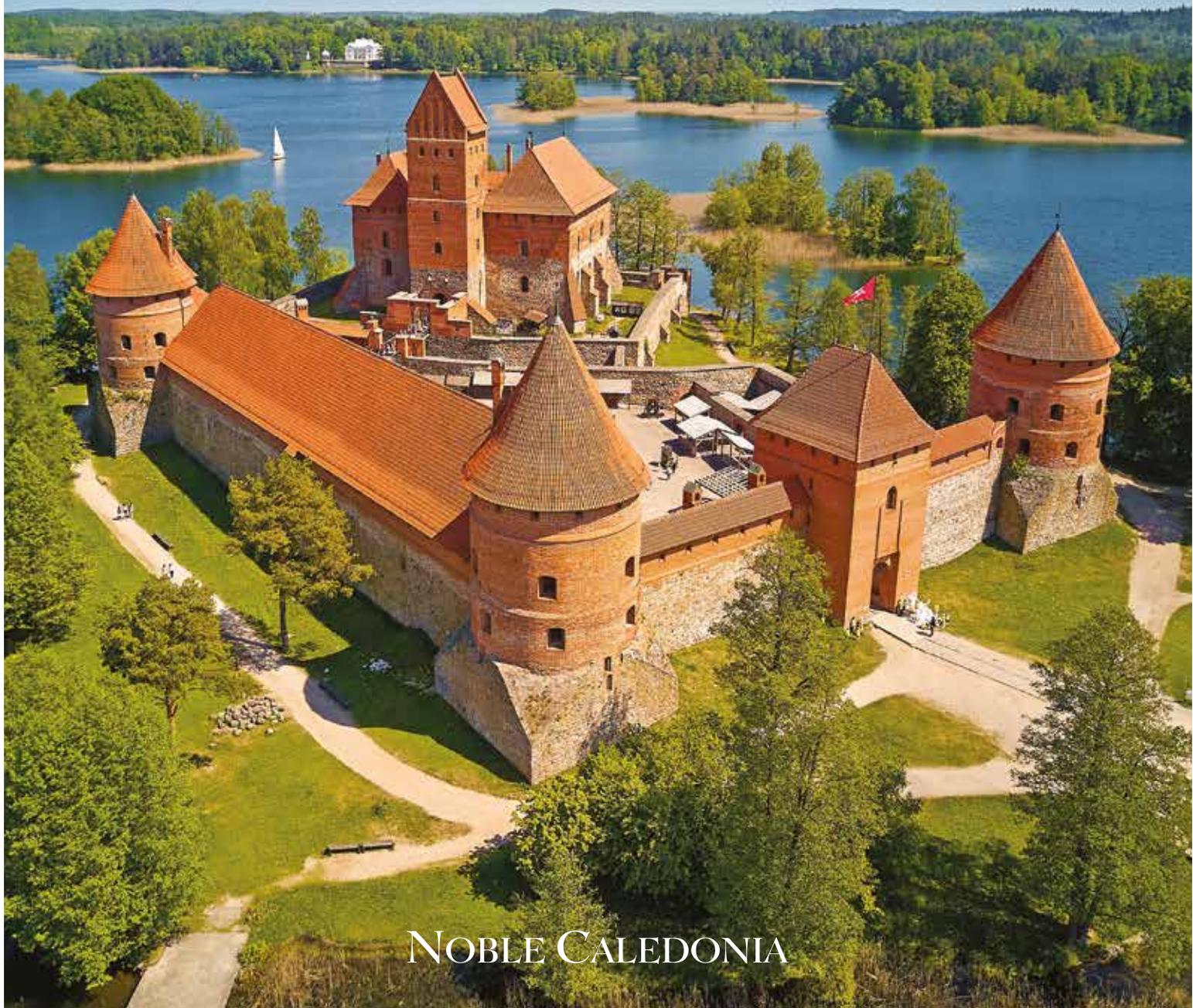


THE HIDDEN BALTICS & BELARUS

An escorted tour of Latvia, Lithuania & Belarus

4th to 13th September 2020



NOBLE CALEDONIA

Having operated voyages around the Baltic for over twenty years, we thought it was time to devise an escorted tour which allows for some more time to discover the many facets of both Latvia and Lithuania with the added benefit of time to explore the little visited yet intriguing city of Minsk in Belarus. This in-depth journey which received excellent feedback from passengers on the first departure, offers the perfect balance of guided excursions with visits to some stunning National Parks, glorious palaces and gardens, natural wonders such as the Curonian Spit, fascinating museums showcasing remnants of the Soviet era as well as time spent wandering the charming streets of Riga and Vilnius admiring the Gothic architecture.

Despite the often turbulent history of conquests and partitions, since the departure of their Soviet masters, both Latvia and Lithuania have retained their unique character and enchanting old quarters. This, combined with their natural treasures has meant they are fast being recognised as two of Europe's gems and now is the time to discover their many riches. In contrast, the city of Minsk was razed to the ground in World War II and very little remains from the pre-war years, there are however a myriad of places of interest to those interested in the Soviet period and just outside the city is Nesvizh Castle, a combination of Medieval, Renaissance and Classical architecture which we will explore during our time in Belarus.

We do hope you can join us for what promises to be a fascinating tour of some relatively unknown places of much interest which are unlikely to remain 'hidden' for too much longer given their wealth of cultural and natural wonders.



OUR VIEW

“ There are not many places left in Europe that can still be said to be truly off the tourist map, but this tour gives us the opportunity to visit the continent's least visited country, the state of Belarus. Whilst researching this trip I was in Klaipeda in Lithuania the day a large cruise ship was in port; more guests were on board that single ship than travel to Belarus from the UK in an entire calendar year.

This is very definitely not your usual, everyday touring programme, but if you have a passion for discovering new places, or have been enchanted by the Baltic States on a previous cruise holiday perhaps and wish to explore further, this could be the tour for you.

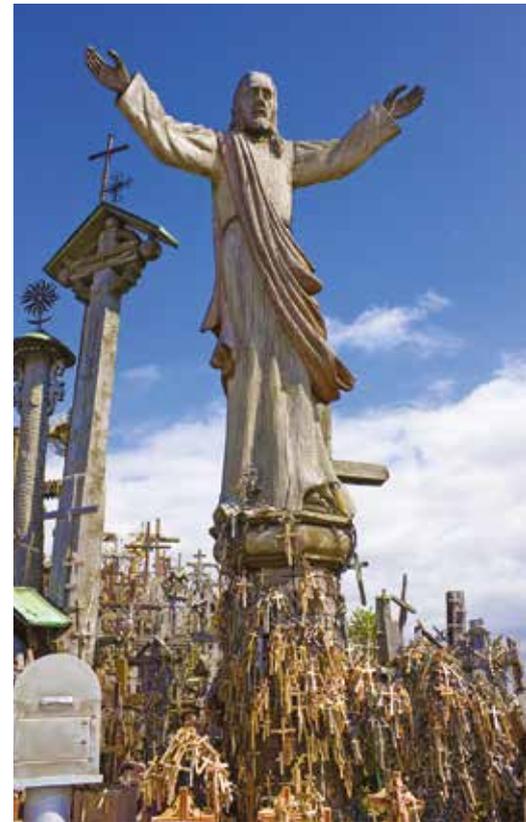
James Buchanan,
Head of Land Department

The Itinerary

Day 1 London to Riga, Latvia. Fly by scheduled flight from London to Riga and transfer to the centrally located Grand Poet Hotel for a two night stay. Explore Riga at leisure this afternoon before meeting for dinner at a local restaurant. (D)

Day 2 Riga. Riga, the 800-year-old capital of Latvia is famous for its historic centre and Art Nouveau architecture. On a morning city tour we begin with a panoramic drive along the boulevards of the city, passing by the iconic Freedom Monument. We will take a walking tour of the Old Town, visiting Dome Square to view the exterior of the Dome Cathedral and to see the House of Blackheads; now the temporary residence of the President of Latvia. This house with its 14th century origins was destroyed in 1948 and restored in 1999. Pass through Theatre Square to view the Riga Russian Theatre and the Great and Small Guilds which reflect Latvia's period as a Hanseatic City. Continue to the Swedish Gates, constructed during Riga's period under Swedish rule in the 17th century before viewing other interesting buildings such as the Parliament and the 'Three Brothers', the oldest complex of dwelling houses in the city. Our tour ends with a walk down Albert Street admiring the interesting Art Nouveau architecture. Enjoy an afternoon and evening at leisure. (B)

Day 3 Rundale Palace & Klaipeda, Lithuania. After a leisurely breakfast transfer to the Zemgale region of Latvia and the beautiful Rundale Palace. Constructed in the 1730s to a design by Bartolomeo Rastrelli, Rundale Palace was originally the summer residence of Ernst Johann von Biron, Duke of Courland. The 136 room palace was badly damaged in 1919 during the Latvian War of Independence but has been fully restored to its former glory and



Hill of Crosses, Siauliai, Lithuania

is now considered one of the most outstanding monuments of Baroque and Rococo art in northern Europe. Take a guided tour through the Palace halls and private quarters, enjoy lunch in its restaurant and explore the Baroque style park and rose garden. This afternoon we journey south and, after crossing the border into Lithuania, we visit the Hill of Crosses, a pilgrimage site to the north of the city of Siauliai. Enjoy a brief visit before we continue on to Klaipeda and check in to the National Hotel for a two night stay. (B, L, D)

Day 4 Klaipeda & the Curonian Spit. After breakfast we take a panoramic drive through Klaipeda and a ferry across to the Curonian Peninsula, a UNESCO-listed 60 mile long curved sand dune spit that separates the lagoon from the Baltic Sea coast. Admire the beautiful craftsmanship of 80 carved wooden sculptures at the Hill of Witches near Juodkrante before driving to the main settlement of Nida, home to a collection of traditional fishermen's houses and weathervanes. Following lunch at a local restaurant continue to the 52 metre high Great Dune for panoramic views over the dunes and lagoon. On a clear day it is possible to see into the Russian territory on Kaliningrad at the southern end of the Spit. (B, L)

Day 5 Plateliai, Lapiiai & Kaunas. This morning we drive to Plateliai National Park, where we will visit the nuclear missile site built under great secrecy in 1960 by the Soviets. From here nuclear missiles were targeted towards the biggest European cities including Berlin, London, Madrid and Paris. It was from this very same site in 1962 that missiles were deployed to Cuba in what became known as the Cuban missile crisis. We will visit the four remaining decommissioned nuclear missile silos, their control station and



Medieval castle at Nesvizh, Belarus



Riga Cathedral and the Old Town, Latvia



Rastrelli's magnificent Rundale Palace



Rugged landscape of the Curonian Spit, Lithuania



The Gates of Dawn, Vilnius, Lithuania

the underground facilities, giving an insight into the hidden secrets of the Cold War period. After lunch we visit Lapiai and the home of the first British defence attache to Lithuania. He will recount stories of his life from his time as a bomber pilot, a diplomat during the Cold War in Moscow and of life now in independent Lithuania. We will visit his refurbished old house and the original outbuildings built in 1926, wander around the large garden and see the Lapiai Castle Hill. Following the visit transfer to Kaunas and check in to the Daugirdas Hotel for an overnight stay. Enjoy dinner in a local restaurant this evening. (B, L, D)

Day 6 Rumsiskes, Trakai & Vilnius. After breakfast at the hotel we will drive to Rumsiskes, home to an open-air ethnographical museum. The 150 cottages, windmills and even a church were transferred here from different villages to give an authentic representation of life in Lithuania in the 19th century. En-route to Vilnius we will stop in Trakai, the first capital of Lithuania and home to the stunning Trakai Castle, a well preserved 15th century castle beautifully located on the lake. Following lunch at a local restaurant we transfer to Lithuania's capital Vilnius for a two night stay at the Imperial Hotel. (B, L)



Traditional fisherman's house in Nida

Day 7 Vilnius. We have a full day to explore the Old Town of Vilnius which was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1994. Our city tour will commence with a walk to the Gates of Dawn, historically the gates of Vilnius' original defensive walls. The tour continues with a panoramic drive around Vilnius. Make a short stop to see St Anne's Church, one of the city's best known landmarks and a masterpiece of the late Gothic period and make a stop at the 17th century Peter and Paul's church. After a short stroll through the winding streets of Vilnius Old Town we visit the 14th century Vilnius University. Following time for an independent lunch in the Old Town, visit the KGB Museum, representing the darkest days of the Soviet era. Return to the hotel for an evening at leisure. (B)

Day 8 Minsk, Belarus. Following an early breakfast transfer to Vilnius station and join a train for the transfer to Minsk, one of Europe's least visited capitals. Badly damaged in World War II, much of the city was rebuilt in typical Stalinist style in the 1950s, though our tour will begin in the Trinity District, an historic neighbourhood on the banks of the Svislach River that retains plenty of examples of 19th century buildings. Whilst here we will walk to the Island of Tears, a memorial to the Soviet Afghanistan war, before we transfer to the Upper Town to visit the Virgin Mary Church and the impressive Orthodox Cathedral. We will have lunch at a local restaurant before driving to Independence and Victory Squares. Our final stop will be a visit to the World War II museum. Check in to the Double Tree Hilton Hotel for a two night stay. (B, L, D)

Day 9 Nesvizh. Following breakfast drive to the small town of Nesvizh, whose palace and castle complex is one of the architectural

treasures of Belarus. Construction work took place through the 16th to 19th centuries and therefore combined the techniques of Medieval, Renaissance and Classical architecture with the distinctive art of local craftsmen. Explore the many rooms of the palace and wander around the beautiful parklands before we enjoy lunch in the castle restaurant. Transfer back to the hotel for some free time before meeting for dinner. On route we will visit the Ballet and Opera Theatre for a guided tour before enjoying a farewell dinner at a local restaurant which offers panoramic views of the city. (B, L, D)

Day 10 Minsk to London. Transfer to Minsk airport for your return scheduled flight to London.

NB. It must be noted that this tour will involve being on your feet for long periods and navigating many cobblestoned streets and uneven paths. For security reasons portage assistance is not available at Vilnius Station. Guests will be expected to take their own luggage from the coach, through passport control and up onto the platform.

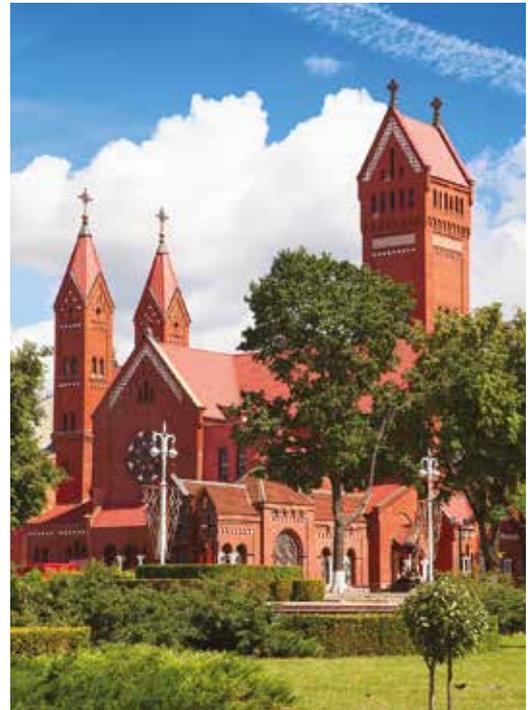
PRICES PER PERSON

Based on double occupancy

Twin **£3095**
Single **£3595**

Group Size: We are restricting the group size to just 25 participants

PRICE INCLUDES: Economy class scheduled air travel • Nine nights hotel accommodation as described • Meals as indicated (B - breakfast, L - lunch, D - dinner) • Excursions • Noble Caledonia Tour Manager • Gratuities • Airport transfers.
Not Included: Travel insurance, Belarus visa.



Back Cover images (left to right): Cathedral Tower Square and Gediminas Castle in Vilnius, Lithuania; Bell-towers of Riga Cathedral and Saint Peter's Church, Latvia; Highest dune of the Curonian Spit, Lithuania; Traditional cottage at Rumsiskes Open-Air Museum, Lithuania; Chapel of St. Simon and St. Elena, Minsk, Belarus.

Front Cover image: Trakai Castle, Lithuania

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Our current booking conditions apply to all reservations and are available on request.