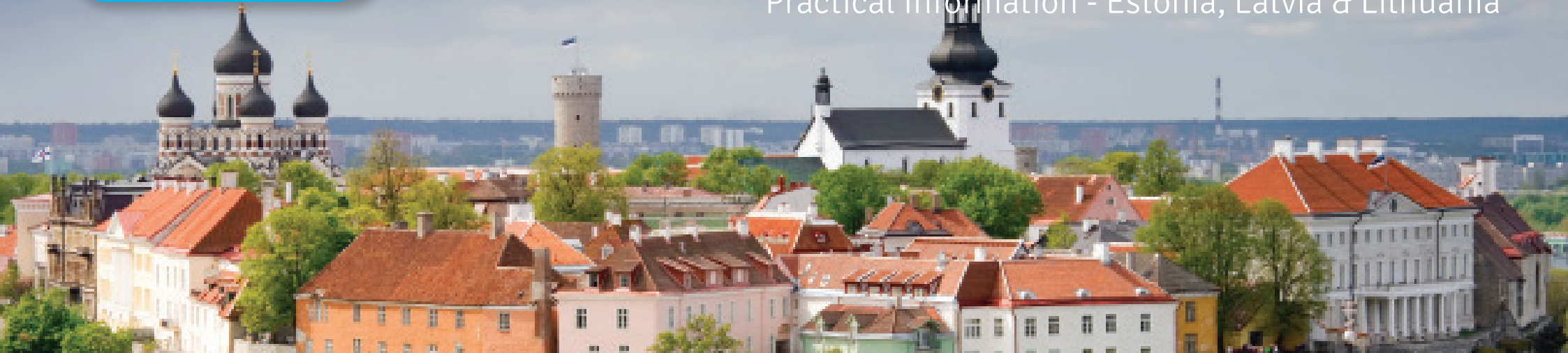


Baltic States

Practical Information - Estonia, Latvia & Lithuania



CLIMATE

Conditions in the Baltic States during summer are generally pleasant and mild. Despite some warm summers recently, summers in the Baltic States can be wet and variable.

Estonia has a maritime temperate climate with all four seasons. Summers are warm and winters are not particularly cold but quite snowy. Rainfall is moderately low, falling in frequent showers throughout the year, and at its heaviest in summer and autumn. Estonia is a very flat, low-lying country covered in lakes and as such has little regional variation in climate. Small differences are caused by the proximity of different locations to the Baltic Sea and North Atlantic Ocean, and by the direction of the prevailing winds.

You can expect rain year round in Latvia, though it is highest in summer, peaking in August. Summers are generally mild; the warmest months are July and August. Spring and autumn are periods of rapid change but are generally pleasant nearer to summer. Winters are cold and snowy.

Lithuania lies on the southeastern shore of the Baltic Sea. It lies north of Latvia and is home to a 99km coastline, 38km of this coastline lies on the Baltic Sea. The Curonian sand peninsula

shelters the rest of the coast, which is a long sand barrier that separates the Baltic Sea from the Curonian Lagoon. The Lithuanian terrain is split between flat lowlands and highlands. There are numerous lakes and wetlands scattered across the country and forest covers 30% of the land. Spring in the region is awash with wildflowers and blossoms. The summers are generally warm and mild with temperatures ranging from 15-19°C to 23-28°C.

LANGUAGE

The sole official language in Lithuania as well as the language you will hear the most is Lithuanian (native to some 85% of population and spoken by 96%). With millennia-old history and struggles for its survival, Lithuanian language is very much a part of national identity.

Estonian is the official language of Estonia and it is closely related to Finnish.

Latvian is the official language of Latvia and is most closely related to Lithuanian.

English is the most popular foreign language to learn today in the Baltic States. 30% of total population and 80% of the

youth speaks it. Older generations are unlikely to speak English however as very few schools taught it seriously under the Soviet occupation. Because of the Soviet history Russian is still widely spoken within the older generations in the Baltic States. Today English is the language locals expect foreigners to know, so it is widely used in modern museums, hotels, tourist signs and city/resort restaurant menus.

VISA & ENTERING/DEPARTING

Citizens from Australia, New Zealand, America, Japan and Canada can travel in Estonia, Latvia & Lithuania without a visa for up to three months within any six-month period, with the time limit beginning on the first entry to any Schengen Agreement nation.

Make sure you get a stamp in your passport as you enter the first Schengen country, as that is then valid for entering any other Schengen country.

TIMEZONE

The Baltic States are on Greenwich Mean Time +2 time making them 11 hours behind Australian Eastern Standard Time. When on daylight saving time (GMT +2) they are 10 hours behind Australia. When on daylight saving time (GMT +2) they are 9 hours behind Australia. Daylight Saving starts on the last Sunday in March and ends on the last Sunday in October.

CURRENCY

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are all members of the Euro-zone; their official currency is the Euro (EUR).

A good website to check exchange rates before you travel is www.xe.com. Perhaps writing a small summary of the different exchange rates will help when you arrive. It is also a good idea to download one of the various apps for smartphones/tablets before you travel.

A combination of cash, an ATM card and a credit card as a backup is good.

Traveller's cheques are no longer accepted in the Baltic States. ATM's are common in all tourist towns and cities. Most accept Visa, MasterCard, Electron, Cirrus, Maestro and InterBank cards. ATMs sometimes run dry on weekends in smaller towns.

Remember to check with your bank about using your cards overseas and find out what new international banking cards they have available.

ELECTRICITY

The electric current in Lithuania and Latvia is 220V AC, Estonia uses 230V AC. Thick round ended two-pronged continental points are used. Most hotels have a limited supply of adaptors so we would recommend you take your own adaptor with you.

Many gadget chargers these days come with the

standard 'figure 8' connection to which a power cable is attached. You can buy the 'figure 8' power cables in local shops if your charger breaks or if you need more options. These will also fit the ipad/iphone chargers (just remove the 'duckhead').

INTERNET & MOBILE PHONES

The Baltic States has a very good telecommunications infrastructure, ground breaking in some areas, and unless you are in very remote locations, Internet access is no problem, and usually free in hotels.

Cities in the Baltic States are teeming with Internet cafes, while smaller towns and villages feature over 500 public Internet access points (in libraries, post offices, tourist information centres, etc.). Internet access points are marked with an @sign.

If you are dialling, or need to be contacted by phone, the country codes are; Lithuania (370), Latvia (371) and Estonia (372). Mobile coverage is generally very good. Pre-paid GSM phone cards (Estonia: Simpel, Pop, Zen, Ultra, Smart, Latvia: Zeltzivtina, OKarte, Amigo & Lithuania: Omnitel Extra, Ezys, Pildyk) can be purchased at petrol stations, newsstands, kiosks, supermarkets, other outlets and the shops of the providers throughout the countries. If you choose to purchase a local sim card please check with your local provider prior to departure to make sure your phone is unlocked and will accept another sim card. Be careful about the cost of using Global Roaming with your home provider. If you're dialling ahead to hotels in another province, remember to also dial the area code for the province.

SAFETY

As with any destinations, take good care of your personal belongings. Don't carry too much cash and remember that expensive watches, jewellery and cameras may be tempting targets for thieves. Stand as far as possible from Gypsies, including the children. Don't give them money and the like. You won't even notice when all your valuables are disappeared.

No attempt should be made to photograph anything remotely connected with the armed forces or in the vicinity of defense installations.

HEALTH

The Baltic States have high living standards. Tap water is safe to drink; laws and regulations ensure that restaurants and cafes serve fresh and well prepared food.

MEDICAL CARE

Medical care in the Baltic States is becoming more reliable and a higher quality health system, although rural cities might be less dependable. The region is becoming a popular medical tourism destination.

Travel health insurance is essential. No vaccines are required for travel in the Baltic States.

Latvia:

Latvia provides a Hotline 1188 which gives you access in English to information about business addresses, hours, service providers, state institutions, public transport timetables, concerts and events, the location of the nearest service provider, as well as all vital tourism information – about accommodations, museums, attractions, restaurants and cafes, and medical centres. The Hotline is reachable 24 hours per day. Information is provided in Latvian, Russian, and English.

PHARMACIES

Many pharmacies in the larger cities are open until early evening; some supermarkets will have a small pharmacy section as well.

The word for pharmacy in Estonian is apteek, Latvian aptieka and Lithuanian is vaistine.

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Emergency telephone numbers in Estonia: police: 110, ambulance and fire brigade: 112.

Emergency telephone numbers in Latvia: police: 110, ambulance: 113 and fire brigade: 112.

Emergency telephone numbers in Lithuania: 112.



SHOPPING

In general, shops are open from 9-18, with short hours on Saturdays and closed on Sundays. Corner shops are open later and major cities do have some Sunday trade. Most of the museums are closed on Mondays.

In the Baltic States, major shops (as well as restaurants & bars) will accept credit cards. It is the norm to have to show ID when you use a credit card so be prepared to show a passport or a driver's licence. Markets & corner shops prefer cash.

ALCOHOL

Beer & wine are your best value options in restaurants/bars. Liquor tends to be quite expensive when purchased in bars/ restaurants. Light beer is for sale in most food stores.

TIPPING

Tipping is not compulsory nor expected, but always appreciated. If a service charge is not already included in your restaurant bill, you might wish to leave the small change that is returned to you.

LAUNDRY

Most hotels will offer a dry cleaning and/or laundry service. You might like to hand wash personal items when staying at hotels for several days if you wish to minimize costs. It is also a good idea to bring some 'travel wash', and a travel clothesline.

DRIVING IN THE BALTIC STATES

You will drive on the right side of the road throughout the region. Cars are well maintained (by law), manual gearboxes are the norm, and the pace is generally civilized and respectful.

Drivers should note that the standard of roads in the Baltic States varies – streets in cities are asphalted or cobbled, however, unpaved roads are common outside cities and lowering speed is advisable.

Maximum speed: 50 km/h in build-up areas; 90 km/h outside build-up areas; 90 or 110 km/h on motorways depending which state you are in, unless otherwise stated. When driving, always switch on dimmed headlights and fasten seat belts in all seats both front and rear.

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When travelling with us you will have access to a 24-hour emergency number in Norway. Our Lillehammer office will look after you if anything arises during your trip that affects your travels or the enjoyment of your holiday. We will always be just a phone call away.

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