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## GEEO ITINERARY

Baltics 7/23/2023

### **Day 1: Vilnius Arrive in Vilnius at any time.**

You may arrive in Vilnius at any time today. If you have the time, we would recommend coming in a day early. Check into our hotel any time after 2:00 p.m. and enjoy Lithuania's capital city. Multi-faceted, puzzling, and a heady mix of old and new, Vilnius has all the glories of a royal past, the troubling reminders of wartime and Communist atrocities, and a vibrant forward-looking perspective. Check the notice boards or ask at reception for the exact time and location of the group meeting, typically 6:00 p.m. or 7:00 p.m. After the meeting, you might like to take the option of heading out for a meal in a nearby local restaurant to further get to know your tour leader and traveling companions. Please make every effort to arrive on time for this welcome meeting. If you are delayed and will arrive late, please inform us. Your tour leader will then leave you a message at the front desk informing you of where and when to meet up.

### **Day 2: Vilnius (B) Visit Trakai Castle. Enjoy optional activities.**

We start the day with a visit to the late 14th-century Trakai Castle, which is located about 45 minutes out of town by bus. Getting out of the capital and visiting this historic treasure is a great way to experience a little more of Lithuania. After returning to Vilnius, you have the remainder of the afternoon to explore this lovely city. Some highlights you might want to check out are the Frank Zappa monument, the breakaway Republic of Uzupis, a giant egg statue, the Gediminas tower and castle museum, and/or the KGB Museum. Approximate travel time: 1.5 hrs by local bus

### **Day 3: Vilnius/Klaipėda (B) Travel by private vehicle Klaipėda.**

This morning, we travel by private vehicle to Klaipėda, one of the oldest cities in Lithuania, next to the northern tip of the UNESCO-listed Curonian Spit. The Curonian Spit is a long, thin sandbar that runs from Klaipėda in Lithuania to Kaliningrad, Russia's westernmost oblast. It separates the Curonian Lagoon from the Baltic Sea. Join an orientation walk led by your tour leader and visit the famous sights and many interesting sculptures that make Klaipėda unique. Approximate travel time: 4.5 hrs by private vehicle

### **Day 4: Klaipėda (B) Explore the Curonian Spit. Visit the Parnidis dune, the Hill of Witches, and the resort town of Nida.**

Today, we explore the Curonian Spit, including the Parnidis dune, a mighty sand dune near the Lithuania-Russia border. Then we visit the Hill of Witches, which used to be the site of dancing and gathering during Pagan festivals. Now, the forested hills are dotted with wooden statues created by local artists depicting witches, dragons, and the elements. Some of the statues tell stories of the local legends and folklore, bringing the region to life with their intricate carvings. You will have time to explore the resort town of Nida. You may want to check out the Nida Lighthouse or wander through the Ethnographic Fisherman's Museum, a restored 19th-century fishing cottage that now exhibits relics and tools from the fishing trade. Approximate travel time: 3-4 hrs by private vehicle

### **Day 5: Klaipėda/Riga (B) Cross the border into Latvia and head to Riga. Opt to visit the Occupation Museum, the Riga Art Nouveau Center, Riga Castle, the Andrejsala artists' district, or simply to wander the cobblestone streets.**

Cross the border into Latvia and head to the capital, Riga. Options for this charming city include visiting the Occupation Museum, the Riga Art Nouveau Centre, Riga Castle, the Andrejsala artists' district, or simply wandering the cobblestone streets. Explore the narrow streets on foot and get better acquainted with the city known as "the Paris of the East." Opt to visit St. Peter's Church, where you can ascend the spire by lift for a fantastic view over the city. The Andrejsala neighborhood is an industrial port area just

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outside the city. It has recently developed into a cultural hub with art and entertainment areas, workshops, galleries, and cafés. Approximate travel time: 4 hrs by private vehicle

**Day 6: Riga (B, L) Enjoy a guided tour and a lunch of treats from the Central Market. Spend a free afternoon exploring the city.**

This morning, we visit some of the neighborhoods and sights on a guided tour around Riga and learn about the history of this 800-year-old city. We will visit the central market to pick up some delicacies for lunch. You will have the afternoon free to continue exploring the city. One option is visiting the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia. This museum is free and is dedicated to portraying what life was like in Latvia during the three periods of occupation. Learn about life under Soviet and Nazi rule and how Latvians regained their freedom in 1991. See our optional activities list further below for more places you can visit in your free time.

**Day 7: Riga/Kuressaare (B, D) Cross the border to Estonia and get the local experience with three nights on a farm in Saaremaa. In the area, there is canoeing on the Nasva river, fishing, and island visits. Over the next three nights, savor farm-to-table dinners specially prepared by your host family.**

Today, we cross the border to Estonia for a truly local experience with a 3-night stay on a farm in Saaremaa. Over the next three nights, savor farm-to-table dinners specially prepared by your host family. This remote island in the Baltic Sea has unique traditions and culture. Thatched roof houses, stone walls, and windmills make up this fairytale landscape. Some of the optional activities you might undertake include canoeing on the Nasva river, fishing, or island visits. You might also consider traveling into the capital of Saaremaa, Kuressaare, for a folk evening with traditional music. Approximate travel time: 2.5-3 hrs by local bus; 2.5-3 hrs by boat

**Day 8: Kuressaare (B, D) Enjoy a tour of Saaremaa, including a visit to the Kaali meteorite lake, bakeries, and windmills. Opt to visit local breweries.**

Today, we take a tour of Saaremaa, during which we will visit a group of windmills and try traditional baked goods while sipping on local beer. In the area, you'll find a naturally growing oak forest with rare flora (such as orchids) and a bird-watching platform. You will also visit the Kaali meteorite lake, formed by a meteorite strike around 3,500 years ago. You will have some free time in the afternoon to see more of the area; see our list of optional activities below.

**Day 9: Kuressaare (B, D) Enjoy a free day to explore. Opt to visit some of the ancient churches or natural sites like the lake, the Panga Cliff, and the Pühatu Springs.**

The final day of our stay in Saaremaa is a free one to explore further. Today, you might want to visit some of the churches, some dating back as far as the 1300s while others still have ancient wall frescoes intact. Alternatively, maybe you want to see some of the natural sites, including the lake and the Panga Cliffs. You may also want to visit the beautiful Pühatu Springs. "Pühatu" resembles the word "bottomless" in the Estonian language and describes the seemingly bottomlessness of this vibrant green spring. Locals have been visiting this site for hundreds of years, throwing coins into the pool as offerings for good health and fortune.

**Day 10: Kuressaare/Tallinn (B) Travel to Tallinn. Enjoy an included visit to Kadriorg Palace.**

Today, we travel to Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, where you might fall in love with this medieval town. Together we will visit the Kadriorg Palace, which was built by Peter the Great for Catherine I of Russia. Designed by an Italian architect, much of the palace's architecture is distinctly Baroque in style. Today, it's also home to collections from the Estonian Art Museum. Approximate travel time: 4 hrs by private

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vehicle

**Day 11: Tallinn (B) Spend a free day exploring this medieval city. Use your free time to visit the Museum of the Occupation, the Dome Church, the open air museum, go sea kayaking, visit the beaches, or relax in a sauna.**

Spend a free day exploring this medieval city. Use your free time to visit the Museum of the Occupation, the Dome Church, the open air museum, go sea kayaking, visit the beaches, or relax in a sauna. Please look further below for our optional activities list.

**Day 12: Tallinn/Helsinki (B) Travel by ferry to Helsinki. Enjoy an orientation walk and free time.**

This morning, we travel by ferry to the charming capital city of Finland, Helsinki. We will take an orientation walk before you have the remainder of the day free. Helsinki sits on a peninsula in the Gulf of Finland. Its central avenue, Mannerheimintie, is flanked by cultural and political institutions, including the National Museum, which traces Finnish history from the Stone Age to the present. Also on Mannerheimintie are the imposing Parliament House and Kiasma, a contemporary art museum. Approximate travel time: 2-2.5 hrs by ferry

**Day 13: Helsinki (B) Depart Helsinki at any time.**

Our program ends in Helsinki this morning. You may depart at any time. If you have the time, we recommend staying an extra day in Helsinki. Want more adventure? Book two or more GEE0 trips in the same year and receive a discount! GEE0 will give you 10% off of the lesser value program(s) (up to 3 programs). If you don't see a program that interests you that pairs with this trip, but still would like to extend your time abroad, let us know. We will work with you to find a non-teacher trip from our tour operator's much larger catalog. Even better, if you are an educator, we can still offer you a discounted price on the trip you choose!