



ADVENTURES & CULTURES

A CULTURAL TOUR DIVISION OF
"TDI - TRAVEL DIMENSIONS"

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Baltic Escape

A comprehensive cultural journey over the Baltic countries, from Helsinki - Finland to Estonia and trough Latvia to Lithuania

13 nights / 14 days

The Baltic Republics of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, located on the edge of the Baltic Sea, with their rich history and graceful cities are emerging as one of the most interesting tourist destinations in the Western World. Ironically it was 50 years of Soviet rule that prevented large scale construction in the city centers, inadvertently ensuring and retained their old world charm. The three capitals of Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn all have something different to offer and the countryside as well can produce many unexpected attractions. In addition there is Helsinki of Finland to be discovered on our short encounter here...

Day 01: Arrive Helsinki

After we arrive at the International Airport in Helsinki, the Capital city of Finland, we meet our guide and are transferred to the hotel. The rest of the day is free, so we can rest and later have dinner at the hotel.

Overnight: Radisson Royal, Helsinki (2 nights) (D)

Day 02: Helsinki / Porvoo / Helsinki (drive)

After our Breakfast in the hotel, we meet our English-speaking guide and have a full-day Sightseeing tour of Helsinki and nearby Porvoo City. On our Helsinki tour we will visit the historical centre with the Senate Square, the Presidential Palace, the City Hall, the Parliament building, the Finlandia Hall and the Opera House. We will also stop at the Sibelius Monument and at the Temppeliaukio Church (the church in the rock). Later we drive to Porvoo, the second oldest town in Finland. Porvoo was granted town status in the 14th Century and it is one of the most precious treasures in the history of Finnish architecture. The

town-plan is dating back to the Middle Age and the small houses, picturesque yards and narrow streets form a historically and artistically unique wooden town image. The symbols of Porvoo - the red warehouses on the riverbanks - tell the story of seafaring and trading. After our guided tour we will have some free time here, for a cup of coffee and for a walk in the old town with delightful shops and craftsmen's workshops. We then return to Helsinki for dinner and our overnight stay. (B,D)

Day 03: Helsinki / Tallinn, Estonia (ferry)

We will leave Helsinki today and after Breakfast we will embark a 'Fast-boat' (ferry) to Tallinn, Estonia. The crossing over the Gulf of Finland will last for two hours and we'll then arrive to Tallinn. After clearing the border formalities, we are met by our guide and the driver, who will take us for a Tallinn City Tour. Tallinn is a picturesque old city where whole districts date back to the Middle Age era. We will visit first the 'Old Town' part with its quaint narrow streets and beautiful merchants' houses, exemplifying the best of Gothic architecture. The tour will include visits to the Toompea Castle, the 13th Century Dome Church, the 19th Century Russian Orthodox Cathedral of Alexander Nevskij, the 15th Century Town Hall square, the Old Guild built to celebrate Tallinn's membership in the Hanseatic League and the St. Olaf's Church. Before we retire to our hotel, we'll have dinner at a typical restaurant in Old Town.

Overnight: Hotel Meriton Grand, Tallinn (3 nights)

(B,D)

Day 04: Tallinn

This morning we visit the Rocca Al Mare Museum, an Open Air Museum which presents a unique collection of old Estonian buildings on a large seaside land. Farm buildings, windmills and water mills from various periods and regions have been brought here. Folk and National events are celebrated in traditional style at the Museum. Handicrafts are sold at the main gateway and horseback riding is also available. Afternoon we tour the Kadriorg Palace. The Palace, constructed as a gift by Peter the Great to his wife Catherine I in the 1720's, is an excellent example of Baroque architecture. Inside, the Foreign Art Museum of the Kadriorg Palace displays paintings, sculptures, graphic art and applied art of Western Europe and Russia from the 16 - 20 Centuries. We then return to our hotel. (B,D)

Day 05: Tallinn / Lahemaa / Tallinn (drive)

After breakfast we depart for a full day tour to Lahemaa National Park. The Park is located about 60 km from Tallinn and covers 480 square km of typical North Estonia seacoast landscape. Lahemaa National Park is famous for its beautiful scenery, the peninsulas that reach far into the sea, the fishing villages along the coastline and its manor houses. Palmse and Sagadi manor houses in the heart of Lahemaa provide an excellent opportunity to observe the past way of life of ancient lords and ladies of the manor. During our tour we will also visit the typical fishing village of Altja and its old Inn, Vosu Resort,

one of the best-known resorts in North Estonia, as well as the Captain's Village of Kāsmu. When we return to Tallinn we'll enjoy again a typical dinner. (B,D)

Day 06: Tallinn / Saaremaa & Kuressaare (drive)

Another day-tour this time to Saaremaa and Kuressaare Town. We take a short ferry ride first to reach Saaremaa, one of the most popular tourist destinations in Estonia. According to archeological findings here, the territory of Saaremaa has been inhabited for at least five thousand years. At the beginning of the 20th Century there were approximately 60,000 inhabitants in Saaremaa and about 4000 of them lived in Kuressaare. Kuressaare it is officially declared a town in 1563 by Duke Magnus, brother of the Danish King Frederik II. The town-centre of Kuressaare lies at its present place from the first half of the 17th Century, since earlier the town centre was situated closer to the castle. The downtown with its small triangular squares took its present shape at the end of the 17th Century, being nowadays continuously restored for a better preservation. Kuressaare it's very small and one can easily take walking tours in the town. After our Lunch, we'll visit the Kuressaare Castle. The most important sight in Kuressaare is considered to be the Episcopal (Bishop's) Castle. Among the medieval castles in the Baltic countries this is the one that has been best preserved. The castle was built of chiselled dolomite blocks in the late 14th Century and the basic plan of the building is a square with sides of 43 meters each.

Overnight: Hotel Grand Rose, Kuressaare (1 night)

(B,L,D)

Day 07: Kuressaare / Turaida / Sigulda / Riga, Latvia (drive)

After an early breakfast we leave for Riga, the Capital city of Latvia. En route we'll have some important stops, first at Turaida and later in Sigulda. The Turaida Museum Reserve is in the historical town-center of Turaida and comprises archeological, historical and art monuments that have witnessed life-events here since the 11th Century. The Turaida walled castle, which is a medieval architectural monument, is situated on the Turaida castle mound. Archaeological investigation and restoration work still continues on this site. The mound is also an ancient site for a church and graveyard. The Turaida Church, one of the oldest wooden churches around, built by local craftsmen, as well as a graveyard, which was used for the first baptized Liivs, are situated here. The buildings of Turaida and the whole historic area, the roads and ponds are being progressively restored. The "Folk Song Garden", containing 25 sculptures by Indulis Ranka, is situated on the site of a former ancient Liiv village and it is dedicated to the grandeur of the Latvian folk songs. One of the most picturesque towns in Latvia is Sigulda, often called the Latvian Switzerland, which is located about 50 km from Riga, on the banks of the Gauja River, in the Gauja National Park and it is the most popular Latvian tourist and leisure destination for both winter and summer seasons. We'll visit here the Crusader Castle and the Kropotkin's Palace from the 19th Century located in the outskirts of Sigulda. We will arrive late in the afternoon to Riga.

Overnight: Reval Hotel Latvija, Riga (2 nights)

(B,D)

Day 08: Riga and Jurmala

This morning we'll have a city tour of Riga and after lunch a visit to Jurmala town. Riga is a medieval Hanseatic town and our tour will include the St. Peter's Cathedral, from whose steeple will have the best views of the city, the Riga Castle with its three wonderful museums, the Dome Cathedral, which boasts one of the worlds largest pipe organs, and the old Guild Houses. We will learn here why Riga became one of Europe's leading Centre for the architectural style of 'Art Nouveau' from the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. Also Riga boasts Europe's greatest concentration of jugendstil (German Art Nouveau) buildings. An architectural historian will highlight details of the finest city facades. Afternoon we continue to Jurmala, a resort town possessing 150-years-old resort traditions. Jurmala is the place for a city dweller, tired of city-life, to reacquire the feeling of being the Nature's child. Here fresh sea-wind will fill our lungs, the smell of pines is everywhere, our feet will sank in the soft golden sand and our eyes will rest in the distant-blue of the waters... Jurmala with its romantic wooden houses in art nouveau (Jugendstil), its spacious beaches, forests, and the calmly flowing Lielupe River, it is an attractive place in this modern world and has not lost its singularity. We will then return to Riga. (B,D)

Day 09: Riga / Rundale / Siauliai / Klaipeda, Lithuania (drive)

After breakfast we leave Riga and drive first to Rundale, to visit the Rundale Palace. The Rundale Palace is the most magnificent masterpiece of the Baroque architecture in the Baltic States and lies at a distance of 70 km from Riga. The Palace, built in the first part of the 18th Century by the Italian architect, baroque expert & genius from Italy, F. B. Rastrelli who has also created many of St. Petersburg's finest buildings, including the Winter Palace, has been professionally renovated and the interiors are decorated with authentic 18th Century furniture, paintings and china. The most impressive are the Golden Hall, the White Hall and the bedroom of the Duke of Courland Johan Ernst Biron. The Palace also boasts a beautiful French-style park. After our Lunch at Rundale Palace Restaurant, we continue to Sauliai. The Hill of Crosses (Kryžiu Kalnas), located 12 kilometers north of the small industrial city of Siauliai (pronounced shoo-lay) is the Lithuanian national pilgrimage centre. Standing upon a small hill are many hundreds of thousands of crosses that represent Christian devotion and a memorial to Lithuanian national identity. After visiting the Hill of Crosses we leave for Klaipeda.

Overnight: Europa Royale Hotel, Klaipeda (2 nights)

(B,D)

Day 10: Klaipeda / Nida / Klaipeda (ferry & drive)

This morning we take the ferry from Klaipeda to Neringa, situated on a unique peculiar patch of land, washed by the Baltic Sea in the west and the Curonian Bay in the east. We'll have here a sightseeing tour in the National Park of the Curonian Spit, as no one can leave without seeing the great sand dunes and this natural wonder. Also during the tour we go to Nida, a renowned fisherman's

village, and visit the Thomas Mann House. Thomas Mann first visited Nida in 1929 after his stay in Rauschen. One year later a summerhouse was built for him on the "Mother-in-law" hill, designed by the architect Herbert Reissmann. Reminiscent of a fisherman's house it became the new residence of the Nobel Prize winner, stimulating his creativity and a place to rest and relax. Thomas Mann and his family spent three consecutive summers in Nida from 1930-1932. During this time Thomas Mann not only relaxed, but he wrote various articles, essays, numerous letters and the novel Joseph and his brothers. Thomas Mann and his family were forced to leave Germany in 1933. The house survived the war relatively untouched and was saved from ruin. In 1967 the building was restored and a memorial and a library was founded. Since 1987, Thomas Mann seminars are regularly held here. In 1995 the Thomas Mann Cultural Centre was established in this house and it became a museum. Before returning to Klaipeda we'll climb the Witches Mountain. (B,D)

Day 11: Klaipeda / Kaunas (drive)

After breakfast we start with Klaipeda city tour. Klaipeda is often called "Gateway to The Sea", because it is the main Seaport of Lithuania. Our tour includes the Old Post Office, the historical Old Town, full of handicraft shops and the Old Theatre and Simon Dach square. We'll then leave for Kaunas. Lying at the confluence of the Nemunas and Neris Rivers, Kaunas with its population of 430 000 inhabitants is the second largest city in Lithuania. Kaunas was not harmed nor destroyed during the Second World War, thus it has a large number of well-preserved ancient architecture & monuments. The Old Town part contains high concentration of the most important, ancient architectural monuments, like the 13th Century Old Castle, the Old Town Hall, nicknamed the "White Swan", the Basilica, the Church of St. Francis Xavier and the Jesuit Monastery, the Perkunas House and Vytautas Church. The most outstanding monument from the Baroque epoch is the architectural complex of the Pazaislis Monastery. We will end our city tour walking along the green and flowering pedestrian street Laisves Aleja, the main business and leisure area of Kaunas.

Overnight: Best Western Santakos, Kaunas (1 night) (B,D)

Day 12: Kaunas / Trakai / Vilnius (drive)

On our way to Vilnius today, we will stop and visit the Trakai Castle. Trakai, the former capital of Lithuania, is situated on an island in the middle of a lake, not far from Vilnius and its most prominent building is Trakai Castle. The 14th Century built red brick Castle now houses the National Art Museum, which we will visit. Further we're transferred to Vilnius, the Capital city and have the rest of the day at leisure.

Overnight: Reval Hotel Lietuva, Vilnius (2 nights) (B,D)

Day 13: Vilnius

During our full day sightseeing in Vilnius we will visit the Old Town part's St. Anna's Church, St. Peter's and Paul's Church, the Cathedral, the University, the Gediminas Castle, the Gates of Dawn and the Amber Gallery as well as the

Television Tower, Parliament House and the Antakalnis Cemetery. One of the highlights of today's tour is the Gediminas Castle. After climbing up Castle Hill and the 78 steps up to the western tower of the Higher Castle, we can admire the breathtaking view of Vilnius. The red brick tower is now all that remains of the Higher Castle, dating back to the 13th Century. The Castle is rebuilt in 1419 by the Grand Duke Vytautas following the great fire of Vilnius, which caused catastrophic damages. The western tower was restored and is open for viewing, alongside the preserved ruins of the Gothic palace and fragments of the defensive wall and southern tower. Inside the three-storey tower we will find displayed models of the castle as it was in the 14th Century, also displays of 14th to 18th Century ammunition, armor and other historical findings. Another must see is the Hill of Three Crosses. Legend has it that long time ago seven Franciscan monks were crucified here, and four were thrown into the Vilnia River afterwards. The first crosses were erected on the hill in the 17th Century in memory of these martyrs. During Stalin's dictatorial rule the three crosses were removed and buried. It was only on June 14, 1989, that a new memorial was unveiled, rebuilt according to the original plans. These crosses are symbols of Lithuanian mourning and hope. The tour will end at the Amber Museum - Gallery Shop. Ancient amber as well as contemporary sculpted and natural pieces are on display and a whole gallery of modern pieces of amber jewelry created by Lithuanian artists. In the evening we'll have a farewell dinner at a local Restaurant. **(B,D)**

Day 14: Vilnius / Homebound

After our Baltic Cultural 'escapade', we leave these friendly people and their wonderful lands filled with history, architecture and art, as we are transferred to the airport and bringing with us long-lasting memories. **(B)**

End of Tour and our Services

Tour details for the 'The Baltic Escape' tour

Tour price includes:

- Hotel accommodation as mentioned or similar
- Meals as per itinerary (B=breakfast, L=lunch, D=dinner)
- All transfers, tours and sightseeing by private car or minivan
- All ferry and boat fares
- Entrance fees to all Sites and Museums as mentioned
- Services of English speaking local guides at various locations
- Road taxes, parking fees and drivers wedges

Tour price does not include:

- International flight tickets and airport taxes
- Visa fee (if applicable) and insurance
- Personal expenses, such as bar, laundry or phone bills

- Any drinks or beverages with meals
- Tips or other such costs
- All other meals and services not mentioned

Departure dates for 2008:

Every Sunday from mid March till mid October

Tour size: minimum 04, maximum 12 people traveling together

Tour price: USD: 3,945.00 / CAD: 3,985.00 - per person in double occupancy
Single supplement is USD: 655.00 / CAD: 690.00

Tour Highlights and World Heritage Sites (WHS):

- Sightseeing tour of Helsinki and Porvoo City
- Historic Centre (Old Town) of Tallinn - WHS:
<http://thesalmons.org/lynn/wh-estonia.html>
- Rocca Al Mare Museum and Kadriorg Palace
- Saaremaa and Kuressaare Town
- Turaida walled castle & Gauja National Park in Sigulda
- Historic Centre of Riga - WHS:
<http://www.worldheritagesite.org/sites/riga.html>
- Jurmala's romantic wooden houses in art nouveau (Jugendstil)
- The Rundale Palace & the Hill of Crosses
- The Curonian Spit - WHS: Neringa and the Curonian Spit -
<http://www.randburg.com/li/neringaspit.html>
- The Old Town part of Kaunas
- The Trakai Castle
- The Old Town of Vilnius - WHS: <http://thesalmons.org/lynn/wh-lithuania.html>