

The Baltic States

Friendly, safe and relaxing





Estonia

Baltic hospitality with European quality

Come and discover the three Baltic countries - Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania - prodigal sons that have returned to the European Community. They are often grouped together as the Baltic States, or Baltic Nations. They are considered to be scarcely populated countries of nature, amber and medieval cities, many of them former members of the Hanseatic League. Although they each are small in territory and population, they have shown an incredible ability to hold on to their unique languages and cultures for several thousand years. After 50 years of Soviet occupation, the Baltic countries regained independence in 1991 and became EU members in May 2004.

Estonian history is a history of conquests, its rich culture carrying traces from many centuries. The architectural and cultural heritage offer many possibilities for unique and interesting programmes.

Tallinn, the medieval capital of Estonia, is the best-known tourist magnet of Estonia. Due to Tallinn's grand history and superb architecture it has been listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site. Majestic manor houses and castles all over the country are fine examples of feudal architecture.

Estonia offers a good supply of culture. The country is famed for its song festival tradition, which reaches back more than a century. Folk music festivals, opera, concerts, art exhibitions and numerous museums

- there is a lot to be included in incentive programmes.

Estonian nature is better preserved than in most Western countries. Estonia stands out in Europe for its biodiversity. The islands and islets of the Western coast form a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve of the West-Estonian Archipelago, which is a home to over 1,000 species of plants. Millions of migrating water and coastal birds pass Estonian coasts every year. The romantic West Coast is the most interesting part of Estonia. The islands Hiiumaa and Saaremaa with wooden windmills and juniper fields, lighthouses, ruined churches, thatched villages and white sandy beaches offer an interesting background to several incentive programmes. The rolling hills, sparkling

lakes and streams and green forests of Southern Estonia are very popular both in summer and in winter. In winter it is Estonia's ski paradise, summer visitors can enjoy hiking, cycling, canoe and horseback riding, fishing and camping.

Northern Estonia offers flat landscapes. The national park of Lahemaa 60 km from Tallinn with its forests, unique alvar meadows, swamps and neo-classicist manor houses is an ideal site for nature lovers.

The more to the east from Tallinn you go, the more you discover mixture of two cultures, Estonian and Russian. In Narva a visitor can witness the most awesome confrontation of two great fortresses across the Narva River: Narva Fortress in Estonia and Ivangorod Fortress on the Russian bank.



Samples of Popular Incentive Activities

Action

- Golf in Niitvälja
- Horseback riding
- Helicopter tour to islands
- Sailboat outing in Tallinn Bay
- Tartu Ski Marathon
- Kayak tours
- Fish and smoke your trout
- Wildboar hunting in Hiiumaa

Culture & History

- Private concert of classical music
- Tour to Saku brewery
- Reception in rural manor house
- Russian Orthodox convent in Petseri
- Survival week on authentic farm
- Tracing medieval legends

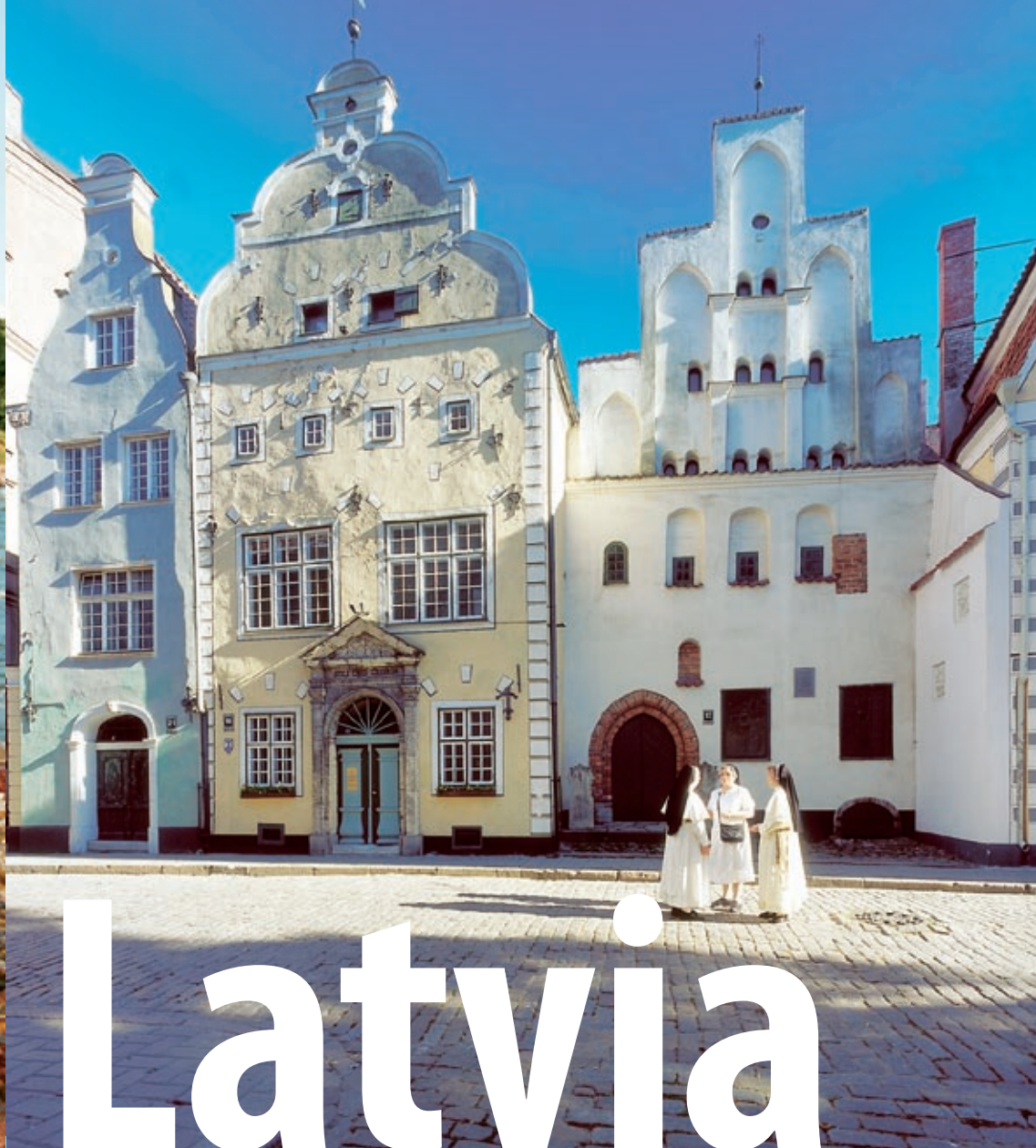
Nature

- Hiking in Soomaa marshlands
- Mushroom & berry picking in Lahemaa
- "Pines and Sand" picnic on secluded beach
- Birdwatching in Vilsandi island
- Sandstone caves in Taevaskoja canyon



Estonia: Quick Facts

Area: 45,227 sq km
Coastline: 3,794 km
Population: 1.4 million (65.3% Estonians)
Capital city: Tallinn (pop. 400,000)
Language: Estonian
Currency: Estonian kroon (EEK)
Member of EU from May 2004



Different cultures in close neighbourhood

Estonians are not Indo-Europeans. Linguistically they are related to the Finns and Hungarians, with whom they make up the Finno-Ugric language family. Latvian and Lithuanian are related languages within the broad Indo-European language family. They are considered to be among the oldest living languages in continuous use. In the course of history, political developments affected the countries differently, especially in the area of religion. Estonia and Latvia were conquered by German crusaders. As a result, the two countries are mainly Lutheran. But in Lithuania, through a royal marriage arrangement with Poland, the population was converted to Roman Catholicism. Each Baltic nation has its own culture, ethnography and traditions. And, of course, cuisine - though similar at the first glimpse, the tastes differ from country to country.

Latvia is a country cosily nestled between Estonia and Lithuania on the shore of the Baltic Sea, also known as the Amber Sea. The territory of Latvia, about the size of Ireland (24,900 square miles), is inhabited by over 2.4 million people.

Having been annexed by the USSR since 1940, Latvia re-established its independence in 1991. Latvia started to revamp its economy for the integration into various Western European political and economic institutions and has now joined NATO as well as the EU.

Although Latvia occupies only a small territory, the variety of its nature is large. Numerous lakes sparkle at the bottom of hills. The forests and waters are full of wildlife. There are many small medieval towns, country castles, museums and parks to be visited.

Time, history and internal harmony can be found in Latvia's numerous churches and cathedrals representing three major religious confessions - Roman catholic, Lutheran and Russian Orthodox - as well as several other confessions that have occurred and are strongly represented in accordance with historical developments.

Riga, Latvia's capital, celebrated its 800th birthday in 2001. It was a major center of the Hanseatic League and prospered from its trade with central and eastern Europe in the 13th-15th centuries.

In the 19th century it became an important economic center, and the suburbs of the medieval town were built, first in imposing wooden buildings in classical style and then in Jugendstil. It is generally recognized that Riga contains the finest concentration of Art Nouveau buildings in Europe.



Latvia: Quick Facts

Area: 64,600 sq km
Population: 2.4 million
(57% Latvian, 40% Russian, 2% Lithuanian, 1% Polish)
Capital city:
Riga (pop. 800,000)
Language: Latvian
Currency: Latvian lat (LVL)
Member of EU
from May 2004



Samples of Popular Incentive Activities

Action

- Prison show "Behind the Bars" in Liepaja Naval port
- Horse riding in Turaida and Sigulda
- Bobsledging in Sigulda
- Sailing in the Baltic sea
- Curling in Jelgava ice-hall
- Tee times in Ozo Golf Club
- Old car ride

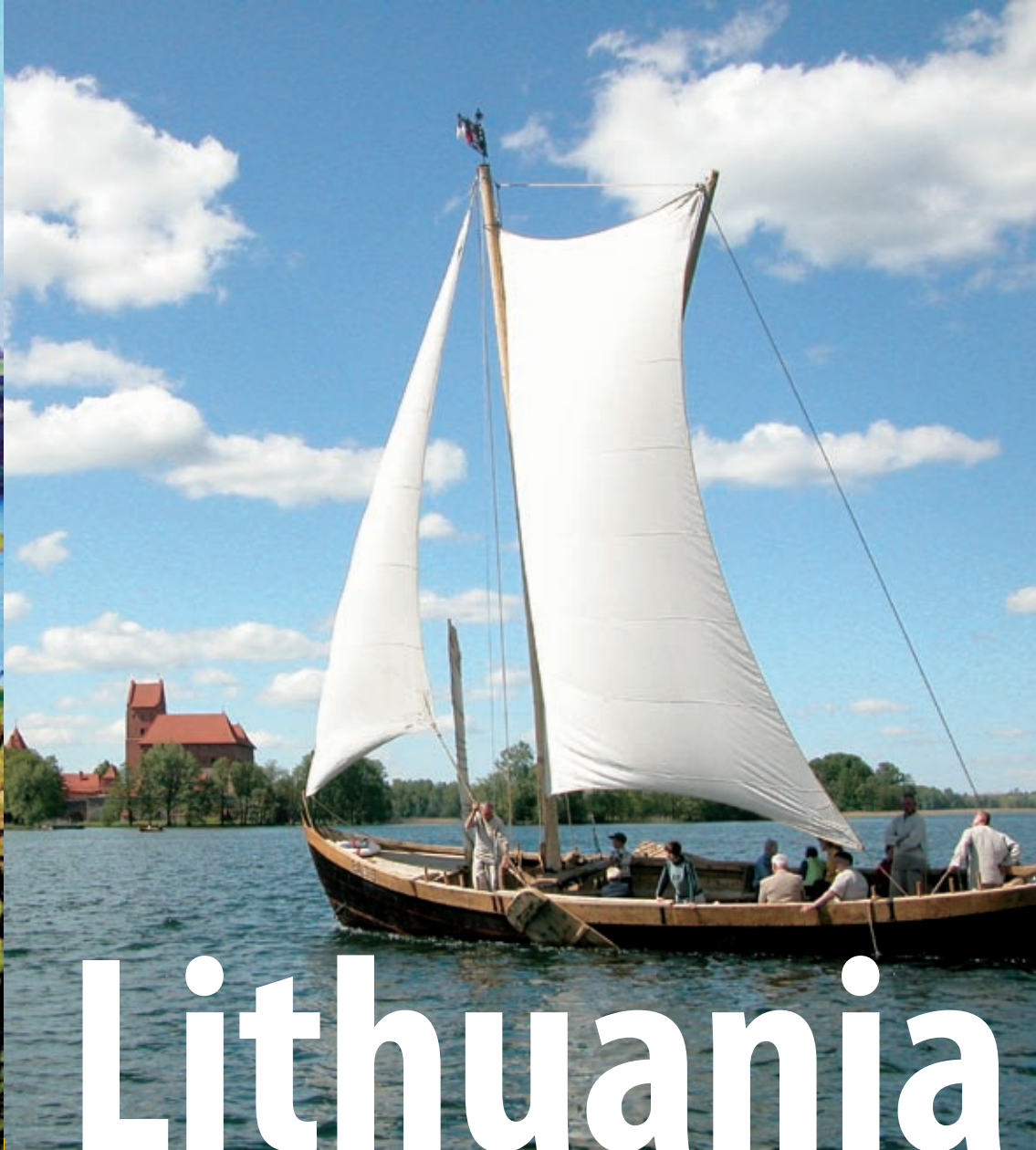
Culture & History

- Private organ music concert
- Tour of Latvian castles and palaces
- Latvian style meal with folklore show
- Evening with Mr. Reutern in house of Reutern
- Medieval dinner in Cesis
- Tour of Latvian National Opera House
- Tasting of Latvian national drinks
- National Song Festival

Nature

- Tour of National parks of Latvia
- Bird watching in Engures lake
- Tour of western coast of the Baltic sea, Kolka Cape
- River rafting along the Gauja
- Sandstone caves of Riezupe
- Adventure track in Sigulda
- Open Air Sculpture garden in Pedvale
- Hunting and fishing tours





Lithuania

A lot in common

Having developed in close neighbourhood for many centuries, the Baltic nations have a lot in common. The climate is similar, of course, and the landscape. All three countries have a great deal of forest land with many lakes. Historically, all three Baltic cultures depended mainly on agriculture. Fishing also was important near the seacoast. Music and song play an important role in the lives of Baltic people. Song lyrics passed down through generations serve as a unifying force for the people. Nationwide song festivals are organized regularly when young and old in the tens of thousands join to celebrate their heritage and culture.

Lithuania, the most southern of the three Baltic States, is the biggest one of them. Together with the Latvians, the Lithuanians are survivors of the Baltic family of peoples who lived in the region in ancient times and traded with the Romans, primarily in amber.

Lithuania emerged as a united nation under Grand Duke Mindaugas in the 13th century. Mindaugas's successors founded an empire extending as far south as the Black Sea. In 1386 Grand Duke Jagello accepted the Polish crown, introduced Christianity and established a personal union between Poland and Lithuania.

After Poland's partition Lithuania was annexed by Russia.

A Lithuanian nationalist movement developed and after the collapse of the Russian Empire, Lithuania regained its independence in 1918. Having been forcibly annexed by the USSR in 1940, the independence was re-established in 1991.

Lithuania is a place of rolling hills and gentle plains; of quietly flowing rivers and of lakes. The largest river, the Nemunas, gathers and carries the waters of many tributaries to the Baltic Sea, wherein lies Lithuania's famous "amber coast".

Curonian spit is the most beautiful part of Lithuania, its "tiny Sahara". Registered as a UNESCO World Heritage site in December 2000, the Curonian lagoon and spit were

formed 5000 years ago by the churning waves of the restless Baltic Sea: the northern part of the lagoon belongs to Lithuania and the southern part to the Russian Federation (Kaliningrad district).

Lithuanian capital Vilnius boasts a Baroque Old Town that is the largest in Eastern Europe and praised as the 'New Prague'. The city has managed to retain its unique character as a northerly cultural meeting point at the crossroads of the Roman and the Byzantine and the European and the Eurasian worlds. Vilnius' Old Town, covering 255 hectares of the city, has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



Samples of Popular Incentive Activities

Action

- Horse riding
- Hot air ballooning
- Bungee jumping from TV-tower
- Paintball
- Canoeing
- Go Kart race competition
- Fish and prepare your trout or carp
- Sailing in the Curonian Lagoon
- Jeep rally

Culture and History

- Private folk performances / medieval music concerts in the 14th century Trakai Castle
- Jazz evenings
- Cathedral Undergrounds
- Street festivals and markets
- Hill of Crosses
- Lithuanian beer / mead tasting
- Grutas Park with Soviet sculptures and relicts

Nature:

- Birdwatching in Ventes Ragas
- Exploring sand dunes in Curonian spit
- Extreme walking in the swamps
- Cognitive nature paths in Curonian spit
- Bee keeping museum



Lithuania: Quick Facts

Area: 65,300 sq km

Population: 3.7 million

(80% Lithuanian, 9.5% Russian, 7% Polish)

Capital city: Vilnius (pop. 580,000)

Language: Lithuanian

Currency: Lithuanian litas (LTL)

Member of EU from May 2004



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