miss the start of your tour, please ask at the reception of the hotel for a message from your tour leader which will give you instructions on how to catch up with the group. Any associated costs will be at your own expense (although, depending on the reason, you may be able to claim these from your travel insurance so ensure you keep all receipts).

If you know in advance that you are unlikely to arrive on time, please contact us immediately so we can inform the tour leader. On The Go Tours cannot be held responsible should your airline/boat/coach be delayed and we are unable to refund any unused portion of your tour.

Time Keeping

Punctuality is very important and throughout the tour your tour leader will give you the time to meet in reception. Tour leaders will often post notes at reception with meeting times, so remember to always look out for these.

Although rare, delays can occur and we therefore advise you not to arrange your onward travel too close to the end

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of the tour. We take no responsibility for any missed flights or additional expenses if the group arrives late into the departure city at the end of the tour.

Money

For personal spending money you should bring Euros alongside the local currency (where applicable). Generally the most convenient way of carrying your spending money is by having at least a couple of credit or debit cards. The majority of cards (Visa, Diners Club, MasterCard, American Express and Maestro, Plus and Cirrus for debit cards) are accepted in most large cities and tourist areas. ATMs (cash machines) are widespread. It is always best to carry a mix of cards and cash with you, including notes in small denominations.

Your spending money should cover some meals, optional excursions, souvenirs, drinks, laundry, border and airport taxes and any visas obtained locally. We provide guideline prices for optional excursions in the itinerary to help you budget, but ultimately the amount you will need to budget for your trip very much depends on your individual requirements. We recommend bringing extra money to cover emergencies or unexpected situations.

Tipping

Tipping is a part of the life in Europe, but you should not feel obliged or pressured to tip if you have not received good service. A gratuity of 10% of the total bill is recommended in restaurants. Gratuities are usually expected for local guides on included and optional excursions. Tips are also appreciated by tour leaders at the end of your tour and we recommend an average of \$2-\$4 per person per day for the duration of your tour. This is only if you feel that their service was up to standard and tipping is always completely at your own discretion.

Electricity Supply

If bringing electrical equipment, make sure that you bring a two-pin/pronged, round-pin adapter/plug adapter.

Health, Fitness & Safety

Pack a Medical Kit

A medical kit is handy for minor wounds and ailments. In areas with limited or dubious medical facilities, an emergency medical kit containing sterile syringes is also advisable. By law our staff are not allowed to administer first aid or give drugs to travellers, so please be prepared with your own supplies.

If you are taking medication, please ensure you bring an adequate supply and a letter from your doctor to avoid potential issues at border crossings.

Fitness & Suitability

This is a coach based tour so it is essential that you be able to carry your bags between the bus and hotels. Disruptions happen and while your tour leader will make every effort to ensure your trip runs smoothly, patience, a sense of humour and willingness to get involved and help your tour leader are essential ingredients for a successful and happy group.

If you have any pre-existing medical conditions please let us know at the time you book or as early before departure as possible. Depending on the severity of the condition, you may be asked to produce a medical certificate from your doctor approving your participation in this tour. While this would only happen in very exceptional circumstances, if we consider you incapable completing this tour or you have conceded an existing medical condition which is affecting your ability to participate in the tour of On The Go Tours reserve the right to turn you away without reimbursement.

Safety & Security

Europe is generally very safe, even more so in a group. Reasonable

precaution is advised; do not bring valuable jewellery or watches (even fakes can catch the eye of a thief), do not bring your camera equipment in a flashy camera bag, be prudent and keep your valuables in a safe secure place whenever possible, wear a money belt and distribute your valuables throughout your luggage, heed your tour leader's advice and always keep an eye and a hand on your camera and bags in public places. On The Go Tours cannot accept responsibility for any valuables left in safe deposits in hotels or on public transport.

Age Restrictions

We have a minimum age on all our Baltic tours of 5 years old. Children aged between 5 and 18 must each be accompanied by a legal guardian or parent. While we do not have an upper age limit, the nature of our group tours can be very fast paced and travellers might be required to walk long distances, often in the heat.

Documents

Passport

Your passport should be valid for at least 6 months after you have finished your tour with sufficient blank pages for visas and immigration stamps. Photocopy your passport, leaving one copy at home and taking one with you on tour. If you lose your passport while on tour, you will be responsible for any expenses incurred such as extra accommodation and transport while replacing your passport and will not be entitled to a refund of any unused portion of your tour.

Tour Documents

Before you depart you will be issued with a voucher for your tour any extra services such as airport transfers and pre/post tour accommodation. Please print these out and bring them with you. These Trip Notes are updated regularly, so we recommend checking our website for the latest version just prior to the start of your tour.

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Final Balance

The balance for your tour is due no later than 60 days prior to the start of your tour and no tour vouchers will be issued until this is received. In addition please send the following details at least 60 days before you depart:

- Passport number, date of issue, date of expiry, nationality and place of issue
- Your full name and date of birth
- Flight arrival details in your starting city
- Special requirements, e.g. special dietary requirements or allergies

Please let us know if you are travelling with another person on the tour but have made separate bookings and we will endeavour to make suitable rooming arrangements.

Visas

All countries have visa requirements that are subject to change at short notice. Please check with your local embassy or consulate for the very latest visa requirement information based on your nationality. It is your responsibility to ensure that you have all necessary visas for your tour. If you would like help applying for visas, we have recommended visa agencies.

Important things to check when applying for visas:

- Does the validity of the visa cover the duration of your time spent in the country?
- Do you require a single or multiple entry visa(s) for your tour?
- Are you required to show additional documentation when you arrive in a country? (Examples include proof of onward travel and travel itinerary)

Some visas are only valid for entry within three months of the date of issue which means on some of our longer tours the visa would expire before you are scheduled to enter the country. In these cases you must obtain the relevant visa during your tour. If it is

necessary for you to obtain any visas en-route, please contact On The Go Tours or your travel consultant and inform your tour leader at the start of the tour. If you do not have the appropriate visas, On The Go Tours will not reimburse any expenses incurred in acquiring visas or any unused portion of the tour.

It is best to apply for visas in your home country if possible. If applying for visas by post, please allow plenty of time before departure and send your application by registered mail. Postal applications tend to be given a lower priority than in person applications and can take longer to process.

Special Note: If you have dual nationality it is advised not to obtain different visas in different passports. Although this may sometimes be cheaper, you may encounter problems at border crossings if your exit stamps from one country are not the same as your visa for the next.

Travel Insurance Policy

Travel insurance is compulsory for all tours. You must be adequately insured for medical, hospital, baggage and personal expenses, any necessary extra travel (rejoining tour or repatriation) as well as curtailment and cancellation.

We strongly recommend that all clients carry a copy of their full policy document with them at all times, together with any certificate showing the policy number and emergency contact details. Your tour leader will also ask for a photocopy of your insurance document, so please take this to the pre-departure meeting at the start of your tour. You will not be able to commence your tour unless you can provide proof of insurance to your tour leader.

Document Checklist

- Passport (with photocopies of information pages and visas)
- Trip Notes

- Cash & credit/debit cards (best to take a mixture and more than one card in case one does not work)
- Travel Insurance Certificate and photocopy for tour leader
- Travel consultant's phone number and email address
- Proof of onward travel, ie airline ticket

Optional Excursions

Optional excursions are not operated by On The Go Tours and while every effort is made prices may not be up-to-date and are intended as a general guide to help you budget for your trip.

Excursions are run by a local operator or third party with both On The Go Tours and the Tour Leader acting as a booking agent only. Optional activities are not part of the tour and our booking conditions do not apply to them. It is your responsibility to ensure you have the correct travel insurance for the excursions you intend to take part in and On The Go Tours is not liable for any injuries incurred.

Illegal Drugs

The possession or use of illegal drugs will not be tolerated on our tours. When overseas you are subject to local laws and the penalties for breaking these laws can be harsh. In order to safeguard the interests of the group as a whole, our tour leaders have been instructed to insist that any person found with illegal drugs leave the tour immediately – without refund. The tour leader's decision on this matter is final. If you need to carry certain drugs with you for purposes of medication, please inform your tour leader and ensure that you carry a copy of your prescription or letter from your doctor.

Estonia Country Guide

Estonia: Fact File

Official Name: Republic of Estonia

Capital: Tallinn

Population: 1.4 million

Total Area: 45,748 square kilometres

Official Language: Estonian, Russian

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Religions: Evangelical Lutheran 13.6%, Orthodox 12.8%, other Christian (including Methodist, Seventh-Day Adventist, Roman Catholic, Pentecostal) 1.4%, unaffiliated 34.1%, other and unspecified 32%, none 6.1%

Voltage: 220 volts / 50 Hz

Dialling Code: +372

Time Difference: GMT/UTC + 2. For other time differences please visit www.timeanddate.com

Estonia: Brief history

Originally a pagan territory followed by a spell under servitude to German nobility. Estonia's history along with the other Baltic States has been a continuous struggle to maintain independence and national integrity against its larger neighbours. Russia in particular saw the benefits of acquiring Estonia's territory for both economic and strategic reasons and took Estonia from Sweden, at the Treaty of Nystadt, in 1721. Proceeding the German invasion of the Soviet Union during WWII, Estonia became one of the 15 Soviet Socialist Republics until Mikhail Gorbachev then Communist Party General Secretary, offered the prospect of change for the Baltic States. In 1990, the Estonian Communist Party voted in favour of full independence from the Soviet Union but allowed for a six-month transitional period before making the decision final. Rapid international recognition of Estonia as a sovereign state, followed by admission to the United Nations, completed the transition to full nationhood. Estonia joined the European Union in 2004.

Estonia: Geography and weather

Estonia is a low lying country with almost half of its land mass forested and over 1,400 lakes

Our tours only operate from late spring (April/May) to early Autumn (in Eastern Europe) when the weather is generally at its best. Temperatures will vary but will still be cool in April/May and again in October. The warmest months

tend to be July/August. The further south you are the higher the average temperatures. You can expect snow from December to late March.

Visit www.worldclimate.com to get an idea of what the weather will be like on your trip.

Estonia: Visas

Make sure your passport is valid for at least two months after your trip. Visa regulations change frequently so it is important you consult with the embassy prior to travelling to ensure you have the correct visas. In some cases you will be crossing the borders on overnight trains and without the correct visa for your nationality you will not be allowed to enter the country and will be asked to leave the train. It is the responsibility of the traveller to obtain all correct visas needed prior to departure.

Nationals of EU and EEA member states are free to enter Estonia. The required travel document for entry is a national ID card or passport.

Estonia: Money

ALL prices stated in this dossier are given as a guide only and are subject to change.

Local currency

The monetary unit in Estonia is the euro. For up to date exchange rates with your own currency visit www.oanda.com or www.xe.com.

Changing money, credit cards & ATMs

All major currencies can be exchanged at banks and bureaux de change. Credit cards are widely accepted. Most banks will give cash advances on credit cards with a passport. There are ATMs in most towns. Traveller's cheques can be changed in banks in most larger towns. The main banks in Estonia who serve tourists are Hansapank, Sampo Pank and Ühispank.

Working out your budget

Our Europe pre departure information includes a general list of all the things you should take into consideration when budgeting and an estimate of what you should allow per day for spending money. Below are some specific notes relevant to our trips in Estonia.

Entrance fees

Generally speaking most entrance fees will be covered by the recommended spending money. There are, however, other sites and museums that are not part of the tour programme which you may wish to visit in your free time. If you have an International Student Card you will often be entitled to reduced entrance fees.

Tipping

In restaurants 15% is usually added to restaurant bills and you are obliged to pay this. It is also customary to give the waiter 5%-10% on top of this if you are happy with the service.

You do not need to tip taxi drivers, etc but you should tip people who assist you with your luggage at hotels (don't over-tip; your tour leader will advise a suitable amount). Tipping guides at the end of excursions and treks etc is always appreciated and your tour leader will advise you on the amount for this.

Estonia: Optional excursions

A full list of the main excursions available on each tour can be found on daily itinerary on these trip notes. All prices given are approximate and are subject to change due to local inflation or exchange rates.

Estonia: Local transport

Estonia's cities have good bus and tram networks running from approximately 6am to Midnight. Tickets are sold from Kiosks in the street or from the driver they must be validated once on board the vehicle on the spot fines can be issued if not. One of the most popular and reliable ways of

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getting around on your own in large cities is by taxi. Try to find out what the going rate for journeys is before you hop into a taxi to ensure you are not being overcharged. Your tour leader will be able to provide advice on this when you stop in major cities.

Estonia: Security

Generally people find Eastern Europe to be safe and feel confident wandering alone during the day. However if you are unfamiliar with an area it is recommended that you exercise more caution at night and taxi taxis rather than walk, especially if you are a lone female traveller. In some cities bag snatching can occur so always keep a firm hand/eye on your personal items. Petty theft, especially in Tallinn Old Town, is becoming increasingly common. If there is a safe available in your hotel it is recommended you use it.

Estonia: Local food and drink

Some breakfasts are included in your tour. Breakfasts can be basic so if you tend to get hungry it may be a good idea to buy some fruit or snacks to eat during the day. All other meals, extra snacks and drinks on the tour are at your own expense.

Ask your tour leader if they can recommend any restaurants in the area to suit your taste or budget or have fun exploring independently. Hors d'oeuvres are very good in Estonia and often considered the best part of the meal.

Food

You may want to try national specialities such as: Sùlt (jellied veal), Täidetud vasikarind (roast stuffed shoulder of veal), Rosolje (vinaigrette with herring and beets), Braised goose stuffed with apples and plums and Estonian wild mushroom soup.

Drink

National drinks include: Saare beer (dark and heavy yet tasty), Mulled wine

and Vana Tallinn (a local liqueur that's probably best left to the locals to sip!

All drinks such as bottled water or soft drinks are at your own expense at all times and are fairly inexpensive. Alcoholic drinks vary in price, with wine and beer generally being the cheapest options.

Vegetarians

Vegetarians will find no shortage of fresh salads on offer.

Estonia: National holidays

1 January - New Year's Day.

24 February - Independence Day.

10 April - Good Friday.

1 May - May Day.

31 May - Whit Sunday (Pentecost).

23 June - Võidupüha (Victory Day - anniversary of the Battle of Võnnu).

24 June - Midsummer's Day/Jaanipäev (St John's Day).

20 August - Restoration of Independence Day.

25-26 December - Jõulud (Christmas) and Boxing Day.

Lithuania Country Guide

Lithuania: Fact File

Official Name: Republic of Lithuania

Capital: Vilnius

Population: 3.7 million

Total Area: 65,300 square kilometres

Official Language: Lithuanian, Lithuania has a large number of dialects for such a small territory, including High Lithuanian (Aukstaiciai) and Low Lithuanian (Zemaciai).

Religions: Roman Catholic (79%) with Russian Orthodox and Protestant, including Evangelical Lutheran and Evangelical Reformist.

Voltage: 220 volts / 50 Hz. European-style two-pin plugs are in use.

Dialling Code: +370

Time Difference: GMT/UTC + 2. For other time differences please visit www.timeanddate.com

Lithuania: Brief history

Lithuanians, along with Latvians and ancient Prussians, are descendants of the Balts, an Indo-European ethnic group that settled on the Baltic coast 4,000 years ago.

The name Lithuania dates back to 1009 AD. Grand Duke Mindaugas is recognised as the founder of Lithuania, a territory which included Minsk and later stretched as far as the Black Sea.

Lithuania was able to withstand the advance of the Teutonic Knights, merging with Poland in 1569 to create the Joint Republic of the Polish Kingdom and Lithuanian Grand Duchy. Russia then took possession of part of Lithuania in 1795 (the western region was claimed by Prussia). The Russians were driven out by the German army during World War I. The Lithuanian Council then declared independence in February 1918. In 1921, Lithuania joined the League of Nations. Poland continued to occupy Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital. Lithuania was occupied by the German Army in 1941 until its re-annexation by the Soviets three years later. Despite occupying radio, TV and other key installations, the Soviet forces were forced to back down. This period in Lithuanian history concluded with the effective end to Soviet Government followed immediately by Lithuanian independence. The country was recognised and rapidly gained admission to the United Nations, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, the Council of Europe and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

Present-day Lithuania joined the European Union on 1 May, 2004 and today has one of the fastest growing economies in the bloc.

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Baltic Capitals Explorer

Lithuania: Geography and weather

Lithuania is the largest of the Baltics and mainly flat with forest covering around a third of its mass.

Our tours mostly operate from late spring (April/May) to early autumn (in Eastern Europe) when the weather is generally at its best. Temperatures will vary but will still be cool in April/May and again in October. The warmest months tend to be July/August. The further south you are the higher the average temperatures. You can expect snow from December to late March.

Visit www.worldclimate.com to get an idea of what the weather will be like on your tour.

Lithuania: Visas

Make sure your passport is valid for at least three months after your tour.

Visas are not required by British, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand and US citizens for a stay of up to 90 days.

Lithuania joined the Schengen Agreement on 21 December 2007 for overland entry points and seaports, and on 29 March 2008 for airports.

Lithuania: Money

ALL prices stated in this dossier are given as a guide only and are subject to change.

Local currency

Lithuania is in the euro zone. For up to date exchange rates with your own currency visit www.oanda.com or www.xe.com.

Prices quoted in this country dossier are in euros or litas.

Changing money, credit cards & ATMs

Major credit cards are accepted in the main hotels, restaurants, shops and in some petrol stations. ATMs are available in most cities.

Traveller's cheques are not accepted by retailers and can only be exchanged

at a few outlets. To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travellers are advised to take traveller's cheques in US dollars.

Working out your budget

Our Europe pre departure information includes a general list of all the things you should take into consideration when budgeting and an estimate of what you should allow per day for spending money. Below are some specific notes relevant to our tours in Lithuania.

Entrance fees

Generally speaking most entrance fees will be covered by the recommended spending money. There are, however, other sites and museums that are not part of the tour programme which you may wish to visit in your free time. If you have an International Student Card you will often be entitled to reduced entrance fees.

Tipping

Restaurant bills usually include a tip. It is customary to give a little extra for good service.

You do not need to tip taxi drivers, etc but you should tip people who assist you with your luggage at hotels (don't over-tip, your tour leader will advise a suitable amount). Tipping guides at the end of excursions and treks etc is always appreciated and your tour leader will advise you on the amount for this.

Lithuania: Optional excursions

A full list of the main excursions available on each tour can be found on daily itinerary on these trip notes. All prices given are approximate and are subject to change due to local inflation or exchange rates.

Lithuania: Local transport

Public transport includes buses and trolley buses, which usually run from 5am-11pm, tickets can be bought either at news kiosks before boarding or from the driver.

One of the most popular and reliable ways of getting around on your own in large cities is by taxi. Try to find out what the going rate for journeys is before you hop into a taxi to ensure you are not being overcharged. Your tour leader will be able to provide advice on this when you stop in major cities.

Lithuania: Security

Generally people find Eastern Europe to be safe and feel confident wandering alone during the day. However if you are unfamiliar with an area it is recommended that you exercise more caution at night and taxi taxis rather than walk, especially if you are a lone female traveller. In some cities bag snatching can occur so always keep a firm hand/eye on your personal items.

Lithuania: Local food and drink

Some breakfasts are included in your tour. Breakfasts can be basic so if you tend to get hungry it may be a good idea to buy some fruit or snacks to eat during the day. All other meals, extra snacks and drinks on the tour are at your own expense.

Ask your tour leader if they can recommend any restaurants in the area to suit your taste or budget or have fun exploring independently.

Food

National specialities to keep a look out for are skilandis (smoked meat), salti barsciai (cold soup), vedarai (potato sausage) and bulviniai blynai (potato pancakes), smoked eel is a famous Baltic delicacy, and you may enjoy trying mild white curd cheese, best served with honey.

Drink

National drinks include local brands of beer and imported drinks are popular. A famous Lithuanian spirit is midus, a mild alcoholic beverage made from honey.

Latvia Country Guide

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Baltic Capitals Explorer

Latvia: Fact File

Official Name: Republic of Latvia

Capital: Riga

Population: 2.4 million

Total Area: 64,589 square kilometres

Official Language: Latvian is the official language. Russian, English and German are widely spoken.

Religions: Non-religious 35%, Lutheran 24%, Catholic 18%, Orthodox 15%, others 8%.

Voltage: 220 volts / 50 Hz. European-style two-pin plugs are in use.

Dialling Code: +371

Time Difference: GMT/UTC + 2. For other time differences please visit www.timeanddate.com

Latvia: Brief history

Latvia has long been an important trading centre and strategic territory in the Baltic region. The various Latvian tribes were self-governing, hailing back to around 2000 BC. By the end of the 13th century the territory was the conquered by the German Teutonic Knights, who founded Riga in 1202 AD and went on to control the seaboard from Poland to Estonia and inland into Latvia. The territory was then controlled by Poland from 1561 (during the reign of Ivan the Terrible) followed by Sweden.

By 1795, the entire Latvian territory was under Russian control, ruled by Peter the Great. This continued until the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 which resulted in the 1918 Treaty of Brest-Litovsk under which Russia was obliged to give up its Baltic territories.

The Treaty of Versailles then enabled the Latvians to assert their independence briefly for the first time in more than 600 years. Russian forces took over power once more just before World War II but were driven out by the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. Troops returned to Latvia three years later, to incorporate the country into the Soviet Union along with Estonia and Lithuania as one of the 15 Soviet republics.

Latvia's present independence began with the accession of Mikhail Gorbachev as Soviet leader in 1985. The country gained full independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. The new state was quickly recognised internationally and re-admitted to the UN. A new currency, the Lat, was introduced in 1993 followed by the first post-independence elections

Latvia joined the EU in May 2004, along with its Baltic neighbours.

Latvia: Geography and weather

Latvia is situated on the Baltic coast and borders Estonia to the north, Lithuania to the south, the Russian Federation to the east and Belarus to the southeast. The coastal plain is mostly flat but, towards the east, the land is hilly with forests and lakes. There are about 12,000 rivers in Latvia, the biggest being the River Daugava. The ports of Riga and Ventspils often freeze over during the winter.

Our tours mostly operate from late spring (April/May) to early Autumn (in Eastern Europe) when the weather is generally at its best. Temperatures will vary but will still be cool in April/May and again in October. The warmest months tend to be July/August. The further south you are the higher the average temperatures. You can expect snow from December to late March.

Visit www.worldclimate.com to get an idea of what the weather will be like on your tour.

Latvia: Visas

Make sure your passport is valid for at least three months after your tour begins.

Visa regulations change frequently so it is important you consult with the embassy prior to travelling to ensure you have the correct visas. In some cases you will be crossing the borders on overnight trains. Visas are not required by British, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand and US citizens

for a stay of up to 90 days within any six-month period. For stays over 90 days these nationals should apply for a residence permit from the Latvian offices of citizenship and migration affairs.

Latvia: Money

ALL prices stated in this dossier are given as a guide only and are subject to change.

Local currency

Latvia is in the euro zone. For up to date exchange rates with your own currency visit www.oanda.com or www.xe.com.

Changing money, credit cards & ATMs

Bureaux de Change are found all over main towns, including inside shops, hotels, post offices and train stations. These tend to close at 7pm. The most convenient currencies to exchange are the euro and the US dollar.

American Express, Diners Club, JCB, MasterCard and Visa are accepted by most hotels, restaurants and shops. ATMs are available in towns and cities.

To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travellers are advised to take traveller's cheques in US dollars or pounds sterling.

Working out your budget

Our Europe pre departure information includes a general list of all the things you should take into consideration when budgeting and an estimate of what you should allow per day for spending money. Below are some specific notes relevant to our tours in Latvia.

Entrance fees

Generally speaking most entrance fees will be covered by the recommended spending money. There are, however, other sites and museums that are not part of the tour programme which you may wish to visit in your free time. If you have an International Student Card you will often be entitled to reduced entrance fees.

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Tippling

In restaurants 15% is usually added to restaurant bills and you are obliged to pay this. It is also customary to give the waiter 5%-10% on top of this if you are happy with the service.

You do not need to tip taxi drivers, etc but you should tip people who assist you with your luggage at hotels (don't over-tip; your tour leader will advise a suitable amount). Tipping guides at the end of excursions and treks etc is always appreciated and your tour leader will advise you on the amount for this.

Latvia: Optional excursions

A full list of the main excursions available on each tour can be found on daily itinerary on these trip notes. All prices given are approximate and are subject to change due to local inflation or exchange rates.

Latvia: Local transport

Latvia's cities have good bus and tram networks running from approximately 5am to midnight. Tickets are sold from kiosks in the street or from the driver they must be validated once on board the vehicle on the spot fines can be issued if not.

Latvia: Security

Generally people find Eastern Europe to be safe and feel confident wandering alone during the day. However if you are unfamiliar with an area it is recommended that you exercise more caution at night and taxi taxis rather than walk, especially if you are a lone female traveller. In some cities bag snatching can occur so always keep a firm hand/eye on your personal items.

Petty theft, especially in Riga, is becoming increasingly common. If there is a safe available in your hotel it is recommended you use it.

Latvia: Local food and drink

Some breakfasts are included in your tour. Breakfasts can be basic so if you

tend to get hungry it may be a good idea to buy some fruit or snacks to eat during the day. All other meals, extra snacks and drinks on the tour are at your own expense.

Ask your tour leader if they can recommend any restaurants in the area to suit your taste or budget or have fun exploring independently.

Food

Hors d'oeuvres are considered very good and often the best part of the meal. Overall, cuisine can be heavy but almost always tasty and nourishing. Look out for the astounding variety of cakes, breads and pastries.

You may want to try national specialities such as, kotletes (meat patties), skabu kapostu zupa (cabbage soup), Alexander torte (raspberry- or cranberry-filled pastry stours), sweetbread soup with dried fruit, piragi (pastry filled with bacon and onions).

Drink

National drinks include, Riga's Black Balsam, a thick, black alcoholic liquid which has been produced since 1700. The exact recipe is a closely guarded secret, but some of the ingredients include ginger, oak bark, bitter orange peel and cognac. It is drunk either with coffee or mixed with vodka. There are several good local beers, including the dark beer Bauskas Tumsais and the pale Gaisais. Kvass is a refreshing summer drink.

All drinks such as bottled water or soft drinks are at your own expense at all times and are fairly inexpensive. Alcoholic drinks vary in price, with wine and beer generally being the cheapest options. The legal drinking age is 18.

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