

# THE BALTICS

DETAILED ITINERARY

RUSSIA, LITHUANIA, LATVIA AND ESTONIA

Jul 17/18



**Trakai Castle**

Three neighboring countries - Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia - known as the Baltics, share a common history and seacoast but are all unique. All three Baltic capitals have UNESCO designations. We also explore Russia's most impressive and historic city, St. Petersburg.

Baltic highlights include Lithuania's castle on an island, Latvia's guild houses, Estonia's well-preserved medieval Old Town, sand dunes on the Curonian Spit, national parks, and Estonian islands in the Baltic Sea are just a sample of what to expect on our Baltic adventure.

In the 14th century, Lithuania was the largest country in Europe. Medieval castles are evidence of its glorious yet turbulent past. We begin our adventure in its capital and largest city, Vilnius (UNESCO). Other stops include the old capitals of Trakai and Kaunas. We visit the unique and sacred Hill of Crosses before exploring the Curonian Spit (UNESCO), a site full of picturesque sand dunes, fishermen's villages and long beaches.

Latvia is a country of many contrasts; from the 13th century capital Riga (UNESCO) - once the trading center

## FACTS & HIGHLIGHTS

• 21 land days • Maximum 16 travelers • Start in Vilnius, Lithuania and finish in St. Petersburg, Russia • All meals included • The Old Town of Vilnius (UNESCO) • Grand Duchy of Lithuania residence and capital Trakai • Kernave archeological site (UNESCO) • Soviet history in Grūtas Park • Hill of Crosses & Curonian Lagoon • Boat ride in the Curonian Lagoon • Art nouveau architecture of Riga (UNESCO) • Sigulda, Turaida and Cesis Castles in Gauja National Park • Medieval market in Tallinn's Old Town (UNESCO) • Peterhof (UNESCO), Catherine Palace, Peter & Paul Fortress of St. Petersburg • St. Petersburg's Hermitage and Faberge Museums

## DEPARTURE DATES & PRICE

**Jun 09 - Jun 29, 19 - \$7995 USD**

**Jun 09 - Jun 29, 20 - \$7995 USD**

**Activity Level: 2**

**Comfort Level:**

Some long drives.

## ACCOMMODATIONS

Comfortable hotels with private bathroom facilities.

**ELDER TREKS**



SMALL GROUP  
**EXOTIC ADVENTURES**  
FOR TRAVELERS 50 PLUS

of the Hanseatic League - filled with medieval buildings and Art Nouveau architecture; to the medieval castles of Turaida and Sigulda in Gauja National Park; to small historic villages. In southern Latvia, we visit Rundale Palace to see one of the most beautiful examples of Baroque architecture in the Baltics - the palace was built in the 18th century as a summer residence for a Duke of Courland and has a beautiful French garden.

In Estonia, we visit the Islands of Saaremaa and Muhu, with their medieval villages and coastal towns. We visit the capital of Tallinn (UNESCO) with its well-preserved medieval Old Town as well as many medieval castles

throughout the country. We visit Narva castle, situated directly across the river to the Russian fortress at Ivangorod.

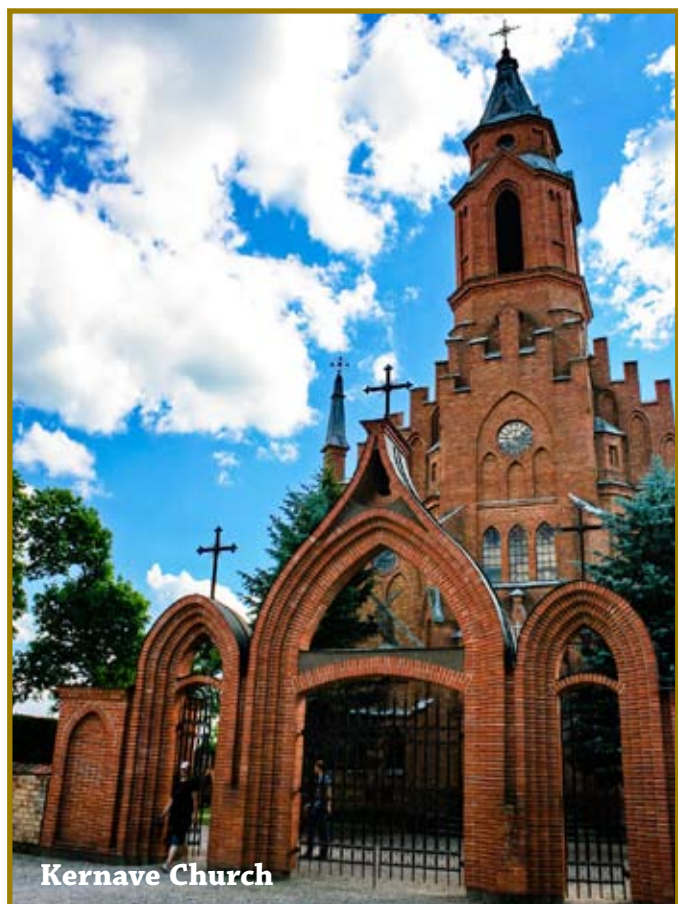
We continue our tour with 4 nights in beautiful St. Petersburg, Russia where we will take in the history of the Peter and Paul Fortress, visit both the famed Hermitage and Faberge Museums, and enjoy the opulence of both the Peterhof and Catherine Palaces.

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## **DAY 1 ARRIVE IN VILNIUS, LITHUANIA**

You are met upon arrival at Vilnius International Airport and transferred to your hotel. We will meet this evening for our group orientation and welcome dinner.

Overnight in Vilnius.



**Kernave Church**

## **DAY 2 OLD TOWN OF VILNIUS, UZUPIS ART DISTRICT AND TRAKAI**

Today we begin our Baltic adventure with a walking tour of the Old Town of Vilnius, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Major attractions include: the Gates of Dawn, the Town Hall Square and Vilnius University, the oldest university in the Baltics (1579); Presidential Palace; Cathedral Square and the Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania; Gediminas' Tower, where the city of Vilnius was founded in 1323; gothic St. Anne's Church and historical-architectural ensemble of Bernardines; the neighborhood of Užupis, which symbolically declared itself a republic in 1997.

This afternoon we make our way to Uzupis, close to Old Town. This district has been popular with artists for some time, and has been compared to Montmartre in Paris and to Freetown Christiania in Copenhagen due to its bohemian and laissez-faire atmosphere.

Afterwards we make our way to Trakai, a former capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The town hosts a beautiful medieval castle on one of the islands of Lake Galvė. Trakai is also where the Crimean Karaites (Jewish community) have lived since late medieval times. We will enjoy dinner in Trakai.

Overnight in Vilnius.

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## **DAY 3 ANCIENT CAPITAL OF KERNAVE, KGB MUSEUM**

Today we drive to Kernave, the ancient capital of Lithuania and the last pagan state in Europe. Situated on the northern bank of the River Neris and famous for its five adjoining hill forts, Kernave is one of the oldest known settlements of Lithuania.

Together with a segment of the Neris River, these hill forts form the Kernave Archaeological Site and are listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

In the afternoon, we visit the Museum of Genocide Victims, more commonly known as the KGB Museum. Established in 1992, the museum is located in the former KGB headquarters across from the Lukiškės Square and is dedicated to collecting and exhibiting documents relating to the 50-year occupation of Lithuania by the Soviet Union, the Lithuanian resistance, and the victims of the arrests, deportations, and executions that took place during this period.

Overnight in Vilnius.

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## **DAY 4 SOVIET STATUES OF GRŪTAS PARK**

Today we travel to the spa town of Druskininkai, which became one of the most popular resorts during the Soviet occupation. Currently this town is dotted with many sanatoriums and water parks. After lunch we'll visit Grūtas Park, a unique park in which statues of Soviet revolutionaries and political leaders, once dominating squares of Lithuanian towns and villages, have found a new home after being removed more than 10 years ago.

Overnight in Vilnius.

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## **DAY 5 TO KLAIPEDA VIA RUMŠIŠKES, KAUNAS & HILL OF CROSSES**

Today we make the long drive to Klaipėda, the main seaside town of Lithuania.

Our first stop is at the Rumšiškės open-air ethnographic museum, covering a total of 176 hectares. The museum offers a glimpse into 18th-19th century architecture, traditions, crafts and the way of life of farmers. The museum boasts a



collection of old houses, farms, schools, pubs and mills representing the major regions of the country, complete with the flora specific to these regions. As well as the architectural splendor, this is also a living museum, featuring men and women in traditional costume, baking bread and making pots the old way.

We continue to Kaunas, the second largest city of Lithuania, built where the two longest Lithuanian rivers meet. Our tour of the Old Town includes: Kaunas Castle (13th century), the Cathedral, Town Hall Square, Perkūnas House, which in medieval times served as an office for the German trading union - the Hanseatic League.

Before our arrival to Klaipėda we will stop at the fascinating Hill of Crosses. Located near Siauliai, the Hill of Crosses is an unforgettable, emotional site, and is considered a very special place in Lithuania. Thousands of crosses, with their handwritten messages stand on a hill which is considered to be a sacred spot and an enduring testament to the peaceful endurance of Lithuanian Catholicism. Despite repeated attempts by the Soviets to destroy the site, new crosses were repeatedly built and today the site is said to contain over 100,000 crosses.

Overnight in Klaipėda.

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## **DAY 6 KLAIPEDA AND PALANGA**

Our city tour of Klaipėda is focused on the Old Town of Klaipėda with its Theater Square dominated by the statue of a girl named Ann from Tharau, narrow alleyways with attractive courtyards, art galleries, cafes and small boutiques, blocks of lattice-work buildings and old warehouses reflecting the influence of Germanic architecture of the Hanseatic period. Klaipėda is the port of Lithuania and a place every Lithuanian stops at on the way to the seaside resorts of Palanga and the small towns in the Curonian Spit.

In the afternoon, we continue to Palanga where we will visit the Amber Museum and take a walk in the Botanical Park up a high dune known as Birute's Hill. Overnight in Klaipėda.

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## **DAY 7 TO CURONIAN SPIT, HILL OF WITCHES, NIDA, JUODKRANTE**

A short ferry ride across the Curonian Lagoon from Klaipėda takes us to the Curonian Spit. The Curonian Spit is a narrow sand peninsula that separates the Curonian Lagoon from the Baltic Sea and is also a National Park. Our sightseeing includes a walk on the Hill of Witches in Juodkrantė, where wooden sculptures based on Lithuania legends and folk tales can be seen; an excursion to Nida, a small quiet fishing village famous for its majestic sand dunes, some up to 60 metres high and a neo-gothic church and an old ethnographic cemetery.

In the afternoon, we take a boat tour in the Curonian Lagoon, along the sand dunes and all the way to the Russian border. From the top of the sand dunes, you can see the Baltic Sea on one side, and the Curonian Lagoon on the other.

Overnight in Klaipėda.

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## **DAY 8 TO RIGA (LATVIA) VIA LIEPAJA AND KULDIGA**

Today we depart for Riga, the capital of Latvia. Our first stop is Liepaja, the third largest city in Latvia, located on a stretch of sand between the Baltic Sea and Lake Liepaja, along the Baltic coast. We visit the city as well as the imposing Naval Port with its infamous prison built during Tsarist times. Afterwards we continue on to Kuldiga, an ancient town with unique architecture, that was originally founded in the 13th century and was one of the

capitals of the Duchy of Courland. Visit the medieval historical center of Kuldiga, located on the banks of the river Alekšupīte which flows along the walls of many of its houses. We then continue on to Riga and our hotel.

Overnight in Riga.

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### **DAY 9 BAROQUE RUNDALE PALACE**

Today we visit Rundale Palace, the most beautiful baroque palace in Latvia, located near the town of Bauska. Built in the 18th century, Rundale Palace is an outstanding example of the early work of Italian - Russian architect Francesco Bartolomeo Rastrelli who also designed the famous Winter Palace in St. Petersburg. The professionally renovated palace interiors are decorated with authentic 18th century furniture, paintings and china. The most impressive are the Golden Hall, the White Hall, and the bedroom of the Duke of Courland, Johan Ernst Biron.

Returning to Riga (time permitting) we will stop at Jelgava, the former capital of the Duchy of Courland where another magnificent 18th century palace stands - the main palace of the Duke of Courland.

Overnight in Riga.

### **DAY 10 EXPLORING THE OLD TOWN OF RIGA**

Today we have a walking tour of Riga's Old Town including: Riga Castle and the Three Brothers, the three oldest dwelling houses in Riga, each dating from a different century; visiting the Dome Cathedral which is a famous concert hall and St. Peter's Church, where we will have a spectacular panoramic view of Riga; Livu Square to see the old Guild Houses and back to the Town Hall Square with its beautiful House of the Blackheads which used to host the guild for unmarried German merchants. We take in a concert in the Riga Cathedral (time permitting and cathedral concert schedule dependent) prior to lunch.

In the afternoon, we visit the Freedom Monument, the Central Market, and prior to dinner, the Art Nouveau district.

Overnight in Riga.

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### **DAY 11 GAUJA NATIONAL PARK, MEDIEVAL CĒSIS**

Today we travel to Gauja National Park and to one of the most picturesque towns in Latvia, Sigulda. Gauja National Park is known as the most popular tourist and leisure destination in Latvia, known primarily

**Hill of Crosses**







**Cesis**



as a winter sport resort because of its bobsleigh track and the down-hill skiing routes. We enjoy visits to the Medieval Sigulda Castle, the Sigulda New Castle (Kropotkin Palace) and the Turaida Medieval Castle. In the afternoon, we visit Cesis, a 13th century town. Stroll through the cobbled stone streets and medieval ruins with red tiled roofs and restored facades from the Middle Ages. In 2006, Cesis celebrated its 800th anniversary.

Overnight in Riga.

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## **DAY 12 TO SAAREMAA ISLAND (ESTONIA), MUHU ISLAND**

We depart this morning to Kuressaare, the “capital” of Saaremaa Island and the largest Estonian island. Our first stop is the town of Pärnu, where we enjoy a city tour. Pärnu is called the Estonian Summer Capital - a seaside wellness resort.

Later, we drive to Virtsu Port and take a short ferry ride to Kuivastu Port on the island of Muhu. Muhu is the third largest island in Estonia and is connected by road to Saaremaa Island. In winter, the sea freezes allowing locals to drive over the ice. Visit the small village of Koguva - a well preserved 19th century village, and stop by one of the medieval island churches - Muhu Church.

Overnight in Kuressaare.

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## **DAY 13 SITES OF SAAREMAA ISLAND**

Today, we explore Kuressaare and Saaremaa Island. Our day begins by visiting the Kuressaare Episcopal Castle built in the 14th century by the Teutonic Order. We tour the town, passing the Town Hall and Weighing House before continuing on towards Saaremaa Island. Our first stop is the Angla windmills, five wooden windmills built at the

beginning of the 20th century. We also visit the Karja Church, the smallest church on Saaremaa Island and still containing a lot of interior detail from medieval times. After lunch we explore Panga Cliff, the highest of the Saaremaa and Muhu cliffs reaching a height of 20mts (65ft).

Overnight in Kuressaare.

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## **DAY 14 TO TALLINN**

This morning, we take a ferry ride to Kuivastu back to Virtsu and travel to Haapsalu. Known as the “Venice of the Baltics”, the town dates back to 1279 with many buildings from those days still remaining. After lunch we stop to visit one of these buildings, the Episcopal castle which has the largest single-nave cathedral in the Baltic states, Haapsalu Castle. We then continue to Tallinn in time for dinner.

Overnight in Tallinn.

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## **DAY 15 TALLINN SITES AND MIDSUMMER'S EVE**

Today we have a walking tour of the Old Town of Tallinn including Toompea Hill with a magnificent view of the Old Town and the Baltic Sea, Toompea Castle, Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, the Dome Church, the Guild Houses of this Hanseatic city and the Great Coastal Gate. Later we tour greater Tallinn by bus including Kadriorg Palace and Park, where Peter the Great established an estate and public park in the early 1700s.

In the afternoon we make our way to the Open-air Museum, Rocca al Mare. Tonight we celebrate Midsummer's Eve at this site. It's a vast, forested park filled with thatched, 18th-20th century farm buildings, windmills, a wooden chapel and a village school with demonstrations on how people lived and worked in times past.

After and during a simple local dinner, we enjoy the sights and sounds of the festival with the locals, including flaming bonfires, live folk music and dancing.

Overnight in Tallinn.

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### **DAY 16 LAHEMAA NATIONAL PARK**

Today we spend a full day at Lahemaa National Park, the first and largest national park in Estonia, with unspoiled landscapes and beautiful views of the Baltic coast, forests, waterfalls and abandoned Soviet military relics. Enjoy a walking tour around the park and a visit to the restored Palmse Manor, built in the 18th century and once home to barons and their families. Time permitting we will also take a stroll along the Baltic coast.

From here we make our way back to Tallinn, stopping along the way to visit the Tallinn Song Festival Grounds.

Overnight in Tallinn.

### **DAY 17 NARVA CASTLE, TO ST. PETERSBURG**

Today we travel to the eastern part of the country to visit the town of Narva. Situated on the banks of the Narva river, Narva is Estonia's third largest city with a population that is 95% Russian. We will visit the centuries old Narva Castle and Museum and glance across the river to the Russian fortress at Ivangorod. After lunch we head towards the Russian border and continue on to St. Petersburg

Overnight in St. Petersburg.

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### **DAY 18 PETERHOF PALACE, HERMITAGE MUSEUM**

This morning we visit the UNESCO designated Peterhof Palace, commissioned on the orders of Peter the Great. Located just outside of St. Petersburg, Peterhof Palace consists of a series of palaces and gardens, and is often referred to as the "Russian Versailles". The expanse of the Lower





Gardens is designed in the formal style of French formal gardens of the 17th century.

After lunch at a local restaurant, we will travel back to the city by hydrofoil boat before making our way to the Hermitage Museum. The museum is comprised of 6 historic buildings and contains over 3 million works of art and culture and starts its history from collections which were gained by Russian empress Catherine the Great in a private capacity.

Overnight in St. Petersburg.

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### **DAY 19 PETER AND PAUL FORTRESS, FABERGE MUSEUM**

On our morning city tour of St. Petersburg we will visit Peter and Paul Fortress, which was the original citadel founded by Peter the Great in 1703. In the early 1920s, it was still used as a prison and execution ground by the Bolshevik government. Today it has been adapted as the central and most important part of the State Museum of Saint Petersburg History. We will also visit the main street, Nevskiy Prospect named after the 13th-century Russian prince Alexander Nevsky and planned by Peter the Great. We will also see St Issak's Cathedral, the largest Russian Orthodox cathedral in the city.

After lunch at a local restaurant we will visit the famed Faberge Museum, home to more than 4000 works of art, including the 15 Fabrege eggs. We will enjoy a relaxing boat ride on the canal followed by dinner at local restaurant.

Overnight in St. Petersburg.

### **DAY 20 CATHERINE PALACE**

Today we will journey south of St. Petersburg to the magnificent Catherine Palace, the summer residence of the Russian Tsars. The Catherine Palace is named after Catherine I, the wife of Peter the Great, who ruled Russia for two years after her husband's death. Originally a modest two-storey building commissioned by Peter for Catherine in 1717, the Catherine Palace owes its later grandeur to their daughter, Empress Elizabeth, who chose this town as her chief summer residence. Starting in 1743, the building was reconstructed by four different architects, before Bartholomeo Rastrelli, Chief Architect of the Imperial Court, was instructed to completely redesign the building on a scale to rival Versailles. The palace was completed in 1756 and took 100kg of gold to decorate the exterior.

Farewell dinner and overnight in St. Petersburg.

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### **DAY 21 DEPART ST. PETERSBURG**

Today we say goodbye to the Baltics and Russia and

**Tallinn, Old Town**



**Curonian Spit Sand Dunes**





## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

### 1. HOW BIG ARE THE GROUPS?

Each group is limited to 16 participants. Small groups are an important ingredient in adventure travel.

Small groups allow for more interaction and more personalized service throughout the itinerary.

### 2. WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THE TOUR PRICE?

All accommodations throughout; all meals, starting with dinner on day 1 and finishing with breakfast on departure day (i.e. the last day of the ElderTreks tour); bottled drinking water throughout the trip; all internal transportation; airport transfers on day 1 and departure day (i.e. the last day of the ElderTreks tour); all day trips and entrance fees as outlined in the itinerary; tips for hotels (portage), national guide, restaurants and spot guides; services of a trip leader.

### 3. WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED IN THE TOUR PRICE?

International flights, tips to ElderTreks tour leader, alcoholic drinks, visas and travel insurance.

### 4. ARE THESE “EDUCATIONAL” TOURS?

Yes, in the broadest sense of the word, “educational”. We visit museums and local villages. We also have talks and discussions on many aspects of the history and culture of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, but this is only one aspect of what we do. We believe that it is equally educational to meet new people on a non-commercial basis, visit their homes and even try to learn a few words in the native language. Sometimes the most “educational” moments are spent having a cold drink with locals in a street market.

### 5. HOW DO WE TRAVEL DURING THE TOUR?

All local transportation is included in the land price of the trip. We travel by bus, boat and by foot.

### 6. WHAT ARE OUR ACCOMMODATIONS LIKE?

We stay in comfortable hotels with private bathroom facilities.

### 7. WHAT ABOUT THE WEATHER?

The weather in the Baltics is largely dictated by its closeness to the Baltic sea. Temperatures can vary between the low 70's °F to the high 80's°F (20 - 27°C) in summer and an average high of 70 °F (20C) during the day and a low of 45 °F (7C) at night in the fall. In summer there can be 19 hours of daylight, known locally as the “white nights”. Light rain can fall in spring and autumn so bring an umbrella and waterproof jacket.

### 8. WHEN IS PAYMENT DUE?

A non-refundable deposit of \$500 USD (plus insurance if you desire it) is due as soon as you decide to go and will reserve your place on the tour. The balance of the land payment is due 100 days before departure. Cancellation charges are applicable and these are outlined in the “Terms & Conditions” section of our brochure.

### 9. IS MEDICAL INSURANCE REQUIRED?

Insurance coverage is not included in the cost of your trip. Please note that medical insurance is mandatory for this adventure. Proof of health insurance required, and to be presented to immigration, on entry into Lithuania. Lack of documentation may result in refusal of entry into Lithuania. ElderTreks offers comprehensive travel insurance and we are happy to provide you with a quote if you call our office. If you are purchasing insurance elsewhere, please ensure you provide the details to ElderTreks as soon as possible.

### 10. WHAT MEALS ARE INCLUDED?

All meals are included, starting with dinner on day 1 and finishing with breakfast on departure day. In many cases, we simply order a number of shared dishes, so that we can try everything.

### 11. WHAT SHOULD I TAKE ON THE TOUR?

There is a detailed “What to Take” list in our Trip Kit, which we will send to you after you have booked the trip.

### 12. CAN YOU ARRANGE MY FLIGHTS?

We would be happy to take care of your air

arrangements. ElderTreks offers personalized flight itineraries, not group flights. Stop over enroute, come in a few days early, or extend your stay. Call us for a customized itinerary.

### 13. WHAT IF I WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION?

If you have any further questions about the adventure, please call our office for more details. A Trip Specialist will be happy to answer your questions. A Trip Kit containing further details on the destination will be sent to you once you have booked the trip.







Narva Castle