

Lithuania & Latvia: The Baltics

Bike Vacation Only

Ancient and modern history unfurl before you as you explore two contrasting countries on this Baltic bike tour. The eclectic capitals of Lithuania and Latvia frame your discoveries, as you venture from the storied Curonian Spit—a UNESCO World Heritage site—and along the Baltic coast into a bucolic countryside. Along the way, you'll probe each distinctive culture as you explore the Amber Museum and an amber craftsman's workshop, delight in colorful Baltic villages, embark on guided walking tours of parks and cities, cruise the canals of Riga's Old Town, and discover the lasting influences of the Soviet era at a former missile site. Special meals including an authentic Lithuanian barbecue and overnights at some of the region's finest accommodations round out this amazing experience.

Cultural Highlights

- Explore the Curonian Spit, the natural boundary between mainland Lithuania and Russia—and a UNESCO World Heritage site.
- Delve into Lithuania's amber industry on a tour of the Amber Museum, housed in a palace and at an amber artisan's workshop.
- Tour the Cold War Museum, located in a former underground missile site.
- Enjoy a canal cruise through the historic heart of Riga.
- Stay in 4- and 5-star hotels, including the only member of "The Leading Hotels of the World" in Latvia.

What to Expect

This tour offers easy terrain on bike paths and roads through both urban and rural areas. You will encounter traffic, especially in urban areas. Some of the bike paths are unpaved, and the terrain can lack shelter from the wind. Our VBT support vehicle is available every day at designated points for those who would like assistance.

Tour Duration: 7 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 10 - 27 miles

Average Cycling Time: 01:00 - 03:30

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

May 61°/45°, Jun 68°/52°, Jul 70°/55°, Aug 68°/55°, Sep 59°/48°, Oct 52°/41°

Average Rainfall (in.)

May 1.7, Jun 2.4, Jul 3.1, Aug 3.1, Sep 3.0, Oct 2.4

DAY 1: VBT Bicycle Vacation begins / Travel to the Baltic Coast / Warm-up ride / Welcome dinner

Meet your local VBT driver at 8:00 a.m. in the lobby of the Grand Hotel Kempinski Vilnius. If you are late, please contact the hotel to advise of any travel delays or changes, and the staff will pass your message on to your VBT trip leaders.

Departing Lithuania's capital of Vilnius, you journey approximately four hours to your hotel in the city of Klaipėda. You arrive at approximately 12:30 p.m. Meet your trip leaders, who provide a quick introduction to the day's schedule. A local guide leads you on a short walking tour to help you get better acquainted with Klaipėda's medieval Old Town, a delightful warren of streets lined with half-timbered houses and Scandinavian-style architecture. Later, join your trip leaders for a safety and bike-fitting session. Your Baltic bike tour officially begins with a warm-up ride that traverses the charms of Klaipėda.

This evening, gather with your trip leaders and travel mates for a welcome reception and dinner.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning:: Warm-up Loop – 15 km (9 miles)

What to Expect:

Cycle from your hotel out of the town center of Klaipėda. Your route traces the river Danes and returns almost the same way back. The bike path may become busy at times with local weekend cyclists.

Cumulative Distance Range: 15 km (9 miles)

Included Meals: Dinner

DAY 2: Curonian Spit National Park / Nida / Curonian Lagoon /

Klaipėda

After breakfast, you cycle to the city's port and embark a ferry for a 10-minute cruise to Curonian Spit National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site. Today's ride follows a scenic designated bike path just a short distance from the Baltic shore.

An easy asphalt bike path spans the entire Curonian Spit, a narrow strip of land separating the Baltic Sea from the Curonian Lagoon. Interestingly, the southern half of the spit belongs to Russia's Kaliningrad Oblast territory, a tiny portion of which lies just south of Lithuania. You cycle through the Nagliai Natural Reserve, renowned for its Grey Dunes. These "Dead Dunes," as they are also known, are far from dead; they are the highest drifting sand dunes in Europe, towering up to 200 feet in some places. Marvel at their heights as you ride among rare plants and pass through four villages excavated from sand. The fragrance of coastal pine forests accompanies you as you cycle into several charming fishing villages.

Your destination is Nida, the spit's best-known little enclave. Pause here to savor the flavors of the Baltic Sea during an included lunch of local specialties. After, you meet a local craftsman and learn how he creates jewelry from Baltic amber. The fossilized tree resin here is among the most prized in the world, and Lithuania is a leading producer. Watch as your skilled artisan-host fashions pieces from the gemstone.

After, you head to a nearby pier to begin your exciting journey back to Klaipėda. Your captain welcomes you aboard his speedboat for an invigorating hour-and-a-half cruise in the Curonian Lagoon. As you trace the length of the spit that you just rode along, take in spectacular views of soaring sand dunes, colorful fishing villages and sea birds taking wing along the coast. The lagoon's tranquil waters are part of a migratory route for millions of birds each year.

This evening, enjoy dinner on your own in one of Klaipėda's numerous restaurants close to your hotel.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning:: Klaipėda to Juodkrante — 25 km (15 miles) | Juodkrante to Nida — 33 km (20 miles)

What to Expect:

Today's ride is an easy one with little elevation gain. You have the choice of varying distances—either to the fishing village of Juodkrante or all the way to Nida. From your hotel, you cycle to the port to ferry across the Curonian Lagoon. Then you follow a designated bike path through the pine forests of Curonian Spit National Park. An asphalt bike path winds through the forest close to the beach before rejoining the

streets that lead you to the village of Nida.

Cumulative Distance Range: 25 – 58 km (15 – 35 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 3: Palanga / Amber Museum / Žemaitija National Park

This morning, you leave Klaipėda behind and cycle north to the seaside resort town of Palanga. With its miles of bike routes, Palanga is a haven for cyclists.

En route, you ride through Birutė Park, one of the most picturesque and best-preserved parks in northern Europe. The park was the vision of Count Feliks Tyszkiewicz, who also built his palace here in 1897. Today, the Count's palace is home to Lithuania's Amber Museum. During an included tour, your guide introduces you to the formation of amber, the extraction process, and the gemstone's historical significance. The museum houses one of the largest collections of unique amber objects, including the Sun Stone—at 6.6 pounds, it is one of the largest pieces of amber in the world.

Afterward, explore Lithuania's prime summer resort town of Palanga, admiring its sand beaches, dunes, and aromatic pine forests. Once a fishing village and source of amber, Palanga was transformed into a health resort during the 19th century. Today, it is an artistic and cultural center. With its numerous international cafés, Palanga's main street, J. Basanaviciaus Street, is a perfect place for lunch on your own.

Later this afternoon, you leave the Baltic coast and travel an hour inland through Lithuania's rural agricultural landscapes. Your destination is the Samogitian Highlands and Žemaitija National Park. The ethnographic region of Samogitia (Žemaitija) boasts a proud cultural heritage dating to the pagan era.

Here, you settle into your lakeside boutique-style resort. Your small group will have almost exclusive access to its four-star amenities, including the soothing spa.

This evening (weather permitting), enjoy a traditional outdoor Lithuanian barbecue dinner on the resort's patio as the sun dips below the horizon.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning:: Klaipėda to Palanga – 25 km (15 miles)

Afternoon:: Palanga to Sventoji – 14 km (8 miles)

What to Expect:

Start your ride out of the city, to avoid cycling on sidewalks and busy streets. The bike routes to Palanga trace designated bike paths, following country roads with some traffic. In Palanga, you ride mostly on designated paved bike paths that pass through coastal pine forests and Birutė Park. The afternoon ride offers a very similar pleasant ride all the way to Sventoji. Today's ride poses very little elevation gain.

Cumulative Distance Range: 28 – 39 km (17 – 23 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 4: Lithuanian Villages / Žemaitija National Park / Žemaičių Kalvarija

After a hearty Lithuanian breakfast, enjoy another lovely morning ride through the Žemaitija region all the way to one of the most important sites for Catholic pilgrimage in Baltics, Žemaičių Kalvarija. Today's scenic route traces country roads to the highlands of the park, passing through some of the most beautiful villages of quaint Baltic architecture you'll see on your tour. Keep your eyes open for the many stork nests that dot this magical landscape.

Soon, you pause with your travel mates for lunch at a manor farm, a delicious and educational experience. Here in the heart of Žemaitija, you learn about Lithuanian cuisine, folklore, and history. With this well-rounded repast and tasty meal, you gain a deep knowledge of Žemaitija National Park from your hosts.

After, you pedal mostly downhill back to your lakeside resort, where the rest of the afternoon is free for you to spend at your leisure. Perhaps you'll take advantage of the spa or row one of the resort's canoes or kayaks out onto the lake.

This evening, gather with your fellow travelers and trip leaders for an included dinner at the resort.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning:: Sala resort to Žemaičių Kalvarija – 18 km (11 miles) | Žemaičių Kalvarija to Plateliai Manor and Sala – 29 km (17 miles)

What to Expect:

Your route today begins on the bike path in front of your resort. After a short stretch, you leave the paved bike path and follow scenic, two-lane country roads, mostly uphill, through small villages and past stunning scenery. With rolling hills and winding roads, the traffic here is slow and minimal. The return follows the same route, offering wonderful descents. As always, there will be a support vehicle for the uphill climbs. This will be the most challenging ride of the tour—but also one of the most rewarding.

Cumulative Distance Range: 18 – 47 km (11 – 28 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 5: Cycle around Lake Plateliai / Cold War Museum / Hill of Crosses

Begin today's ride on Žemaitija National Park's easy lakeside bike path, located right in front of your hotel. The park was established in 1991 to preserve the unique landscape and cultural heritage of this region of northwest Lithuania. Lakes cover more than seven percent of its territory, and you will cycle around the largest of them, Lake Plateliai. Pass through the picturesque village of Plateliai before stopping at one of the village's typical 100-year-old wooden houses with its sloping Samogitian roof. Then cycle a flat, easy route to the Cold War Museum, a former, top-secret, Soviet underground missile site. Here, you will have an included walking tour that introduces you to the Soviet Union's nuclear arms mission during the Cold War era.

On our way back to the resort, gather with your group for an included lunch.

You then set off for the second Baltic country on your tour: Latvia. Breaking up the afternoon's three-hour drive is a stop at the historic pilgrimage site of the Hill of Crosses, a mound in northern Lithuania blanketed with crosses adorned with statues, rosaries, and icons. Dating to at least the mid-19th century, this eerie site has been subjected to many efforts to demolish it—including a 1961 Soviet attempt that destroyed more than 5,000 crosses. Yet, this pilgrimage site has been rebuilt numerous times and even expanded. Today, the exact number of crosses is unknown, but estimates put the count at well over 100,000. In 1993, Pope John Paul II visited the site and declared it a place for hope, peace, love, and sacrifice.

Later in the afternoon, you arrive in Riga, Latvia's scenic capital and Baltic port. Your five-star "Leading Hotel of the World" is ideally set within Riga's Old Town. After settling into your accommodations, join a local guide for a walking tour of the city.

Dinner is on your own tonight at one of the many renowned restaurants in Riga.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning:: Loop Ride around Lake Plateliai – 25 km (15 miles)

What to Expect:

Žemaitija National Park's bike path around Lake Plateliai is paved bike path or bike lane, except for approximately 1.2 miles (2 km) of main road. Today's ride is an easy one with very little elevation gain.

Cumulative Distance Range: 25 km (15 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 6: Riga Canal Cruise / Jūrmala and Gulf of Riga Shore

After breakfast, join a local guide for a short walk through Riga and a cruise on the lovely canal flowing through the town center. Your boat crosses the Daugava River, where you join a bike route to Latvia's Baltic resort town of Jūrmala, an enticing setting of sea and sand. Originally a cluster of fishing villages, this seaside oasis grew over two centuries to embrace an eclectic architectural mix. During the Soviet era, it was a favorite summer get-away for high-level Communist Party officials such as Brezhnev and Khrushchev. Today, it is a resort for the Baltic countries and Russia's rich and famous—as witnessed by its luxurious and very expensive villas. You will have ample time to explore the town's romantic wooden houses, Art Nouveau architecture, and beautiful beaches. After free time in Jūrmala get a ride with us back to Riga.

This evening, join your fellow travelers and trip leaders for a joyous reception and farewell dinner in your hotel's elegant dining room.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning:: Riga to Jūrmala – 25 km (15 miles)

What to Expect:

Today, you follow designated bike paths along sidewalks and paved paths through the seaside forests of

Jūrmala. During the summer months, the bike path can become crowded with cyclists and pedestrians.

Cumulative Distance Range: 25 km (15 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 7: VBT Bicycle Vacation ends

After breakfast, your tour ends. Hotel check-out time is 11:00 a.m.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

National Hotel (Days: 1,2)

Set in the very heart of the city, this four-star cozy boutique hotel, offers the best location in the town and spirit of Klaipeda's past, where hospitality traditions are cherished. Enjoy easy access to the picturesque Old Town or stay onsite and refresh yourself at the bar and restaurant and retire to your comfortable, air-conditioned room with the views of harbor and River Dane. WiFi is available throughout.

SALA Plateliai Resort (Days: 3,4)

Set on the shores of Lake Plateliai, the largest lake in Žemaitija National Park, the four-star SALA Plateliai Resort welcomes you with warm hospitality, exquisite décor, magnificent views, and a spirit of relaxation and rejuvenation. The centerpiece of the hotel is its spa, offering a massage parlor, sauna, Turkish bath, lounge, open-air yoga hall, and whirlpool with beautiful lake views. Savor locally sourced cuisine at the restaurant, and gaze out over the lake from the terrace. Lake swimming, fishing, hiking, and tennis are also available. The hotel is not air conditioned but does offer WiFi throughout.

Grand Palace Hotel (Days: 5,6,7)

Built in 1877 as the Central Bank of Latvia, the Grand Palace Hotel was converted into a five-star superior boutique hotel in the year 2000. Voted Latvia's "Leading Hotel" for many years in the World Travel Awards, this magnificent property offers a place of warmth and comfort, accompanied by attentive and impeccable service. It also offers a prime location: the business, shopping, and sightseeing district of Riga's Old Town. The hotel is the only member of "The Leading Hotels of the World" in Latvia. Dine in elegance in the hotel restaurant, or enjoy a more casual ambiance in the bar or on the summer terrace.

Take advantage of the fitness center, sauna, and steam bath. And relax in the sumptuous comfort of your air-conditioned room. WiFi is available throughout the hotel.