

Lithuania & Latvia: Vilnius to Riga

Tour-Only Itinerary

If you dream of discovering a destination before anybody else, the Baltics are the place to go! On this one-of-a-kind walking vacation, you'll explore many diverse landscapes in Latvia and Lithuania—including the Curonian Spit's unique 60-mile sandbar, the boreal forest and river valley of Gauja National Park, and the vast wetlands at the Great Ķemeri Bog. Without the crowds, you'll find Baltic cities a pleasure to explore. Visit the fascinating Trakai Island Castle beside Lake Galvė and learn to make traditional *kibinai* during a cooking class. In the charming village of Beržoras, you'll make new friends as your leaders invite you into a local home for a lunch. With the late-night sun of high summer lighting your way, it's easy to find the energy to see it all!



Highlights

- Take in sights straight out of the pages of a fairy tale as you visit magnificent Baltic castles and grand, historic palaces, nestled in beautiful settings.
- Follow scenic trails into the national parks of Trakai, Curonian Spit, Žemaitija, Gauja, and Ķemeri.
- Share a traditional lunch with a local family in their lakeside home.
- Pay a visit to an amber museum to learn about the traditions surrounding this treasured gem and craft your own keepsake in the workshop.
- Tour one of Europe's largest markets guided by a Latvian chef, sampling fresh bread, cheese, and more, treating your senses as you explore.

On all Fully-Guided Adventures you can count on ...



Expert local guides to introduce you to the best of your destination.



Gracious accommodations that are a clean, comfortable home away from home.



Off-the-beaten-path places you'd never find on your own.



Experts to handle all the details.



A maximum of 18 fun-loving fellow travelers to share the journey.



Air Packages include plane tickets, airport car service, and pre- and post-tour accommodations.



Delicious, authentic multi-course meals—virtually all are included.

Activity Level

This tour is one of our Guided Walking Adventures, rated easy, with an average of 3 to 6 miles per day. Each day includes slight ascents and descents, including steps at castles and along forest trails. All walks have an elevation gain or loss of less than 500 feet. The terrain varies and may include grassy paths, dirt roads, wooden boardwalks, sand dunes, and cobbled streets, with routes passing through villages, forests, and open farmland. Some days offer opportunities for self-exploration, cultural visits, or free time to relax at your leisure. As this tour spans a large region of Baltic Europe, a few longer bus transfers are included, which are thoughtfully broken up with walks and cultural stops.

DAY 1

Your Country Walkers Vacation Begins

Varnikai to Trakai Castle; 4.5 miles, easy

After breakfast on your own, meet your Country Walkers leaders—one Latvian and one Lithuanian—at 8:45 a.m. in the lobby of your first hotel for a brief orientation. Please be dressed for walking—comfortable, weather-appropriate attire, sturdy footwear, and a daypack (to carry essentials such as rain gear and a water bottle) are required.

Your Baltic adventure begins with a 45-minute drive to the hamlet of Varnikai, where tranquil nature trails wind through peaceful forests and along serene bogs and lakes. Along the way, take in the earthy scent of pine and pause at a memorial of carved wood and inscribed stones marking a Holocaust mass gravesite dating to 1941. The trail leads to Trakai, a lake resort town with a rich and diverse history. Built and preserved by settlers of many nationalities—including Karaims, Tatars, Lithuanians, Russians, Jews, and Poles—Trakai was designated a National Historic Park in 1991. As you approach, you'll cross two footbridges over Lake Galvė to reach the town, and then a final bridge to Trakai Island Castle, a red sandstone fortress that once served as the seat of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

Upon arrival, enjoy a traditional cooking workshop for lunch, where you'll learn to prepare *kibinai*—a savory Karaim pastry similar to an empanada. After lunch, enjoy some free time to explore Trakai at your own pace. You might browse the local shops, tour the castle (optional, at an additional cost), or admire the vaulted brick ceilings of its elegant chapel. As a lake resort, Trakai also invites you to relax with a swim, paddleboat ride, or pontoon cruise.

If time allows, you might stop to stroll the grounds of Užutrakis Manor, a neoclassical estate once home to Lithuanian nobility. Alternatively, you may visit the nearby Hill of Angels, where a gentle trail leads to an open-air display of tall, carved oak angel sculptures.

Back in Vilnius, head out on foot for a welcome dinner featuring traditional Lithuanian cuisine and local libations.

Included Meals: Lunch, Dinner

DAY 2

Kernavė

3-4 miles, easy with moderate options. Travel to Klaipėda. City tour, 1-2 miles

At breakfast this morning, be sure to try some of the local honey. Lithuania has a long tradition of beekeeping and honey-making that dates back to medieval times. The honeybee is not only a respected creature here, but also a national symbol of friendship. After breakfast, depart Vilnius for Kernavė, the medieval capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

Today's walk highlights some of Lithuania's 800 hillforts, or *piliakalniai*, which are central to the nation's history and identity. Ancient tribes constructed defensive walls along the contours of these oval, table-top hills to maximize protection. Within the earth of these mounds, archaeologists have discovered remains of settlements and burials, many dating to the Bronze Age. Some hillforts are also associated with historic conflicts against the Teutonic Knights. Kernavė's archaeological site is particularly notable for its rare concentration of five hillforts. Several are accessible by stairway, and you'll have the opportunity to explore a few and enjoy sweeping views of the Neris River.

Later, visit the idyllic country homestead of Vida and Simas. Your gracious hosts will prepare a hearty lunch using fresh, seasonal ingredients from their heritage-certified, century-old gardens. Be sure to sample their homemade herbal teas made from rose, lavender, and spring water.

This afternoon, shuttle approximately two hours to the port city of Klaipėda, once an important member of the Hanseatic League. During the drive, keep an eye out for Lithuania's national bird—the white stork. In spring and summer, these striking birds migrate from Africa to nest atop buildings, trees, and utility poles. You may also spot them foraging in open farmlands.

Upon arrival at your hotel, you may join your leader for a brief walking tour. Dinner is on your own this evening—choose from one of the many nearby restaurants or dine at your hotel.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 3

Curonian Spit National Park

Hill of Witches; 2-3 miles, easy. Nagliai Nature Reserve; 1.5 miles, easy

Set out this morning on a walk to the pedestrian ferry dock, where you embark on a short crossing to the picturesque Curonian Spit. This 60-mile stretch of sand dunes separates the Curonian Lagoon from the Baltic Sea and links Lithuania with Russia's Kaliningrad Oblast. The lagoon's calm waters lie along a major migration route for millions of birds each year. As you explore today, watch the skies for great cormorants and grey herons, two of the many majestic species that nest on the spit.

From the Bay of Amber—where straw sculptures by local artists adorn the coastline—you follow the marshy shoreline through the tiny resort town of Juodkrantė. Once a fishing village in Old Prussia, Juodkrantė is home to the Hill of Witches, where 80 intricately carved wooden sculptures depict characters from Lithuanian folklore and mythology.

Later, walk the boardwalks of Nagliai Nature Reserve through scenic grey dunes, sculpted over centuries by strong coastal winds. As you stroll, inhale the bracing Baltic air, rich with the scent of the surrounding pine forests. This afternoon, enjoy a seaside picnic lunch featuring smoked fish and other regional specialties.

Continue on to Nida and visit a local amber gallery, where a craftsman introduces you to the unique qualities of this prized Baltic gem. After viewing the museum's collection of 434 amber amulets, try your hand at crafting your own while learning about the stone's folklore and history.

You'll then have time to explore independently. Perhaps visit the Fisherman's Homestead or the summer residence of author Thomas Mann. Or hike to the towering Parnidis sand dune, crowned by a 45-foot sundial weighing 36 tons. If time allows on the return to the ferry, you may enjoy a swim in the Baltic Sea.

Back at the hotel, you may choose to relax, visit the Maritime Museum at Fort Wilhelm, or stop by the 235-year-old Švyturys Brewery, home to Lithuania's most popular beer. Dinner is on your own this evening.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 4

Žemaitija National Park

Šeirė trail and Lake Plateliai; 4-5 miles, easy. Hill of Crosses; 1 mile, easy. Travel to Latvia

Depart Klaipėda this morning and drive to Žemaitija National Park in the Samogitian Highlands. Samogitia (Žemaitija) is a culturally distinct region with a proud heritage dating back to the pagan era. Established in 1991, Žemaitija National Park protects this unique landscape in northwest Lithuania, where lakes cover more than seven percent of the terrain. This scenic region—said to be the last place in Europe to adopt Christianity—offers a window into Lithuania’s ancient past.

Your walk begins on the Šeirė Trail, a peaceful woodland path that leads to the shores of Lake Plateliai. Underwater archaeologists have discovered stones arranged in a circular pattern here, suggesting that the lake’s islands were once larger and more numerous. From this historic lake, follow a route through several villages that evoke the simplicity and charm of old Lithuanian life.

In the nearby town of Plungė, enjoy a special visit with locals who welcome you into their home for lunch. Foraged berries and mushrooms—staples of the Lithuanian table for generations—are likely to be featured, along with a hearty feast of meats, vegetables, freshly baked breads, and just-churned butter. You might even sample a national favorite: *žemaičių blynai*, or Samogitian pancakes. Meals are served on earthenware dishes and eaten the traditional way—with wooden spoons—in keeping with the old Lithuanian proverb, “One can manage without gold, but not without bread.”

This afternoon, continue to the Hill of Crosses, one of Lithuania’s most poignant pilgrimage sites. Covered in crosses, statues, rosaries, and icons, this sacred hillside dates to the mid-1800s. Despite repeated efforts to destroy it—including the Soviet demolition of 5,000 crosses in 1961—the site has endured and now holds more than 100,000 symbols of devotion. In 1993, Pope John Paul II visited and described it as a place of hope, peace, love, and sacrifice.

Your final destination today is the Zemgale region of southern Latvia. As you journey north, pass through gently rolling fields of wheat and bright yellow rapeseed flowers en route to your elegant manor-house hotel, where you’ll enjoy dinner this evening.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 5

Latvian Countryside

Rundāle Palace; 2-4 miles, easy

This morning, walk directly from your manor house to the grand Rundāle Palace, a sprawling, butter-hued Baroque masterpiece. Built in the 18th century for the Dukes of Courland, the palace now serves as a museum and a cherished symbol of Latvian heritage. Begin your visit with a guided tour of the opulent interiors, admiring the richly decorated rooms. Afterwards, enjoy time to explore the palace grounds at your own pace and have lunch at one of the on-site cafés. For those interested, an optional golf cart tour of the extensive formal gardens is available for an additional fee (approximately 6 euros, cash only).

Return to your manor house for a free afternoon. Perhaps treat yourself to a visit to the expansive spa, rent a bicycle or boat (at your own expense), or explore the on-site Sugar Beet Museum, located in the historic Great Servants' House.

This evening, enjoy another delicious meal at your hotel. Thanks to Latvia's proximity to the sea and abundance of rivers, fresh fish is always featured on the menu, often paired with hearty dark rye bread—a Baltic staple—and seasonal specialties like beet or nettle soup. For dessert, you might try *rupjmaizes kārtojums*, a beloved Latvian treat layered with jam, whipped cream, and dark rye breadcrumbs, served parfait-style.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 6

Ķemeri National Park

Ķemeri Great Bog walk; 1.5-3 miles, easy. Jūrmala; 1-2 miles, easy. Independent exploration of Riga

After breakfast, journey to Ķemeri National Park. Millennia ago, this scenic region was submerged beneath the Baltic Sea. Today, it is a vast wetland ecosystem supporting thousands of plant and animal species—including the white wagtail, Latvia's national bird, easily recognized by its striking black, white, and gray plumage. Ķemeri's lakes, mires, marshes, and bogs are among the park's most distinctive

features, and you'll witness their tranquil beauty up close during a walk through the Great Ķemeri Bog. Choose from two loop trails along a network of raised boardwalks; the longer route includes a popular observation platform that offers panoramic views. As you stroll, admire the delicate mosses, colorful orchids, stunted pine trees, wild rosemary, and blueberries. With luck, you may also spot a stork or even an elusive otter.

After a rewarding morning, continue to the charming seaside town of Jūrmala, where you'll explore Jomas Street—its oldest pedestrian avenue—lined with vibrant shops, fruit stands, and local eateries. Here, pause for lunch on your own and perhaps savor fresh seafood from the nearby Gulf of Riga.

Later, travel to Riga, Latvia's cosmopolitan capital, where cobbled lanes wind past gingerbread-trimmed houses and some of Europe's most remarkable Art Nouveau architecture. This afternoon and evening are yours to enjoy at leisure. You might wander the Riga Craft Road, a self-guided walking route featuring artisan shops and studios, or join your leader for an orientation tour of the Old Town. If time permits, consider visiting the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia or catching a performance at the Latvian National Opera House. Dinner is on your own—your leader will be happy to recommend spots for enjoying the city's innovative cuisine and local craft beers.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 7

Gauja National Park

Riga Central Market tour, 1.5 miles, easy. Three Castles Walk; 2.5 – 3.5 miles, easy to moderate

Early risers may join an optional outing to Riga Central Market, one of the largest in Europe. This impressive emporium of produce, flowers, and countless other goods is housed in five former Zeppelin hangars—remarkable structures of which only nine remain worldwide. You'll be guided by a celebrated Latvian chef, whose strong local connections allow them to hop behind food counters and offer you samples of the freshest bread, smoked meats, and other delicacies. You'll also help gather picnic provisions for later in the day.

Afterward, travel approximately one hour to Gauja National Park for your "Three Castles Walk."

Begin at the old and new Sigulda Castles, the latter a neo-Gothic stone fortress adorned with elegant details. You may wish to ascend the towers for sweeping views (entrance at your own cost), browse artisan shops offering leather goods, silver jewelry, pottery, and woodwork, or enjoy a coffee in the garden. Your hike begins with a stroll through Walking Stick Park, named for Sigulda's 200-year-old tradition of carving wooden walking sticks.

Next, board a cable car for a thrilling ride across the Gauja River. Enjoy spectacular views of the primeval valley and the three castles of Sigulda, Krimulda, and Turaida—including Krimulda Manor and a winding bobsled track.

Disembark at the remains of Krimulda Castle and follow a serpentine forest path through Tautas Park. Originally built as a carriage road, its gentle switchbacks made it easier for horses to ascend. Along the way, stop at Gutman's Cave, the largest cave in the Baltics and the legendary setting of the tragic tale of the Rose of Turaida. Deceived by a malevolent suitor, the heroine meets her fate here, while her fiancé is wrongly accused of her murder. Pause to reflect on this powerful story of love and loss before gathering for a scenic picnic lunch surrounded by birch trees, ponds, wildflowers, footbridges, and dragonflies.

Continue your walk to Turaida through forest paths lined with oak, ash, and linden trees, and bordered by ferns and lily of the valley. For those who prefer to skip this moderately rated trail, our shuttle provides direct access to the castle and extra time to explore.

Your day concludes at Turaida Castle's Folk Song Hill, a moving tribute to Latvia's cultural resilience. This powerful blend of sculpture and nature honors the Singing Revolution, when thousands of voices united in song to peacefully resist Soviet rule. Traditional folk songs became symbols of identity, culture, and freedom for the Baltic nations.

Afterward, return to Riga and celebrate your journey with a festive farewell dinner at one of the city's top restaurants. Enjoy a multi-course tasting menu emphasizing fresh, seasonal, and locally sourced ingredients. To cap off the evening, the adventurous might raise a glass of Black Balzām, Latvia's famed 45-proof herbal liqueur once praised by Goethe as "the elixir of life." This traditional toast offers a fitting close to your unforgettable exploration of Latvia and Lithuania—from vibrant cities to tranquil countryside and stunning coastline.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 8

Your Country Walkers Vacation Ends

Uz redzēšanos! Your tour concludes after an included breakfast. Enjoy more time exploring Riga at your leisure or prepare for your onward travels.

Included Meals: Breakfast

What's Included

	Air Package	Tour Only
Exceptional boutique accommodations	✓	✓
16 on-tour meals: 7 breakfasts, 5 lunches, 4 dinners	✓	✓
Local leaders with you throughout tour	✓	✓
Local wine and/or beer with dinner	✓	✓
Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary	✓	✓
Telescopic walking sticks provided on tour	✓	✓
Roundtrip airfare	✓	
One extra night in Vilnius and one extra night in Riga	✓	
Airport arrival and departure transportation	✓	
Pre- and post-tour breakfast	✓	
Business class upgrades available	✓	