

# EXPLORE!

**Russia, Belarus and the Baltics**  
15 days

Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia - Trip code HBR



## Russia, Belarus and the Baltics

This is the perfect trip to introduce you to the legendary cities of the old Soviet Union. You'll visit 5 fascinating countries and stay in 6 historic cities. Whilst in the Baltics you'll have the chance to marvel at Tallinn's Old Town, Riga's Freedom Monument and Vilnius University. In Minsk you can stroll down Independence Avenue. Then in Moscow you'll ride the metro to the Red Square and visit the Hermitage in St. Petersburg and Catherine's Palace at Pushkin. This trip is a must for anyone looking to soak up the history and culture of Eastern Europe.

### Trip highlights

- ★ **Distinguished cities** - Experience Tallinn, Riga, Vilnius, Minsk, Moscow and St Petersburg
- ★ **The Baltics** - Discover the capital cities on foot and visit Trakai Castle and the Hill of Crosses
- ★ **Minsk** - Explore Belarus's lesser visited capital and see Mir Castle and Nesvizh Castle
- ★ **St Petersburg and Moscow** - Visit the best known sites including the Kremlin, Hermitage and Catherine's Palace

#### 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 Tallinn (Estonia)

Our tour starts in Estonia's enchanting capital of Tallinn. After checking in to our hotel and meeting the rest of the group, there may be time to explore some of the city at our leisure. 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 also boasts a vibrant cafe, restaurant and nightlife culture, which you may choose to experience this evening.

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: Hotel Go Schnelli** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

## DAY 2 - Morning walking tour of Tallinn with a free afternoon

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 has been left free for you to further explore at your own pace. Estonia is well known for its traditional handicrafts. Keen shoppers might enjoy browsing for knitted mittens and lacy woollen shawls, along with colourful hand embroidered linen products.



**Accommodation: Hotel Go Schnell** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 3 - Drive to Riga (Latvia) and visit the seaside city of Parnu en route

This morning we bid farewell to Estonia and head for Riga, the capital city of Latvia. However, before crossing 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 Riga; in total today's drive takes us around five hours.

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.



**Accommodation: Hanza Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 4 - Walking tour of Riga; afternoon free

Most of the important sites in Riga are concentrated in a small area, so a walking tour 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. Riga also has a lively market, which sells traditional produce, such as smoked fish, sauerkraut, pickled garlic and crusty cheeses.

This afternoon you have time at leisure to discover more of the city. 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.



**Accommodation: Hanza Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 5 - Drive to Vilnius (Lithuania) and visit the Hill of Crosses and Trakai Castle

This morning we begin our full day's journey to our third country on this trip - Lithuania. En route to Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania our first stop will be 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.

Our next stop will be Trakai Castle set on an island in Lake Galve. Trakai is the former capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The splendid red brick castle dates back to the 14th century and houses some interesting museums, including an exhibition on pre-war Lithuania.

We reach Vilnius this evening and check in to our hotel.



**Accommodation: Panorama Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 6 - Walking tour of Vilnius with an afternoon at leisure

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 sightseeing 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. In the newer part of Vilnius lies the main shopping street with the opera, cafes and parliament building.

This afternoon has been left free for you to enjoy more the city's attractions. You may wish to join our excursion to the KGB Museum or the Gediminas Tower - the only remaining section of what was once Vilnius Upper Castle.



**Accommodation: Panorama Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 7 - Drive to Minsk (Belarus) and enjoy a walking tour

This morning we leave Lithuania and head for Minsk, the Belarusian capital. Set on the banks of the Svislach River, the city was first settled by the Early East Slavs back in the 9th century AD. Trinity Suburb is one of oldest and most picturesque areas, which is perfect for strolling in and Victory Square features a memorial to the fallen heroes of World War II. On arrival we'll enjoy a sightseeing tour of the city including Oktyabrskaya Place, Traetskae Pradmestse (the last remaining section of the Old Town), Independence Square, Church of Saints Simon and Helen (Red Church), the Town Hall and Holy Spirit Cathedral. There may be the opportunity this afternoon for you to choose to see an organ concert at the Cathedral of Saint Virgin Mary, as long as there isn't a mass or religious celebration taking place on the day. The organ in this cathedral is a traditional wooden instrument, which provides wonderful acoustics and the performance takes place in a beautiful setting, which further enhances the experience.



**Accommodation: Hotel Tourist** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 8 - Visit the UNESCO World Heritage Sites of Mir Castle and Nesvizh Palace

Today we'll take a full day excursion to visit the UNESCO World Heritage Sites of Mir Castle and Nesvizh Palace.

Construction began on Mir Castle at the end of the 15th century and it has sections in Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque styles. It was abandoned for nearly 100 years and was badly damaged during the Napoleonic period. Thankfully it was restored in the 19th century and is now open to visitors.

The impressive Nesvizh Palace has been home to the Radswill Family for over 400 years. The complex consists of a residential castle and mausoleum. The castle acted as the prototype for many other castles in Europe that have followed the same blueprint, with its 10 interconnecting buildings set around a central courtyard. Following our visit we return to Minsk for the evening.



**Accommodation: Hotel Tourist** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast and Lunch

## DAY 9 - Free day in Minsk; flight to Moscow (Russia)

Today is free for you to explore Minsk at your own pace or you may wish to join an excursion to Dudutki - the Belarusian Museum of Folk Crafts.

In the early evening, we will fly to Moscow, the capital of Russia and transfer to our hotel on arrival.



**Accommodation: Hotel Ibis Budget Moscow Panfilovskaya** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 10 - Tour of the Red Square and Kremlin in Moscow

Moscow is the pivotal centre of Russia and there is much to see and do here. Rather than battle with the traffic on a bus tour, we will use the metro system to get around - an experience in itself. Many of the stations are cavernous underground halls, elaborately decorated with chandeliers. We take the metro to the famous Red Square, still paved in its original stones, where we can gaze in awe at the colourful onion-domes of Saint Basil's Cathedral. Surely one of the most remarkable architectural edifices in the world, Ivan the Terrible commissioned the work in the 16th century. Living up to his name, legend has it that he gorged out the eyes of its architect once completed, so that he could never again design a building of such brilliance. Today we'll also visit the Kremlin - a city within a city. The triangular walls enclose an incredible complex of buildings, including three fine palaces, cathedrals, belfries and towers that represent Russia throughout its glorious past.



**Accommodation: Hotel Ibis Budget Moscow Panfilovskaya** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 11 - Explore Moscow and enjoy free time; overnight train to St. Petersburg

This morning we'll further explore Moscow's historic centre by metro. We'll visit Arbat Street, which is a kilometre long pedestrian road that has been in existence since the 15th century. After this you'll have a free afternoon in the city. With the exception of holidays, you have the opportunity to visit Lenin's Mausoleum. Open between 10.00 and 13.00, entry is free, but there is often a bit of a queue. Other options include a visit to one of the many fine art galleries, the Bolshoi Theatre, Gorky Park or the impressive GUM department store, with its beautiful glass roof.

This evening, we reunite to transfer to Moscow's main station to board the train bound for St. Petersburg. Our accommodation is in four-berth compartments with bedding provided.



**Accommodation: Overnight Train from Moscow to St Petersburg**



Simple Overnight Train



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 12 - Arrive in St. Petersburg for a city tour

We arrive in St. Petersburg by train this morning. Built on the hundred islets that form the delta of the Neva River, St. Petersburg

(formerly Leningrad) was founded by Peter the Great as his 'Window on the West'. Regarded as one of the most beautiful and romantic cities in the world, its picturesque canals and baroque and neoclassical architecture give it a very European feel. St. Petersburg has always been a city of ideas and ideals. Not only was it the home of great writers such as Pushkin and Dostoyevsky, but it was here that the Russian Revolution began, and where, arguably, the first shoots of democracy sprouted, 70 years later. We take a tour of the city that will show us some of the main highlights. We will take in Alexander Nevsky Convent, the Church of the Saviour of the Spilled Blood and Palace Square.



**Accommodation: Ibis St Petersburg Centre** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 13 - Excursion to the Hermitage and Isaak Cathedral; free afternoon

This morning we enjoy an excursion by metro to the Hermitage, which is unquestionably one of the finest art galleries in the world. It contains the works of masters like Leonardo da Vinci, Titian, Raphael, Velázquez, Rubens and Rembrandt, as well as contemporary pieces by Matisse and Picasso. Collections are split between buildings, with much on display at the Winter Palace. The official residence of Russia's Tsars from the 18th century until Nicolas II's forced abdication in 1917, this monumental building contains no less than 1,500 rooms. Stormed by Red Army soldiers in a defining moment that marked the beginning of the Soviet era, the following month-long looting of the palace's wine cellars led to what some describe as 'the greatest hangover in history'. After the Hermitage, we then visit Saint Isaac's Cathedral and then the rest of the day is free for you to explore the city.



**Accommodation: Ibis St Petersburg Centre** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 14 - Excursion to Catherine the Great's Palace at Pushkin

This morning we drive to Pushkin, named after the eminent author and home to his 19th century wooden house. Formerly 'the Tsar's Village', the royal estates were built here, including the summer residence of Catherine the Great, a majestic palace styled in blue and gold rococo. After viewing its sumptuous interior, including the grand gold and crystal ballroom, we may stroll around the lakes and gardens of the palace. Following our visit we return to St. Petersburg for our final evening.



**Accommodation: Ibis St Petersburg Centre** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available

## DAY 15 - Trip ends in St. Petersburg

The tour ends after breakfast at our hotel in St. Petersburg.



## What's included?



### Included meals

Breakfast: 14  
Lunch: 1



### Transport

Bus  
Train



### Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader  
Driver(s)  
Local Guide(s)



### Accommodation

13 nights standard hotel  
1 nights simple overnight train

## Trip information

### Country information



# Belarus

## Climate

Belarusian climate is moderately continental, a transitional form from maritime to continental climate with mild and humid winters, warm summers and damp autumns. Average July temperatures range from +17 C to +18.5 C, January temperatures vary from -8 C to -4.5 C.

## Time difference to GMT

+3

## Plugs

2 Pin Round

## Religion

Orthodox

## Language

Belarusian

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# 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

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# 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

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# 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

## Russia

**Climate**

In European Russia snows usually start in November and stay till late March/early April, when a great thaw occurs with temperatures ranging from about 5°C in October and April to -15°C in January.

**Time difference to GMT**

+3

**Plugs**

2 Pin Round

**Religion**

Orthodox Christianit, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism

**Language**

Russian

## 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.

Tallinn: Maritime Museum Seaplane Harbour €15.00 per person plus €85.00 per group for a local guide; Bastion Tunnels €7.00 including a local guide - this needs to be booked in advance of travel.

Riga: Latvian Ethnographic Open Air Museum €5.00; observation deck at the Academy of Science €4.00; KGB Museum free admission and from €3.50 for a guided tour.

Vilnius: KGB Museum €20.00; Gediminas Tower €5.00.

Minsk: Dudutki Museum €50.00 (including transport, entrance and lunch); Organ concert at the Cathedral of Saint Virgin Mary €13.00 (available in the summer and between September and October)

Moscow: Bolshoi Theatre approximately €25.00; Novodevichy Convent €8.00/€17.00 for entrance and guide (minimum 7 participants); Novodevichy Cemetery free entrance; Tretyakov Gallery €10.00/€25.00 for entrance and guide (minimum 7 participants); Christ the Saviour Cathedral free entrance or €60.00 for a local guide (minimum 7 participants); Historical Museum €7.00/€15.00 with guide (minimum 7 participants); Saint Basil's Cathedral €7.00/€15.00 with guide (minimum 7 participants).

St. Petersburg: Alexander Nevsky Convent €5.00; Peterhof Palace and Park €30.00 including guide; Yusupov Palace €25.00 including guide; folk show with dinner €85.00; ballet tickets from €100.00.

Please note that for any ballet or opera performances that this is subject to availability and that performances may sell out. If there is a particular concert or venue you wish to visit, or you just want to ensure you're able to get a ticket to a performance, then we recommend booking your tickets online directly with the theatre production company before leaving the UK.

## Clothing

In spring and summer, lightweight clothing is best during the day plus warmer clothing for colder nights. We also recommend taking a lightweight raincoat and an umbrella, as rainfall is possible at any time of year. During autumn and winter layers work best. We recommend taking a hat, gloves, scarf and a fleece/jumper. In winter a thick waterproof and windproof jacket is required and you may also find thermals useful.

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

## Footwear

Comfortable shoes for walking and sandals or trainers for relaxing. If you're travelling in winter then it may be slippery underfoot, so please ensure that your footwear is waterproof and that it has a good grip.

## 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 and at railway stations this could mean going up and down long flights of steps and on/off trains - so don't overload yourself.

## Equipment

We recommend taking insect repellent (especially if travelling in summer), a water bottle, sunscreen, sunglasses, a personal first aid kit and a torch in case of emergencies. An eye masks may also be useful for sleeping during the white nights (midnight sun). A money belt is good to have, especially in Russia. You might also want to pack a swimsuit. Most importantly don't forget your camera.

## 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 £30.00 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 trip.

### International Departure Taxes

Airport Embarkation Tax

Local Departure Tax is levied on all passengers from Vilnius Airport: 18 Euros

## Country Information

### Belarus

#### 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

£6

##### Dinner price

£11

##### Beer price

£2.00 - 4.00

##### Water price

£0.4

## Foreign Exchange

### Local currency

Ruble

### Recommended Currency For Exchange

USD or Euro

### Where To Exchange

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

### ATM Availability

You might find it difficult to obtain money from some ATM machines using Maestro and Visa cards due to difficulties in reading the card.

### Credit Card Acceptance

Restaurants and shops in major towns.

### Travellers Cheques

Are difficult to cash on this tour.

## 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

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.

## 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.

## Russia

### 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.

**Dinner price**

£12.00 - 16.00

**Beer price**

£2.00 - 4.00

**Water price**

£1

### Foreign Exchange

**Local currency**

Rouble.

**Recommended Currency For Exchange**

We recommend that you take your money in Euros or US Dollars cash. For US Dollars notes should be in good condition (not torn or marked), issued after 1990 (pre-1990 are often refused) and ideally in small denominations. Euros and Dollars are easily transferable into the local currency, Roubles.

**Where To Exchange**

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

**ATM Availability**

Cash can be withdrawn both in Moscow and St. Petersburg

**Credit Card Acceptance**

Local currency (Russian Roubles) can also be drawn on credit cards from ATM's in both Moscow and St Petersburg.

**Travellers Cheques**

Travellers cheques are accepted in Moscow and St Petersburg but are very time-consuming to change and attract unfavourable exchange rates

## Transport, Accommodation & Meals

### Transport Information

Bus, Train

### 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.

For the overnight train journey we will use sleeper carriages with four bunk beds with bedding provided (two beds on floor level and two above) per compartment and with a shared toilet and wash basin in each carriage. There are no shower facilities on board. Luggage is stored under the bottom bunk beds and above the cabin door for the top bunks. There is the possibility that you will be sharing with non-Explore clients in the same cabin. There is no air-conditioning on board and it's not always possible to open the windows, so we recommend light weight bed clothes. You can experience authentic rail travel with the local people and it's a great way of getting from place to place during the night, so you maximise on the amount of time you have in each city during the day to explore. Take snacks, drinks, toilet roll, hand sanitiser and an open mind with you for maximum enjoyment.

Please note that the majority of hotels in the Baltics don't have air-conditioning.

## 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.

Belarus: Entry visas are required for UK citizens and need to be applied for in advance. A tourist voucher is required as part of your application and Explore will request this on your behalf. This is received and sent to you from 4- 6 weeks before departure. You should ensure that your passport has at least six months' validity and two unused pages. All other nationalities should consult their relevant Embassy prior to departure for visa requirements. Please note that Belarus Immigration Authority requires you to have medical insurance which is recognised by the government. You have the option to purchase such medical insurance at the border for 20 Zloty (approximately 5 Pounds) for a week.

Russia: All nationalities require a single entry visa in order to enter Russia. As part of the visa requirements you will need to obtain a Russian Travel Voucher and Authorisation from the local Russian authorities. Explore will request this on your behalf approximately 8 weeks prior to departure. Please allow a minimum of 5 working days for the travel voucher and authorisation to be processed. Due to the visa processing times, Explore are unable to accept bookings within one month of travel. For British passport holders: All applicants must present themselves in person to the Russia Visa Processing Centre in London, Manchester or Edinburgh, on the day of application, to provide biometric information (fingerprints). There is currently no appointment system in place for this process, so applicants will be seen on a first come, first serve basis. It is likely this will mean lengthy queues and waiting times. The biometric process is not optional, and any applicant who refuses to provide their fingerprints will automatically be refused a visa. This information is not stored and applicants will therefore need to travel to the Processing Centre each time a visa is required. In the event an application is rejected due to inaccurate or incomplete information, fingerprints must be resubmitted as part of the revised application. For more information regarding this new process - we recommend contacting the Russian Embassy direct, their website is <http://rusemb.org.uk/visa/>

It is essential that you provide Explore with the correct passport information at the time of booking, as this will be required in order to request the travel voucher and letter of invite. Corrections and amendments will incur additional charges, so please double check that the information we have for you is up to date and correct, this includes your passport number, full name as per passport (including middle names), date of birth and place of birth. If you intend to renew your passport please let Explore know at the point of booking and please ensure that you have the new passport no later than 8 weeks prior to travel.

You will be required to enter a reference number and a confirmation number on your visa application. These can be found at the top of your authorisation letter. In order for Explore to provide the necessary documentation to support your visa application (i.e. your visa authorisation), all post tour accommodation must be booked through Explore and not booked independently. Please ensure that your passport has a minimum of 6 months validity from the date of return to your home country.

All other nationalities should check with the Russian embassy. For nationalities that require proof of their travel insurance through Explore as part of their visa application, please contact us for a copy of this. For all nationalities - If passport details or names change within 8 weeks before departure, services on the trip may be compromised (for example train tickets) and costs will be incurred for new tickets, if available.

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](http://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.

## Included activities

Please note for many attractions and sites you visit during the trip, especially whilst in Russia, you will not be allowed to take coats or bags inside. These will have to be checked into the cloakrooms available and so customers are advised to carry a small bag for wallets/purses, mobile phone, personal docs etc. whilst inside the venues.

This trip is designed to acquaint you with the highlights of five fascinating countries in 15 days. There's so much to enjoy and there's a lot of ground to cover, so please be prepared for the busy nature of this enthralling holiday.

## Non refundable permits

## Belarus

### Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, we recommend protection against Diphtheria, Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Rabies, Tetanus, Tick-borne encephalitis, Tuberculosis and Typhoid. 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.

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## 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.

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## 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.

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## 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.

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## Russia

### Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against tetanus, typhoid, hepatitis A, polio and diphtheria. 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. The Russian government advises that certain medications must be declared upon entry into the country, and you may also be required to carry a prescription with you. You should consult your local consulate for up to date information prior to travel.

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