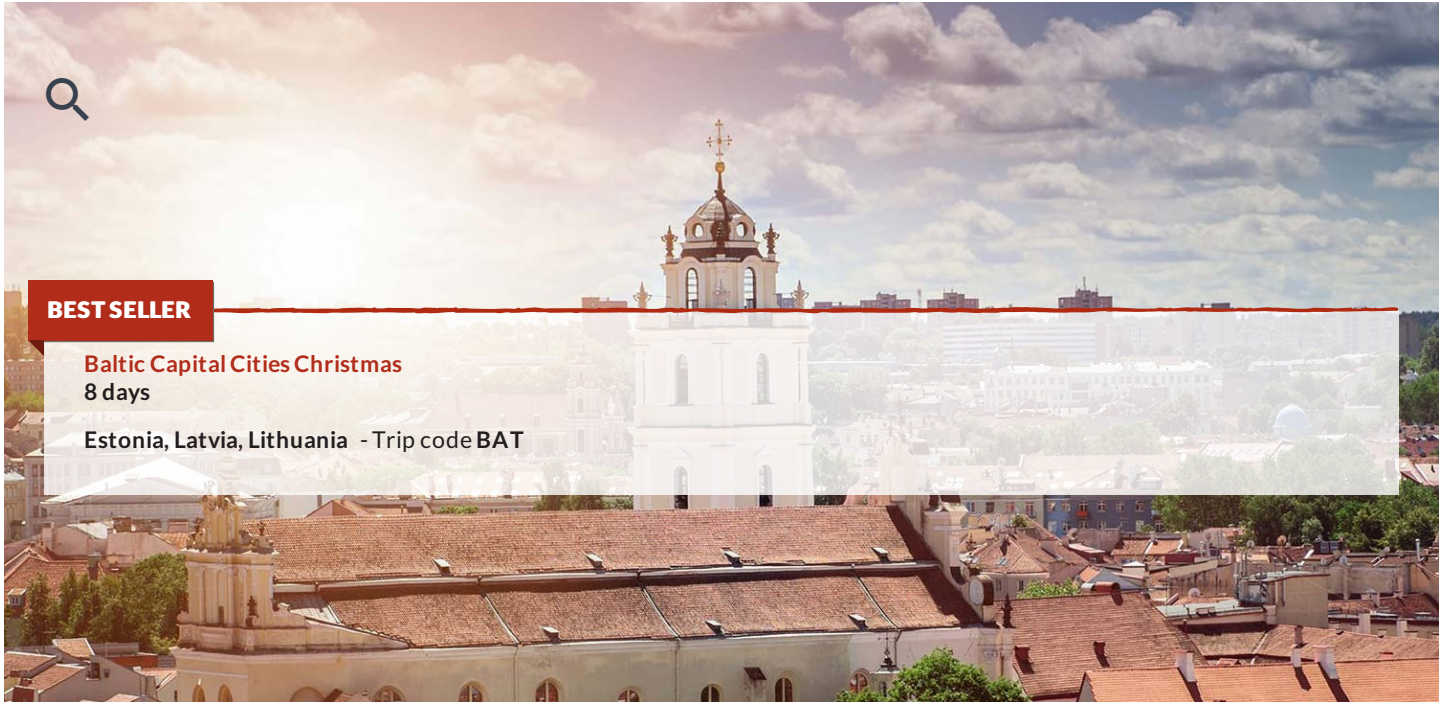


EXPLORE!



BEST SELLER

Baltic Capital Cities Christmas
8 days

Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania - Trip code BAT

Baltic Capital Cities Christmas

This trip is the perfect introduction for first time visitors to the Baltic States. We explore the three capital cities on foot, as well as visiting the KGB Museum in Vilnius, Europe's largest market in Riga and discovering an ancient monastery in Tallinn. We stay overnight and enjoy a traditional beer tasting and dinner in the historic Pakruojis Manor, founded in 1531. As well as visiting Trakai Castle, Kaunas, the Hill of Crosses and Parnu on the Baltic Sea.

Trip highlights

- ★ **Vilnius** - Experience the historical sights and learn about Lithuania's troubled Soviet past at the KGB Museum
- ★ **Riga** - Discover the capital of Latvia's main highlights and take in the sights, smells and tastes at Riga's huge Central Market
- ★ **Tallinn** - Explore the city's best known sights and stunning Medieval architecture on foot
- ★ **Pakruojis Manor** - Stay overnight on the estate and enjoy a traditional dinner and beer tasting

ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

Standard

Our standard, mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service, often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en suite facilities.

TRIP PACE:

Full on

Full on paced trips are for travellers who like their holidays packed with activities and experiences, moving on quickly from place to place with lots of early starts and long, busy days. Some may find them tiring, but others get a buzz from packing their precious holiday-time as chock-a-block full of new experiences as possible!

GROUP SIZE:

12 - 18

Maximum group size ranges from between 6 to 20 people, depending on the type of trip, the transport and accommodation used and activities included. We rarely have groups that are smaller than five or six people and the average is 12 people plus an Explore leader.

Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

DAY 1 - Join trip in Vilnius, Lithuania

Our trip begins in Lithuania's capital city, Vilnius. After checking in to our hotel and meeting the group, this evening is at leisure for you to enjoy your first taste of the city's vibrant cafe, restaurant and nightlife culture.

The majority of visitors to the Baltic States will be surprised by the quality, variety and value of food and drink on offer. The majority of food is locally sourced and part of the regions heritage is being able to forage for food and make local brews. Walking through the forests you will see locals passing the time picking mushrooms and gathering berries. There are a lot of traditional restaurants, with influences from Germany and Russia, serving locally produced dishes. There's a wide variety on the menu including soups, casseroles, salads, meat and fish dishes. Beer is locally brewed and you can find light and dark beers, filtered or unfiltered all for a reasonable price. You can also find flavoured wines such as raspberry and cherry wine and each country has its own herbal liquor which is a popular after dinner tittle.



Accommodation: Panorama Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 2 - Walking tour of Vilnius and visit to the KGB Museum

The Catholic influence on Vilnius is very evident from the numerous baroque churches. By the turn of the last century, Vilnius also had an 80,000-strong Jewish community. However, by the end of World War II, it had been completely decimated. During our morning orientation walking tour of the capital, we'll visit the ancient university founded by the Jesuits - a centre of the Counter Reformation and a source of Lithuanian culture. We'll also see the cathedral and Church of the Dawn. In the newer part of Vilnius lies the main shopping street with the opera, cafes and parliament building.

This afternoon we'll visit the KGB Museum. The museum is located in the former KGB Headquarters and has exhibits documenting the crimes that were planned and committed from this very spot during Soviet rule. The displays also show you how the Lithuanians fought back to re-claim their independence. You'll be able to see the inner prison cell that has been preserved in the same condition as when the headquarters closed in 1991.



Accommodation: Panorama Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 3 - Drive to Pakruojis Manor via Trakai Castle and Kaunas

Our first stop this morning on our full day's journey will be at Trakai Castle set on an island in Lake Galve. Trakai is the former capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and this splendid red brick castle dates back to the 14th century. You'll have the opportunity to go inside to view some of the interesting museum exhibits that it houses including one on pre-war Lithuania.

On some departures due to functions taking place it may not be possible to go inside Trakai Castle, so instead we will make an additional stop at Rundale Palace. Built in the 18th century by Anna, Empress of Russia, for her lover, Count Biron. The architect, Bartholomeo Rastrelli, also built the Hermitage in St. Petersburg. The 138 room palace is richly decorated and is an example of the fusion of German and Russian society.

We continue our drive to Kaunas where we'll have free time for lunch. Kaunas was the country's temporary capital between 1920 and 1939 when Vilnius was forcibly annexed by the Poles. Situated in the heart of Lithuania, it is often regarded as the most characteristic city in the country. Many of its buildings date back to the 17th century, when the Jesuits bought tracts of land here and built a large monastery. Some buildings are older, with impressive examples of Gothic architecture.

Later this afternoon we arrive at Pakruojis Manor where we will be spending the night. The manor consists of 34 buildings including the main house, a stable block, mill and perfumery all set in a beautiful park setting, which is now a living museum that shows how the residents and staff would have lived and worked in 19th century. You'll have the opportunity to explore these historic buildings before we have a traditional dinner and an included beer tasting - all brewed on site.



Accommodation: Manor of Pakruojis (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast and Dinner

DAY 4 - Visit the Hill of Crosses en route to Riga, Latvia; walking tour of Riga

Before leaving Lithuania we'll make a stop at the Hill of Crosses near Siauliai where a vast number of rosaries and crosses adorn a small hill. Both German and Soviet troops in the past have tried to crush this symbol of national and religious fervour, but images of the Virgin and literally thousands of crosses always reappeared despite their best efforts to destroy them.

This afternoon we'll arrive in Riga, Latvia's capital, and take an orientation walking tour. Most of the important sights in Riga are concentrated in a small area, so walking is the most effective way to explore. We will take in the Freedom Monument, Gunpowder Tower, Saint Jacob's Church and the city's cathedral. Buildings have been painstakingly restored over the last twenty years and commanding Gothic structures sit adjacent to Baroque and lavish Art Nouveau architecture.



Accommodation: Hanza Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 5 - Visit to Riga Central Market; afternoon at leisure

This morning we'll visit Riga's huge and lively Central Market, which sells traditional produce, such as smoked fish, sauerkraut, pickled garlic and crusty cheeses.

The rest of the day is free for you to discover more of the city. Riga is an old Hanseatic city on the banks of the Daugava River and is arguably the most beautiful in the Baltics. Its skyline is pierced with spires, towers and weather vanes, making the streets a joy to amble through. The Latvian Ethnographic Open Air Museum and Riga Castle are well worth a visit or you may choose to enjoy a long lunch in one of the many restaurants. Cheese and meat filled pastries served with wild berry preserves are popular, especially when washed down with a local beer or perhaps a glass of Riga Black Balsam, a traditional herbal liqueur - an acquired taste!



Accommodation: Hanza Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 6 - Drive to Tallinn, Estonia via the seaside city of Parnu

This morning we bid farewell to Latvia and head for Tallinn, the capital city of Estonia. After we've crossed the border we'll make a stop in the pretty seaside town of Parnu on the Gulf of Livonia. This Baltic coast spa resort has been popular with tourists since the 1830's with people flocking to its clean sand beaches and to revitalise in the Parnu Mud Baths. After time here for lunch we'll continue our journey to Tallinn; in total today's drive takes us around five hours.

With just half a million citizens, Tallinn is not a sprawling metropolis. This adds to its charm, as it is easy to explore on foot, with minimal traffic. Famed for its Medieval architecture, the Old Town is one of the best preserved Hanseatic town centres in the world and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The city has a huge range of restaurants, pubs and wine bars for you to choose from this evening.



Accommodation: Hotel Go Shnelli (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 7 - Orientation walking tour of Tallinn; visit to the Bastion Tunnels

Less than 100 kilometres across the water from Helsinki and midway between St. Petersburg and Stockholm, Tallinn has come under several different cultural influences since the first stronghold was built in the 10th century. Linguistically and economically, Estonia's closest ties are to Finland, despite the best efforts of other nations. In 1561, as a coveted trading port, it was seized by the Swedes and held for 150 years until the Russians took over and industrialised much of the Medieval town. Perched on a hill overlooking the sea, we'll explore the cobbled Old Town on foot this morning. The colourful houses of the crooked streets reflect the German, Scandinavian and Russian periods of Tallinn's history. We'll walk through the quarter where merchants once traded and take in the historical and architectural highlights. The busy town square is a hectic mix of pavement cafes and shops, dominated by the 14th century Gothic Town Hall. The pink Parliament buildings and Toompea Castle lie near the imposing deep yellow Alexander Nevsky Cathedral.

This afternoon we'll visit the Bastion Tunnels beneath the city. The tunnels were constructed in the 1670's and were used by the military as defensive tunnels beneath the city walls and buildings above. The tunnels lay unused for many years, but at the start of World War II they were renovated to be used as bomb shelters and then during Soviet rule they were installed with electricity, ventilation, water and telephones. During our excursion you'll get to see the tunnels still in their Medieval state and those that have been modernised in the 20th century.

On some departures due to events taking place we may not be able to visit the Bastion Tunnels, so instead we will take a tour to learn about the secrets of the white monks at the Dominican Monastery. In the Middle Ages the influence of the Dominican religious order was enormous, as the monks were the confessors of the kings. We'll be met by a monk at the monastery who will give us an insight into what it would have been like in the city and to be a monk in Medieval times. There is almost no electricity in the monastery, so our tour will be conducted by candle light. And, of course, we will get the chance to try the traditional monastery liqueur.

This evening you may choose to participate in a traditional Medieval dinner.



Accommodation: Hotel Go Shnelli (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 8 - Trip ends in Tallinn

The trip ends after breakfast at our hotel in Tallinn.



Meals Provided: Breakfast



Why book this trip

See the main highlights and lesser visited sights in three beautiful Baltic capital cities - Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn, in just 8 days. Stay overnight in one of the largest historical manor estates in Europe, Pakruojis Manor.

What's included?



Included meals

Breakfast: 7
Dinner: 1



Transport

Bus



Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader
Driver(s)



Accommodation

7 nights standard hotel

Trip information

Country information

Estonia

Climate

Summer days in Estonia are warm though changeable with the occasional thunderstorm. Temperatures are commonly around 20-25°C, but can reach 30°C or more especially in July. At night temperatures are cooler. Winters can be harsh with very low temperatures, especially in January. Sometimes it drops as low -30°C, but more commonly it'll be around -5°C. Snowfall usually starts in November and lasting through to March. Being a maritime climate it can rain at any time of the year and it can be foggy in the autumn.

Time difference to GMT

+2

Plugs

2 Pin Round

Religion

Evangelical Lutheranism

Language

Estonian

Latvia

Climate

Summers in Latvia are generally hot and sunny and less humid than in Central Europe, with temperatures commonly around 18-22°C, but can reach 30°C. Summer is normally the rainiest time of year on a count of the afternoon thunderstorms that occur on some days. It can be windy on the coast at any time of year. Temperatures begin to drop in autumn and September can quite cold with temperatures between 8-15°C. Winters are normally below freezing with the first snows starting in November and lasting to the end of February. Temperatures regularly reach as low as -5°C, but can go down as far as -35°C.

Time difference to GMT

+2

Plugs

2 Pin Round

Religion

Christian

Language

Latvian

Lithuania

Climate

Summer days in Lithuania are warm though changeable. Temperatures on the coast are usually around 19°C and between 22-23°C further inland, but they can reach over 30°C. At night temperatures are cooler. Winters are cold, with temperatures regularly below freezing, so be prepared for snowy and icy conditions. Temperatures regularly reach as low as -5°C, but can go down as far as -35°C. Snowfall usually starts in November and lasting through to March. Being a maritime climate it can rain at any time of the year.

Time difference to GMT

+2

Plugs

2 Pin Round

Religion

Roman Catholic

Language

Lithuanian

Budgeting and packing

Optional activities

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations. Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

Due to the busy nature of this trip there are no optional excursions offered.

Clothing

During winter layers work best and we recommend taking a woolly hat, ear warmers, gloves, scarf/nood, fleece/jumper, a thick waterproof and windproof jacket and thick socks. You may also find thermal underwear and waterproof trousers or ski trousers useful. We recommend taking an umbrella, as rainfall is possible at any time of year.

Ladies should take a headscarf to cover their head when entering religious sites.

Footwear

In winter it may be slippery underfoot, so please ensure that your footwear is waterproof and that it has good grip. We recommend bringing warm walking shoes with you and also a pair of more comfortable lightweight footwear for relaxing in our hotels.

Luggage

20kg

Luggage: On tour

One main piece of baggage and a daypack for personal items. Remember that you'll have to carry your own luggage so don't overload yourself.

Equipment

We recommend taking a water bottle, sunscreen, sunglasses, a personal first aid kit and a torch in case of emergencies. Most importantly don't forget your camera. You might also find walking poles useful in case it is icy underfoot.

Tipping

Explore leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Explore Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Local crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognised part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. Accordingly you should allow approximately £12.00 for tips.

In order to make things easier for you, the Explore Leader may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour.

Country Information

Estonia

Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch price

£10

Dinner price

£15

Beer price

£2.4

Water price

£0.5

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Euros.

Recommended Currency For Exchange

EUR, GBP or USD

Where To Exchange

USDollars, GBP Sterling and Euros can be changed in most places.

ATM Availability

Cash can be drawn from ATM's in most cities.

Credit Card Acceptance

Credit cards are generally accepted only in the larger hotels and restaurants.

Travellers Cheques

Travellers cheques are not always easy to exchange.

Latvia

Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch price

£10

Dinner price

£15

Beer price

£3

Water price

£0.5

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Euro

Recommended Currency For Exchange

We suggest you take most of your spending money in cash (in small denominations). US Dollars and Euros are more easily converted than Pounds Sterling. N.B. US\$ notes should be in good condition (not torn or marked). Notes prior to 1990 (of any currency) are often not accepted.

Where To Exchange

Most major towns - your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival.

ATM Availability

Cash can be drawn from ATM's in all major towns.

Credit Card Acceptance

In major restaurants and shops.

Travellers Cheques

Are very difficult to cash on this tour.

Lithuania

Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch price

£10

Dinner price

£15

Beer price

£1.5

Water price

£0.5

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Euros

Recommended Currency For Exchange

EUR, GBP or USD

Where To Exchange

US Dollars, GBP Sterling and Euros can be changed in most places.

ATM Availability

Cash can be drawn from ATM's in most cities.

Credit Card Acceptance

Credit cards are generally accepted only in the larger hotels and restaurants.

Travellers Cheques

Travellers cheques are not always easy to exchange.

Transport, Accommodation & Meals

Transport Information

Bus

Accommodation notes

Booking a Single Room

All of our group tours are planned and operated on a twin-share basis, meaning that the standard cost is based either on individual travellers sharing accommodation with another group member of the same sex, or people who book together sharing accommodation. Please refer to the tour notes where the single room option availability is detailed on a night by night basis for this tour, and the price for the available nights is detailed on the dates & prices tab by departure date. For Self-Guided trips the Single Room supplement offers the option of a single room each and is charged per person. The Single Room supplement also applies to the third person in a party of three that will be accommodated in a single room.

In the Baltics the majority of buildings including the hotels still use the old Soviet District Heating System. Large power plants supply both electricity and hot water and from autumn to spring the central heating provided is at a set temperature, which can't be individually adjusted. So this means that it can be hotter or cooler inside the hotel bedrooms than you'd expect, so it's best to open a window if you are too warm and to bring layered bed wear and perhaps slippers in case it is cooler at night.

Essential Information

FCO Advice

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice [click here](#).

For more information from Explore about travel advice, [click here](#)

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Price Guarantee

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

Visa and Passport Information

Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia: Visas are not required by UK, Australian, New Zealand, US and Canadian citizens. Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office. You should confirm all visa related questions with the relevant Embassy prior to departure. Visa regulations in the Baltics are often subject to frequent change so ensure you check before you travel.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, with the correct validity for your chosen destination.

Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our Essential Information and Booking Conditions.

Transfers

[Find out more about Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions before you book.](#)

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Polar, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer [click here](#)

Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. The cost of many of our Polar Voyages will exceed the capped amount covered by standard insurance premiums and you will be required to pay an additional premium to cover the full value of your trip. Please ensure that you are covered for the full amount of your holiday cost, as insufficient cover could invalidate a claim under the policy. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. [Read more about them here.](#)

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Non refundable permits

Estonia

Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against tetanus and hepatitis A. Tick-borne encephalitis is recommended by some medical sources if travelling in certain areas of Eastern Europe, at specific times of the year. Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at [Explore Travel Health](#) and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.

Latvia

Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against tetanus, typhoid, hepatitis A, polio and diphtheria. Consult your travel clinic for further advice. tick-borne encephalitis is recommended by some medical sources if travelling in certain areas of Eastern Europe, at specific times of the year. Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at [Explore Travel Health](#) and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.

Lithuania

Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against tetanus and hepatitis A. Tick-borne encephalitis is recommended by some medical sources if travelling in certain areas of Eastern Europe, at specific times of the year. Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at [Explore Travel Health](#) and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.
