

Survival Guide

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Directory A-Z

Accommodation

In the Baltic, the Eastern Bloc bedtime blues are a thing of the past. Many hotels have been renovated and though there are still a few grey Soviet monsters lurking about, nowadays plenty of other options are available. The capitals tend to have the best range – from hostels to international hotel chains – but things can get tight on summer weekends.

Generally speaking, hostels, camp sites and cheaper guesthouses fall into the budget category; most of the guesthouses and the less expensive hotels are rated midrange; and top-end places include the ritzier hotels and boutique properties. In the capitals, especially Tallinn, it's hard to come by a decent double in the budget category, but competition is

fierce, so in most cases you should be able to find something after a bit of online research.

The peak tourist season is from June to August (the ski resorts have a second peak in winter); if you're travelling then, you should book well in advance. This is essential in Tallinn, Vilnius and Riga, as well as in popular summer-lovin' destinations, including the Estonian islands and all the coastal resorts.

From October to April (and to a lesser extent September and May), room prices typically drop by about 30% – sometimes substantially more, depending on your powers of persuasion. Also keep in mind that popular seaside spots and other weekend getaway destinations (including Tallinn) are pricier on Friday and Saturday than during the week.

Camping

Many Baltic camping grounds are beautifully located by lakes or within forests, but most are difficult to reach unless you have a private vehicle. Some have permanent wooden cottages or, occasionally, brick bungalows. Cabins vary in shape and size but are usually small, one-room affairs with three or four beds. Showers and toilets are nearly always communal and vary dramatically in cleanliness.

Camping grounds usually open in May or June and close in mid-to-late September. A night in a wooden cottage typically costs €10 to €30 per person, while tent sites range from €4 to €10 per person.

Estonia, in particular, has an extremely well-organised outfit overseeing camping. **RMK** (☎676 7500; www.rmke.ee) maintains dozens of free basic camp sites in forests all over the country; check its dedicated website www.loodusegakoos.ee for details.

Farmstays

The term 'farmstay' can vary widely – and isn't always the farm-based homestay experience you might be expecting. Many 'tourist farms' are set up as small guesthouses, while others offer self-contained apartments or whole cottages. Regardless, farmstays can prove to be a memorable choice. For a fee, host families will often

COTTAGE RENTALS

Baltcott (www.baltcott.com) An Estonian company with dozens of cottages and apartments on its books, throughout Estonia (☎648 5788) and Latvia (☎6756 9435). Scour its website for a log cabin in Lahemaa National Park, a farmstead on Saaremaa, a beachside apartment in Pärnu or Jūrmala, or a city base in Tallinn or Riga.

Lauku Celotajs (www.celotajs.lv) This Latvian tourism company catalogues dozens of rural hotels and farmsteads in Latvia and beyond on its excellent website.