

# welcome to Estonia, Latvia & Lithuania



## Li'l Nations; Big Attitude

From a foreign perspective it seems rather easy to group Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania into one Baltic bundle. They are, after all, three little countries in a tiny continental corner where Northern and Eastern Europe meet. Upon closer inspection, however, it becomes rapidly apparent that these three nations are hardly alike. Beyond the basics like language, you'll find wildly different worlds as you pass across borders. From religion to more modern propensities, such as design aesthetics and popular music, each Baltic sibling has a significantly different set of fundamentals that helps make it unique.

## A Limitless History

The Baltic countries shouldn't merely be measured against each other: these three nations sit at the crossroads of some of the fiercest powers the world has even known, where, over a thousand years ago, warring pagan tribes battled each other. Christian subjugation soon followed with the arrival of the Hanseatic League and Teutonic Knights. Sweden, Poland and Russia each had their turn to incorporate the land into their expanding empires. Then modern powers, eg the Soviet Union and the Nazis, had a go, too.

Every power that's held claim over the Baltic has left an indelible mark of its rule, from the haunting tribal mounds of



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*A land of crumbling castles, soaring dunes, pagan rituals, towering pine forests, quaking lakelands and churning northern seas – a trip to the Baltic proves that fairy tales do come true...*

(left) Old Town Riga, Latvia (p185)

(below) Teashop, Vilnius, Lithuania (p280)



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the ancient pagans, to the soaring stone castles and cathedral spires of medieval kingdoms, to the opulent manor houses of 18th- and 19th-century feudal lands, and the space station-like bases and efficiently boxy structures, of the Soviet era.

## Welcome to the Party

On any trip, one gets a certain excitement – almost giddiness – when discovering a new destination, so consider for a minute that the Baltic nations are just as elated to get to know you (and to find out what has drawn you to their country). This newfound openness starkly contrasts with the terse qualities of the former Russian influence (not to mention the bleak

winter weather) and shows that the Balts are primed for tourists and seem genuinely invested in ensuring that visitors have a good time.

There's eagerness in the air; it permeates the borders of all three countries featured in this book. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are ready to shed any remaining fetters from their history of Soviet oppression. These Baltic brothers are globalising, glamorising, stylising, and you've been officially invited to the party as they leapfrog over the other emerging European nations to firmly take their place on the world's stage as three distinct nations.