



Kaliningrad & the Baltics 2019



Kaliningrad & the Baltics

Definitive Journey Through Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Kaliningrad

Two Departures in 2019 – Premier Series – 13 Days

April 22–May 4 • July 29–August 10

This overland journey roves the countryside and urban centers of four distinct nations: the three independent Baltic countries – Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia – and Kaliningrad, an exclave of Russia. Together they form a mosaic of countries ruled over in early years by the traders of the Hanseatic League, and later occupied by the Soviet Union at the end of the Second World War. Admire the UNESCO-listed Old Towns of each of the Baltic capital cities. Begin in Tallinn, Estonia’s charming capital, with its narrow winding streets, red-roofed buildings, and enchanting churches. Travel to Latvia to explore Riga, 2014 European Capital of Culture, with its lovely cobbled center and turn-of-the-century architecture. Traveling via the coastal town of Klaipeda and the UNESCO-listed Curonian Spit, arrive in Kaliningrad, formerly known as Königsberg, now a Russian city with a German past. The journey ends in Lithuania’s capital, Vilnius, a former Capital of Culture – an honor that showcased the city’s contribution to the cultural life of Europe.



Daily Itinerary

Day 1, Monday	Arrive Tallinn, Estonia
Day 2, Tuesday	Tallinn
Day 3, Wednesday	Tallinn • Parnu • Sigulda, Latvia • Gauja National Park • Riga
Day 4, Thursday	Riga
Day 5, Friday	Riga
Day 6, Saturday	Riga • Rundale Palace • Hill of Crosses • Klaipeda, Lithuania
Day 7, Sunday	Klaipeda
Day 8, Monday	Klaipeda • Curonian Spit • Nida • Kaliningrad, Russia
Day 9, Tuesday	Kaliningrad • trip to Svetlogorsk
Day 10, Wednesday	Kaliningrad • Kaunas, Lithuania • Vilnius
Day 11, Thursday	Vilnius
Day 12, Friday	Vilnius • day trip to Trakai Castle
Day 13, Saturday	Depart Vilnius



MIR Signature Experiences

- Discover Europe's best-kept secret, the Baltic states, with their rich heritage and unique traditions.
- Get to know the spirited Estonians while wandering the cobbled lanes of Tallinn's UNESCO-listed Old Town.
- Explore magical Riga, with its delightful town center and turn-of-the-century architecture, and enjoy a backstage tour of the Riga Opera House.
- Attend an organ concert in old Riga at the Dome Cathedral.
- Visit Lithuania's Hill of Crosses, a revered roadside shrine where thousands of crosses have been planted.
- Learn about the history of "Lithuanian Gold" at the Amber Museum in Palanga.
- Traverse the Curonian Spit, a narrow strip of land between Russia and Lithuania dotted with fishing villages, forests, and white sand dunes.
- Explore Kaliningrad, Russia's southernmost Baltic port, with its multiethnic heritage.
- Take a boat ride around Lake Galve near Trakai Castle.
- Pay a visit to the ominous KGB Museum in Vilnius.

Tour Highlights

Tallinn	Old Town (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Song Festival Grounds, St. Birgitta's Convent, Dome Church, Kadriorg Park, Dome Hill (Toompea), Gothic Town Hall
Parnu	Sandy beaches of Parnu
Sigulda	Gauja National Park, Turaida Castle
Riga	Old Town (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Dome Cathedral, LAIMA Chocolate Museum, Art Nouveau District, Ethnographic Museum, Riga Opera House with backstage tour, Rundale Palace
Hill of Crosses	Hill covered in thousands of crosses of all sizes
Klaipeda	Theater Square, <i>fachwerk</i> -style architecture
Palanga	Resort town with many sculptures, Palanga Botanical Garden, Amber Museum
Curonian Spit	Curonian Spit sand dunes (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Hill of Witches
Kaliningrad	Russia's Baltic sea port, hometown of Immanuel Kant, Konigsberg Cathedral, Bunker Museum, Hanseatic heritage
Svetlogorsk	Sculpture Park, amber mine, largest sundial in Europe
Kaunas	Perkunas House, Town Hall, Vytautas Church, Ciurlionis House Museum
Vilnius	Old Town (UNESCO World Heritage Site), St. Anne's Church, Gates of Dawn, Church of St. Casimir, Pilies Street, Vilnius University – one of the oldest in Europe, KGB Museum, Trakai Castle, Kernave, Karaite Ethnographic Museum

Daily Itinerary

Day One, Monday
Arrive Tallinn, Estonia

Arrive in Tallinn and transfer to the centrally located hotel. This evening, enjoy a **welcome dinner** to start off the tour.

Meals: D – *Hotel Savoy Boutique, Hotel Telegraaf, or similar*



Day Two, Tuesday Tallinn

Today tour the city of Tallinn and its environs. **Tallinn's Old Town** is the best-preserved medieval town center in Eastern Europe, in spite of various invasions of Danes, Swedes, Teutonic Knights, Russians, Nazis, and Soviets. Its winding cobbled streets, red roofs, and remaining turreted fortress wall are on the **UNESCO World Heritage list**. Located across the narrow Gulf of Finland from Helsinki, and not far from St. Petersburg, Tallinn has been a trading and strategic center for hundreds of years.

The tour begins with a visit to the **Tallinn Song Festival Grounds**, where Estonians defied the Soviet Union in 1988, and where every five years an enormous song festival is held. Estonia's cultural identity is closely linked to music. The oldest Estonian song type, the runic chant, dates to the first millennium BC. Native traditions were passed down through the generations, preserving the rich oral folklore that survives to this day.

After visiting the Song Festival Grounds, drive to the Pirita district to explore **St. Birgitta's Convent**. The ruins of St. Birgitta's Convent have become a symbol of this district. The convent's church was consecrated in 1436, and the convent was operational for about 175 years. It was destroyed during the Livonian War (1558-1583). Today, the western limestone gable and the side walls are all that remain. In 2001, a new convent was built next to the ruins, and the nuns of St. Birgitta's Order returned after more than 400 years.



Next, stop to tour at **Kadriorg Park**. Peter the Great built a summer palace and park here in 1718, calling it Katherinethal, after his second wife. The architect, Michetti, was later involved in building Peterhof, Peter's summer palace outside of St. Petersburg. The park originally encompassed almost 250 acres and hundreds of trees were planted, including horse chestnuts intended for Peterhof. Continue back to the city center for lunch at a local restaurant.

Following lunch, begin a walking tour of the city at **Dome Hill (Toompea)**. Estonia's oldest church, the Lutheran Cathedral of St. Mary the Virgin, or the **Dome Church**, was first mentioned in 1219. A Catholic church until 1561, it was later used as a burial place for German and Swedish nobility. The appearance of the church today dates from the 17th century, when it was rebuilt after a fire. After visiting the Dome Church, walk down



the hill to the Lower Town and visit the **Gothic Town Hall** and the 14th century Holy Ghost Church with its fantastic old outdoor clock and medieval interior.

Return to the hotel; dinner tonight is independent.
Meals: B, L – *Hotel Savoy Boutique, Hotel Telegraaf, or similar*

Day Three, Wednesday

Tallinn • Parnu • Sigulda, Latvia • Gauja National Park • Riga

Depart early from Tallinn and journey onward to Latvia's charming capital of Riga. Stop at **Parnu Beach**. Just 80 miles south of Tallinn near the border with Latvia, Parnu is known as a favorite summer retreat and health spa locale in Estonia, and has been called the "Baltic Riviera" for its location on the Gulf of Riga. The town itself has the friendly, laid-back atmosphere of a beach town; at night, the storefronts are lit up colorfully, and bars and restaurants buzz with energy. Enjoy lunch at a cafe before stopping in Sigulda.

Sigulda is the gateway to the **Gauja National Park**, established in 1973. The park embraces some of the most beautiful scenery in all of Latvia and is home to over 200 ancient oak trees (some with a circumference of 10 feet). Tour the **Sigulda Castle ruins** (originally built by the Livonian Knights) on the southern bank of the Gauja River. Also visit the **restored castle of Turaida** on the northern bank of the river, built by the archbishops of Riga, to admire excellent views of the town and the river.

By late afternoon, arrive in Riga. Check into the hotel and enjoy dinner at a local restaurant.
Meals: B, L, D – *Hotel Neiburgs or similar*

Day Four, Thursday

Riga

Following breakfast at the hotel, embark on foot for an exploration of the **UNESCO-listed Old Town of Riga**. Riga was first a fishing village founded by native Livonians. When the proto-Balts, an Indo-European people arrived, they gradually assimilated most of the Livonians. The resulting mix of people, now called Latvians, lived in small kingdoms, easy prey for German crusaders who came to spread Christianity to the pagans at the beginning of the 13th century. For the next 500 years, while the leadership of the country changed hands among the Swedes, Poles, and Russians, the ethnic German aristocracy hung on to its autonomy and feudal estates.

Peter the Great conquered Latvia in the early 1700s, and Riga began to grow as a trade and industrial center. Between 1857 and 1863, the medieval town walls were demolished, and parks and green belts were allowed to grow in their stead. Although the town was badly damaged during both World Wars and neglected during its Soviet period, Riga today is Latvia's flourishing center of the arts, art nouveau architecture, and lively nightlife.

The tour begins with a visit to the **Dome Cathedral**. With walls six feet thick, the Dome Cathedral in Riga is the largest working church in the Baltics. Founded in 1211, the church was rebuilt and added to several times. Today, its main brick body is 15th century Gothic, while the steeple is 18th century baroque. The cathedral houses one of the biggest organs in



Europe, with 6,718 pipes.

This afternoon, board a 100-year-old wooden boat and float serenely along the Riga Canal, admiring the lush 19th century plantings and 20th century parks, fountains and monuments.

Dinner tonight is independent, with overnight at the hotel.

Meals: B, L – *Hotel Neiburgs or similar*

Day Five, Friday

Riga

This morning, continue with a full-day tour of Riga. On the way to the **art nouveau District**, pass by the Latvian University and Conservatory. See where Riga's most famous art nouveau buildings are grouped, many designed by Mikhail Eisenstein (father of film director Sergei Eisenstein). The imaginative and decorative art nouveau style took root in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and resulted in beautifully decorated facades adorned with sculpture, ironwork, and stylized motifs drawn from nature. UNESCO has declared Riga to have one of the finest collections of art nouveau architecture in Europe.



Following an independent lunch, visit the **Ethnographic Museum**. One of the oldest ethnographic museums in Europe, Riga's open-air museum features historical homes, farmsteads, windmills, a tavern, and a church representative of the lives of Latvian common people in the last two centuries. During the summer, masters of over 18 different crafts assemble here to demonstrate spoon-carving, beekeeping, embroidery, and other Latvian specialties.

Next, visit the **LAIMA Chocolate Museum** to sample sweets and learn more about Latvia's confectionery traditions.

Tour the **Opera House**, one of the first buildings to be renovated after Latvia became independent again from the Soviet Union in 1991. Latvians consider opera to be an important part of their cultural heritage. Enjoy a brief **backstage tour** of the opera house before an independent dinner, with dining suggestions from the local

guide. With its cobblestone streets, gabled buildings, outdoor cafes, and shops, Riga is a delight to explore on foot. Dinner tonight is independent.

Meals: B – *Hotel Neiburgs or similar*

Day Six, Saturday

Riga • Rundale Palace • Hill of Crosses • Klaipeda, Lithuania

Early departure from Riga, continuing south. Stop at **Rundale Palace**, designed in the early 18th century by Rastrelli, who also built St. Petersburg's Winter Palace. The palace was the home of the Duke of Courland, a favorite of Russia's Empress Anna. It has served time as apartments, a primary school, and a



granary, but in 1972 restoration work began; restoration was completed in 2015 and the rococo rooms are now open for inspection, including the royal kitchens.

After crossing into Lithuania, stop at the **Hill of Crosses**, a powerful symbol of faith and perseverance. This small hill, which in early times accommodated a defensive fortification, is totally hidden by a multitude of crosses planted in the ground by local believers. During the Soviet era, authorities regularly tore down and burned the crosses, though many of them were valuable examples of folk art. Undaunted, Lithuanian Catholics, artists, and patriots would steal up the hill at night and plant more. The last major attempt at leveling the shrine was in 1975. Since then, local people and travelers have placed more than 100,000 crosses on the hill. The evocative atmosphere of this sacred place draws thousands of believers and pilgrims each year.

This evening, arrive in **Klaipeda**, the third largest city in Lithuania and an important port on the Baltic Sea. Upon arrival, check into the hotel and enjoy dinner at a local restaurant. The remainder of the evening is free to enjoy this beautiful port city independently.

Meals: B, L, D – *Hotel Radisson Blu Klaipeda or similar*

Day Seven, Sunday Klaipeda

Located where the Dane River flows into the Curonian Lagoon, Klaipeda was originally a fishing village founded by the Balts. Soon after its entry into written history, it was captured by the Teutonic Knights and was ruled by Germany for 700 years. Known during that time by its German name, Memel, Klaipeda was not recaptured by the Lithuanians until 1923. Annexed by the Germans in 1939, the city received heavy shelling as a Nazi submarine base during WWII.

Despite its difficult history, the city retains considerable charm, with much of its old quarter carefully restored since the end of the war. Take a walk through cobbled **Theater Square**, with its lovely, restored 1819 Drama Theater. Klaipeda is known for its warehouses – big, timber-framed buildings built during Hanseatic times in the German *fachwerk* style. The largest of these, formerly a fish warehouse, has been restored and reincarnated as an exhibition hall.

Continue to **Palanga**, Lithuania's liveliest beach resort, famed for its 11 miles of beautiful sand beaches and its thermal and mineral springs. On summer weekends, half of Lithuania seems to be lying in the sun here. From the 15th-17th centuries, however, Palanga was an important port and a bulwark against the Livonian Knights and the Teutonic Order.

After lunch at a local restaurant, view several of the numerous sculptures Palanga is known for. The **Birute and Kestutis** sculpture is located on the foot of the Birute Hill that towers over Palanga Botanical Park. Legend has it that Birute was a pagan priestess who was forcibly married to Kestutis, the Grand Duke of Lithuania, and was mother of Vytautas the Great, one of the most famous rulers of medieval Lithuania.



Continue on to the **Botanical Garden**. The Tyszkiewicz palace park surrounding the Amber Museum was converted into a botanical garden in 1960. Originally designed for one of the Counts Tyszkiewicz by a French architect and a Belgian gardener at the turn of the century, the park now contains over 300 species, including a tree planted by the first Lithuanian president, Antanas Smetona. Sculptures dot the pine-dominated formal landscape.

Visit Palanga's **Amber Museum**, located in a neo-Renaissance palace (the former residence of the noble Tyszkiewicz family) set in the gracefully landscaped botanical park. The museum exhibits a complete history of "Lithuanian gold," including fossilized insects from millions of years ago.

Another focus of the museum is the use of amber for adornment. Since the Neolithic Age from 10,000 BC on, humans have prized amber for decoration and for talismans or amulets to ward off evil. Baltic amber jewelry has turned up in ancient graves in places like England, Greece, and Egypt. The fossilized resin from pine forests that grew in this area over 50 million years ago, Baltic amber still washes up on the beaches in Lithuania.

Return to Klaipeda for an independent dinner.

Meals: B, L – *Hotel Radisson Blu or similar*



Day Eight, Monday

Klaipeda • Curonian Spit • Nida • Kaliningrad, Russia

Early departure toward Kaliningrad via the Curonian (Courland) Spit, a narrow, 60-mile-long strip of sand running from Klaipeda south into the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad. Formed over 5,000 years ago, the spit and its forested dunes separate the mostly freshwater Curonian Lagoon from the Baltic Sea. Declared a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** in 2000, the **Curonian Spit** is a strange and beautiful landscape of corrugated dunes, little villages, and forests of linden, elm, birch, and pine.

The first stop is at one of the oldest settlements along the spit, Juodkrante. Climb the **Hill of Witches** and wander through the groves of carved wooden figures straight out of old Lithuanian folk tales and mythology. Wooden sculptures were first carved here in 1979, but the hill was a place of pagan celebrations for hundreds of years before then.





Continue along the narrow piece of land and stop at the fishing village of **Nida**, which was moved to its current location in 1784, and is the administrative center for the Lithuanian half of the spit. The little town has been a resort for many years. Its placement on the warm and shallow Curonian Lagoon and the proximity of looming sand dunes give it a coastal austerity offset by the brightly painted wooden houses typical of the area. Artists and writers sought refuge here, and it was from here that the Curonian Spit's reforestation and reclamation efforts were launched at the beginning of the 19th century.

After lunch at a local restaurant, head for the **Russian border**. Cross the border and continue to Kaliningrad, Russia's southernmost Baltic port and the only year-round, ice-free port in Russia. Known since 1255 as Königsberg, the city was for many years the German capital of East Prussia. During WWII, Königsberg was nearly destroyed by Allied forces, and after the Soviets were awarded the region in 1945, they did not restore the evidence of its long Germanic past. It was renamed Kaliningrad in 1946 after Mikhail Kalinin, its recently deceased Soviet President. Because the Soviet Baltic fleet was headquartered here, Kaliningrad was closed to foreign visitors until 1991. It is still heavily militarized. The multiethnic heritage of its inhabitants, combined with its varied history, makes Kaliningrad an unusual and interesting place to visit.

Upon arriving in Kaliningrad, check into the hotel. Dinner is independent.
Meals: B, L – *Hotel Radisson Blu or similar*

Day Nine, Tuesday **Kaliningrad • trip to Svetlogorsk**

After breakfast, depart on a half-day tour of Kaliningrad, starting with a visit to the **Gothic red-brick cathedral** with its museum of **Immanuel Kant**. Kant lived all of his 80 years in Königsberg and was buried outside of this church. Near the church, find the popular **Bunker Museum**. This was the underground command post of German General Otto von Lasch in WWII, and includes the room where he signed the city's surrender papers.

After lunch in a private home, drive to **Svetlogorsk**, a resort area said to offer the most vibrant cafe and beach scene in the region. It boasts lovely architecture, tree-lined streets, a beautiful water tower, and the largest sundial in Europe.

This evening, enjoy dinner at a local restaurant.
Meals: B, L, D – *Hotel Radisson Blu or similar*



Day Ten, Wednesday

Kaliningrad • Kaunas, Lithuania • Vilnius

Following breakfast, depart overland back to Lithuania, stopping at the Russian-Lithuanian border for required customs and passport formalities. Drive on to the **town of Kaunas**, the second largest city in Lithuania. Founded at the confluence of the Nemunas and Neris Rivers and first mentioned in written sources in 1361, Kaunas is now an important business center and home to seven universities. Kaunas has a reputation for political protest, and a large Russian garrison was quartered here in the 19th century after several uprisings.

The first stop on the tour is the **M.K. Ciurlionis House Museum**. Mikalojus Konstantinas Ciurlionis (1875-1911) was an avant-garde Lithuanian artist who attempted to combine painting and music into a single medium. In his short life, he produced hundreds of musical works and even more paintings, many of which are collected here. He was a founding member of the Lithuanian Union of Arts.

The Kaunas **Town Hall** on Rotuse Square was begun in 1542. The white Gothic building with its baroque elements is sometimes called the “White Swan,” because of the 170-foot tower rising like a swan’s neck from the body of the hall. In 1970, the hall was transformed into a Wedding Palace, and newlyweds can be seen emerging from the doors every Saturday morning.

Continue by visiting the Gothic-style **Vytautas Church**, built for Franciscan monks and foreign merchants by Vytautas the Great at the beginning of the 15th century. The church has had a tumultuous past at the end of which, during Soviet times, it was used as a warehouse for pharmaceuticals. But in spite of its unfortunate history, the church has retained some of its early Gothic characteristics, and is used today as a venue for sacred music festivals.

Tour the **Perkunas House**, built in the Brick Gothic style that will also be seen at St. Anne’s in Vilnius. The Brick Gothic style took root in places where there was little native stone to build with. Perkunas House is a late 15th century trading house built by Hanseatic merchants and later sold to the Jesuits.

Arrive in Vilnius later this evening and enjoy an independent dinner.
Meals: B, L – *Hotel Radisson Blu Astorija or similar*

Day Eleven, Thursday

Vilnius

After breakfast, begin with a **walking tour of Vilnius**. Throughout its long history, Vilnius has survived successive attacks by Crusaders, Crimean Tatars, Russians, Napoleon’s armies, Poles, and Germans. A **UNESCO World Heritage Site**, Vilnius is considered the largest baroque city north of the Alps.

The tour goes through squares, archways, and courtyards. One of the original gates of 16th century Vilnius, the **Gates of Dawn**, is among the last remaining parts of the old city wall. At that time, city gates often incorporated holy icons to protect the city from invaders. The



chapel in the Gates of Dawn is home to one of the most revered icons of Catholic Lithuania, the golden-clad Mother of Mercy. Down the street, pass the **Church of St. Casimir**, which was begun in 1604.

Walk down **Pilies Street**, the main artery of the Old Town. The most famous street in Vilnius, Pilies, or “Castle,” Street, runs from the Cathedral Square to the Town Hall Square. Many artisans sell their goods on this busy stretch, and travelers can find such traditional souvenirs as inexpensive amber, Russian dolls, linens, and woolen mittens. Pilies Street is also the place to experience most festivals, parades, and celebrations that happen around Vilnius. Also located on Pilies Street are the headquarters of Vilnius University as well as the house where the Lithuanian Declaration of Independence was signed in 1918.

Admire **St. Anne’s Church**, a diminutive red-brick church that represents the pinnacle of Gothic architecture in Lithuania. Built around 1500, the building displays a remarkable 33 kinds of brick. The combination and variety of arches, finials, brick patterns, and spires with metal crosses make for an elegant and graceful exterior. Legend says that Napoleon Bonaparte expressed his admiration for St. Anne’s with the words, “If I can, I will put this church on my palm and bring it to France.” St. Anne’s has survived more than five centuries almost unchanged, and today stands as the most famous building in Vilnius.

Visit **Vilnius University**, founded by Stefan Batory, King of Poland in 1579, which developed into an important scientific and cultural center. One of the oldest universities in Northern Europe, its buildings encompass all the major architectural styles that influenced Vilnius over 400 years. Walk around the courtyards and admire the architecture.

After lunch at a local restaurant, pay a visit to the **KGB Museum**, in the basement of the former District Court Building on Lukiskiu Square. This is where thousands of Lithuanians underwent interrogations before their deportation to Siberia. Their cells have been left almost as they were in those not-so-distant days.

Dinner tonight is independent.
Meals: B, L – *Hotel Radisson Blu Astorija or similar*



Day Twelve, Friday **Vilnius • day trip to Trakai Castle**

After breakfast at the hotel, depart for **Trakai**, several miles outside of Vilnius. The 14th century town of Trakai was one of Lithuania’s first capitals, and has two lakeside castles. The peninsula castle was destroyed in the 17th century, and only ruins remain. The restored island castle was built in the Brick Gothic style on a little island in **Lake Galve**. At the end of the 14th century, when Lithuania expanded its territories as far as the Black Sea, this castle became the residence of the Lithuanian Grand Dukes. Grand Duke Vytautas brought some 400 families of Karaites (Turkic adherents of Karaite



Judaism) from the Crimea to serve as his castle guards. An active *kinessa* – a Karaite house of prayer – is located here, as is the **Karaite Ethnographic Museum**. Board a boat for a short cruise of Lake Galve.

Next visit **UNESCO-listed Kernave**. The site of Kernave in the Pajauta Valley has been settled for at least 10,000 years. An accident of geology made the conditions in the valley perfect for preserving its cultural layers; each succeeding settlement was covered with the alluvial soil of the river valley, which formed wet peat, preserving the artifacts intact. In particular, five hill forts attest to the importance of the location in the 13th and 14th centuries, when it was a medieval capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

Return to Vilnius and enjoy a **farewell dinner** this evening.

Meals: B, D – *Hotel Radisson Blu Astorija, or similar*

Day Thirteen, Saturday Depart Vilnius

Following breakfast, the tour concludes with a transfer to the airport.

Meals: B

Dates for 2019 – Two Departures – Premier Series

The land itinerary is scheduled to operate on the following dates. Please note you need to depart the U.S. one day prior to the tour start date due to airline flight schedules.

April 22-May 4, 2019

July 29-August 10, 2019

Package Prices – 2019

4-16 travelers, \$7,095 per person, twin share

Single supplement \$1,195

Tour Includes

- Accommodations as noted in itinerary.
- 12 breakfasts, 9 lunches, and 5 dinners per the itinerary. Some lunches and dinners are not included so that you may enjoy a chance to experiment on your own.
- Restaurant tips for included meals.
- Services of experienced, English-speaking local guides, drivers, and other staff, including a MIR Tour Manager.
- Arrival/departure airport transfers. MIR will arrange for all travelers to be met on arrival and seen off on departure whether we make your airfare arrangements or not, provided you arrive and depart on the tour start/end dates in the tour start/end cities.
- Ground transportation throughout itinerary by private vehicle (size of vehicle depends on group size).
- Guided sightseeing tours and entrance fees as outlined in itinerary.
- Special events, excursions, and cultural performances per the itinerary.
- Baggage handling where available.
- Gratuities to local guides, drivers, porters, and other service personnel.



- Complete pre-departure information including detailed packing list, reading list, *Touring with MIR* handbook with country-specific information, maps, and travel tips.
- Customized visa application and instruction kit (please note, visa fees are not included in the tour price).
- Assistance booking your custom flight arrangements (on request; please note that international airfare is not included in the land tour cost).
- Final document packet including luggage tags, final updates, and more.

Not Included

- International airfare or taxes – available through MIR; please call for rates.
- Meals not specified as included in the itinerary.
- Single supplement charge, if requested or required.
- Items of a personal nature (phone calls, e-mail, laundry, alcohol, excess baggage, etc).
- Gratuities to Tour Manager.
- Visa/passport fees, airport departure fees.
- Travel and trip cancellation insurance.
- Expenses incurred as a result of delay, modification or extension of a tour due to causes beyond MIR's control.
- Travel and trip cancellation insurance

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Premier Series

MIR's Premier Series programs feature some of our most distinctive tour concepts and include uncommon and educational experiences, including visits to small towns and villages outside the major urban areas and capital cities. While all MIR trips feature comfortable, well-located hotels, Premier Series programs take advantage of five star or best-in-class properties along the way wherever possible.

Important Notes: Is This Trip Right For You?

It is important to keep in mind that while Kaliningrad, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are fairly modern and cosmopolitan, some aspects may not live up to the standards North American travelers expect. Services are improving in the region; nevertheless, you may encounter problems with plumbing, bureaucratic service, road conditions, unpaved sidewalks, uneven surfaces and steps and availability of public restrooms. Kaliningrad, generally speaking, sees few travelers, and the infrastructure is not as fully developed as in the Baltic countries.

While this program is designed to be the most comfortable possible for travel in this region, this is an adventuresome tour. It is rated as **rigorous touring** due to the daily walking involved and the overall shortcomings of the tourism infrastructure. This itinerary features a significant amount of touring on foot. Many streets are of cobblestone, and some attractions are only accessible via steep staircases. Museums rarely have elevators. Flexibility and a sense of humor are essential components of the enjoyment of your trip.



Every effort has been made to ensure that the information in this schedule is accurate. However, trip itineraries are always subject to change. We do our best to inform you in advance of any changes, but due to the nature of travel in these countries, this may not always be possible.

Are You Prepared?

A Travel Guard travel insurance plan can help cover your vacation investment, offset expenses from travel mishaps and provide you with emergency travel assistance. To learn more about all of the benefits of purchasing a Travel Guard travel insurance plan, please visit www.travelguard.com/mircorp

Please read the U.S. State Department's Travel Advisory regarding travel to Russia here: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/russia-travel-advisory.html>

Please read the U.S. State Department's Travel Advisory regarding travel to Estonia here: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/estonia-travel-advisory.html>

Please read the U.S. State Department's Travel Advisory regarding travel to Latvia here: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/latvia-travel-advisory.html>

Please read the U.S. State Department's Travel Advisory regarding travel to Lithuania here: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/lithuania-travel-advisory.html>

If you are not already enrolled in STEP, Smart Traveler Enrollment Program, a free service to enroll your trip with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate, please consider enrolling. For more information: <https://step.state.gov/step/>

Weather

This region of Europe enjoys a transitional maritime/continental climate, with warm summers and fairly mild winters. Spring and summer are the best times to travel to these destinations, particularly when driving overland. These are all agricultural countries, with the landscape varying from cultivated fields to forests. Expect temperatures to range from 45-65 degrees Fahrenheit in May and 70-85 degrees Fahrenheit in August. Rain and slightly cooler temperatures at night are possible.

We recommend checking temperature ranges online. Research using sites such as Weatherbase, available online at www.weatherbase.com, will help you get a snapshot of daily average temperatures as well as precipitation days and more.

International Airfare

MIR's in-house, full-service air department is available to assist with your air travel needs. Check with MIR before booking air on your own, as we are happy to research and compare the best fares available through multiple channels. Airfare varies depending on a wide variety of factors, such as dates of travel and seasonality, seat availability, special airline promotions, how restrictive ticket changes are, how long the fares can be held without purchase, routing considerations such as stopovers, and more. Tour dates are based on the land tour only. Our preferred carriers for this tour are Lufthansa and SAS Scandinavian Airlines, as they offer convenient itineraries and competitive rates from multiple cities across the U.S. to the Baltics.



Please call us at 1-800-424-7289 to discuss air options and routings for this program, and to request a quote for your specific plans and dates of travel. We will be happy to put together a no-obligation suggested air itinerary and estimate for you at your request.

Visas

At the time of writing, U.S. passport holders require one visa for this tour: Russian. You may also need a visa for any additional country you fly via to join the tour. Non-U.S. passport holders may require visas for the other Baltic countries as well.

An estimate of current visa costs for U.S. passport holders, based on standard processing time, is \$237. Your exact visa fees may differ as visa costs can depend on a number of factors, such as state of residence, processing time, and return shipping. Visa fees are always subject to change.

Standard visa processing in the Russian visa section is ten to fifteen days for this tour. Travelers should prepare to be without their passports for that amount of time. If you plan to travel extensively in the time leading up to your MIR tour, you may need to obtain a second valid passport or use expedited processing, depending on your plans. Please contact us with any questions you may have regarding the timeline for visa processing.

Extensive pre-tour paperwork is necessary to apply for this visa, which requires an overseas approval authorization to be issued prior to submission of your application materials to the Embassies/Consulates. A valid passport with six months validity from the end of the tour is also required.

In the past some travelers have made their own visa arrangements instead of using MIR's preferred provider for their visa processing; either using their own visas service or attempting to process directly with the embassies/consulates. We strongly recommend you discuss it with us before choosing an alternate visa processing method, to help avoid difficulties and visa problems. **In the event that you plan to process visas without going through MIR's preferred provider, please contact us first so we can pass you detailed instructions with critical trip-specific information.**

Pre- and Post-Tour Extensions

You may want to do a pre-tour in Helsinki and take a ferry to Tallinn, or possibly a tour in St. Petersburg with an overnight train to arrive in Tallinn. Belarus or Poland can be easily added for a post-tour trip from Vilnius. It is also possible to add a hotel night and easily combine this tour with the following tour: **Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova, May 5-18, 2019 and August 11-24, 2019.**

Call us at 1-800-424-7289 for more details.

Also Nearby...

For more tours in Eastern Europe and Western Russia, you may want to check out the following:

Flexible Essential Trips – Classic Private Journeys

Essential Baltics, 7 days. Take an overland survey of the Baltic capitals, Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn, exploring their UNESCO-listed Old Towns, featuring cobbled streets and red-tiled roofs. Visit important rural sites like Lithuania's Hill of Crosses and Latvia's baroque Rundale Palace.



Essential Ukraine, 8 days. Ukraine is the new borderland between Europe and Russia. Explore this resilient region influenced by Polish princes, Cossack *hetmen*, Turkish khans, Russian communists and Ukrainian poets and nationalists.

Essential St. Petersburg, 7 days. St. Petersburg, home of the czars and their courts, is a rich repository of extravagant palaces, brilliant museums and renowned theaters overflowing with music and dance. Its fashionable boulevards and serene canals glisten in the “White Nights” of summer and dazzle on sunny winter days.

Essential Russia, 7 days. A compact and compelling survey of Russia’s political capital, Moscow, and its cultural capital, St. Petersburg, this tour communicates the character of Western Russia in a succinct and meaningful series of experiences.

Small Group Tours

Belarus, Ukraine & Moldova, 14 days. Traverse a little-known region that has changed hands from its earliest history. Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova are three of the least frequented and least familiar countries in Europe. Time slowed drastically here after the devastation of WWII, but these beautiful countries are emerging from the shadows.

Bulgaria & Romania: Frescoes & Fortresses, 16 days. Explore the complex history and fascinating culture of Bulgaria and Romania, two Balkan countries whose rugged terrain and consequent isolation have helped preserve their heritage. Discover the luminous frescoes of the painted monasteries, breathe in the fragrance of the Valley of the Roses, and spend an afternoon visiting with villagers in a tiny Transylvanian town.

Russia’s Imperial Capitals & Ancient Villages, 11 days. Discover where Russian art, architecture and culture began. In between the urban centers of Moscow and St. Petersburg, experience the Russian countryside. The oldest and loveliest churches in Russia, Sergiev Posad’s wooden crafts and Fedoskino’s glowing lacquer boxes all put a shine on Russia’s Golden Ring.

Conditions of Participation

Your participation on a MIR Corporation trip is subject to the conditions contained in the 2019 Tour Reservation Form and Release of Liability and Assumption of Risk Agreement. Please read this document carefully and contact us with any questions.

Cancellation and Refund Policy

Payment Terms: Non-refundable deposits are accepted by check, Visa, MasterCard, or American Express. Final land payments may be made by check or credit card for reservations made directly with MIR. If booking through a travel agent, please contact your agent to find out what form of payment they accept. (MIR can accept final payment from travel agents by agency check only.) Airfares are subject to change until ticketed; payment policies vary by carrier.

If you cancel your trip please notify MIR in writing. Upon MIR’s receipt of notice the following charges apply to land tours (policies for air tickets, custom group trips vary).

MIR Small Group Tours

Cost of cancellation, if received:



61 or more days prior to departure, deposit due or paid in full of \$750;
31-60 days prior to departure, 50% of land tour cost;
30 days prior to or after trip departure, no refund.

References

We encourage you to speak directly with satisfied past travelers. Please request a list of references.

Why MIR?

Regional knowledge is crucial to the success of any trip to our corner of the world. MIR combines detailed information about geography and infrastructure, history and art, language and culture, with the depth of knowledge that comes only from decades of regional experience. You may wonder how we differ from other tour operators...

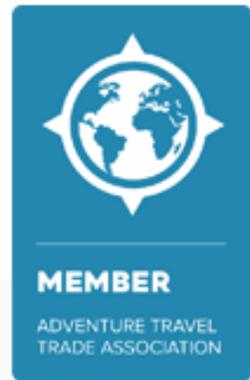
Destination Specialization

MIR focuses exclusively on the exceptional region at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. This area has been our overriding passion since 1986; we don't do the rest of the world. Our hard-earned expertise gained over the last three decades can take you from end to end of the largest country in the world – Russia – and to all of its neighbors. We specialize in travel to Siberia, the Silk Route, St. Petersburg & Beyond. Our destinations include: Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, the Baltics (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia), Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan), Iran, the South Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan), Turkey, Mongolia, China, Tibet, and Central/East Europe (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia).

30 Years of Experience

A travel company doesn't last more than 30 years in the business without a solid track record. MIR has helped thousands of individuals achieve their travel goals. Our dedication and experience have earned us their trust and the trust of many well-respected institutions. Today MIR is the preferred tour operator for museum, alumni and special interest organizations across the country.





Recommended & Respected

MIR has twice been rated one of the “Best Adventure Travel Companies on Earth” by *National Geographic Adventure*. Several of our tours have won awards in top travel publications, such as *Outside* magazine and *National Geographic Traveler*. Our trips have been featured in books such as *Riding the Hula Hula to the Arctic Ocean* and *1,000 Places to See Before You Die*.

More Questions?

Please feel free to call us with questions at 1-800-424-7289, 8:30am-5:30pm Pacific Time.

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