



Baltic Capitals and St. Petersburg

September 7-22, 2023

Few regions possess a more turbulent history than Russia and the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. After countless wars, occupations—even a “singing” revolution—these countries have re-emerged to reveal their splendor to the world. You’ll immerse yourself in these destinations through NEW features, such as a visit to the Cold War museum coupled with a conversation about that tumultuous time, exploring the grounds where the “Singing Revolution” took place, and admiring Latvia’s signature architectural style at the Art Nouveau Museum. Plus, be among the first of our travelers to discover an Estonian village, a new Grand Circle Foundation site, where you’ll make cross-cultural connections with the local residents during A Day in the Life experience.

When you travel to the Baltic capitals in a small group with us, you’ll also discover the turrets, spires, and winding cobbled streets of Vilnius, Riga, and Tallinn—three capitals that preserved the timeless elegance of their Old Towns. And you’ll cast your eyes to Mother Russia as you discover the wonders of St. Petersburg, the glorious city on the Neva, founded by Peter the Great early in the 18th century as a showcase for Russia’s imperial might. Travel to the Baltic capitals and take in the rich sweep of history, unique cultures, and natural beauty of one of Europe’s long-buried treasures on this adventure, which 91% of our travelers rated excellent.

Thanks to the small group size—just 8-16 travelers, (with an average of 13)—and our expert Trip Experience Leaders, we’ll truly get to know the culture and people of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Russia. And, whenever you’d like, you have the freedom to explore more of these Baltic states on your own: Break off from the group for independent discoveries—like The Faberge Museum in St. Petersburg or the MO Modern Art Museum in Vilnius—during your free time.

REMINDER: Space for this special journey is available on a first-come, first-serve basis and is truly limited. To reserve your place today, please call Curtis Whitaker at **(269) 209-5889**. If you haven’t experienced a Scott & Curtis travel adventure before, feel free to ask questions or meet with our staff.



Snapshot Itinerary: Baltic Capitals and St. Petersburg 2023

Travel Dates: *September 7-22, 2023*

Day 1 – Depart U.S. on an overnight flight to Vilnius, Lithuania

Day 2 – Arrive in Vilnius, Lithuania

Day 3 – Explore Vilnius

Day 4 – Vilnius • Excursion to Trakai • Experience Karai Culture • KGB Museum Visit

Day 5 – Rumsiskes Open-Air Museum • Travel to Klaipeda

Day 6 – Klaipeda • Curonian Spit • Hill of Witches

Day 7 – Klaipeda • Travel to Riga, Latvia

Day 8 – Explore Riga • Home-Hosted Dinner

Day 9 – Riga • Controversial Topic: The impacts of Latvia’s Russian Non-citizen Policy with Svetlana Markova • Optional Tour to Rundale Palace

Day 10 – Travel to Tallinn, Estonia • Song Festival Grounds Visit

Day 11 – Tallinn • Controversial Topic: The Contentious Relationship Between Estonia & Russia with Anelli Kaar

Day 12 – Tallinn • A Day in the Life of a Kose Village • Grand Circle Foundation Visit: Harmi Village School

Day 13 – Tallinn • Travel to St. Petersburg, Russia

Day 14 – St. Petersburg • Controversial Topic: Growing Threats to Civil liberties in Russia with Olga and Irina • Hermitage Museum • Optional Russian Ballet Performance or Optional Russian Folk Show

Day 15 – St. Petersburg • Explore Peterhof Palace

Day 16 – Return to U.S.



COVID-19 UPDATE: Your health and safety is our #1 priority. In partnership with our travel providers Great Circle Travel and OAT, we are monitoring the COVID-19 situation daily, including how it may impact future travel plans. If any changes are made, we will do our best to alert you as soon as possible. If you have questions in the meantime, please call Curtis Whitaker during regular business hours at **(269) 209-5889**. Thank you!





Detailed Itinerary: Baltic Capitals and St. Petersburg 2023

Day 1 – Depart U.S. on an overnight flight to Vilnius, Lithuania.

Day 2 – Arrive in Vilnius, Lithuania

Afternoon: After an overnight flight, we'll arrive at the Vilnius airport, where an O.A.T. representative will greet you and help you transfer 20 minutes to your hotel where we'll meet travelers from the pre-trip extensions to Poland: Krakow, Auschwitz & Warsaw and New! Copenhagen & Odense: Denmark's Cultural Capitals. Depending on where you stay, the hotel may be located in the center of the Lithuanian capital city and blend medieval styling with modern comfort. If you venture beyond the serene courtyard, it's only a 5-minute walk to the bustling city center. Rooms typically include air conditioning, cable TV, minibar, and Wireless Internet.

Once checked into the hotel, there is time to rest before a 30-minute discovery walk with our Trip Experience Leader around 5pm in the Uzupis neighborhood. Known for its exuberant Bohemian culture, this section of the city is dotted with colorful street art and lined with artists' studios and hip eateries. The community is a self-proclaimed independent republic, even boasting its own constitution.

Dinner: On your own this evening. Be sure to ask your Trip Experience Leader for dining recommendations in the area. Perhaps you'll seek out traditional dishes such as cepelinai, Lithuania's national dish—large potato dumplings filled with pork in a sour cream sauce.

Evening: On your own—you are free to explore more of the area or retire to your room to rest after your flight.

Freedom to Explore: During your three days in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, you have the freedom to explore this vibrant city—known for its medieval architecture—on your own during your free time. Below are a few recommended options for independent explorations:

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Visit The Workshop and Gallery “Amatu gildija:” Observe artists, such as woodcarvers and potters, as they produce unique ceramic items by using a traditional technique in this hidden gem located below street level. The gallery displays handicrafts made of ceramics, wood, and pottery. In addition to watching and learning about the production process, you’ll have the opportunity to interact with the artists, ask them any questions you may have, and purchase some of their works of art. Plan to spend between 20-45 minutes at the gallery and workshop, depending on your level of interest in ceramic production.

How to get there: A 15- to 20-minute walk.

Hours: 11am-7pm, Monday-Saturday.

Cost: Free.

Explore art at the MO Modern Art Museum: This extensive collection of over 5,000 works of art tells the history of Lithuania from the 1950s to the present day. In addition to the permanent works, the museum regularly hosts temporary exhibitions, as well. Before it was an art museum, a cinema used to occupy this spot during the Soviet era. When it was knocked down, the citizens of Vilnius voiced their desire for a cultural landmark to replace it, rather than a commercial

one. Designed by American architect Daniel Libeskind, the construction was funded by a Lithuanian family, a wealthy, art-loving family that decided to share their collection with the people. A visit to the museum provides comprehensive background on Lithuanian art, as well as a reprieve from the hustle and bustle of the city. Besides art, the museum contains a café, bookstore, roof terrace, and an auditorium for educational talks and presentations. Plan to spend between 1-1.5 hours here during your visit.

How to get there: A 20- to 25-minute walk.

Hours: 10am-8pm, Saturday-Thursday; 10am-10pm, Friday.

Cost: About \$8 USD.

Important Travel Notes:

- For your comfort and safety, we recommend this tour for individuals in good physical condition. If you have difficulty walking, this may be a difficult trip for you.
- We reserve the right to cancel this tour due to insufficient registration. Full refund will be given if tour is canceled due to insufficient registration.
- If traveling alone, we will match you up with a roommate (this tour is double occupancy only).
- Please read the “What to Expect” box on the next page carefully. If you have further questions, call Curtis Whitaker at **(269) 209-5889**.

Visit the remaining part of the Upper Castle in Vilnius at Gediminas’ Tower: Named after the Grand Duke of Lithuania, this tower acts as a symbol of the city and appears in a number of Lithuanian folk songs and legends. Situated upon a hill, it is one of the oldest structures in Vilnius, formerly used as defense construction during a number of wars in the Middle Ages. Today, the tower grants visitors magnificent

views, as well as historical perspective on the city. Access the tower by funicular, or if you'd enjoy a walk, the tower is accessible by foot along a cobblestone road. Plan to spend approximately 1 hour here during your visit.

How to get there: A 20- to 25-minute walk.

Hours: 10am-7pm, daily.

Cost: About \$8 USD.

Day 3 – Explore Vilnius

Breakfast: Served buffet-style at the hotel beginning at 7am, featuring European-style cuisine.

Morning: At about 9am, our Trip Experience Leader will lead a Welcome Briefing at the hotel, during which we will introduce ourselves and review our itinerary in more detail (including any changes that may need to occur). Our group will also review logistics, safety and emergency procedures, and answer any questions we may have.

Then, at around 10am, we'll embark on a walking tour of the Lithuanian capital. Although the exact location of its original capital city has been lost to time, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was the first established state in this region. Vilnius distinguished itself as an important cultural center when Vilnius University opened in 1579, immediately attracting students from as far away as Sweden and Hungary. The 20th century proved a turbulent time for the Baltic city, but its historic buildings survived.

We begin our exploration by walking the cobbled streets of the city's compact Old Town to admire the carefully restored Baroque buildings and medieval charm that earned it UNESCO World Heritage status. We'll also explore the Jewish Ghetto, President's Palace area and linked courtyards of Vilnius University, followed by a 30-minute discussion with a local resident about younger generations emigrating from Lithuania to the other European Union countries. We'll have the opportunity to ask this person about what drives these youths to leave Lithuania and if they ever plan to return.

Lunch: Around 1pm in a local tavern.

Afternoon: After lunch, we'll have a choice of walking 15 minutes back to the hotel or perhaps exploring more of the Old Town. Alternatively, you may wish to join a 1-hour discovery walk through Uzupis, led by your Trip Experience Leader, who will help facilitate interactions and discussions with locals as you explore the hidden streets of the old town.

Dinner: Around 6:30pm, we'll enjoy a Welcome Dinner at the hotel or local restaurant, featuring a selection of local and international dishes.

What to Expect: Baltic Capitals and St. Petersburg 2023

■ **Physical Requirements:** Pacing is 5 locations in 15 days. Not appropriate for travelers using wheelchairs or other mobility aids. You should be able to walk 3-5 miles unassisted over the course of each day, and over cobblestone city streets in Vilnius, Riga, Tallinn, and participate in 6-8 hours of daily physical activity. We reserve the right for Trip Experience Leaders to restrict participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home, if their limitations impact the group's experience.

■ **Transportation:** Travel over city streets and paved roads. Go for several walking tours along cobblestone streets in Vilnius, Riga, and Tallinn, which includes going up and down many stairs; an uphill hike on the Curonian Spit. Travel by 30-passenger air-conditioned coach; tram; train; small boat; and ferry.

■ **Accommodations & Facilities:** Hotels feature a variety of Western-style amenities and personal services. All accommodations feature private baths.

■ **Climate:** Due to the varied geography of the destinations, you will experience a wide range of temperatures and weather conditions. To learn more about what to expect in each area, please visit: https://www.oattravel.com/trips/land-adventures/europe/the-baltic-capitals-and-st-petersburg/2021/resources/weatherandclimate?icid=prnavsb_weatherandclimate.

Passport & Visa Information

U.S. citizens will need a visa (or visas) for this trip. In addition, there may be other entry requirements that also need to be met. For your convenience, O.A.T. has created a quick reference list, organized by country, which is available on the following web page: https://www.oattravel.com/-/media/flipbooks-pdf/oat-land-2023/2023_tpg_blt.pdf. Please see pages 60-61 for specific information on passport and visa requirements.

Vaccinations Information

Our travel partner GCT requires a valid Covid-19 vaccination **plus** booster shot for all travelers. For other vaccinations that **may** be recommended for this trip, please visit the CDC's "Traveler's Health" website at www.cdc.gov/travel.



Evening: The remainder of your night is free—you have time to gather with fellow travelers at the hotel bar, take an evening stroll, or take advantage of the hotel’s amenities.

Day 4 – Vilnius • Excursion to Trakai • Experience Karai Culture • KGB Museum Visit

Activity Note: Visiting the KGB Museum is often an emotional experience for visitors.

Breakfast: Served buffet-style at the hotel starting at 7am, featuring local and international cuisine.

Morning: Around 9am, a local expert will join us at the hotel, likely a journalist or university lecturer, to discuss Lithuania’s past, present, and struggle for independence.

At 10am, we’ll take a brief journey outside of Vilnius to Trakai, considered the de facto medieval Lithuanian capital because Duke Vytautas the Great preferred the natural landscape punctuated by azure lakes and lush islands over Vilnius. First, we take a 45-minute bus ride, then a 20-minute boat ride over Lake Galve to arrive at Trakai Island Castle. Trakai Castle is a red brick, fairytale fortress built by Vytautas and his father in the early 15th century to fend off German knights. At 11:30am, hear a short introduction in the courtyard castle before

we’ll take 30 minutes to explore on our own, or stay with our local guide to learn more, if you prefer.

After our visit, we’ll take a walk along the lake shore, across a bridge, and back to the mainland for further discoveries. Around 12:30pm, we’ll venture to the Karai community tavern to meet with local Karaims who belong to the oldest Turkish tribe—Kipchaks. This ethnic group was brought from Crimea to Trakai in the 14th century to act as bodyguards for the castle. There are only 241 people remaining in this indigenous group today.

Lunch: Around 12:30pm, our small group will enjoy a Karai cooking demonstration led by a local chef, after which we’ll try our hand at traditional Karaite specialties, such as kibinai (savory meat pastries), before enjoying the fruits of our labor for lunch. This is a wonderful opportunity to learn about a community leader working hard to preserve a waning local culture, as well as to learn new cooking techniques. Of course, the discussion is not limited to food—you’re free to inquire about other aspects of local culture, such as religion as well as the quality of life for the Karaim community.

Afternoon: Around 2pm, we’ll walk 15 minutes to reach our bus, stopping outside a Karai school and house of prayer, before departing for Vilnius. We’ll then drive 45

minutes in the direction of Vilnius to visit the Museum of Genocide Victims—commonly called the “KGB Museum” because it occupies the former KGB headquarters. For much of the 20th century, Vilnius was under communist Soviet occupation, both before and after a three-year Nazi occupation during World War II. While Lithuania was a state of the USSR, anti-Soviet resistance gained power through a dissident movement, which had the support of the church, and the people finally elected a government in 1990 that declared Lithuanian independence. We’ll view exhibits that serve as a memorial to the victims of the atrocities that took place here, including a walk through the prison where the KGB held dissidents and freedom fighters.

Around 4:15pm, we’ll have the option of continuing to explore in the Old Town or heading back to the hotel.

Dinner: On your own—your Trip Experience Leader can provide recommendations on the best restaurants and which traditional dishes you should try. One local dish you may want to seek out is bulviniai blynai, potato pancakes fried with eggs and onions.

Evening: The evening is free for your own discoveries. Perhaps you’d like to squeeze in a visit to the MO Modern Art Museum to view a collection of 5,000 major Lithuanian art works from the 1950s until today.

Day 5 – Rumsiskes Open-Air Museum • Travel to Klaipeda

DAY 5

Breakfast: Served buffet-style at the hotel, starting at 7am, featuring European-style cuisine.

Morning: Around 8:30am, we will check out of our hotel and board our bus for our 3-hour drive to Klaipeda. To break up our journey, we’ll stop along the way at roughly 9:45am at Rumsiskes to explore an insightful open-air ethnographic museum where the expertise of our local guide is sure to enrich our understanding of regional history and culture. We’ll walk through a collection of 18th- and 19th-century rural dwellings and farmsteads, gaining insights into the history, lifestyles, and character of Lithuania’s four main regions. Around 11:30am, we’ll take a short bus ride to visit an artisan shop and a dwelling used by Lithuanians who were deported to Siberia by the communists, referred to as a yurta. Around 12:30pm, we’ll depart Rumsiskes and continue via bus toward Klaipeda.

Lunch: At a local tavern around 1:45pm, en route to Klaipeda. Here, we’ll meet with workers who will welcome us to this traditional eatery and tell us about their life and culture.

Afternoon: Around 2pm, we’ll hit the road for the final 2-hour stretch of our journey. Upon our arrival in Klaipeda—Lithuania’s oldest city—we’ll check into our hotel, around 4pm.

Depending on the hotel we’re staying at, the hotel may feature an on-site bar and restaurant. The air-conditioned rooms typically have a safe, cable TV, Wireless Internet, minibar, and a private bath. Around 4pm, enjoy free time until dinner this evening. Perhaps you want to settle into the hotel, or stretch a bit from the drive with a walk around the vicinity of your hotel.

Dinner: At a local restaurant, around 6:30pm, featuring a selection of local and international cuisine.

Evening: You have the rest of the evening on your own. You may choose to join your fellow travelers at the bar where you can grab a cocktail and reminisce about your discoveries thus far. Or, you may retire to your room to get some sleep.

Freedom to Explore: During your two days in Klaipeda, you have the freedom to explore this coastal city on your own during your free time. Below are a few recommended options for independent explorations:

Take a stroll through the Botanical Gardens: Located in the northern section of Klaipeda, walk through 25 acres of rock gardens, plants, and tree collections, and learn about Lithuania’s flora, as well as flora from every continent (the only place in Western Lithuania where you can do so). The garden is situated in the valley of the Dane River. It was the site of the first meeting between a Prussian and a Russian monarch in 1802, leading to the founding of this great park to remember the historic moment in 1993. Discover over 3,500 species of plants, from coniferous woody, deciduous woody, herbaceous ornamental, roses, herbs, medicinal plants, and more. The gardens are also a wonderful place for people-watching and mingling with locals who bring their families here to enjoy the flora, as well as to picnic. Plan to spend approximately 2 hours here.

How to get there: A 10- to 15-minute taxi ride, about \$7 USD one way.

Hours: 8am-8pm, daily.

Cost: About \$2 USD.

Visit the Amber Queen Museum: Admire rare pieces of amber from the Baltics and all around the world in this large exhibition. Learn about amber, its origin, and importance, and bring a unique piece home with you, such as antique amber pipes and wares. One of the most famous Lithuanian legends is that of Jurate, a sea god-

dess, and Kastytis, a local fisherman. It's said that Jurate lived under the Baltic Sea in a castle constructed of amber, and upon falling in love with Kastysis, her punishment by Thunder God Perkunas was the destruction of the castle. According to legend, the amber ramparts that wash ashore after a storm belonged to her castle. Plan to spend approximately 30 minutes here.

How to get there: A 5-minute walk.

Hours: 10am-7pm, Monday-Saturday; 10am-4pm, Sunday.

Cost: About \$6 USD.

Experience the architectural marvel of the National Library of Latvia: Also known as Castle of Light, this prominent cultural institution formed in 1919 after the independent Republic of Latvia was officially declared. The impressive, sloping edifice that stands today, however, was designed in 2014 by renowned Latvian-American architect Gunnar Birkets. The striking exterior was intended to resemble a mountain, which according to Latvian folklore, symbolizes the height of achievement. Housing everything from an information center to event venues and millions of artifacts, the library serves as a cultural hub and meeting place for both locals and visitors alike. Inside, you'll also find a restaurant, café, complimentary Wireless Internet, and a sweeping view of the Old Town. How to get there: A 10-minute taxi ride (about \$10 USD). Hours: 9am-8pm, Monday-Friday; 10am-5pm, Saturday-

Sunday.

Cost: Free.

Day 6 – Klaipeda • Curonian Spit • Hill of Witches

Breakfast: Served buffet-style at the hotel starting at 7am, featuring European-style cuisine.

Morning: Around 8:30am, we'll depart Klaipeda for a short bus ride to the ferry terminal, where we'll catch a 10-minute ferry ride at 9am headed to the Curonian Peninsula. Klaipeda is the gateway to a coastal stretch known as the Curonian Spit, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Shared by both Russia and Lithuania, this area is separated by a protected lagoon on one side and exposed to the harsh Baltic Sea on the other. After disembarking the ferry, we'll take a 15-minute bus ride to the Curonian Spit, boasting 60 miles of curving coastline.

This striking stretch of land has undergone quite a transformation throughout the last five centuries. Once a settlement of a now nearly extinct Baltic ethnic group, the Kursenieki, the health of this natural environment quickly began declining due to significant human impacts, namely deforestation. As a result of this destruction, the miles of life-giving forests eventually gave way to lifeless dunes, which could no longer sustain the Kursnieki, and as a result, swallowed over a dozen villages. Today, thanks to a reforestation project aimed at stabilizing the



dunes, the Curonian Spit has made a remarkable comeback, making it a prime location for outdoor activities such as bird watching.

Around 9:30am, we will begin a search along the beaches for amber—known as Baltic gold—that washes up during storms. Locals combing the beach for these precious stones is a common sight, and with the help of our Trip Experience Leader, we'll try our luck in finding amber for approximately 30 minutes.

Around 10:15am, we will drive for 30 minutes and come face-to-face with Lithuanian legends as we hike to the "Hill of Witches," an outdoor sculpture gallery located on a forested sand dune. We'll journey through a dense, lush path lined with more than 80 unique wooden sculptures based on mythological figures, including the dramatic Queen of Serpents statue, goblins, and devils for approximately 1.5 hours. We can tap into our local Trip Experience Leader's expertise for richer insights into the origins of many of these fascinating Lithuanian legends along the way.

Around 12:15pm, we'll depart for a 30 minute drive to lunch.

Lunch: Around 12:45pm in the private tavern of a local family.

Afternoon: Around 1:45pm, we will walk 15 minutes to an amber workshop and gallery located in Nida. The Baltic region contains the largest deposit of natural amber in the world, dating back approximately 44 million years. This industry is a major source of income for the area. Here, we'll enjoy a hands-on masterclass and demonstration given by an artisan, where we'll learn about the many uses for this beautiful fossil resin—and even get to take home our own amber necklace. We'll also sample a special vodka produced with amber before heading back to the bus around 3pm and then driving a little over an hour to the ferry terminal. Our short ferry ride will depart around 4:30pm, putting us back at the hotel around 4:45pm, depending on weather and traffic conditions.

Dinner: On your own—your Trip Experience Leader can provide recommendations on the best locales for whatever your preferences are. One beloved local dish you may want to seek out is vėdarai (Lithuanian potato sausage), a natural casing filled with grated potatoes and lard, fried until golden brown. Occasionally sausages will also contain barley grits for added sustenance and heartiness.

Evening: You're free to continue your discoveries as you'd like. If you're feeling celebratory, you may want

What's Included in the Package

- International round-trip airfare from Detroit Metro Airport to and from Europe.
- Airport transfers, government taxes, fees, and airline fuel surcharges unless you choose to make your own air arrangements
- Accommodations for 14 nights.
- 32 meals: 14 breakfasts, 10 lunches, and 8 dinners (including 1 Home-Hosted Dinner).
- 19 small group activities.
- Explore in a small group of 8-16 travelers (average group size of 13).
- Exclusive services of a local O.A.T. Trip Leader.
- Gratuities for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters.
- All land transportation.



to find raguolis (also referred to as sakotis), a traditional Lithuanian cake formed into a hollow ring and covered with what looks like horns created from dripping batter as the cake rotates on a machine that functions similarly to a spit cooker.

Day 7 – Klaipeda • Travel to Riga, Latvia

Activity Note: Today's drive to Riga is a little over 4 hours total.

Breakfast: Served buffet-style at the hotel starting at 7am, featuring European-style cuisine.

Morning: We will depart Klaipeda around 9am and drive towards Latvia, a more than 4-hour drive in total. We'll break up our journey with stops along the way, first to the Cold War museum at around 10am for a tour led by our Trip Experience Leader, a recently-added feature. Located inside a former Soviet bunker that was once top secret, the museum boasts a collection of authentic machinery and propaganda posters from the Cold War era as well as a well-preserved nuclear missile shaft. Around 11:15am, we'll drive to a local restaurant for lunch.

Lunch: Around 12:45pm at a local restaurant, featuring traditional Latvian cuisine.

Afternoon: After lunch, we'll depart around 2pm for our 15-minute drive to the Hill of Crosses. This grassy double hillock is blanketed by several thousand crosses and is considered a historically significant site for Lithuanian Catholics. Our Trip Experience Leader will walk us through the legacy of this religious group in the region before we set out again around 2:45pm for our final stretch toward Riga, the Latvian capital.

After a roughly 2-hour and 15-minute bus ride, we will check into our hotel around 5pm. Depending on where we stay, typical rooms are air-conditioned and include satellite TV, wireless Internet, and private bath. Hotel amenities may include a spa and restaurant. You'll then have around 1.5 hours of free time to settle in or get acquainted with your new surroundings.

Dinner: Around 7pm, we'll enjoy dinner together at our hotel, with local and international dishes available.

Evening: On your own—perhaps you'll start your explorations of Riga before tomorrow's discoveries, or find a spot to simply sit and take in the spirit of the city.

Freedom to Explore; During your three days in Riga, you have the freedom to explore Latvia's capital on your own during your free time. Below are a few recommended options for independent explorations:

Listen to a Riga Cathedral Organ Concert: Experience a unique performance by choirs and organ players in a more than 800-year-old cathedral, and see one of the biggest organs in the world, containing over 6,000 pipes. Considered the largest medieval church in the Baltic states, the cathedral currently operates as both a Lutheran place of worship, as well as museum. During Soviet occupation from 1939-1989, religious services were prohibited, and it was solely utilized as a concert hall. Concerts range from 20 minutes to 1 hour in length.

How to get there: A 20-minute walk.

Hours: 12pm-7pm, daily.

Cost: About \$23 USD.

Explore a turbulent period of history at the Riga Ghetto Museum: Learn about the atrocities committed in the Riga Ghetto, one of several neighborhoods designated by the Nazis for both Latvian and German Jews to live during World War II. The main feature of the museum is a reconstructed wooden flat, demonstrating the conditions in which the Jews were forced to live. In fact, much of

the neighborhood still resembles how it looked during the war. Among the thoughtfully-curated exhibitions here—several of which are outdoors, visitors will see a railway wagon similar to the kind that brought German Jews to Riga to be killed, as well as a photographic section, depicting images of many who lived and died here. Also available to visitors is a list of the names of more than 70,000 Holocaust victims, serving to memorialize all that they endured.

How to get there: A 10-minute taxi ride (about \$10 USD).

Hours: 10am-6pm, Sunday-Friday.

Cost: Suggested donation of \$6 USD.

Take a stroll down Miera Street to see a different side of Riga: In recent years, the once-forlorn neighborhood around Miera Street has transformed into the city's creative hub, earning the quirky and bohemian neighborhood the nickname "the Republic of Miera." Nowadays, bakers, crafters, and artisans all call the area home. Visit Miera to glimpse the hippest part of town and perhaps to buy an offbeat souvenir.

How to get there: About a 30-minute walk, or a 10-minute taxi ride (about \$10 USD).

Hours: Daily from 10am.

Cost: Free.

Day 8 – Explore Riga • Home-Hosted Dinner

Exclusive O.A.T. Activity: This evening we'll join a local family for a Home-Hosted Dinner featuring typical Latvian cuisine and lively cultural exchange. This is a unique opportunity to connect with everyday citizens and enhance your understanding of local life. To facilitate a more intimate experience, we'll be divided into smaller groups of no more than 5 for our dinner. Read more about this activity below.

Breakfast: Served buffet-style at the hotel starting at 7am, featuring local and international cuisine.

Morning: Around 8:30am, our small group will enjoy a discussion at the hotel about contemporary Latvia and its past, where a local journalist will provide rich insights into this complex topic. We'll also learn about the dominating industries in the area, as well as the average salaries for workers. The discussion will even touch on what it's like for a small country to be part of the European Union, as well as the relationship Latvia maintains with Russia. This is an excellent opportunity to learn about both the domestic and global perspectives of the country.

Then, around 9:45am, we'll depart by bus for our city tour of Riga. Set close to the mouth of the Daugava River, which travels from the Baltic Sea into Russia, Riga was historically an important trade port. Its prosperity also



made it a target for conquerors; before Latvia declared itself an independent nation in 1918, Riga was claimed by Russia, Sweden, Lithuania, and Germany. As a diverse, thriving city with a prominent upper class, Riga experienced radical change under occupation by the Soviets and Nazis. Riga was heavily damaged during World War II, but buildings from Riga's most prosperous eras—particularly the Art Nouveau period—still stand throughout the city as every effort was made to reconstruct those buildings, such as St. Peter's Church. Today, Riga is a vibrant cosmopolitan city, revered as an artistic hub, particularly in the realm of Soviet ballet. Mikhail Baryshnikov, arguably the most famous male ballet dancer in the world, was actually born in Riga when it was under Soviet rule and still currently resides here.

Our tour begins with a visit to the Art Nouveau Museum at around 10am—a recently-added feature. Containing collections of Art Nouveau artifacts made and used in Riga, this museum celebrates the city's unique architecture and is the only museum to focus on the Art Nouveau period in all of the Baltics. The centerpiece of the museum, which was once the lavish home of architect Konstantīns Pēkšēns, is a series of rooms designed to portray a typical, upscale residence during the early 20th century, complete with art, furnishings, and even clothing.

After exploring the museum, we'll step outside to experience Riga's Art Nouveau district during a tour led by a local guide to see how the architectural style influences the city today. Riga contains among the highest concen-

tration of Art Nouveau architecture in the world, making it an excellent place to seek out this distinct style. Most buildings were designed in the early 20th century and generally represent one of four niches within the architectural genre: eclectic, perpendicular, national romantic, and neo-classical.

Around 11:45am, we'll take a 15-minute drive to Riga's Old Town, a dizzying collection of cobbled lanes, gargoyle-adorned buildings, and lovingly restored 17th-century architectural treasures under UNESCO World Heritage Site protection. Led by a local guide, we'll walk approximately one hour down the main avenues, familiarizing ourselves with important landmarks as we go and giving us the opportunity to gather ideas for how to spend our free time in the afternoon. Afterwards, you'll have the option to join your Trip Experience Leader for a visit to a local market to shop and eat like a Latvian local, taking a brief walk to the market around 1:15pm.

Lunch: On your own in Old Town. Those who accompanied our Trip Experience Leader on the market visit will have lunch on their own at one of the many food stalls there.

Afternoon: From about 2pm onward, you'll have free time to soak in more of Riga's timeless elegance on your own. You may want to remain in the Old Town, or if you'd like to get a little rest, join your Trip Experience Leader for an approximately 30-minute walk back to the hotel. For those who would like to continue exploring,

you could also visit the Latvian Academy of Sciences, a rare piece of Soviet architecture known as “Stalin’s birthday cake” to the locals. Or relax in a café and, if you dare, order a beverage with Riga Black Balsam—an herbal liqueur that Latvians celebrate as an invigorating cure-all for whatever ails you.

We’ll gather at the hotel at about 6:30pm to take a 30-minute drive to our Home-Hosted Dinner—a NEW feature. This special meal will be your opportunity to truly connect with Latvian culture in an intimate, comfortable setting: a family home. To ensure a more personal experience, we’ll split into even smaller groups of no more than 5 travelers for our dinner this evening.

Dinner: Our bus will drop us off at our hosts’ homes by approximately 7pm. The families we’ll be dining with this evening all comprise two generations and are all middle class, making their livings as teachers, engineers, small business owners, and healthcare workers. Latvia has one of the highest gross domestic product (GDP) growth rates in Europe, an above-average human-rights record, and a very strong cultural identity—quite a feat for a one-time Soviet republic. Since your hosts likely lived through the Singing Revolution in the late 1980s, you might be interested in discussing Latvia’s remarkable transition from socialist puppet-state to a high-income democracy.

Our cultural conversation will be served up alongside typical Latvian dishes, all handmade by our hosts. The cuisine here is quite hearty, so you can look forward to meat-based dishes like karbonade (pork cutlets with creamy mushroom sauce) or sipolu sitenis (beef and onion stew), as well as starchy accompaniments like kartupelu pankukas (potato pancakes) and rupjmaize, a dark rye bread that’s eaten at nearly every meal. Our visit will conclude around 8:30pm.

Evening: You’ll have the rest of the night to relax or discover more of the area before our explorations tomorrow.

Day 9 – Riga • Controversial Topic: The impacts of Latvia’s Russian Non-citizen Policy with Svetlana Markova • Optional tour to Rundale Palace

Exclusive O.A.T. Activity: Today’s activities include a conversation about the Controversial Topic of non-citizenship for Russians living in Latvia. Our conversation will be led by 73-year-old Svetlana Markova, a Russian woman who has lived in Latvia since 1969 and assimilated to the culture—but has never been able to gain citizenship. This eye-opening conversation will reveal the prejudices and inequality more than a quarter of Latvia’s inhabitants face as a result of the country’s citizenship policies. Read more about this activity below.

Breakfast: Served at the hotel starting at 7am, featuring traditional hot and cold breakfast choices.



Morning: Around 9am, we'll board our bus and continue our city tour of Riga. First, we'll take a 30-minute drive to Salaspils labor camp, a recently-added feature, which was established in 1941 during the Nazi regime and saw the demise of thousands. Although Salaspils was not technically a concentration camp, there was still much violence and extremely poor living conditions in this so called "labor correctional camp." Here, our Trip Experience Leader will lead us through the camp, shedding light on the resilience of its survivors. We'll also witness the Soviet sculptures, whose looming figures represent themes such as humiliation and solidarity to honor the trials and triumphs of all who passed through the camp's doors.

We'll depart the camp by bus around 10:15am and drive about 15 minutes to the Rumbala Memorial, a recently-added feature, commemorating the lives lost in Latvia during the Holocaust. Your Trip Experience Leader will explain the meaning of this monument as you explore. At about 11am, we'll then drive approximately 45 minutes to the World War II monument, a recently-added feature, where our Trip Experience Leader will lead a conversation on the Latvian World War II controversy and why the country has conflicting opinions surrounding Victory Day.

Around noon, our small group will walk less than 5 minutes to a nearby café overlooking the World War II monument, where we'll meet with 73-year-old Svetlana Markova to discuss the Controversial Topic of non-citizenship for Russian Latvians—a perpetual source of controversy due to ongoing prejudices and inequities toward Russians living in this Baltic nation. The location for our discussion is fitting: Protests and demonstrations are held here every year on Victory Day, commemorating the surrender of Nazi Germany to the Soviet Union and subsequently the beginning of the Soviet occupation of Latvia. This site remains a painful reminder of the division and tension between these two communities, a disunity further exacerbated by the controversy surrounding citizenship.

As a Russian living in Latvia, Svetlana is intimately familiar with this segregation. During the Soviet Occupation, she and her husband, a construction engineer, were sent to Latvia as part of a professionals' relocation program in 1969. As we'll learn, the transition to this new life, without friends, family, or virtually anything she'd ever known, was very difficult. But, over the decades, Svetlana and her husband managed to build a life and family in Riga, raising their two children there, mastering the local language, and cultivating friendships with Latvian citizens. Yet, despite their cultural assimilation

and many contributions, Svetlana and her family were denied citizenship in 1991—more than two decades after they had relocated. She will reveal to us how this "betrayal" made her feel and the ongoing discrimination she feels her family must face, inequities like a lower pension than Latvian citizens purely because of their non-citizen status. She will also share her unyielding beliefs surrounding Latvia's naturalization test, an assessment which she believes to be unfair and unjust. Throughout our conversation, we will come to not only understand the huge political and cultural divide that tears at the seams of the country, but also the personal turmoil it has caused families like Svetlana's.

Following the restoration of Latvian independence in the early 1990s, non-citizen status was given to Soviet-era immigrants and their descendants, as their families had not been citizens of Latvia prior to the Soviet occupation. In a country of 1.9 million people, one in four inhabitants—about 27%—are Russian Latvians. Currently, about 216,000 Russian Latvians hold non-citizen status. Non-citizens are subject to almost 100 legal restrictions, which include denial of full voting rights, entry to various professions, as well as residency and working rights in the E.U. In Latvia, dual citizenship is only permitted for E.U. and N.A.T.O. member states, and dual citizenship with other countries is only granted to descendants of those who have been deported or exiled—including descendants of Latvians. However, Latvian and Russian dual citizenship is not permitted for ethnic Russians, leaving many to feel that these restrictions have pushed them to the fringes of Latvian society. The government does offer a path to citizenship for non-citizens through a naturalization test that covers Latvian language, geography, and history. Over 150,000 non-citizens have completed the program since 1991; however, the test presents difficulties for many. Specifically, the prerequisite to recognize Latvia's occupation by the Soviets has remained an obstacle for countless non-citizens.

Today, many Latvians still feel threatened by Russia and express concerns over the loyalty of Russian Latvians should Russia attack. However, Svetlana's firsthand experience provides an eye-opening contrast to these concerns. We'll hear her story for about 20 minutes, and then our small group will have roughly 40 minutes to ask any questions we have about life here in Riga or perhaps the discrimination Svetlana has faced in the past. This is a unique opportunity to understand the difficulties of an ethnic minority, particularly in a country with such a complex history.

After our 1-hour conversation, enjoy free time to explore as you wish. Check with your Trip Leader for ideas.



Lunch: On your own around 1pm. Your Trip Experience Leader can provide dining suggestions, if you'd like.

Afternoon: You will have the rest of the day to make your own discoveries. Perhaps you'd like to wind down the day in a café near the iconic Town Hall Square, a prime spot for observing daily life and appreciating the architecture. Alternatively, you may wish to join an optional tour of Rundale Palace led by your Trip Experience Leader. Those taking the tour will depart by bus from the restaurant around 2:15pm and take a 1-hour and 15-minute drive to the sprawling Baroque palace originally constructed for the Dukes of Courland. Upon arrival at about 3:45pm, we'll set out on a 1-hour guided tour of the palace with our Trip Experience Leader, where we'll learn the history behind the rooms adorned with period furnishings and take in the vast grounds. We'll have time to explore the manicured rose garden located on both sides of the parterre, home to 52 rose circles blooming with varieties from different countries.

At around 6pm, those on the optional tour will walk to a local restaurant for dinner.

Dinner: On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for a recommendation or discover somewhere new to try, or at a local restaurant around 6:15pm for those on the optional tour.

Evening: Free for your own discoveries. You may retire to your room to get some sleep. Or, perhaps you and your fellow travelers will head to the hotel's bar for a nightcap to discuss your discoveries thus far. Travelers on the optional tour will take a 1-hour and 15-minute drive back to the hotel around 7:30pm before enjoying a free evening.

Rundale Palace - \$115/person

Visit the opulent Rundale Palace and its sprawling gardens. Constructed in the 1730s, the palace was designed by Bartolomeo Rastrelli as a summer residence for the Duke of Courland. After a tumultuous history where its ownership often changed hands, Rundale became a museum and attraction for travelers to Latvia in 1972 and now also houses leaders of foreign nations while they are visiting the country.

Day 10 – Travel to Tallinn, Estonia • Song Festival Grounds Visit

Activity Note: Today will be a particularly long travel day. Our bus transfer from Riga to Tallinn will take approximately 9 hours, with several included stops along the way.

Breakfast: Served buffet-style at the hotel starting at 7am, featuring traditional hot and cold breakfast items.

Morning: Around 9am, we will depart by bus for Tallinn, the capital of Estonia. This is a long drive of approximately 9 hours, which we will break up throughout the day. Our first stop is at noon in Parnu. Here, we'll have a chance to stretch our legs and catch a glimpse of Estonia's premier seaside resort during a 30-minute walk led by our Trip Experience Leader that ends at a local restaurant.

Lunch: Around 12:30pm at a local restaurant in Parnu.

Afternoon: We'll depart the restaurant around 1:30pm, and after about 2 hours, arriving in Tallinn around 3:30pm. Our first stop here will be the Song Festival grounds, a recently-added feature. Tallinn was the site of Estonia's "Singing Revolution"—a series of protests in the late 1980s where thousands gathered and sang for independence from the Soviet Union. After four years of singing and other acts of protest, Estonia achieved something remarkable—independence from the Soviets through a relatively bloodless revolution. Today, Tallinn manages to preserve its history and quaint medieval buildings, while at the same time continuously evolving and modernizing. As the home of the only technical university in Estonia, Tallinn has earned a reputation as quite the technology hub.

After a 30-minute visit here, we'll depart for the city's upper town, where we'll get panoramic views of our new surroundings from a viewing platform. At around 5:30pm, we'll take a 30-minute drive to our hotel, concluding our journey for the day. Once there, we will receive our room assignments and check into our hotel, which is conveniently located near Tallinn's Old Town. Enjoy approximately 1 hour to settle in before dinner.

Dinner: We will enjoy dinner together at a hotel restaurant, around 7pm.

Evening: On your own—you are free to explore Tallinn, the northernmost of the Baltic capitals, on your own or retire to your room to rest after a long day of travel.

Freedom to Explore: During your three days in Tallinn, you have the freedom to explore this multicultural city on

your own during your free time. Below are a few recommended options for independent explorations: Browse through boutiques in St. Catherine's Guild: A small, atmospheric alleyway, half-hidden behind a church and dating back to the medieval area, is lined with various shops, workshops, galleries, and restaurants, beckoning history-loving visitors with its old world charms. One of the oldest monasteries was once located here, and you can still spot tombstones dating back to that time. As you make your way down the street, you'll also come upon a "sweaters wall," where locals sell hand knits and local embroidery. Plan to spend approximately 30 minutes strolling this area, not including time for a meal, should you want to eat.

How to get there: A 15- to 20-minute walk.

Hours: 11am-6pm, Monday-Saturday.

Cost: Free.

Step back in time at the KGB Museum: During the Soviet occupation of Estonia, Tallinn's Hotel Viru saw many foreign visitors from beyond the Iron Curtain. To help keep track of these guests and the information they brought with them, the hotel was secretly wired so the KGB could listen in conversations. After the Iron Curtain fell, KGB staffers packed up their listening room and returned to Russia. Today, the room—which has now been turned into a museum—remains exactly as they left it. Come take a tour to get a behind-the-scenes look at the KGB's influence in Tallinn, and how life was impacted by the occupation. On display are a number of KGB artifacts, such as uniforms, cameras and spy gear.

How to get there: A 15- to 20-minute walk.

Hours: 11am-6pm, Monday-Saturday.

Cost: About \$14.

Discover one of the oldest medieval buildings in the Old Town when you visit the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church: Also known as the Church of the Mother of God with Three Hands, this small church and monastery serves as the center of Ukrainian religious and cultural life in Tallinn. Call ahead to reserve a tour with Monk Anatoliy, who will show you the church, cultural center, prayer rooms, and workshops, where a variety of hand-made crafts—including toys, ornamental eggs, and paper goods—are produced. This is a great opportunity to learn about Estonia's second largest ethnic minority.

How to get there: A 20- to 25-minute walk.

Hours: Upon request.

Cost: Free.

Day 11 – Tallinn • Controversial Topic: The Contentious Relationship Between Estonia & Russia with Anelli Kaar

Exclusive O.A.T. Activity: Today’s activities include a conversation about the Controversial Topic of the ongoing tensions between Estonia and Russia with Estonian freedom fighter Anelli Kaar. Estonia is the closest Baltic state to Russia, and as we’ll learn during our conversation today, that proximity makes Estonians very uneasy—especially after watching Russia annex Crimea in 2014. Read more about this complex topic below.

Breakfast: Served at the hotel starting at 7am, featuring traditional hot and cold breakfast choices.

Morning: Around 8:30am, we’ll board our private motor-coach for a 30-minute drive to a nearby TV tower, where we’ll engage in a Controversial Topic about the present day relationship between Estonia and Russia—one that remains riddled with tension and public criticism. Our conversation will be led by 48-year-old Estonian freedom fighter Anelli Kaar. The location is particularly relevant to the topic, as the TV tower here formerly broadcasted pro-independence communications at the height of the nation’s struggle to break free from the Soviet Union. It was also the site of a number of high-profile demonstrations, which are believed to have been turning points for the movement.

As the closest of the Baltic states to Russia, Estonia is the most vulnerable to its influence. The entire world can perhaps sympathize with this vulnerability after witnessing the 2014 annexation of Crimea following the Ukrainian revolution. In light of this highly controversial (and most would say, illegal) action, it seems that Russia does not shy away from its history, nor does it mind repeating it. Despite the evidence, Estonia’s president Kersti Kaljulaid agreed to meet with Vladimir Putin in April 2019—the first Baltic president to meet with him in roughly a decade. This meeting occurred much to the dismay of local Estonians, who were quick to chastise her actions. Her response to this flurry of criticism was that it’s “only natural” to speak to your neighbors, shrugging off any implications that it could send the wrong signals or put national security at risk. Still, many Estonians feel the shadow of Russia continues to loom over them and that exploring the possibility of a relationship is simply playing with fire.

To contextualize the topic, Anelli, an active participant in pro-freedom demonstrations, will describe the events she witnessed firsthand as a young woman. In the years leading up to Estonian independence, Anelli’s family was deeply affected by Soviet occupation, having suf-

fered the deportation and persecution of several family members. She was just 18 years old when the fight came to a head. At the time, she was an activist with the Youth Group for Protection of National Heritage, an organization aimed at the preservation of Estonian identity. The influx of foreign workers—who carried out the economic agenda of the Soviet Union—ignited growing concerns over this issue. These apprehensions, along with a slew of others, eventually led to the four-year-long Singing Revolution, the singing of forbidden national songs in protest, of which Anelli participated (despite women and children being told to stay home). This non-violent form of protest even took place right here at the TV tower, providing our small group a first-row seat to history. In order to understand Estonia-Russian relations today, Anelli will break down this history for us and explain where it has led.

Following World War II, the Baltic states were officially incorporated into the Soviet Union via military occupation and annexation. Over the decades, the Baltic states saw a sharp decline in trust and satisfaction with Soviet Union authorities—including former Soviet Union leader Mikhail Gorbachev, who attempted to boost the failing economy through controversial means, like rescinding limitations on political freedoms. In addition to questionable practices and an imbalance of freedoms, the Soviet-Afghan War and nuclear fallout in Chernobyl led to an even further degradation of trust between the Baltic states and Russia. Furthermore, as already stated, non-Russian populations became increasingly concerned about the threat to their national identities posed by the migration of various ethnic groups. All of these factors combined culminated in mass demonstrations throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, perhaps the most famous of which were the aforementioned Singing Revolution of 1988 and the Baltic Chain of 1989, a demonstration in which more than 2 million Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians joined hands in a show of solidarity—a chain which ran the length of all three countries. By the end of the 1980s, pro-independence campaigns spread like wildfire throughout the Baltic states. After years of struggle—often met with violent resistance by Soviet Paratroopers—Estonia defiantly declared its independence on August 20, 1991. A few weeks later, the Soviet Union begrudgingly recognized this declaration, followed by international recognition of the Republic of Estonia.

We’ll hear from Anelli about this Controversial Topic for about 20 minutes, before opening up the conversation for approximately 45 minutes of questions. Take this opportunity to ask Anelli what it was like to experience these demonstrations. You might also want to ask her what it was like for women freedom fighters at this time

compared to her male counterparts. At around 10am, we'll spend about 30 minutes exploring the grounds of the TV tower, learning in greater detail about the specific events that occurred here.

Then, around 10:30am, we'll depart for the 30-minute drive down to Tallinn's historical Old Town, where we'll enjoy a roughly 1.5-hour walking tour led by our Trip Experience Leader. During our tour, we'll explore notable sites and wander Tallinn's ancient, cobbled streets. Estonia's capital and largest city, Tallinn, sits on the Bay of Finland, directly across from Helsinki. Due to its history and geographic location, we'll find both Scandinavian and Russian influences in the language and culture here. We'll begin our explorations in the city's UNESCO World Heritage-designated Old Town, a tangled warren of historic streets lined with outdoor cafés and wonderfully preserved 14th- and 15th-century buildings. Our tour will end in the Town Hall Square, at which point you'll have free time until dinner this evening. You may decide to continue exploring the Old Town on your own, or feel free to consult with your Trip Experience Leader for alternative suggestions.

Lunch: On your own around 12:30pm. Consider asking your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations on where to get authentic Estonian cuisine, such as smoked fish, home-made rye bread, or mulgipuder, potato and groats porridge. Or, you can walk back to the hotel and enjoy lunch at the hotel's restaurant.

Afternoon: After lunch, enjoy some free time to explore. Perhaps you'd like to visit the Marzipan Room to learn about Tallinn's affinity for the confection, which your Trip Experience Leader will be glad to assist with.

We'll gather together at our hotel around 6:30pm and walk about 15 minutes to a local restaurant for dinner.

Dinner: Around 6:45pm at a local restaurant in the Rottermanni district, featuring regional specialties.

Evening: We'll return to the hotel around 8:15pm where you'll have the evening on your own. You can gather with fellow travelers at the hotel bar, take an evening stroll, or return early to your room before our discoveries tomorrow.



Day 12 – Tallinn • A Day in the Life of a Kose Village • Grand Circle Foundation Visit: Harmi Village School

Exclusive O.A.T. Activities: We'll visit the village of Kose today to experience A Day in the Life of a rural Estonian community. After learning about the town from local leaders, Helen and Ants Kari, we'll visit a small school in the nearby village of Harmi, supported by Grand Circle Foundation since 2019. With our travelers' help, Grand Circle Foundation has donated \$2,000 to the school, which has been used to modernize the building and keep the school open for future generations. During our visit, we'll meet with teachers and students (when possible) to learn more about the education system in rural Estonia. Our experience concludes with lunch in the Karis' home. Read more about these activities below.

Breakfast: Served buffet-style at the hotel starting at 7am, featuring traditional hot and cold breakfast items.

Morning: Around 9am, we'll board our bus and take a 45-minute drive to the village of Kose for our NEW A Day in the Life experience. Situated just southeast of Tallinn, this village of around 2,000 inhabitants embodies a pastoral lifestyle and has a strong sense of community.

At about 9:45am, we'll begin our explorations when we meet with local residents, Helen and Ants Kari, as well as their two sons, Orm and Aaren. Helen was born and raised here, and currently serves as the community leader. She and her husband are in their 30s, and upon deciding to settle here, purchased an old, abandoned homestead, which they then renovated by hand. This has made life for their family much easier financially, and it has also allowed them to remain in Helen's village, as opposed to migrating into the city. Helen will lead us on a 1-hour guided walk through her village, pointing out notable sights and spots as we go. She will share stories from her childhood about various establishments and landmarks, and she may even take us into a local store to get a feel for daily life (perhaps even meet the owners, if they're available). We can also take this opportunity to ask Helen about local traditions, rural living, evolving cultural values, and challenges facing the community, such as securing funding for education—a topic we'll explore in-depth after our walk.

At about 10:45am, Helen will accompany us on a 15-minute drive to the village of Harmi, home to just 50 people. Our destination is a local school—supported by Grand Circle Foundation since 2019—where we'll learn about education in rural Estonia. Upon arrival, we'll meet with at least one of the teachers (depending on their availability) and if school is in session, have the opportunity to

play games and interact with school children who range in age from 6 to 14 years old. Unlike in larger towns, where there are typically 25 to 30 children per classroom, students at the Harmi school enjoy class sizes of just 6 to 10 children, which allows for a more individualized approach to learning, encourages a sense of community, and helps keep local traditions alive. Currently, the school has no acting principal, but is instead run by a community board and teachers. Years ago, the plan was to close this school down; however, Helen took action and founded the Educational Society of Harmi, a non-profit which provides educational funding to rural villages. Thanks to the generosity of our travelers, Grand Circle Foundation has donated \$2,000 to the cause to-date, which has been used to modernize the building's old wooden-stove heating system and to help keep the school open for future generations.

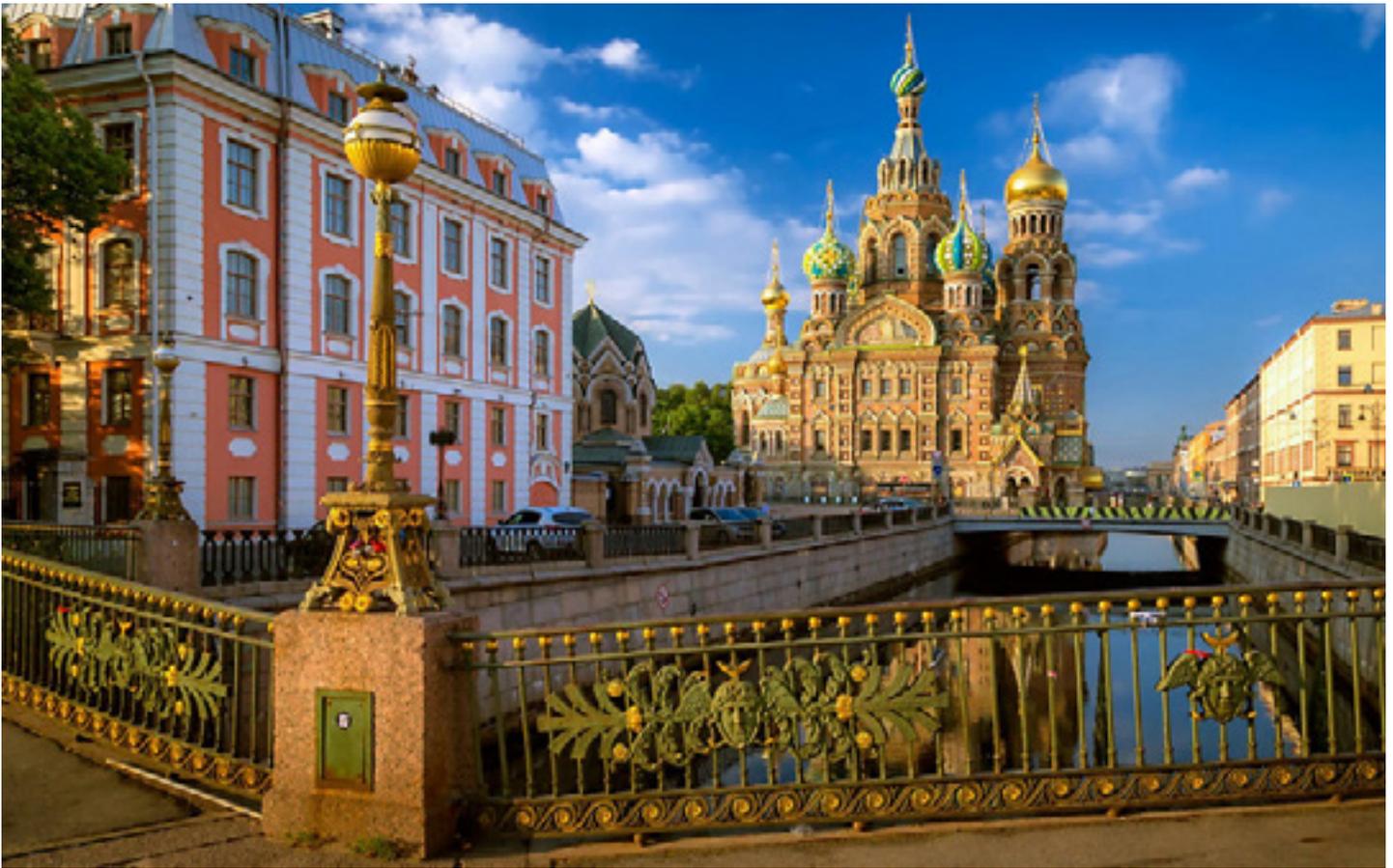
We'll then depart the school around noon for a 15-minute drive to Helen and Ants' homestead. Once we arrive, we'll learn about the renovations they did to their home, including the traditional method they used to craft wooden shingles for their roof. Until the end of the 19th century, thatched roofs were commonplace in rural areas, but by 1930, the increased availability of nails and construction tools enabled people to switch to wooden shingles. The method Helen and Ants use is referred to as pilbas, a roughly 3-millimeter wide shingle that is split from a rock using special tools. After an introduction, we'll have a chance to make some for ourselves, guided by our expert hosts.

Shortly before 12:45pm, we'll then help to prepare lunch using locally-sourced and seasonal ingredients.

Lunch: At the homestead around 12:45pm with Helen and her family, featuring a traditional meat and vegetable stew comprised of locally grown farm-fresh fare.

Afternoon: Around 1:45pm, we'll say goodbye to our new friends in Kose and take a 45-minute drive to the Kadriorg Garden, a manicured garden set on the grounds of an ornate palace. We'll then have the choice to stay and explore the park under the guidance of our Trip Experience Leader or return to the hotel by bus or tram. The rest of the day is yours to explore independently. You may choose to explore the Rotermann Quarter. After Estonia gained independence, this run-down neighborhood experienced a great renewal. Now full of modern buildings, it's become a center for shopping and culture—whether you browse the open-air markets or relax in a café.

Dinner: On your own tonight. Perhaps you'll sample kama, a blend of flours used in making many traditional Estonian desserts. You may seek out mannaht, a fruity



semolina mousse, or kohupiimakreem, curd cheese cream. You might also want to pair your meal with a famous Tallinn beverage: honey beer.

Day 13 – Tallinn • Travel to St. Petersburg, Russia

Activity Note: Today will be a particularly long travel day. Our bus transfer from Tallinn to St. Petersburg will take about 9.5 hours, with several included stops along the way. We will cross the border to Russia today, so make sure to have your passport and visa at hand. The border crossing can take anywhere from 2-4 hours. Lunch will be early today to speed up our border crossing.

Breakfast: Served buffet-style at the hotel starting at 7am, featuring traditional hot and cold breakfast items.

Morning: This morning, we'll journey further east by coach to begin our Russian portion of the adventure. This is a more than 9-hour drive, which we'll break up throughout the day.

Around 8:30am, we depart for St. Petersburg, with a 15-minute stop along the way around 10am to stretch our legs. Then, around 11:30am, we'll arrive in Narva, Estonia, where we'll pause for an early lunch.

Lunch: Around 11:30am at a local restaurant.

Afternoon: By 12:30pm, we'll be back on the road, headed in the direction of St. Petersburg, the city that Pushkin described as "Tsar Peter the Great's Window to the West." The border crossing can take anywhere from 2-4 hours, putting us in St. Petersburg sometime in the afternoon. Upon our arrival in the Russian port city, we'll check into our centrally-located hotel. Depending on which hotel we'll stay at, it may feature a bar and restaurant with panoramic views of the historic city center. The air-conditioned rooms typically have Wireless Internet, telephone, satellite TV, minibar, safe, and a private bath.

Around 6pm, a local person will come to our hotel to give us an informative talk on modern Russia. With a history, culture, and political system quite different from our own, Russia can often mystify foreign visitors. This talk will give us context and understanding for the discoveries to come over the next few days.

Dinner: Around 7pm, we'll enjoy dinner at a hotel restaurant, featuring local cuisine.

Evening: On your own beginning around 8:30pm. You are free to enjoy the facilities of our hotel, relax with a book, or take in the nightlife of St. Petersburg.

Freedom to Explore: During your three days in St. Peters-



burg, you have the freedom to explore this sprawling port city on your own during your free time. Below are a few recommended options for independent explorations:

Visit the Fabergé Museum: This privately-owned museum and former palace holds the world's largest exhibition of artwork by the House of Fabergé, such as paintings, porcelain, jewelry and eleven of the renowned Fabergé eggs—the largest collection in Russia and the only place to view them in St. Petersburg. The eggs used to belong to the Forbes Collection, but were purchased by Russian oligarch Wexelberg with the intent to return them to Russia. Overlooking the Fountain River, a visit to the Fabergé Museum also reveals detailed interiors and various personal belongings of the royal Russian family that lived there. Plan to spend between 1-2 hours here during your visit.

How to get there: A 25 to 30-minute walk.

Hours: 10am-9pm, Sunday-Thursday.

Cost: About \$8 USD.

Explore the Erarta Contemporary Art Gallery: Discover contemporary, aspiring Russian artists as well as renowned masters. This privately-owned museum—the largest of its kind in Russia—and non-profit organization provides educational projects to foster a connection between artwork and the viewer. Containing 2,800 works of contemporary art created by more than 300 artists from

over 20 regions of Russia, Erarta aims to expose visitors to a wide variety of paintings, graphics, sculptures, objects, installations and more. The collection is continuously growing, and the artwork of budding, lesser-known artists is frequently displayed here. Plan to spend approximately 1-2 hours here during your visit.

How to get there: A 10- to 15-minute taxi ride, about \$5 USD one way.

Hours: 10am-10pm, Wednesday-Monday.

Cost: About \$8 USD.

Stock up on snacks at the Vasileostrovsky Market: In the heart of the city on Vasilevsky Island, this historic food hall—dating back to the 18th century—brings a variety of modern concept restaurants and grocery stalls under one roof. A popular gathering spot for locals, you'll likely see generations of Russians doing their shopping or sitting down with friends and family for a bite to eat. Stop by to enjoy a meal, or just to browse the market's wares.

How to get there: A 10- to 15-minute taxi ride, about \$5 USD one way.

Hours: 10am-9pm, daily.

Cost: Free.

**Day 14 – St. Petersburg • Controversial Topic:
Growing Threats to Civil Liberties in Russia with
Olga and Irina • Hermitage Museum • Optional
Russian Ballet Performance or Optional Russian Folk
Show**

Exclusive O.A.T. Activity: Today’s activities include a conversation about the Controversial Topic of increasing threats to civil liberties in Russia with 55-year-old Irina Robertovna and 38-year-old Olga Sergeevna. This conversation will reveal how different generations feel about Vladimir Putin’s leadership, including his rocky relationship with the free press, his anti-gay policies, and his annexation of Crimea. Read more about this timely topic below.

Activity Note: The Hermitage Museum is closed on Mondays, and St. Isaac’s Cathedral is closed on Wednesdays. If Day 14 falls on a Monday or Wednesday, your Trip Experience Leader will inform you of the final schedule and can help you make arrangements to visit in your free time.

Breakfast: Served at the hotel, beginning at 7am, featuring traditional hot and cold breakfast items.

Morning: Around 9am, we’ll depart via motorcoach for an approximately 3-hour city tour to explore the high-lights of St. Petersburg, Russia’s imperial capital and second-largest city. Built at the mouth of the River Neva early in the 18th century by Peter the Great, the goal was to create a Russian capital that would rival the splendor of Paris. Before the monarchy was overthrown in the Russian Revolution, the tsars and tsarinas of the empire lived the high life in St. Petersburg. They built colorful, opulent palaces, inspired arts and architecture throughout the city, and handling peasant rebellions. We’ll learn why St. Petersburg is called the “Venice of the North” during our visit to several of the city’s picturesque islands, canals, and bridges—as well as make a photo stop by the late 19th-century Church on Spilled Blood, one of the most recognizable Russian landmarks. Around 10:30am, we’ll then drive approximately 30 minutes to visit St. Isaac’s Cathedral, whose gilded dome dominates St. Petersburg’s skyline. Since 1931, the cathedral has actually served as a museum and only holds mass on special occasions. As we explore this mid-19th-century structure that took forty years to construct, we’ll have the opportunity to admire the imposing, neoclassical exterior as well as learn about the treasures housed inside.

Around 11:15am, we’ll drive 30 minutes to a communal apartment building to visit two local women who share one of these apartments—55-year-old Irina Robertovna,

a retired teacher, and 38-year-old Olga Sergeevna, an accountant—arriving around 11:45am. Here we’ll discuss the Controversial Topic of increasing threats to civil liberties in Russia with both women, who each bring a unique perspective to our conversation today.

Irina lived through the collapse of the Soviet Union and the political movement of Perestroika, a period of time when food shortages, financial instability, and public safety were a daily concern. Remembering these hardships makes her feel grateful for all that she has today, but it also instills a fear of change—even if it has the potential to be positive. The trauma of her past largely informs her feelings on Putin and the regime, maintaining that although some things could be better, she’s merely happy that they’re not worse. Although Irina is retired from teaching, her meager pension forces her to work as a real estate agent. She has lived in a communal apartment all her life, and although she hopes to one day have a place of her own, it can take up to thirty years to acquire one, even with the assistance of state-run housing programs.

Olga, on the other hand, is considerably less apathetic toward Russia’s political and economic position. She admits to having voted for Putin for his first two presidential terms; however, she feels that he should have served these terms and then allowed a successor to take office. If he had, she believes he would be remembered as a great leader. But since the early years of these terms, she has been disappointed to see his thirst for power and controversial actions, like the annexation of Crimea, only increase. She is also alarmed by the further oppression of civil liberties and angry that, in the 21st century, Russia isn’t any closer to being a democratic nation. Every day she worries about the future her three little children will face under such tyrannical conditions, and she hopes to counter the influence of this propaganda by impressing upon them the importance of freedom and justice.

While freedom of speech and the press are both part of the Russian constitution, the Russian government maintains control over its citizens’ liberties by selectively implementing the law with specific restrictions and censures that align with the government’s interests. Since Vladimir Putin came to power in the year 2000, it is estimated that 21 journalists have been killed for speaking out against his policies—forcing the press to practice self-censorship when it comes to coverage of issues considered controversial by the government. This restriction of information is a holdover from Soviet times—as are communal apartments such as the one Olga and Irina share. In St. Petersburg alone, there are still around 70,000 of these communal apartment buildings, in which up to ten unrelated families share one bathroom and kitchen. Across

the country, 18% of Russians live below the poverty line, with nearly two thirds reporting that they cannot afford to purchase household essentials and almost one household in six saying they can afford food but not clothing or utilities. Yet 78% of Russia's citizens continue to vote for the current administration, Irina falling into that category. Her position is "the devil you know is better than the devil you don't." However, 22% of Russians—Olga included—vote against Putin in the hopes of making a positive difference in her country.

The most recent vote in Russia was on the amendments of 2020. This marked the second time substantial amendments were made to the Russian constitution—the last time being in 1993. After Putin introduced these amendments—which included extending presidential term limits, allowing the president to fire federal judges, and banning gay marriage—a national vote was held. They were approved on July 1, 2020 by contested popular vote, signed into law by executive order on July 3, and put into effect the next day. During our hour-long interactive conversation with Olga and Irina, they will share their contrasting views on this latest election, and their opinion on how much freedom they believe Russians have in general. Part of our conversation will include 40 minutes to ask the women any questions you might have. Perhaps you'll ask Irina why she supports Putin: To feel safe? Out of fear? Out of habit? Or you may ask Olga if she feel safe expressing her freedom of speech and what her hopes are for the future.

Lunch: Around 12:45pm, Olga and Irina will invite us to sit down in their apartment to a light lunch of traditional Russian pies.

Afternoon: We'll depart around 1:15pm for a 15-minute drive to the expansive Baroque Hermitage Museum, arriving around 1:30pm. Today, this one-time palace of the tsars—founded by Catherine the Great in 1764—is also one of the oldest museums in the world, as well as the second-largest, occupying a complex of five historic buildings. We'll explore the massive fine art collection and learn about the structure of the former palace itself for approximately 2 hours, before enjoying 1 hour of free time either in the Hermitage or Palace Square.

Around 4:30pm, we'll depart for the 30-minute drive back to the hotel.

Dinner: On your own this evening. Ask your Trip Experience Leader for a recommendation or discover somewhere new to try. If you enjoy meat, keep an eye out for Chicken Kiev, stuffed chicken breast covered in eggs and breadcrumbs and either fried or baked.

Evening: On your own. You may also join us on an Optional Tour to witness one of St. Petersburg's greatest contributions to the arts when we take in a Russian ballet performance, right here in the cradle of the artform, where the dancing style was first developed to entertain the tsars. Home to one of the most distinguished and influential ballet schools in the world, St. Petersburg is where the Russian style of ballet was developed, and for more than 300 years has been the training ground for some of the world's most famous ballet dancers, such as Mikhail Baryshnikov and George Balanchine, founder of the New York City Ballet. Depart for this Optional Tour around 7pm for an 8pm performance.

When the ballet is not available, enjoy an evening of music and dance at the optional Russian Folk Show. Join us for a performance in the revered Concert Hall of Nikolae-vsky Palace. You'll enjoy dances and songs from different provinces of Russia represented by four professional folk groups. This 2-hour show consists of two acts and an intermission, during which you'll be offered local refreshments. You'll gain a new appreciation for Russian culture and the traditions that make it unique. Depart for this Optional Tour around 6:15pm for a 7pm performance.

Russian Ballet Performance - \$120/person

Witness one of St. Petersburg's greatest contributions to the arts when we attend a ballet performance. Home to one of the most distinguished and influential ballet schools in the world, St. Petersburg is where the Russian style of ballet was developed, and for more than 300 years has been the training ground for some of the world's most famous ballet dancers, such as Mikhail Baryshnikov and George Balanchine, founder of the New York City Ballet.

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Russian Folk Show - \$90/person

Day 15 – St. Petersburg • Explore Peterhof Palace

Activity Note: The fountains at Peterhof Palace are only operational from May 1-October 10. Travelers arriving outside of that timeframe will still enjoy a comprehensive visit to Peterhof and its gardens, but without the full effect of the fountains.

Breakfast: Served buffet-style at the hotel starting at 7am, featuring traditional hot and cold breakfast choices.

Morning: Around 8am, our small group will depart for Peterhof Palace, arriving approximately 1 hour later. Also known as the “Russian Versailles,” most visitors conclude that the nickname does a disservice to the grandeur and scope of this royal estate, which includes manicured parks, gardens, and ornate fountains. Residence of the tsars until the Revolution of 1917, the entire complex with its series of palaces and lush gardens is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. We’ll explore the grounds of this historical site before departing around noon for a 30-minute ride to a nearby residential district for lunch.

Lunch: Around 12:30pm, we’ll enjoy a typical Russian lunch in a small restaurant popular among locals.

Afternoon: Around 2pm, we’ll begin the 1-hour return trip to St. Petersburg, where we’ll enjoy an afternoon at leisure. If you would like to spend your free time exploring the city’s many museums—including the Russian Museum, home to the world’s largest collection of Russian fine art—the bus will make a stop at Arts Square en route to our hotel.

Dinner: Around 6:30pm, we’ll drive 15 minutes to a local restaurant to celebrate our Baltic Capitals and Russia travel experiences during a Farewell Dinner.

Evening: You’re free to head back into the city, relax at the hotel with fellow travelers, or prepare for your morning departure tomorrow.

Day 16 – St. Petersburg • Return to U.S.



Pricing Summary & Trip Dates

Trip Name: Baltic Capitals and
St. Petersburg 2023

Trip Dates: September 7-22, 2023

Base Price (PP): \$3,695*

Rd. Trip Airfare: \$1,100*

* **Note** – The prices listed above are subject to change for the planned 2023 trip explained in this document. For the latest updates, please call Curtis Whitaker at **(269) 209-5889**.

Trip Cancellation Coverage – Trip cancellation insurance is not required but is highly recommended. For details, please visit www.oattravel.com/TPP or call Curtis Whitaker at **(269) 209-5889**.

Reservation Deposit: The deposit to reserve your space on this trip is \$350 per person, fully refundable until 65 days prior to departure.

Discount Note: Please note that the special \$500 discount offered by Grand Circle Travel and O.A.T. during the pandemic years of 2020-21 is not offered for trips during the 2023 travel season.

Need Help? For personal assistance or more information about this trip in the meantime, please call Curtis Whitaker at **(269) 209-5889**.

TOUR RESERVATION POLICY:

Reservations can be made by calling Curtis Whitaker at **(269) 209-5889**. A \$350 deposit is required to guarantee your place (credit cards accepted). Remaining balance due 90 days before departure.

Note: The information, dates and prices provided in this document are estimates only based on currently available information. Pricing and itinerary are subject to change.

Pricing Disclaimer: *Every effort will be made to provide accurate pricing information. Operator reserves the right to correct promotional or pricing errors at any time, or to increase the trip price in the event of cost increases due to changes in airfares, cruise fares, currency fluctuations, venue fee increases, taxes, or fuel surcharges, or other reasons, unless you pre-paid according to the terms of the Good Buy Plan prior to the cost increase going into effect. For more information, please call Curtis Whitaker at (269) 209-5889.*

