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The Women's Travel Group Post Tour Extension: The Baltic Capitals

Estonia ♦ Latvia ♦ Lithuania

July 24-30, 2017

(as of November 16, 2016)

The little countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are three strategic nations clustered along the northern Baltic Sea coast. The Old Towns of each of their capitals – Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius – are UNESCO World Heritage Sites, with cobbled streets, handsome medieval churches and a wealth of fascinating and variegated cultural heritage. Roam these beautiful pastoral countries, admiring ancient pagan sites, red brick castles, and three different nationalities united by a love of freedom.



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Seattle ♦ Moscow ♦ St. Petersburg ♦ Irkutsk ♦ Ulan Ude ♦ Kiev ♦ Tashkent

Overview Daily Itinerary

Day 1, Monday	St. Petersburg • drive to Tallinn, Estonia
Day 2, Tuesday	Tallinn
Day 3, Wednesday	Tallinn • drive to Riga, Latvia
Day 4, Thursday	Riga
Day 5, Friday	Riga • drive to Vilnius, Lithuania
Day 6, Saturday	Vilnius
Day 7, Sunday	Depart Vilnius

Descriptive Daily Itinerary

Day 1, Monday St. Petersburg • drive to Tallinn, Estonia

Today transfer to the bus station and board Eurolines coach for the drive southwest through the countryside to Tallinn, the capital of Estonia. On arrival, you will be met and transferred to the hotel.

Tallinn's Old Town is the best-preserved medieval town center in Eastern Europe, in spite of various invasions of Danes, Swedes, Teutonic Knights, Russians, Nazis and Soviets. Its winding cobbled streets, red roofs and remaining turreted fortress wall are on the UNESCO World Heritage list. Located across the narrow Gulf of Finland from Helsinki, and not far from St. Petersburg, Tallinn has been a trading and strategic center for hundreds of years. Today Tallinn's citizens are some of the most "wired" in the world, with all Estonians guaranteed Internet access.

The pagan Finno-Ugric people who originally settled this area were not organized into any kind of political unit. By 1219 the Danish nobility had conquered them and built a castle on Toompea Hill. The Danes ruled from Toompea until 1346, when they sold the territory to the Teutonic Knights, already ruling southern Estonia. As members of the Hanseatic League, the lower town's merchants and artisans built a defensive wall with 66 towers. Nineteen of them remain today, as does Northern Europe's only surviving Gothic town hall, built from 1371 to 1404.

Check in to the hotel and enjoy an independent dinner and a free evening.

Meals: independent

My City Hotel, superior rooms or similar

Ideally situated in the heart of Tallinn and Medieval Old Town, surrounded by the business and entertainment district and adjacent to the fashionable shops and restaurants of Tallinn's old town, My City Hotel captures all the city's excitement, energy and cultural diversity. Hotel offers elegantly decorated rooms with warm colours and high quality furniture guaranteeing sumptuous comfort and discreet accommodation. Rooms have mini safe, mini-bar, refrigerator, cable TV, direct-dial telephone, and hairdryer.

Day 2, Tuesday Tallinn

After breakfast this morning set off on a walking tour of Tallinn's best places, beginning about two km east of the **Old Town**, in Kadriorg. Peter the Great built this summer palace and park

in 1718, calling it Ekaterinenthal, after his second wife. The architect, Michetti, was later involved in building Peterhof, Peter's summer palace outside of St. Petersburg. The park originally encompassed almost 250 acres and hundreds of trees were planted, including horse chestnuts intended for Peterhof. Wander the beautiful park and continue to the Song Bowl, where Estonians defied the Soviet Union in 1988, and where every five years an enormous international festival is held. Estonia's cultural identity is closely linked to music. The oldest Estonian song type, the runic chant, dates to the first millennium BC. Native traditions were passed down through the generations, preserving the rich oral folklore that survives to this day.

Next is **Toompea**, the limestone hill in the center of Tallinn that is nearly 90 feet higher than the rest of the city. Estonian folklore says that the hill is actually the burial mound of Kalev, father of the country's most important folk hero. **Toompea Castle** sits at the highest point, rebuilt by Catherine the Great over the remains of the 13th century castle of the Knights of the Sword. Toompea is the site of the aristocratic **Upper Town**, looking down on the workers' town below.

Alexander Nevsky Cathedral on Toompea was designed in the Russian Revival style and completed in 1900. Commissioned by Czar Alexander III, the church was built to honor the victory of Alexander Nevsky over Estonian foot soldiers fighting alongside the Teutonic Knights on Estonian territory in 1242. Although some Estonians wanted to demolish it after independence, the government ended by restoring it instead.

Also on Toompea is Estonia's oldest church, the Lutheran Cathedral of St. Mary the Virgin, or the Dome Church, built in 1223. A Catholic church until 1561, it was later used as a burial place for German and Swedish nobility. The appearance of the church today dates from the 17th century, when it was rebuilt after a fire.

Next descend to the lower town. Tallinn's medieval Old Town Square, the focal point of the old town, served as its marketplace since the 11th century. Chief among the square's old buildings is the 15th century Town Hall, home of the early Town Council. The weathervane atop its late Renaissance spire is the perch of a squire called "Old Thomas," who guards the town.

At the corner is one of the oldest continuously running pharmacies in Europe, which used to sell powdered unicorn horn and other medicinal herbs in the Middle Ages. Today it still sells medicine and notions, but there is also a small museum on the premises.

Built between 1407 and 1417, the Guild Hall is the second largest building on the square, originally serving as a meeting place for the town's rich merchants. Nowadays it is the home of the Museum of Estonian History, with exhibits from Estonian pre-history to the 19th century.

The Brotherhood of the Blackheads emerged at the end of the 14th century as a junior organization of merchants too young to join the Great Guild. The Brotherhood bought the building in the 16th century, building over the original structure, and then redesigned it again a hundred years later. The beautiful Dutch Renaissance door dates from this period.

Lunch and dinner are independent today, and the rest of the day is yours for independent discovery. Overnight at the hotel.

Meals: B

Day 3, Wednesday Tallinn • drive to Riga, Latvia

After a hotel breakfast, board the coach for the drive through the hills to Riga.

Along the way pause at Sigulda, the gateway to Gauja National Park in the steep-sided Gauja River Valley.

After lunch, take a walk in the Turaida Museum Reserve, climbing to the top of the medieval red brick Turaida Castle for views of the park, and following the path along the stream to the sandstone caves.

This afternoon, continue to Riga, arriving in time for an independent dinner and free evening. Riga was first a fishing village founded by native Livonians, a Finno-Ugric people related to the Estonians and the Finns. When the proto-Balts, an Indo-European people, arrived, they gradually assimilated most of the Livonians. The resulting mix of people, now called Latvians, lived in small kingdoms, easy prey for the German crusaders who came to spread Christianity to the pagans at the beginning of the 13th century. For the next 500 years, while the leadership of the country changed hands among the Swedes, Poles and Russians, the ethnic German aristocracy hung on to its autonomy and its feudal estates.

Peter the Great finally conquered Latvia in the early 1700s, and Riga began to grow as a trade and industrial center. Upon the freeing of Latvia's serfs, a wave of rural people came to Riga to work in the factories and at the port.

Between 1857 and 1863, the medieval town walls were demolished, and parks and green belts were allowed to grow in their stead. Although the town was badly damaged during both world wars and neglected during its Soviet period, today Riga is Latvia's flourishing and lively center of the arts, Art Nouveau architecture and nightlife.

Meals: B, L

Opera Hotel or similar

The four star Opera is housed in a historic building, renovated and brought up-to-the-minute with modern amenities in 2008. A gourmet restaurant serves locally-inspired cuisine and there is a cocktail bar and spa on the property.

Day 4, Thursday Riga

This morning after breakfast set out on a walking tour of Riga.

With walls six feet thick, the **Dome Cathedral** in Riga is the biggest working church in the Baltics. Founded in 1211, the church was rebuilt and added to several times. Today its main

brick body is 15th century Gothic, while the steeple is 18th century baroque. The cathedral houses one of the biggest organs in Europe, with 6,768 pipes.

The spire on **Gothic St. Peter's Church** is its most famous feature. The tallest in the world when it was built, it burned twice and was shelled once. In 1973 it was finally rebuilt in steel. Take the elevator 216 feet up the restored spire for fabulous views of the city.

Dating from the 14th century, the Great Guild Hall represented the town's merchants (mostly ethnic Germans) and the Small Guild Hall its artisans. Today, the Great Guild Hall hosts the Riga Philharmonic, while the Small Hall is a disco.

The **Three Brothers**, standing shoulder to shoulder in Riga's Old Town, are the oldest stone residential buildings in town. The oldest dates back to the 15th century, while the other two were built in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Riga Castle was built in 1330 on the banks of the Daugava, a place chosen to oversee all the ships that came into the port. Members of the Polish, Swedish and Russian ruling class had their seats in the castle. Since 1995 the Latvian government performs its duties here. Riga Castle has been placed on the World Monuments Watch List, and partially closed to tourism.

Continue by car or coach to the **Bastion Hill**, the **Powder Tower**, the **Latvian National Theater**, the **Fine Arts Museum**, the **Art Nouveau buildings** from the turn of the century, the University and the bridges of the Daugava River.

Lunch and dinner are independent. Return to the hotel for overnight.
Meals: B

Day 5, Friday **Riga • drive to Vilnius, Lithuania**

Depart for Vilnius after breakfast. En route stop at **Rundale Castle**. 59 miles from Riga on the way to Lithuania is the baroque Rundale Castle, designed in the early 18th century by Rastrelli, who also built St. Petersburg's Winter Palace. The palace was the home of the Duke of Courland, Ernst Johann Birland, a favorite of Russia's Empress Anna. When Russia annexed Latvia, the palace was given to Russian Count Zubov and later the Shuvalov family. The family owned the place until 1920, when it was turned over the Latvian government. It served time as apartments, a primary school and a granary, but in 1972, the palace saw restoration work begun. Today about 40 of the rococo rooms are open for inspection, including the royal kitchens.

Lunch is at a local restaurant after crossing into Lithuania.

Pause at the **Hill of Crosses**, a powerful symbol of faith and perseverance. This small hill, which in early times accommodated a defensive fortification, is totally hidden by a multitude of crosses planted in the ground by local believers. During the Soviet era, authorities regularly tore down and burned the crosses, though many of them were valuable examples of folk art. Undaunted, Lithuanian Catholics, artists and patriots would steal up the hill at night and plant

more. The last major attempt at leveling the shrine was in 1975. Since then, local people and travelers have placed thousands upon thousands of crosses on the hill. The evocative atmosphere of this sacred place draws thousands of believers and pilgrims each year.

Upon arrival to Vilnius, check in to the hotel and enjoy an independent dinner and free evening.

Meals: B, L

Amberton Hotel or similar

Located in the city center, this small hotel is ideal for a visit to Vilnius. Constructed in 1997, the hotel features include elevators, restaurant, bar, safe, sauna, pool, laundry services and business facilities.

Day 6, Saturday Vilnius

Enjoy a walking tour of Vilnius' Old Town this morning, taking in **Vilnius Cathedral** and its square, the University campus, **Pilies Street** with its 16th to 18th century structures, **Gothic St. Anne's** and the **Bernadine churches**, the former **Town Hall Square**, the **Gates of Dawn** and the baroque **church of Sts. Peter and Paul**.

The imposing neo-classical Vilnius Cathedral conceals a longer history than its 18th century exterior reveals. In the 1960s, when architects examined cracks in the church foundations they discovered ancient crypts and foundations of earlier churches and pagan temples. More recently, archeologists found church jewels that fleeing Russians had hidden in the walls in 1655.

The most famous street in Vilnius, Pilies Street means "Castle Street" and runs from the Cathedral Square to the Town Hall Square. Many artisans sell their goods on this busy stretch, and tourists can find such traditional souvenirs as inexpensive amber, Russian dolls and woolen mittens. Pilies Street is also the place to experience most festivals, parades and celebrations that happen around Vilnius. Both the headquarters of Vilnius University and the house where the Declaration of Independence was signed on February 16, 1918 are situated on this street.

Stefan Batory, King of Poland, established Vilnius University in 1579, and it soon developed into an important scientific and cultural center. The oldest university in Eastern Europe, its buildings encompass all the major architectural styles that influenced Vilnius over 400 years. Moscow closed the university from 1832 to 1917, but today there are over 14,000 students enrolled.

Vilnius' diminutive red brick St. Anne's church represents the pinnacle of Gothic architecture in Lithuania. Built around 1500, the designer made use of 33 kinds of brick. The intricate combination and variety of arches, finials, brick patterns, and spires with metal crosses make for an elegant and graceful exterior. The newer adjacent bell tower is neo-Gothic, designed in 1873 by a different architect. St. Anne's has survived more than five centuries almost unchanged, and stands today as the most famous building in Vilnius.

The Gates of Dawn, built in the 16th century, are a fine example of the Gothic and Renaissance architecture of their time, and the 17th century baroque church of Sts. Peter and Paul is adorned with over 2,000 stucco statues and carvings.

The original castle on Gediminas Hill was built of wood in the 14th century and was destroyed by fire in 1419. Rebuilt in brick and surrounded by a stone wall, the castle was badly damaged in the 17th century war with Russia. Of its three towers, only the western tower remains, and it is now a historical museum. Here weapons and armor are displayed along with a model of the castle as it was in the 14th century. Remnants of the defensive wall and the residential palace are scattered around Gediminas Tower, as the remaining tower is called.

Pay a visit to the **KGB Museum**, in the basement of the former District Court Building on Lukiskiu Square. This is where thousands of Lithuanians underwent interrogations before their deportation to Siberia. Their cells have been left almost as they were in those not-so-distant days.

The rest of the day is yours for shopping or packing. Dinner is independent. Overnight at the hotel.

Meals: B

Day 7, Sunday Depart Vilnius

The Baltics exploration comes to an end after breakfast today, with transfers to the airport for international departures.

Meals: B



TOUR PRICING

Overview Daily Itinerary

Day 1, Mon, Jul 24	St. Petersburg • drive to Tallinn, Estonia
Day 2, Tue, Jul 25	Tallinn
Day 3, Wed, Jul 26	Tallinn • drive to Riga, Latvia
Day 4, Thu, Jul 27	Riga
Day 5, Fri, Jul 28	Riga • drive to Vilnius, Lithuania
Day 6, Sat, Jul 29	Vilnius
Day 7, Sun, Jul 30	Depart Vilnius

Land Tour Package Inclusions

- All accommodation based on double occupancy per itinerary with breakfast daily, local service charge and tax (standard hotel check-in/out times apply unless otherwise noted) Tallinn (2 nights); Riga (2 nights); Vilnius (2 nights)
- Private vehicle for group arrival and departure transfers for those arriving and departing on the set arrival and departure days
- One way bus tickets from St. Petersburg, Russia to Tallinn, Estonia (Day 1)
- Transportation per itinerary by coach or minibus depending on group size throughout
- All sightseeing and excursions including entrance fees per itinerary
- Local English speaking guides throughout itinerary
- Meals as listed in itinerary, breakfast daily, 2 lunches
- Bottled/purified water with meals
- Baggage handling at the hotels where available
- Destination preparation information packet

Land Package Price Per Person

\$1,899 per person, double occupancy
\$425 per person single supplement

Price Does Not Include

- International airfare between the U.S. and the start and ending cities; air taxes or fuel surcharges; pre- or post-tour services; gratuities to local guides, drivers; visa or passport fees; medical and trip interruption insurance; evacuation costs; food or beverages not included in group meals; items of a personal nature such as laundry, alcohol, telephone expense, excess baggage fees, photo/video expenses inside museums (where allowed); other items not expressly listed as included.

Important Notes

- Rates are based on receiving the final payment in advance by check or wire transfer; if final payment is by credit card a 3% fee will apply.
- This tour includes a fair amount of walking: three half day walking tours in the capital cities in the historic areas due to limited access of vehicles to the area. You should be able to walk 1-2 miles per day unassisted at a moderate pace (sometimes on uneven/cobblestone surfaces) and stand for long periods on hard surfaces.