

THE BALTIC STATES: LATVIA LITHUANIA & ESTONIA

8-days / 7-nights small group **QUALITY GUIDED** inn-to-inn easy to moderate cycling tour



Get off the beaten tourist track on this unique and intriguing cycling holiday in the Baltic States of Latvia and Lithuania. Situated in a strategic location on the Baltic Sea, these small countries have been a flashpoint for many centuries, variously controlled by Poland, Sweden, Russia, Prussia, the Habsburg Empire and the Soviet Union. Whilst legacies of these rulers (especially the Soviet Union) remain, each Baltic state has retained its own fascinating traditions, language and cuisine. See the varied influences in the architecture too – a mixture of Art Nouveau, Art Deco, Bauhaus, Baroque and Renaissance styles.

See and experience Lithuanian and Latvian traditions, including festivals and folk music. Taste typical foods with influences from Polish, German, Hungarian, Russian, Ashkenazi Jewish, and Swedish cuisines – from traditional *cepelinai* (dumplings made from potatoes, often stuffed with ground meat or cheese and served with sour cream) through to more elegant dishes with delicate sauces. Beetroot, sour cream, cucumbers, dill, lingonberries and wild mushrooms feature widely. Latvian cuisine is hearty peasant fare, incorporating potatoes, sour cream, pork, herring, dill and again wild mushrooms. Mushrooming in late summer and autumn is a popular pastime in both countries. Meals in both countries will almost always include dark rye bread often flavoured with caraway seeds.

Visit interesting cities and cycle through rural areas and quiet forests. The cycling is easy to moderate, over mostly flat to gently undulating terrain, with average daily distances of about 30 kilometres, and the support vehicle is always available if you need a rest. Well-maintained, specially designed multi-gear touring bikes are provided, or book an E-bike (at extra cost, subject to availability) to make the cycling even more enjoyable.

We begin in Vilnius, capital of Lithuania, and wend our way past lagoons and sand dunes along the coast of the Baltic Sea to Riga, capital of Latvia. There is an optional self-guided extension to Estonia, to finish your trip off with a visit to the third of these captivating countries.

Cost from: \$2395 per person twin-share Single supplement from \$570

Departs: 13th, 20th July, 2019

Includes: 7 nights' twin-share accommodation in carefully selected 3-, 4- and 5-star hotels (all rooms with private bathrooms), 7 breakfasts, 1 lunch, 5 dinners, luggage transfers, multi-lingual cycle tour guide, hire of multi-gear touring bicycle, support vehicle, luggage transfers, entry fees as per itinerary, transfers as per itinerary, city tours of Vilnius, Trakai and Riga, visitor and tourist taxes.

Not included: Meals not mentioned, drinks, personal expenses, entrance / tasting fees unless specified.

Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details or reservations



Suggested itinerary:

Day 1: Arrive Vilnius

Arrive mid-afternoon to our hotel in the historic centre of Vilnius. We stay in an elegant 4-star hotel in a tastefully renovated 19th Century building just minutes from the Presidential Palace. At 5pm meet your guide and fellow guests in the hotel lounge for a tour of the old town's most important sights and Baroque treasures.

Day 2: Vilnius to Kaunas

Cycling distance @ 24km

We leave the 'Baroque Pearl' by bus for a short ride to Trakai, the de facto capital of Lithuania in the late 14th and early 15th Centuries when it was the main residence of Lithuania's ruler, Grand Duke Vytautas. Our cycle tour leads us through the small town to the pink stone Trakai Castle, on an island in Lake Galvė. After a visit to the castle, we continue cycling through an unspoiled landscape of forest, lakes and gaily coloured timber houses. We then transfer by bus to Kaunas, where we stay in a comfortable 4-star hotel on the edge of the old town.

After a walk through the town centre, we have dinner at an excellent restaurant.

Day 3: Kaunas to Ventaine

Cycling distance @ 40km

We transfer by bus from Kaunas to near Šilutė in the Memel District, an area with a turbulent history, once inhabited by the fierce Curonians, a tribe of pirates and warriors. We cycle past birch groves, fish ponds and along tree-lined roadways in this remote and lonely area, soon reaching the Nemunas (Memel) River delta and the Curonian Lagoon. We stay in a simple, comfortable 3-star hotel in an idyllic position with views of the lagoon. Before our traditional dinner at the hotel restaurant, there is leisure time – perhaps use the Lithuanian sauna (in a small wooden structure on the shores of the lagoon), or take a refreshing swim in the Baltic Sea. The menu here, as one might expect, features seafood. Smoked eel or bream are often served as a starter, whilst pike or perch are served baked whole and stuffed and herring is prepared in a multitude of styles.

Day 4: Ventaine to Klaipėda

Cycling distance @ 35km

The Curonian Spit, a long, thin sand dune, separates the lagoon from the Baltic Sea. The northern half of the spit is Lithuanian whilst the southern portion is part of Russia's Kaliningrad Oblast. We cruise through the Nemunas River delta and across the lagoon, to the tourist and fishing town of Nida. The interplay of forest, sea and sand dunes create a landscape of stunning beauty. German author Thomas Mann loved the magic of this place and had a summer residence here, which we visit. Then we climb atop the Great Dune for panoramic views.

We cycle the Lithuanian spit on our bikes, reaching Klaipėda (formerly Memel, once a capital of Prussia), in the late afternoon. We stay at a comfortable 4-star hotel on the main street of the New Town.

Day 5: Klaipėda to Liepāja

Cycling distance @ 39km

We begin with a tour of Klaipėda's Old Town by bike. Most of Klaipėda was razed in 1945 upon the arrival of the Red Army, except for the Old Town which remained mostly unscathed. Highlights are Theatre Square and the Simon Dach fountain with a bronze statue of Little Annie of Tharau, a character from a folk song. We ride past pine forests and gardens to the seaside resort Palanga. Far from traffic, we reach the seaport Šventoji and board a bus to cross the border to Liepāja in Latvia. We stay tonight in a modern 5-star hotel overlooking the Tirdzniecības Canal. Before dinner, there is free time for a stroll through town or a ride to the beach.

Day 6: Liepāja to Riga

Cycling distance @ 22km

A scenic bus ride across the vast Latvian countryside to Kuldīga for a stroll through this charming town with many old timber houses. The bus takes us to Kermeri and we cycle across the town's park to the Gulf of Riga.

We cycle along the beach or sheltered cycle path to the seaside resort of Jūrmala. The streets are lined with late 19th and early 20th Century timber houses, many painted in bright colours and with decorative 'gingerbread' trim. From Jūrmala we take the train the short distance to Riga, the vibrant, bustling capital of Latvia. The metropolis is incredibly rich in impressive Gothic, Renaissance, and Art Nouveau buildings. After a guided sightseeing tour the evening is yours to enjoy. We stay two nights in a 4-star hotel in an excellent central location, surrounded by some of the most important Art Nouveau buildings of the city.

Day 7: Riga circular ride

Cycling distance @ 11km

Today we cycle across Meza Park in Riga and visit a huge open-air theatre, the stage for traditional song festivals featuring distinctive vocal folk music. After lunch, we take a tram back into the city centre. In the afternoon there is an optional guided tour of Riga. For our farewell dinner we dine on traditional Lithuanian specialties (perhaps including the lurid pink *šaltibarščiai*, cold borscht made with beetroot and kefir, served with boiled potatoes, diced hardboiled eggs, dill, and the ubiquitous sour cream and dark rye bread) at a restaurant.

Day 8: Departure day

After breakfast, an optional guided tour of Riga's beautiful Art Nouveau buildings in the city quarter near our hotel, then tour arrangements end.



OPTIONAL EXTENSION TO ESTONIA

See all three Baltic States: this self-guided extension to Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, is ideal. Visit Newski cathedral, the medieval old town and numerous museums. Estonia's geography and history are similar to those of Latvia and Lithuania, however its culture and language are very different. Stay at a boutique hotel in the old town near Toompea hill (Estonia's government building) and the harbour. Travel between Riga and Tallinn is easy, either by air (flights depart several times daily) or by bus (@ 4-hours).

Cost from: \$795 per person twin-share Single supplement from **\$435**

Includes: 2 nights' twin-share accommodation at 5-star boutique hotel in Tallinn with breakfast, guided cycle tour of city conducted in English, TallinnCard (provides free public transport and free or discounted entry to museums and attractions) and a guidebook (1 per room).

Outdoor Travel also offer cycling holiday destinations include several areas of Italy, Spain, France, Germany, Holland, Ireland, England and Scotland, Romania, Austria, Poland, Hungary, in the Czech Republic or India, Vietnam, New Zealand and Australia.

Other group guided Bike & Boat cruises are available in France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Tuscany or Naples in Italy, the Dalmatian Coast of Croatia, the islands of Greece, or in Vietnam.

Contact Outdoor Travel for more details and reservations

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