

Regional Directory

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This chapter contains the nuts and bolts of travelling in the Baltics. Country-specific information can be found in the directories for Estonia (p167), Latvia (p265) and Lithuania (p372).

ACCOMMODATION

Finding a decent place in the Baltics to lay your head is generally not a problem. Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius all have some stylish choices among the many top-end hotels, with fewer midrange and budget options. Outside the capitals you can find a wide range of guesthouses, B&Bs and hostels. In Estonia and Lithuania old-school sanatoriums have been renovated and reopened

as spa resorts. There are a few grey concrete Soviet monsters lurking about (mostly in Latvia), but the Eastern Bloc blues are largely a thing of the past.

In this book, accommodation is ordered under Budget, Midrange and Top End headings. In the Budget category (under €30), you'll find hostels and pretty basic guesthouses with shared bathrooms. Our midrange listings (€30 to €75) run the gamut from family-run guesthouses to large, simply furnished hotel rooms. Most rooms in this category have private bathrooms; some include breakfast in the price. Top-end listings (over €75) comprise historically set hotels, spa resorts and charming places offering something particularly unique (like antique-filled rooms or ocean views). You can expect good service, a prime location and a spacious room in tip-top shape.

The peak tourist season is from June through August. If you come then, you should book well in advance. This is essential in Tallinn, Pärnu, Vilnius and Riga – and in other popular summertime destinations.

Rates published in this guide reflect peak prices. From September to May, room prices typically go down 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 are pricier on weekends than on Monday to Thursday.

B&Bs

Sharing the breakfast table with your host family each morning will give you a keen insight into local life. Sampling traditional cooking is another joy, and one that's hard to find elsewhere.

Several agencies, both within and outside of the Baltics, arrange accommodation in private homes in several cities across Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. See also agencies listed in Tallinn (Rasastra, p80) and Vilnius (p306).

American-International Homestays (☎ 303-258 3234; www.aihtravel.com/homestays; USA) Homestay accommodation with dinner, transport and an English-speaking guide in any of the Baltic capitals for single/double US\$100/175.

Litinterp (☎ 5-212 3850; www.litinterp.com; Bernardiņų gatvė, Vilnius, Lithuania) B&B accommodation with local families in Klaipėda, Nida, Palanga and Kaunas; single/double from €23/46.
Rasastra Bed & Breakfast (Map pp70-1; ☎ 661 6291; www.bedbreakfast.ee; Mere puistee 4, Tallinn, Estonia) Rasastra can set you up in homes in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania; single/double from €18/32.

Camping

In the Baltics, camp sites are found in some gorgeous natural settings – overlooking a lake or river, or tucked away in the forest – but most are difficult to reach unless you have a private vehicle. Some camp sites 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. Bigger camping grounds have a bar and/or cafeteria, and sauna.

Camp sites usually open in mid-May or June and close in mid-September. A night in a wooden cottage typically costs €10 to €20 per person.

Estonia, in particular, has an extremely well-organised outfit overseeing camping. **RMK** (☎ 628 1500; www.rmke.ee; Viljandi maantee 18b, Tallinn) maintains dozens of free camp sites all over the country. You can pick up detailed maps to all of their sites at the head office in Tallinn.

Farmstays

Staying in a private room in a farmhouse, rural manor or cottage is one of the region's most attractive sleeping options. Host families can provide home-cooked meals and arrange fishing, boating, horse riding, mushrooming and berrying, and other activities – for a fee. Each of the Baltic countries has its own rural tourism association through which rural accommodation can be booked.

Baltic Country Holidays (Lauku Ceļotājs; ☎ 761 7600; www.traveller.lv; Kuģu iela 11, LV-1048 Rīga) Arranges B&B accommodation in a variety of rural settings all over Latvia for €12 to €35 per night; it also lets whole farmhouses and cottages, and takes advance bookings for camping grounds, hotels and motels across Latvia.

Countryside Tourism of Lithuania (☎ 37-400 354; www.countryside.lt; Donelaičio gatvė 2-201, Kaunas) Arranges accommodation in farmhouses and rural cottages throughout Lithuania. Most lodgings start at €8 per person. A worthwhile investment is the hefty, illustrated catalogue

BOOK ACCOMMODATION ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at www.lonelyplanet.com. You'll find the true, insider lowdown on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

of the extensive offerings, available in Lithuanian bookshops for 8.75Lt.

Estonian Rural Tourism (☎ 600 9999; www.maaturism.ee; Vilmsi tänav 53b, Tallinn) An umbrella organisation for 220-odd rural tourism organisations in Estonia. The full range of accommodation – from camping and B&B to palaces and castle hotels – can be booked through it. Most B&Bs are on farms and prices start at €15 per person.

Guesthouses

Small private guesthouses are a good bet for affordable travel in the Baltics. Priced somewhere between hostels and standard hotels, guesthouses typically have less than a dozen rooms and usually offer a cosier, less formal setting than other places.

Hostels

There are many hostels scattered across the Baltics, with the largest network in Estonia. Lithuania's hostels have developed in leaps and bounds in the past couple of years, while Latvia has the fewest options. Wherever you decide to stay, book your bed well in advance if you come in the summer. You'll find HI hostels in all of the countries.

For a complete list of hostels in each country visit www.estoniahostels.com, www.hostellinglatvia.com and www.lithuanianhostels.org.

Hotels

There are hotels to suit every price range, although budget hotel accommodation in the increasingly glam capitals has become dishearteningly scarce. As more cheap hotels make the effort to brighten up their image, so nightly rates are being yanked up too.

That's not to say, however, that delightfully horrible relics from the Soviet era – offering cheap accommodation in a glum and shabby setting – don't exist. Head into any town in provincial Latvia, for example, and you'll stumble upon a towering concrete

block whose stereotypical customer – once upon a time – was a man in a vest, lying on his bed quaffing vodka, chain-smoking and watching TV. Nowadays, some floors in many of these blocks have been renovated and offer two dramatically different types of accommodation. One flight above a battered hallway crowded with battered rooms, you might stumble across refurbished wood floors which lead into cosy, handsomely lit rooms. The midrange option – both in and outside of the capitals – is marked by a refreshing breed of small, family-run hotels. The only downside of these places is that they get booked up quickly, given the limited number of cosy rooms they offer.

Top hotels are a dime a dozen. Many are under Western management or are part of a recognised international hotel chain, while others – such as Konventa Sēta in Riga, the Radisson-SAS Astorija in Vilnius and the Three Sisters in Tallinn – are housed in exquisitely renovated, historic buildings dating to the 13th to 19th centuries. Tallinn has plenty of other places to relish the medieval splendour – the Schössle, the Baltic Hotel Imperial, the Olevi Residents – plus there are other alluring options such as Pärnu's highly polished Tervise Paradiis (p159), whose stylish rooms are just steps from the beach, or the luxurious art-deco masterpiece Ammende Villa (p158), also in Pärnu.

Spa Hotels

One of the newest attractions in the region, spa hotels, are an excellent place to be pampered. Even if you don't stay, you can pop in for treatments – mud baths, massages, herbal baths, and dozens of other options. Estonia has the most selections, and you'll find them in Tallinn (p78-9), Saaremaa (p147), Pärnu (p159), Haapsalu (p132) and other places. Druskininkai (p327) is Lithuania's premier spa connection. Latvia has spas in Jūrmala (p221-3).

ACTIVITIES

You'll never run out of options for outdoor amusement in the Baltics. Cycling across the picturesque countryside, hiking through lush forests, canoeing down meandering rivers, bird-watching, swimming in refreshing lakes, plus cross-country skiing in the winter are some of the region's offerings. For complete details see the Activities chapter.

BUSINESS HOURS

Latvia and Lithuania follow similar hours:
Banks 9am to 5pm Monday to Thursday and 9am-4pm Friday
Bars 11am to midnight from Sunday to Thursday, 11am to 2am Friday and Saturday
Cafés 8am to 11pm
Nightclubs 10pm to 5am Thursday to Saturday
Post offices 8am to 7pm from Monday to Friday, 8am to 3pm Saturday
Restaurants noon to 11pm
Shops 10am to 7pm from Monday to Friday, 10am to 4pm Saturday
Supermarkets 8am to 10pm

Estonia marches to a slightly different beat:

Banks 9am to 4pm Monday to Friday
Bars noon to midnight from Sunday to Thursday, noon to 2am Friday and Saturday
Cafés 9am to 10pm
Nightclubs 10pm to 4am Thursday to Saturday
Post offices 9am to 6pm Monday to Friday, 9am to 3pm Saturday
Restaurants noon to 11pm
Shops 10am to 6pm Monday to Friday, 10am to 3pm Saturday
Supermarkets 9am to 10pm

Listed reviews in this book won't include opening hours unless they deviate from those listed above.

CHILDREN

Travelling through the Baltic region with children in tow isn't as daunting as it used to be. Hotels generally do their best to help make kids feel at home; many have family rooms designed for parents travelling with kids or if not most will gladly place an extra bed in the room. A handful of restaurants have kids' menus though not many. Nappies like Pampers and known-brand baby foods, including some organic ones, are widely available in big supermarkets in the capitals. Unfortunately, you won't find many highchairs, and restaurant changing rooms are yet to be invented here.

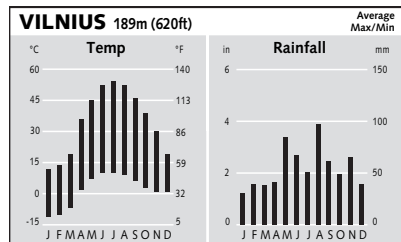
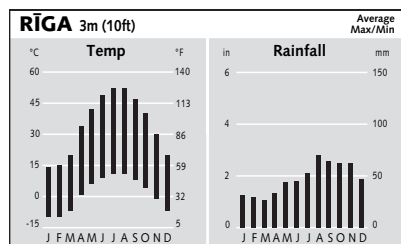
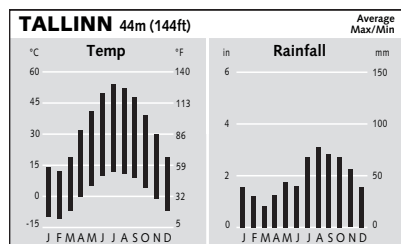
Good places to go with kids are the stretches of western coastline found throughout the region. In Estonia, Pärnu boasts a water park, a small amusement park and a lovely sandy beach. In Lithuania the entire coastline is a fabulous playground for kids, be it the merry-go-round of funfair amusements and in-house restaurant entertainers

in Palanga and Šventoji or the bikes and boats to rent on the Curonian Spit. See also the sections on kids' activities in Vilnius (p305), Tallinn (p79) and Riga (p200).

For tips and anecdotes on successful travel with the underage crowd, check out Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children*.

CLIMATE CHARTS

The Baltic climate is temperate but on the cool and damp side. It verges on the continental as you move inland where, in winter, it's up to 4°C colder than on the coasts but in summer may be a degree or two warmer. From May to September, daytime highs are normally between 14°C and 22°C. It's unusually warm if the temperature reaches the high 20s. At these northern latitudes, days are long in summer, with a full 19 hours of daylight around midsummer in Estonia. April and October have cold, sharp, wintry days as well as mild spring or autumn ones.



In winter, from November to March, temperatures rarely rise above 4°C and parts of the region may stay below freezing almost permanently from mid-December to late February. Winter hours of daylight are short, and sometimes it never seems to get properly light at all. The first snows usually come in November and there's normally permanent snow cover from January to March in the coastal regions – but up to an extra month either side in the inland east.

Annual precipitation ranges from 500mm to 600mm in the lowland areas to 700mm to 900mm in the uplands. About 75% of it falls as rain, 25% as snow. Winters can be foggy.

Coastal waters average between 16°C and 21°C in summer – July and August are the warmest. The Gulfs of Finland and Riga freeze occasionally, and the straits between Estonia's islands and the mainland usually freeze for three months from mid-January. The open coast almost never freezes.

See also p14.

COURSES

Crafts

In Lithuania, **Countryside Tourism of Lithuania** (☎ 37-400 354; www.countryside.lt; K Donelaičio 2-201, Kaunas) can organise a variety of classes in rural crafts. Weaving, pottery, carving, knitting and embroidery are some of the things that can be arranged. Various folk-artist workshops in the Lithuanian capital also run courses; see p305 and p313 for details.

Languages

In Lithuania, Vilnius University runs Lithuanian-language courses. An intensive two-/four-week summer course (50/100 hours) costs €377/580, plus €30 registration fee. Accommodation in a student dorm or with a local family can be arranged for a fee. One-year courses are also available. For more details contact the **Department of Lithuanian Studies** (☎ 5-268 7215; www.vu.lt; Universiteto gatvė 5, Vilnius, Lithuania) at Vilnius University.

In Estonia, the **International Language Services** (☎ 627 7170; www.ils.ee; Roosikrantsi 8b, Tallinn) is one of several schools in Tallinn to run Estonian-language courses. A two-week (40-hour) course, costs €256. In the university town of Tartu, intensive two-week courses (54 academic hours) are available for €320 during summer. Contact the **Division of Estonian** (☎ 737 5358; www.ut.ee; room 110, Näitus tänav 2,

Tartu), which also offers one-week classes (20 hours) on Estonian culture for €174.

Those wanting to twist their tongue around Latvian can contact the **Public Service Language Centre** (☎ 721 2251; www.vmc.lv in Latvian; Smiļšu iela 1-3, Riga).

Sculpture

Lithuania has the unique **Centre of Europe Museum** (Europos centro muziejus; ☎ 5-237 7077; www.europosparkas.lt), which runs an artists' residency programme whereby artists from around the world can brainstorm with one another at the open-air sculpture park near Vilnius. Several programmes are held each year and are open to anyone with an interest in applied art or sculpture. Applications must be accompanied by a CV and must be submitted two months before courses start.

CUSTOMS

If you think that a painting or other cultural object you want to buy in one of the Baltic countries may attract customs duty or require special permission to export, check with the seller before purchasing. You may have to get permission from a government office before it can be exported. For country-specific customs information see Estonia (p167), Latvia (p265) and Lithuania (p372).

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Theft

Crime is on the rise in the Baltics, though it's rarely of a violent nature. Pickpocketing and petty theft (bag-snatching) is a risk in all of the Baltic capitals, particularly in the busy summer (cash-cow) season. Keep an eye out when you're exploring those enchanting old quarters. Late at night there are occasional muggings on the street. Always be mindful of your surroundings, and be sensible about where you go and who you travel with.

No matter which country you're travelling in, you should always call a taxi rather than hail one on the street. You will definitely save money and worry if you call first. Be especially mindful of taxi drivers at airports and outside the main tourist hotels.

If you're driving, don't leave anything of value in your car. Car theft is less of an issue in Estonia, it's a moderate risk in Lithuania, and it's an integral part of the economy in Latvia: Riga has one of the highest rates of car theft in the world.

Ethnic Attitudes

Some Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians have a 'send-'em-home' attitude towards Russians and other ex-Soviet nationalities in their midst. Racist and anti-Semitic statements are likewise not unknown to pass from some Balts' lips.

Mosquitoes

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have vast stretches of forest, and yes, swampland, which is home to the mighty Baltic mosquito. Although disease is not a concern here, that may be of little consolation to you as you're being eaten alive on a late summer afternoon. Bring strong repellent (containing at least 20% DEET).

Other Creatures

Ticks are a greater health hazard than mosquitoes, as these can carry lime disease. If you're going hiking in the forest, try to cover up. See p411 for more tips.

DISABLED TRAVELLERS

With its cobbled streets, rickety pavements and old buildings, the Baltic region is not user-friendly for travellers with disabilities. In Estonia the **Social Rehabilitation Centre** (☎ 658 6355; srk@ngonnet.ee; Männiku tee 92, Tallinn) gives out advice to travellers with disabilities. In Lithuania, contact the **Disability Information and Consultation Bureau** (☎ 5-261 7277; Teatro gatvė 11/8-13, Vilnius).

Many city hotels have rooms equipped for disabled travellers.

Latvia scores oodles of brownie points from disabled travellers for having the Baltics' most disabled-friendly hotel, adjoining Jūrmala's seaside **Vaivari National Rehabilitation Centre** (☎ 776 6122; nr3@nrc.lv; Asaru prospektas 61, Jūrmala), which acts as an information centre for travellers with disabilities. Room rates are exceptionally reasonable. Elsewhere it's only really upmarket hotels that have rooms equipped for disabled travellers.

Some beaches on the western Lithuanian coast in Nida and Palanga have ramps to allow wheelchair access to the sand, as does the above-mentioned hotel.

DISCOUNT CARDS

City Discount Cards

Both Tallinn and Riga offer discount cards to visitors.

TALLINN CARD

The Tallinn Card gives you free or discounted entry to many of the city's sights, discount shopping and free use of all public transport. Prices for one-/two-/three-day cards cost €22.50/26/29 (€11.25/13/14.50 for children) and include a 2½-hour city tour. Cards are sold at tourist information centres, hotels and travel agencies. Further details are available from www.tallinn.ee/tallinncard.

RĪGA CARD

This card offers discounts at restaurants, cafés and theatres. Price includes a walking tour and admission to many museums. Prices for one-/two-/three-day cards are €11.40/17/23 (€6/8.50/11.50 for children). They're sold at tourist offices (www.rigatourism.com), some hostels and travel agencies.

Hostel Cards

A HI card yields discounts of up to 20% at affiliated hostels. You can buy one at some hostels en route; or purchase it before you go, via the national **Youth Hostel Association** (YHA; www.ihf.org).

Student & Youth Cards

An International Student Identity Card (ISIC) can pay for itself through half-price admissions, discounted air and ferry tickets, and cheap cinema and theatre tickets. Many stockists – generally student-travel agencies – stipulate a maximum age, usually 25. If you're aged under 26 but not a student, you can apply for an International Youth Travel Card (IYTC), which entitles you to much the same discounts as the ISIC. Both cards are administered by the **International Student Travel Confederation** (www.istc.org) and issued by student travel agencies. Within the region, ISIC cards are sold at branches of Student & Youth Travel in Riga, Tallinn and Vilnius.

Seniors Cards

There are few discounts available to older people – a handful of museums in Tallinn reduce the entrance fee and seniors aged over 70 travel for free on Riga trolleybuses and trams. But that's about it.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania each have numerous diplomatic missions overseas. Likewise, many countries have their own

embassies or missions in the Baltic capitals. See Estonia (p167), Latvia (p266) and Lithuania (p372) for details.

It's important to realise what your own embassy can and can't do for you if you get in to trouble. Remember that you are bound by the laws of the country you are in. Your embassy will not be sympathetic if you end up in jail after committing a crime locally, even if such actions are legal in your own country.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania all enjoy fat festival calendars encompassing everything from religion and music, to song, art, folk culture, handicrafts, film, drama and more. Summer is the busiest time of year, although each of the three Baltic countries celebrates a couple of truly magical festivals at other times of the year, too. The remarkable Day of Setu Lace in the heart of Setumaa in south-eastern Estonia on 1 March and the colourful Kaziukas crafts fair in Vilnius to mark St Casimir's Day on 4 March are two worth noting. For a list of the region's top 10, not-to-be-missed festivals see p16.

Most festivals are annual, others are one-off. For a comprehensive list of what's happening in the Baltics see the directories for Estonia (p168), Latvia (p266) and Lithuania (p373). Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania celebrate a number of commemorative days when shops, apartment blocks and offices are obliged by law to fly their national flag.

Above all, however, it is two regular events that are absolutely outstanding: the Baltic song festivals (p33) and the midsummer celebrations (p17).

Folk music and dance performances are also regularly held at Rocca al Mare in Tallinn, the Open-Air Ethnography Museum in Riga and the Lithuanian Country Life Museum at Rumsiskės near Kaunas.

Baltika Folklore Festival

The Baltic folk festivals, particularly the annual Baltika Folklore Festival, provide a prime opportunity to catch folk songs, music and dance as well as the colourful traditional costumes that are one of the few instantly recognisable trademarks of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The costumes vary, although women generally sport long and colourful skirts, embroidered blouses, jackets or

shawls, and an amazing variety of headgear ranging from neat pillboxes to vast, winged, fairy-tale creations. The male equivalent is plainer and more obviously a product of peasant existence. The annual international Baltika Folklore Festival takes place in each Baltic capital in turn (usually in mid-July). The week-long festival is a potent splash of music, dance, exhibitions and parades focusing on Baltic and other folk traditions.

In 2006 the Baltika will be held in Latvia; in 2007 it's due in Estonia; and in 2008 in Lithuania.

FOOD

In this guide, eating entries fall under three price points: budget (less than €10), mid-range (between €10 and €20) and top end (over €20). These are based on the price of two courses and a soft drink. For details on the variety of cuisines on offer, see the Food & Drink sections of Estonia (p62), Latvia (p1640) and Lithuania (p284).

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

When it comes to gay rights, the Baltics are still stranded in the shadows of the Dark Ages. While there is a small gay scene in Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius, there's almost nothing elsewhere. Being 'out' here is largely out of the question, as small displays of public affection can provoke some nasty responses. Tallinn has the most progressive scene (with a single venue openly identifying itself as a gay club). Meanwhile, the Latvian parliament recently took the bold step of adding an amendment to the constitution banning same-sex marriages.

If reading all this has you yearning for a drink, you'll find permanent gay and lesbian bars listed under Entertainment in Tallinn (p87), Riga (p216) and Vilnius (p306).

Organisations

Estonia's key gay organisation is the **Estonian Gay League** (gayliit@hotmail.com; PO Box 142, EE10502 Tallinn). **Estonian Gay Planet** (www.gay.ee) lists party venues in Estonian only. The **Gay and Lesbian Infocenter** (GLIK; ☎ 645 4545; <http://pride.gay.ee>; Tartu maantee 29, Tallinn) is also a good source of info.

The Latvian association **Latvian Gay & Lesbian** (☎ 959 2229; www.gay.lv in Latvian; Pastkaste iela 380, Riga) offers advice on gay issues.

The **Lithuanian Gay League** (LGL; ☎ 5-233 3031; www.gay.lt; PO Box 2862, LT-2000 Vilnius) runs a video

library and organises weekend parties, as does the **Lithuanian Lesbian League** (Sappho; www.is.lt/sappho; PO Box 2204, LT-2049 Vilnius).

HOLIDAYS

Public holidays vary between countries; see the holiday information in the directories of Estonia (p169), Latvia (p267) and Lithuania (p374).

INSURANCE

A travel insurance policy to cover theft, loss of property and medical problems is a good idea. The policies written by STA Travel and other travel organisations are usually good value. Some policies offer lower and higher medical expense options. Policies can vary widely, so be sure to check the fine print.

Some insurance policies will specifically exclude 'dangerous activities', which can include hiking.

You may prefer a policy that pays doctors or hospitals rather than you having to pay on the spot and claim later. If you have to claim later make sure you keep all documentation. Some policies ask you to call back (reverse charges) to a centre in your home country where an immediate assessment of your problem is made. Check that the policy covers ambulances and an emergency flight home. For more information on health insurance, see p410.

For further information on car insurance see p416.

Worldwide cover to travellers from over 44 countries is available online at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services.

INTERNET ACCESS

The Internet has boomed in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in recent years, which, according to reports on the region's so-called 'Tiger Leap', saw enormous advancements as the public quickly adopted the Internet. Estonia leads the way, with 54% of 6 to 74 year olds regularly using the Internet (with a computer in one out of three households). Usage is definitely on the rise in Latvia, where 40% of its citizens are Internet-savvy, along with 30% of Lithuanians.

Today, practically every hotel, restaurant and commercial enterprise is happily hooked up; numerous hotels accept online bookings. Wi-fi is growing in the region with hundreds of sites (some pay per use,

some free) scattered across the Baltics. Each of the countries maintains lists of hotspots you can tap into, with the majority of them in Estonia. See Estonia (www.wifi.ee), Lithuania (www.wifi.lt) and Latvia (www.lattelekom.lv) for details.

Public Internet access is available in all three capitals and most provincial towns in the region. Expect to pay around €2 to €3 per hour – or nothing if you visit the public library.

See the country directories of Estonia (p169), Latvia (p267) and Lithuania (p374) for more information.

LEGAL MATTERS

If you are arrested in the Baltics you have the same basic legal rights as anywhere else in Europe. You have the right to be informed of the reason for your arrest (before being carted off to the police station) and you have the right to inform a family member of your misfortune (once you have been carted off). You cannot be detained for more than 72 hours without being charged with an offence, and you have the right to have your lawyer present during questioning.

In Riga, you can be fined on the spot for straying from public footpaths onto the neatly mowed grass lawns in city parks. In Vilnius, you can sit/lie/sunbathe on the grass in city parks but you can't sleep; police patrol on horseback to check that your eyes aren't shut.

If you're travelling in Latvia, note that it's illegal to buy alcohol anywhere except restaurants, cafés, bars and clubs between 10pm and 8am. In Lithuania and Estonia, public drinking anywhere except licensed premises is illegal.

Tobacco advertising in Lithuania was made illegal only in 2000 (Estonia and Latvia banned it in 1993 and 1998 respectively), while public gambling was only legalised in Lithuania in mid-2001.

LEGAL AGE

	Estonia	Latvia	Lithuania
Drinking	18	18	18
Driving	18	18	18
Sex	14	16	16

MAPS

Dent regional and country maps are widely available outside the region, as are quality city maps in each country. A map covering the region is useful for planning: *Lithuania Estonia Latvia* (Cartographia; www.cartographia.hu), *Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania* (Bartholomew World Map Travel Series; www.bartholomewmaps.com) and *Baltische Staaten* (Ravenstein Verlag, Bad Soden am Taunus; http://reisebuch.de) are very similar 1:850,000-scale maps of the three countries.

Good maps to look for in the region include *Eesti Latvija Lietuva* (1:700,000) published by Vilnius-based Briedis (www.briedis.lt). In Estonia, EO Map (www.eomap) does a pretty mean *Baltimaad* (Baltic States, 1:800,000), which is widely available in Estonian bookshops. In Latvia, map publisher Jāņa sēta (www.kartes.lv) is the market leader, with its pocket-size, spiral-bound, 252-page *Baltic States Road Atlas* (1:500,000), containing 71 city and town maps as well as 24 double-page road maps covering the entire region. Its *Baltic States* (1:700,000) road map is equally indispensable.

On the Internet, www.maps.com is a decent digital map resource. See also p170 for Estonia, p267 for Latvia and p375 for Lithuania.

MONEY

The local currencies are Estonian krooni (Kr), Latvian lati (Ls) and Lithuanian litų – or litai – (Lt). Since 1992 when the kroon was introduced and 1993 when the lats and litas were introduced (following the dumping of the Soviet rouble), all three have remained completely stable. See the inside front cover for exchange rates.

Lithuania and Estonia pegged the lits and kroon to the euro in 2002 as the first step to joining the euro. Estonia and Latvia are slated to change to the euro on 1 January 2007; Lithuania should follow in 2008.

Regionwide, Western currencies are perfectly acceptable and can be exchanged easily. Exchange rates for Polish zloty, Russian roubles, Ukrainian hryvna and other Eastern European money remain poor. Within the Baltics, it is easy to change one Baltic currency into another, although rates are not always as favourable as those for US dollars.

For information on costs, see the Getting Started chapter. For notes on individual

currencies see the country directories, Estonia (p170), Latvia (p268) and Lithuania (p375).

Although some hotels and tour operators list prices in euros, payment is always in the national currency. In this book, prices are listed in euros where they are advertised as such.

ATMs

ATMs accepting Visa and MasterCard/Eurocard are widespread in cities and larger towns. Some are located inside banks and post offices but the majority are on the streets, outside banks and at bus and train stations, enabling you to get cash 24 hours a day. Most ATMs are multilingual, using the five main European languages.

Credit Cards

Credit cards are widely accepted in hotels, restaurants and shops, especially at the upper end of the market. Visa, MasterCard/Eurocard, Diners Club and Amex all crop up. They are essential for renting a car. With the liberal spread of ATMs, fewer banks are prepared to give cash advances on Visa and MasterCard/Eurocard – those that do, mainly in cities and larger towns, tack a 2% to 5% commission onto the amount of a cash advance. Bring along your passport if you do receive a cash advance.

Moneychangers

Make sure whatever currency you bring is in good condition. Marked, torn or very used notes will be refused. US-dollar notes issued before 1990 are not generally accepted either.

Every town has somewhere you can change cash: usually a bank, exchange office or currency exchange kiosk. The latter crop up in all sorts of places, particularly transport terminals, airports, bus stations and train stations. Rates vary from one outlet to another. Exchange places are generally open during usual business hours.

Tipping & Bargaining

It's fairly common, though not compulsory, to tip waiters 5% to 10% by rounding up the bill. A few waiters may try to tip themselves by 'not having' any change.

Some bargaining (but not a lot) goes on at flea markets. Savings are not likely to be

more than 10% to 20% of the initial asking price.

Traveller's Cheques

A limited amount of traveller's cheques are useful because of the protection they offer against theft. It is difficult to find places to exchange them though, once you are out of the cities; most banks charge 4.5% commission. Most banks accept Eurocheques too.

American Express (Amex) has a representative in each capital:

American Express (☎ 212 5809, 24hr service ☎ 8-616 81255; www.amextravel.lt; Vokietų gatvė 13, Vilnius)

Estravel (☎ 626 6266; www.estravel.ee; Suur-Karja tänav 15, EE10140 Tallinn)

Latvia Tours (☎ 708 5001; www.latviatours.lv; Kalķu iela 8, LV-1050 Riga)

POST

Letters and postcards from any of the three countries take about two to four days to Western Europe, seven to 10 days to North America and two weeks to Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Occasionally, as in any other country, a letter or parcel might go astray for a couple of weeks but generally everything arrives.

You can buy your stamps at a post office (Estonian: *postkontor*; Latvian: *pasts*; Lithuanian: *pastas*) and post your mail there. In Estonia, you can bypass the post office, buy stamps in shops and slip the envelope in any post box.

Postal rates for individual countries are listed in the country directories (see p170 for Estonia, p268 for Latvia and p375 for Lithuania). You can also check the websites of the postal companies: **Eesti Post** (www.post.ee) in Estonia, **Latvijas Pasts** (www.riga.post.lv) in Latvia and **Lietuvos Paštas** (www.post.lt) in Lithuania. Expensive international express-mail services are available in the capital cities.

The way addresses are written conform to Western norms, for example:

Kazimiera Jone
Veidenbauma iela 35-17
LV-5432 Ventspils
Latvia

Veidenbauma iela 35-17 means Veidenbauma Street, building No 35, flat No 17. Postcodes in Estonia are the letters EE plus five digits, in Latvia LV- plus four digits, and in

Lithuania LT- plus four digits. For people wanting to receive mail on the move, there are poste-restante mail services in the main post offices in Tallinn and Vilnius, and at the post office next to Riga train station. All three keep mail for a month. Address letters to Estonia with the full name of the recipient followed by: Poste Restante, Peapostkontor, EE10101 Tallinn, Estonia. Letters to Latvia should be addressed as follows: Poste Restante, Riga 50, LV-1050, Latvia. Letters to Lithuania: Poste Restante, Centrinis Pastas, Gedimino prospektas 7, LT-2000 Vilnius, Lithuania.

SHOPPING

For traditional handicrafts, Estonia has the best selection. In Tallinn (see p88) and most major centres you'll find traditional items like hand-knitted mittens and socks, lace, leather-bound books, bottles, ceramics, amber, silverware and objects carved from limestone. The syrupy sweet and surprisingly strong liqueur Vana Tallinn also makes a nice gift. *Kaibemaks* is a value-added tax –18% on most items. Medicines and books attract a 5% tax. There is no tax refund for items bought within Estonia although duty-free shops appear at the airport and harbour.

In Vilnius (p312) you'll find an excellent selection of amber jewellery as well as plenty of handicrafts.

Amber, while not as ubiquitous as in Lithuania, is still among one of Latvia's top souvenirs. In fact, the Nordwear shop in Riga (p217, which sells hand-knitted Nordic sweaters patterned with Latvian national symbols, proudly proclaims itself one of the few amber-free souvenir shops!

SOLO TRAVELLERS

There are enormous advantages to travelling alone: aside from not being yoked to a stick-in-the mud. Solo travellers can see and do whatever they want, wake up in the morning and let the fates decide their next destination. They meet locals and socialise with people they'd probably never have spoken to if they were travelling with others. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are no less rewarding for those seeking the freedom of going alone. The only drawbacks are the sometimes lonely and frustrating moments on the road. All of the Baltic countries are fairly safe destinations – Estonia, particularly so – and there's a good

network of hostels sprinkled about the region, where you can meet up with other travellers along the way. The lively expat bars in each of the countries are good social places for meeting travellers. You can also check out Thorn Tree postings on Lonely Planet's website (www.lonelyplanet.com), and possibly make a few connections before or even while you're on the road.

Solo women travellers should employ the usual precautions. Though the region has its dark elements, on the whole men aren't terribly aggressive towards foreign women, and travelling in the region is no less safe than travelling through Western Europe.

TELEPHONE

Nowhere is the region's startling transformation from Soviet stagnation to postcommunist capitalism more obvious than in its telephone systems. New exchanges, allowing direct digital connections to the rest of the world, have replaced the slow and decrepit analogue Soviet system that once painfully routed all calls through Moscow.

Calling to/from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania is like calling to/from anywhere else in the West. International calls can be made from almost every private phone, as well as the public card phones, liberally scattered around the Baltic capitals, cities and towns. Aside from Lithuania, city codes are now a thing of the past in Estonia and Latvia, meaning if you're calling from abroad just dial the country code then the listed number. Precise details on calling as well as the low-down on the local phone scene (hint: it's mobile-centric in all three countries), can be found in the country directories (see Estonia, p170; Latvia, p268; and Lithuania, p375).

Speaking of mobile phones, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania all use GSM 900/1800 – compatible with the rest of Europe and Australia, but not with the North American GSM 1900 or the totally different system in Japan. Assuming your phone is GSM 900/1800-compatible, you can buy a SIM-card package from a choice of mobile-phone providers in all three countries. Again, see the country directories for more details.

TIME

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are on Eastern European Time (GMT/UTC + 2). All three countries adhere to daylight savings,

which runs from the last Sunday in March to the last Sunday in October. At this time it's GMT + 3.

The 24-hour clock is used for train, bus and flight timetables. Dates are generally listed the American way: the month first, followed by the day and the year; ie 01/06/74 refers to 1 June 1974, not 6 January 1974.

Also see the World Time Zones map, p428-9.

TOILETS

Public toilets in the Baltic countries are wondrous things compared to the stinking black holes of the past. Today, you'll find mostly clean, modern systems (no grubby baskets in the corner, just flush the paper). That isn't to say that we recommend spending much time in the public restrooms of train or bus stations; they aren't the most inviting of places – but you should've been here ten years ago! Although there are public toilets in some places, you can also stroll into large hotels in major cities and use the toilets without upsetting the staff too much. Or, do what everyone else does and pop into the nearest McDonald's.

The letter 'M' marks a men's toilet in Estonian, 'V' in Latvian or Lithuanian. 'N' indicates a women's toilet in Estonian, 'S' in Latvian and 'M' in Lithuanian. Some toilets sport the triangle system: a skirt-like triangle for women and a broad-shouldered, upside-down triangle for men.

TOURIST INFORMATION

All three capitals, plus most cities, towns and seaside resorts, sport an efficient tourist office of sorts that doles out accommodation lists and information brochures, many in English and often delivered with a smile. These tourist offices are coordinated by each country's national tourist board, listed under Tourist Offices in the country directories (Estonia, p170; Latvia, p268; and Lithuania, p375).

Overseas, the three tourist boards are represented by the following organisations:

Finland (☎ 0927 84774; latviatravel@kolumbus.fi; Mariankatu 8b, SF-00170 Helsinki) For Latvia only.

Germany (☎ 030 8900 9091; www.baltic-info.de in German; Katharinenstrasse 19-20, 10711 Berlin-Wilmersdorf)

Russia (☎ 095-203 6790; www.litinفو.ru in Russian; Borisoglebskij per 13, Building 2, 121069 Moscow) For Lithuania only.

UK (☎ 207-229 8271; london@latviatourism.lv; 72 Queensborough Terrace, London) For Latvia only.

VISAS

Your number-one document is your passport. Make sure it's valid for at least three months after the end of your Baltic travels. Only some nationalities need visas. Citizens from the European Union (EU), Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand and the US do not require visas for entry into Estonia, Latvia or Lithuania.

Other nationalities should check the websites of the **Ministries of Foreign Affairs for Estonia** (www.vm.ee), **Latvia** (www.mfa.gov.lv) and **Lithuania** (www.urm.lt).

Types of Visas

For those who do need a visa, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania issue transit, single-entry and multiple-entry visas. Fees vary – check the Ministries of Foreign Affairs websites mentioned earlier for updated prices. All visas are best arranged in advance through the respective Baltic consulate or embassy abroad.

At the time of research, sample costs for single-/multi-entry visas were as follows: Estonia €20/35; Latvia €14/24; and Lithuania €35/60.

Applying for Visas

You can get visas in advance at Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian embassies and consulates in most countries. When applying at an embassy or consulate you need to supply your passport, a completed application form and two photos. Applications often have to be accompanied by an invitation from a registered organisation or proof of hotel/return airfare booking from the tour operator with whom you are travelling; you'll also need to show proof of insurance.

Visa Extensions

Single-entry visas can be extended in the Baltics. In Estonia go to the Tallinn office or a regional branch of the **Migration & Citizenship Board** (☎ 612 6978; www.mig.ee; Endla tänav 13, EE15179 Tallinn). In Latvia there is a visa office inside the **Department of Citizenship & Migration Affairs** (☎ 721 9639; www.pmlp.gov.lv; Raiņa bulvāris 5, LV-1181 Riga). In Lithuania make your embassy or the immigration department inside the **Ministry of Interior** (☎ 5-271 8695, 271 8785;

www.vrm.lt; Šventaragio gatvė 2, LT-2600 Vilnius) your first port of call.

Russian Visas

Lithuania's neighbour, Kaliningrad Region, is part of Russia; St Petersburg is just a train trip from any of the Baltic capitals. All Western visitors need a visa to enter Russia.

Getting the visa can be time-consuming and is best dealt with before you leave home. A tourist visa requires an invitation, which can be issued from a hotel or some hostels in Russia or from online visa specialists (like www.visatorussia.com). You'll then present your invitation and application to a Russian consulate and receive your visa a few weeks later. It's a lovely bit of leftovers from the glory days of USSR-dom. If you didn't get the urge to enter Russia until arriving in the Baltics, you can obtain a Russian visa from one of the embassies in Tallinn, Riga or Vilnius. There you'll get a heavy dose of bureaucracy and perhaps a visa, which costs between €40 and €90, depending on your nationality. See Embassies & Consulates in Estonia (p167), Latvia (p266) and Lithuania (p372, or visit the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia** (www.mid.ru) for more information.

Belarussian Visas

Make sure that before you board a train between Poland and Lithuania that it does not pass through Belarus. If it does, you will need a Belarussian visa, arranged in advance, even to transit the country. Visas are not issued at road borders. Belarussian embassies in all three Baltic capitals issue visas. For more bad news, see the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus** (www.mfa.gov.by).

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

The Balts have some fairly traditional ideas about gender roles, but on the other hand they're pretty reserved and rarely impose themselves upon other people in an annoying way. Women are not likely to receive aggravation from men in the Baltics, although unaccompanied women may want to avoid a few of the sleazier bars and beer cellars. Many women travel on overnight buses and trains alone but if you're travelling on a train

at night, play safe and use the hefty metal lock on the inside of the carriage door.

In larger cities, Latvia particularly, some Russian women walk around with skirts so short you can practically see their bottoms – much to the delight of many male travellers who come to the Baltics mistakenly assuming that *all* young Baltic women are desperate for their attention. Unfortunately, tourists who copy this scanty attire risk being treated as prostitutes. In some tourist hotels prostitution is a fact of life, and a woman sitting alone in a foyer, corridor or café might be propositioned.

Organisations

Lithuania's **Women's Issues Information Centre** (WIIC; ☎ 5-262 8543; wiiic@undp.lt; Jakšto gatvė 9, room 303/315, LT-2001 Vilnius) is a fabulous source of information and can put you in touch with other women's organisations in the region. Hot issues of the day for Baltic women are addressed in its quarterly *Women's World* magazine and in other English-language publications.

WORK

The Baltic region has enough difficulty keeping its own people employed, meaning there's little temporary work for visitors. Most Westerners working here have been posted by companies back home. However, these are times of change, and there is some scope for people who want to stay a while and carve themselves a new niche – though, in Western terms, you could not expect to get rich doing so. The English language is certainly in demand, and you might be able to earn your keep (or part of it) teaching it in one of the main cities. On the Internet, there's a wide array of databases where you can search for posts teaching abroad (www.teaching-abroad.co.uk, www.teachabroad.com and www.travelteach.com).

Various volunteer placements – teaching or working in a summer camp, for example – are occasionally advertised on websites such as www.escapeartist.com, an employment overseas index which advertises international jobs and volunteer placements. Very occasionally jobs for English speakers are advertised locally in the **Baltic Times** (www.baltictimes.com).

Transport

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THINGS CHANGE...

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works and be aware of the security requirements for international travel. Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are numerous ways of travelling into the Baltic countries, and there is certainly no need to stick with the same form of transport. It's perfectly feasible to fly or take a bus to Warsaw and then enter Lithuania by train, or fly to Helsinki and sail from there to Estonia, for example. Within the Baltics, distances are relatively small.

Flights, tours and rail tickets can be booked online at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services.

INTERCAPITAL TRAVEL

Buses provide the link between each of the capitals. For details on travel, see Tallinn (p90), Riga (p218) and Vilnius (p314).

ENTERING ESTONIA, LATVIA & LITHUANIA

Whether you arrive by bus, boat or train, entering procedures are fairly quick and painless when entering any of the Baltic countries.

Passport

All arriving travellers need a passport, valid for three months beyond the planned stay. Very few nationalities need a visa for entering Estonia, Latvia or Lithuania. See p391 for more information.

AIR Airports & Airlines

The international airports in the region are **Tallinn Airport** (TLL; ☎ 605 8888; www.tallinn-airport.ee), **Riga Airport** (RIX; ☎ 720 7009; www.riga-airport.com) and, in Lithuania, **Vilnius Airport** (VNO; ☎ 5-720 7009; www.vilnius-airport.lt), **Palanga Airport** (PLQ; ☎ 460-52 020; www.palanga-airport.lt) and **Kaunas International Airport** (KUN; ☎ 46-399 307; www.kaunasair.lt).

The national carriers are **Estonian Air** (code OV; ☎ 640 1101; www.estonian-air.ee), **Air Baltic** (code BT; ☎ 720 7777; www.airbaltic.lv) and **Lithuanian Airlines** (code TE; ☎ 275 2585; www.la.lt).

As well as major carriers, budget airlines like **Ryanair** (code FR; www.ryanair.com) and **easyJet** (code U2; www.easyjet.com) fly into the Baltics.

AIRLINES FLYING TO & FROM ESTONIA, LATVIA & LITHUANIA

Aeroflot (code SU; Lithuania ☎ 232 9300; www.aeroflot.com) Serves Vilnius.

Air Baltic (code BT; Latvia ☎ 720 7777, Lithuania 235 6000; www.airbaltic.lv) Serves Riga and Vilnius.

Austrian Airlines (code OS; Latvia ☎ 750 7700, Lithuania 231 3137; www.aua.com) Serves Riga and Vilnius. Hub Vienna.

British Airways (code BA; Latvia ☎ 720 7097, Lithuania 210 6300; www.britishairways.com) Serves Riga and Vilnius. Hub London, Heathrow.

ČSA (Czech Airlines; code OK; Estonia ☎ 630 9397, Latvia 720 7636, Lithuania 215 1503; www.czech-airlines.com) Serves Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius. Hub Prague.

easyJet (code U2; www.easyjet.com) Serves Tallinn and Riga. Hub London, Luton.

Estonian Air (code OV; Estonia ☎ 640 1101, Latvia 721 4860, Lithuania 273 9022; www.estonian-air.ee) Serves Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius. Hub Tallinn.

Finnair (code AY; Estonia ☎ 611 0946, Latvia 720 7010, Lithuania 261 9339; www.finnair.com) Serves Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius. Hub Helsinki.

KLM (code KL; Estonia ☎ 699 9696, Latvia 766 8600; www.klm.com) Serves Tallinn and Riga. Hub Amsterdam.

Lithuanian Airlines (LAL; code TE; Lithuania ☎ 252 5555; www.lal.lt) Serves Vilnius.

LOT (code LH; Estonia ☎ 605 8553, Latvia 722 7234, Lithuania 273 9020; www.lot.com) Serves Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius. Hub Warsaw.

Lufthansa (code LO; Estonia ☎ 681 4630, Latvia 750 7711, Lithuania 230 6300; www.lufthansa.com) Serves Tallinn and Riga. Hub Frankfurt.

Ryanair (code FR; www.ryanair.com) Serves Riga and Kaunas. Hub Dublin and London, Stansted.

SAS Scandinavian Airlines (code SK; Estonia ☎ 666 3030, Latvia 720 7777, Lithuania 235 6000; www.scandinavian.net) Serves Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius. Hub Copenhagen.

Transaero (code UN; Latvia ☎ 720 7738; www.transaero.ru) Serves Riga. Hub Moscow.

Tickets

Some of the best deals can be found by buying directly from the airlines. This is a departure from the past, where discount agencies often undercut prices. You can buy one-way tickets on no-frills carriers for half the price of a regular ticket, which will give you much more freedom in planning your itinerary.

INTERCONTINENTAL (RTW) TICKETS

Round-the-world tickets are a useful option for long-haul travellers. Tickets are often valid for 90 days to one year. Make sure you understand what restrictions apply: there will be limited stops (or kilometres) allowed, and you won't be able to backtrack.

Australia & New Zealand

There are no direct flights to the Baltic countries from Australia or New Zealand. The best option will nearly always be flying to Western Europe and connecting to your destination from there, although some Asian and Middle Eastern gateways such as Bangkok, Dubai and Hong Kong may

also offer good deals. The cheapest fares to Europe are routed through Asia.

Two well-known agents for cheap fares in Australia are **STA Travel** (☎ 1300 733 035; www.statravel.com.au) and **Flight Centre** (☎ 131 133; www.flightcentre.com.au), which have dozens of offices throughout Australia.

Try **Flight Centre** (☎ 0800 243 544; www.flightcentre.co.nz) and **STA Travel** (☎ 0508 782 872; www.statravel.co.nz) in New Zealand also.

Thai Airways International, Malaysia Airlines, Qantas and Singapore Airlines all fly to Europe and have frequent promotional fares. Flights from Perth are usually a couple of hundred dollars cheaper than from east-coast cities.

Continental Europe

Although London is the travel discount capital of Europe, there are several other cities where you'll find a wide range of good deals, namely Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Munich and Paris. Budget airlines have revolutionised European air transport in the past few years. Most budget airlines require you to book online, where you'll get an electronic ticket.

STA Travel (www.statravel.co.uk) has offices throughout Europe where cheap tickets can be purchased and STA-issued tickets can be altered (usually for a small fee); check on the website for contact details. **Nouvelles Frontières** (www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr) also has branches throughout the world.

Russia, Ukraine, Transcaucasia & Central Asia

There are up to four flights daily between Moscow and each of the Baltic capitals including Estonian Air from Tallinn. In Moscow, flights use Sheremetyevo I airport. There are also three to five weekly flights between each of the capitals and Kyiv (Ukraine).

ONLINE TICKETS

Some recommended air-ticket websites include the following:

- www.ebookers.com
- www.flybudget.com
- www.itassoftware.com
- www.opodo.com
- www.statravel.com

IN & OUT OF ESTONIA BY HELICOPTER

One option of arriving in Estonia is by helicopter from Helsinki. **Copterline** (Helsinki ☎ 0200-18181; www.copterline.com; Herneasaari helicopter terminal, Hernematalankatu 2B; Tallinn Map pp66; ☎ 610 1818; www.copterline.ee; Linnahall, Mere puistee 20) flies between the capitals every hour between 8am and 8pm Monday to Friday, 9am and 5pm on Saturday and 11am and 4pm on Sunday. Flying time is 18 minutes and one-way fares range from €55 to €130. You can book online. Discount tickets are often available at the Copterline desk inside the Sokos Hotel Viru (p82) in Tallinn. Sadly, Copterline had a fatal crash in August 2005.

You can also get to and from dozens of other places in Russia, Transcaucasia and former Soviet Central Asia via a connection at Moscow, which you can book all the way through in one go.

Scandinavia

TO/FROM ESTONIA

Estonian Air and **Finnair** (www.finnair.com) codeshare on five to seven flights daily between Tallinn and Helsinki. Flying time is only 20 minutes but the trip often ends up being no quicker than a hydrofoil (which is substantially cheaper), due to the time spent getting to and through airports.

Estonian Air codeshares with SAS on daily flights to/from the Stockholm. It is cheaper to fly via Helsinki to get to/from Copenhagen.

TO/FROM LATVIA

Air Baltic flies five times a week between Riga and Helsinki, while Finnair flies the same route once or twice. SAS and Air Baltic codeshare on daily Stockholm–Riga–Stockholm flights. The two also codeshare on six flights daily to/from Copenhagen.

TO/FROM LITHUANIA

LAL flies once or twice daily between Helsinki and Vilnius; it also services Copenhagen to/from Vilnius (once or twice a day Sunday to Friday) and Stockholm (six a week), while SAS operates twice-daily flights between the Lithuanian and Danish capitals.

Air Lithuania flies from Kaunas, via Palanga, to/from Kristianstad, Sweden (four a week); Oslo, Norway (once a week in summer); and Billund, Denmark (five a week).

UK & Ireland

If you're looking for a cheap flight to or from Eastern Europe, London is Europe's major centre for discounted fares. However, if you are connecting in London, remember that some 'London' airports are a huge distance from the city – you need to check before giving yourself just a few hours in transit. You'll need much more than that to get between Heathrow and Stansted or Gatwick and Luton, for example.

For destinations in the Baltic countries, Ryanair and easyJet offer some of the best deals. Just be mindful of taxes, which can be very high.

Plenty of budget travel agents advertise in the travel sections of weekend newspapers and also in the **TNT Magazine** (www.tntmagazine.com) and the entertainment listings magazine *Time Out*.

STA Travel (☎ 0870 1600 599; www.statravel.co.uk) has 65 branches throughout the UK and sells tickets to all travellers but caters especially to young people and students.

Other recommended travel agents are **Traifinders** (☎ 020 7937 1234; www.traifinders.co.uk), which has branches in Manchester, Glasgow and other British cities; **Bridge the World** (☎ 0870 814 4400; www.b-t-w.co.uk); and also **Flightbookers** (☎ 0870 814 0000; www.ebookers.com).

USA & Canada

Any journey to the Baltics entails a flight to Scandinavia or another European transport hub, from where there are ferry or plane connections to the region. In addition to online booking sites like **Orbitz** (www.orbitz.com), **Travelocity** (www.travelocity.com), **Expedia** (www.expedia.com) and the name-your-price service of **Priceline** (www.priceline.com), you can also try the following agents:

Council Travel (☎ 800 226 8624; www.counciltravel.com) America's largest student-travel organisation has some 60 offices in the USA. Call for the office nearest you.

STA Travel (☎ 800 781 4040; www.statravel.com) Has offices in Boston, Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco and other major cities.

Travel Cuts (☎ 800 667 2887; www.travelcuts.com) Based in Canada, this outfit has offices in all major Canadian cities.

LAND Bicycle

Bicycles can be carried cheaply (or for free) on the ferries from Scandinavia and Germany to the Baltics; see p400 for more info. Peddlers through Poland face the same choice of routes as drivers; see p397 for more info.

Border Crossings

Now that the Baltic countries are part of the EU, border crossings in the region are simpler. Most visitors don't require a visa to visit the Baltic countries; see p391.

Travelling from north to south, Estonia shares borders with Russia and Latvia; Latvia shares borders with Russia, Belarus, Estonia and Lithuania; while Lithuania borders Belarus, Poland and the Kaliningrad Region (also part of Russia).

Inter-Baltic borders cause little aggravation these days. Public buses get priority over private vehicles and cross immediately, and most trains chug across rail borders without stopping (customs and immigration checks are dealt with on board, while in motion).

If you are travelling by car, don't be alarmed by the kilometres of lorries waiting in line as you approach most crossings. At every border there are separate queues for cars and lorries. The whole procedure should not take more than 30 minutes or so.

Travel to Belarus and Russia is another matter entirely. These borders continue to be rigorously controlled, and you'll need to get a visa in advance. Expect to wait up to an hour regardless of whether you are travelling by bus or car. Entering Russia (including the Kaliningrad Region) or Belarus, you are must fill in a declaration form, specifying how much cash (in any currency) and what valuables you are taking into the country.

At Narva-Ivangorod on the Estonian-Russian border particularly long queues form. The Kaliningrad Region enjoys quieter road borders with Lithuania at Panemunė/Sovietsk, between Kybartai (Lithuania) and Nesterov, and on the Curonian Spit along the Klaipėda–Zelenogradsk road. Queues are known to occur at Lithuania's two border crossings with Poland – between Ogródniki (Poland) and Lazdijai (Lithuania); and on the road from Suwałki, Szypliszki and Budzisko (Poland) to Kalvarija and Marijampolė (Lithuania). Don't be persuaded to detour

through Belarus, however; you'll be delayed at least four to five times as long and have to fork out for a Belarusian visa (not available at any border). Only Belarus' road-borders with Lithuania at Salčininkai, Medininkai and Lavoriskės are open to Westerners.

Bus

With a few exceptions, buses are the cheapest but least comfortable method of reaching the Baltics. There are direct buses to/from Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Netherlands, Poland, Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. From much of the rest of Europe you can reach the Baltics with a single change of bus in Warsaw.

International services to/from the Baltics are operated by **Ecolines** (www.ecolines.ee) and **Eurolines** (www.eurolines.ee). See websites for info. Eurolines has more services within the Baltics; Ecolines has more international routes, and you can purchase tickets online. Both companies give 10% discounts for passengers under 26 or over 60. Return tickets cost about 20% less than two one-way tickets.

Eurolines ticketing offices:

Estonia Tallinn Central Bus Station (☎ 680 0909; www.eurolines.ee; Lastekodu 46); Tartu bus station (Map p109; ☎ 734 0075; Turu tänav 2)

Latvia Riga international bus station (Map pp192-3; ☎ 721 4080; www.eurolines.lv; Prāgas iela 1)

Lithuania Kaunas long-distance bus station (Map p332; ☎ 37-209 836; www.kautra.lt; Vytauto prospektas 24); Panevėžys bus station (☎ 45-582 888; Savanorių aikštė 5); Vilnius bus station (Map pp288-9; ☎ 5-233 6666; www.eurolines.lt; Sodų gatvė 22)

Ecolines ticketing offices:

Estonia Tallinn (Map p70-1; ☎ 610 1570; www.ecolines.ee; Viru Väljak 4/6, Tallinn)

Latvia Riga international bus station (Map p192-3; ☎ 721 4512; www.ecolines.lv; Prāgas iela 1)

Lithuania Kaunas long-distance bus station (Map p332; ☎ 37-320 2020; Vytauto prospektas 24); Vilnius (☎ 5-262 0020; www.eurolines.lt; Vilniaus gatvė 45, Vilnius)

Other ticketing offices for both companies can be found on their websites.

POLAND & THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Eurolines runs five weekly buses in each direction between Warsaw and Tallinn (around €43, 16 hours), stopping at Riga (around €32, 11 hours) and Pärnu (€43, 14 hours). Two weekly buses from Tallinn to Krakow, hit

the same stops en route. One daily bus connects Warsaw and Vilnius (€27, nine hours). There is also an overnight bus from Vilnius to/from Gdansk (€26, 11 hours).

In Warsaw, buses depart from the **Western Bus Station** (Dworzec Zachodnia; ☎ 822 4811; al Jerolimskie 144). Tickets are sold at the *miedzynarodowa* (international) ticket window at the bus station.

The Czech Republic has one weekly bus link with Vilnius (€45, 20 hours).

RUSSIA

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania all have bus links with the Kaliningrad Region (Russia) and the Russian motherland.

From Tallinn, Eurolines runs one bus nightly to Kaliningrad, via Pärnu, Riga, Šiauliai and Sovetsk (€22, 15 hours). From Riga, there's one daily bus to Kaliningrad (€14, 10 hours). From Vilnius and Kaunas, there are two buses daily (€8, six to nine hours). Several buses also travel along the Curonian Spit between Klaipėda and Kaliningrad.

Moscow and Riga are served by two Ecolines buses daily (€25, 15 to 18 hours). Five Eurolines buses connect St Petersburg and Tallinn (€12 to €16, nine hours), passing through Rakvere and Narva en route.

UKRAINE & BELARUS

Vilnius has four daily buses to Minsk (€6, four hours); two daily buses go from Riga to Minsk (€13, 10 hours). Express buses head from Kaunas, Lithuania, to Hrodna, Belarus (€5, four hours, daily), as well as from Riga (€10, eight hours, twice weekly) and Vilnius (€4, five hours, daily Friday to Sunday).

Ukraine-bound buses also pass through Belarus. Latvian-based Ecolines runs a four-times-weekly service between Riga and Kyiv (€44, 17½ hours). Twice a week, the bus continues a further five hours to Odesa (€60).

From Tallinn, three buses go weekly to Kyiv (€40, 25 hours).

All Western travellers need a visa to travel through Belarus. Ukraine has recently eased visa restrictions for some nationalities.

WESTERN EUROPE

There are loads of connections between the Baltic countries and Germany. From Tallinn there is one bus daily to Berlin (€88, 24 hours), five weekly to Aachen (€102,

36 hours), three weekly to Stuttgart (€102, 37 hours) and two weekly to Ulm (€102, 37 hours) and Munster (€102, 34 hours).

There's a daily bus between Riga and Berlin (€73, 19 hours), Kaunas and Berlin (€63, 17½ hours), and Vilnius and Berlin (€63, 16 hours).

Another handy bus route is the four times weekly link going from Riga to London (€116, 36 hours), stopping at Vilnius, Kaunas, Amsterdam and Brussels en route.

To Italy, buses from Riga go twice weekly stopping at Vilnius, Kaunas, Venice, Bologna, Florence and Rome (€117, 44 hours).

Car & Motorcycle

If you do take your own vehicle to the Baltics, get it in good condition before you leave home, and carry a large petrol can and some basic spares. A fire extinguisher, first-aid kit and warning triangle are also advisable. Motoring clubs like the **AAA** (☎ 800 222 4357; www.aaa.com) in the US and **AA** (☎ 0870 600 0371; www.theaa.com) and **RAC** (☎ 0870 572 2722; www.rac.co.uk) in the UK are worth contacting for information on regulations, border crossings, and so on, as are Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian embassies. For information and tips on driving once you're in the region, see p397.

DOCUMENTS

You need to bring your vehicle's registration document. If you can get it in the form of an international motor vehicle certificate, which is a translation of the basic registration document, so much the better. Motoring associations should be able to provide one. An International Driving Permit (IDP; also obtainable from motoring associations) is recommended, but if you don't have one, your own licence will suffice in most situations. All three Baltic countries demand compulsory accident insurance for drivers.

Insurance policies with limited compensation rates can be bought at the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian borders, costing around €25 to €40 for two weeks' insurance. Remember that you'll also need appropriate documentation for all the countries you pass through on the way to or from the Baltics; motoring associations can advise you.

POLAND & GERMANY

Bringing a vehicle into the Baltics from the south entails either a ferry trip from Kiel

(Germany) to Klaipėda, Lithuania (ferry details are listed on p400); or a 30-minute to one-hour wait at the Polish-Lithuanian border at Ogdroniki-Lazdijai or the border on the road from Suwałki, Szypliszki and Budzisko (Poland) to Kalvarija and Marijampolė; or a hellish trip through Belarus.

Suckers for punishment opting for the third – and least rosy – motoring option should not attempt to even approach the border or set foot in Lukashenko land without a Belarusian transit visa, only available at Belarusian embassies. No visas are sold at any Belarus border. Those sufficiently privileged to have their visa application accepted can then expect to wait several hours, at least, at the border. A possible route is from Białystok, Poland, to Grodno in northwestern Belarus, then on to Merkinė in Lithuania; other routes include Brest–Lida–Vilnius or Brest–Minsk–Vilnius.

SCANDINAVIA

If travelling from Scandinavia, you can put your vehicle on a ferry (see p400) or drive to the Baltics through Russia.

From the Finnish/Russian border at Vaalimaa/Torfyanovka to St Petersburg is about 220km; from St Petersburg to the Russian/Estonian border at Ivangorod/Narva is 140km. You could do it in a day but there's little point coming this way unless you want to look at St Petersburg on the way through. Don't delay on the Finland–St Petersburg road, as it's said to be plagued by bandits.

Train

Travelling by train can be an interesting way of reaching the region – cheaper than flying and less boring than bussing it. One of the world's most memorable rail journeys figures among the approaches to the Baltics: the Trans-Siberian. Unfortunately, train service both to and within the region have been cut back markedly in recent years.

The *Thomas Cook European Timetable* is the rail-lover's bible, giving a complete listing of train schedules, supplements and reservations information. It is updated monthly and is available from Thomas Cook outlets or from www.thomascookpublishing.com. An independent website, with loads of excellent up-to-date tips on rail travel throughout Europe, is the brilliant **Man From Seat Sixty One** (www.seat61.com).

On the Internet, you can also search in English through the timetables of Latvian (www.ldz.lv) and Lithuanian (www.litrail.lt) railways.

POLAND

Surprisingly, the only links between Poland and the Baltic states are the several daily trains running from Warsaw to Vilnius. Travel time is anywhere from 10 to 16 hours (€22). Until recently these trains transited through Belarus, but at research time this was no longer the case. Regardless, you should get the latest on the situation before buying your ticket. If the train does pass through Belarus, you'll have a serious headache if you show up without a visa; see p392 for more info on Belarussian visas.

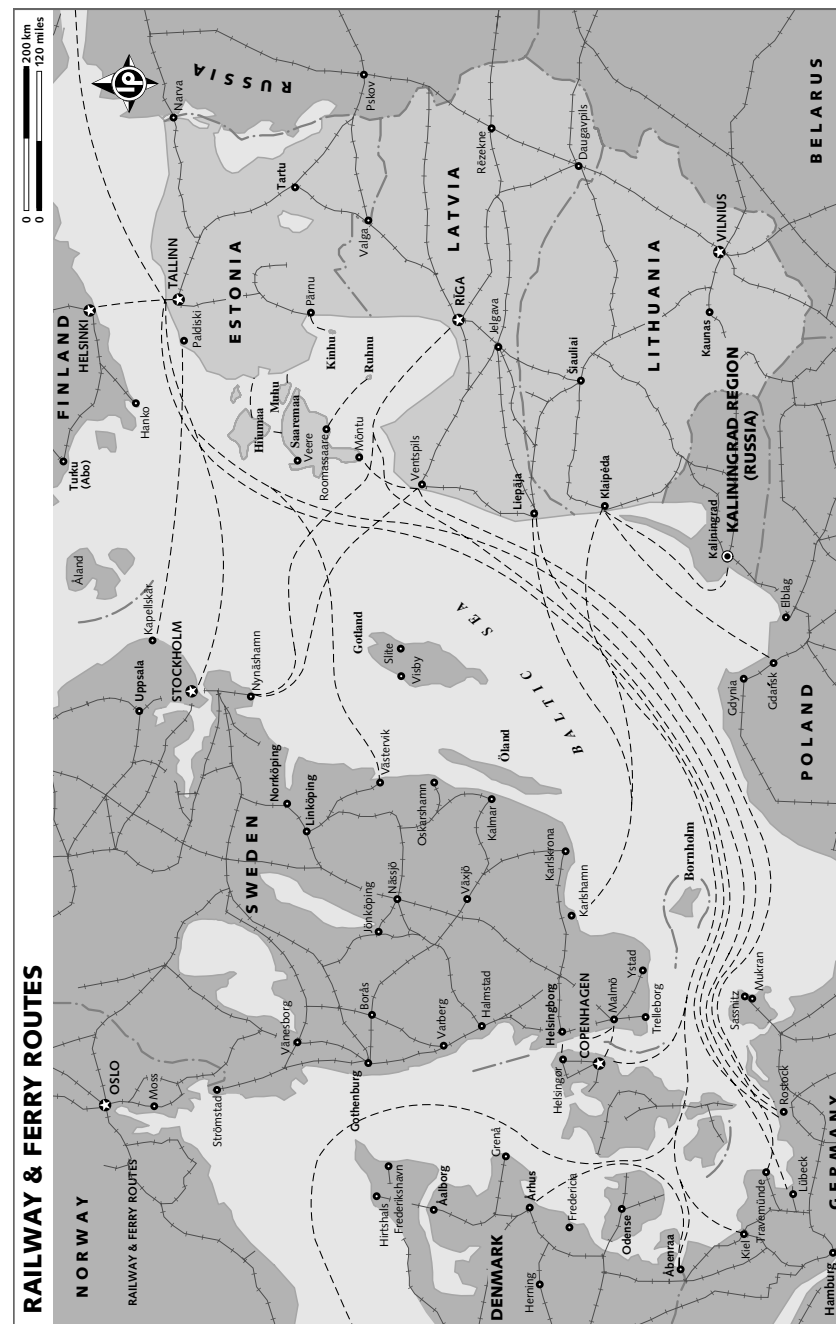
RUSSIA, UKRAINE & BELARUS

The old Soviet rail network still functions over most of the former USSR. Trains linking Moscow with all the main Baltic cities enable you to combine the Baltics with a Trans-Siberian trip or other Russian or Central Asian travels. For information on types of train, classes of accommodation, how to understand timetables and so on, see p408.

Unfortunately, the Tallinn–St Petersburg service was fazed out in 2004. Estonia's only remaining rail link to Russia is via Moscow. Trains depart Tallinn daily in the late afternoon, arriving the next morning (€33/46 in compartment/first class, 16 hours). From Moscow, you can catch trains to every corner of Mother Russia.

The overnight *Latvijas Ekspresis* (Latvia Express) trundles daily between Riga train station and Moscow (from €25, 18 hours). A second train, the daily *Jūrmala*, services the same route, while the overnight *Baltija* links the Latvian capital with St Petersburg (from €20, 14 hours, daily). Neither train passes through Belarus.

From Vilnius, there are several daily trains to Moscow's Belarus train station (13 to 17 hours). These pass through Belarus, so you'll need a Belarussian visa (p392). One of the Moscow–Vilnius trains also links to Kaliningrad (Russia). The daily St Petersburg–Kaliningrad train likewise stops in Vilnius, and it does not transit Belarus. There's also a Kaliningrad train that goes to Kharkiv, Ukraine, passing through Vilnius and Belarus along the way.



There are several options for getting to Ukraine, but these trains go through Belarus, meaning you'll need a visa. There's the direct train between Riga and Lviv (from €25, 26 hours), which stops in Vilnius en route. It departs on odd dates (the first, third etc). From Riga there's also a summertime train to/from Odesa (from €60, 40 hours) passing through Gomel in Belarus, and Kyiv in Ukraine. It departs on even dates between mid-June and the end of September. Another summertime service is the Riga train to Simferopole in the Crimea. From Riga trains depart on even dates between mid-June and early August (from €64, 42 hours); they stop in Vilnius and Kyiv en route.

TRANS-SIBERIAN

If you have the inclination and the time (and we mean lots of it), the Trans-Siberian railway will carry you much of the way between the Baltics and eastern Asia. The 9297km Trans-Siberian (proper) runs between Moscow's Yaroslavl station and Vladivostok on Russia's Pacific Coast. In summer at least, there are steamers between Vladivostok and Niigata in Japan. Straight through without stopping, the ride takes 5½ to 6½ days, but you can break it at places like Irkutsk, Ulan-Ude and Khabarovsk and make side trips to beautiful Lake Baikal and interesting regions like remote Yakutia or Buddhist Buryatia. Branches of the Trans-Siberian with their own names are the Trans-Mongolian, which goes via the Mongolian capital, Ulaan Baatar, to Beijing; and the Trans-Manchurian, which goes to Beijing via Harbin and northeastern China. There's also the Baikal Amur Mainline (BAM), which splits from the Trans-Siberian west of Lake Baikal, running north of it, as it goes eastward.

For complete details of the journey, see Lonely Planet's comprehensive *Trans-Siberian Railway*.

WESTERN EUROPE

There are direct services to/from Warsaw from London, Paris and elsewhere. Alternatively, you can head for Prague, Budapest or Sofia and take a train to Vilnius through Ukraine. Keep in mind that all trains coming from Ukraine pass through Belarus, meaning you'll need a visa.

SEA

There are numerous ways to reach the Baltics by sea, providing for a slower but certainly more nostalgic journey. You can sail directly from Finland or Russia to Estonia; from Germany to Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia; from Denmark to Lithuania; and from Sweden to all three Baltic countries. The Tallinn–Helsinki route has so many competing services that you should have no difficulty in getting a passage any day, but some of the other services – notably Tallinn from Stockholm and the cargo ferries to Denmark – can get booked up far in advance.

Schedules and fares change frequently – double-check both when you are planning your trip. Most ferry and hydrofoil operators keep updated schedules and fares on the Internet.

Between Helsinki and Tallinn, most operators offer special deals for families and serial tickets for frequent passengers. A return Tallinn–Helsinki ticket with Nordic Jet yields a 50% discount on any return ticket with Finnish Railways VR.

Denmark

TO/FROM LITHUANIA

Recently out of commission to receive a substantial upgrade, the ferry *Sea Corona* operated by **Scandlines** (www.scandlines.de) should be up and sailing by the time you read this. Plans are in the works for the former cargo boat to accommodate 300 passengers on its twice-weekly voyages between Århus, Denmark, and Klaipėda, stopping also at Aabenraa, Denmark.

Lisco Lines' twice-weekly cargo ferry between Klaipėda and Copenhagen (22 hours) offers a very limited amount of car and passenger space. Tickets must be bought months in advance from any Lisco Lines or Krantas Shipping office.

Finland

TO/FROM ESTONIA

A fleet of ferries now carries well over two million people each year across the 80km Gulf of Finland separating Helsinki and Tallinn. There are dozens of crossings made each way every day (ships 3½ hours year-round; hydrofoils 1½ hours May to October only). Note that in high winds or bad weather, the faster boats are often cancelled. Fares vary widely, depending on

season, day and time of travel, and other factors – like whether there's a crisis in the world oil market. Fares are generally higher on Friday evening and Saturday.

On most ferry lines, students and seniors can get a 10% discount, children between ages six and 12 pay about half price and those under six ride for free.

Tallink

Year-round, **Tallink** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 640 9808; www.tallink.ee; Laikmaa tänav 5) runs the large passenger and vehicle ferries the *M/S Meloodia* and *M/S Romantika*. Each makes one crossing in each direction daily (3½ hours), using Terminal A in Tallinn and Länsi Terminal in Helsinki. Tickets are cheaper on Monday to Thursday and for departures after 6.30pm from Tallinn or before 1pm from Helsinki. Ballpark high season (July to mid-August) fares for adults start around €18, with a vehicle adding an extra €18. Tickets are available at their office on Laikmaa tänav.

Far more popular than its lumbering old ferries are Tallink's zippy hydrofoils, which transport foot passengers and vehicles. The Autoexpress makes at least 12 departures daily (adult/vehicle from €34/25, 1½ hours) between 7am or 8am and 10pm (8pm Monday to Wednesday). In Tallinn, these hydrofoils depart from Terminal D.

In Helsinki, Tallink ferries and hydrofoils use Länsi Terminal, where you can buy tickets.

Silja Line

Silja Line's *SuperSeaCatFour* travels five to seven times daily between Tallinn's Terminal D and Helsinki's Olympia Terminal (from €26 to €70, 1¼ hours).

Purchase tickets at the **Silja Line** (☎ 09-180 4685; www.siljaline.se) window at the Makasiini terminal. In Tallinn, the **Silja Line office** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 611 6661; www.silja.ee) is on the 5th floor of the Stockmann Kaubamaja (department store) in Tallinn.

Eckerö Line

Eckerö Line's *Nordlandia* ferry, big enough to hold 2000 passengers and 450 cars, sails once daily back and forth from Tallinn to Helsinki year-round (adult/car from €20/€20, 3½ hours). It uses Terminal B in Tallinn and Länsi terminal in Helsinki.

Tickets are sold in Tallinn at **Eckerö Line** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 631 8606; www.eckeroline.ee) in Terminal B, and in Helsinki at **Eckerö Line** (☎ 09-228 8544; Mannerheimintie 10) at Länsi Terminal.

Nordic Jet Line

Nordic Jet runs two sleek, 450-seat jet catamarans, *Nordic Jet* and *Baltic Jet*, between Tallinn and Helsinki. They sail early May to December (depending on the weather); and there are seven crossings a day (adult/car from €24/€28, 1¼ hours), docking at Terminal C in Tallinn.

In Helsinki, **Nordic Jet** (☎ 09-681 770; www.njl.info) uses the catamaran harbour at Kanava Terminal (Kanavaterminaali). The **Nordic Jet** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 613 7000; www.njl.info) office in Tallinn is in Terminal C.

Linda Line Express

The Linda Line Express is a small, independent hydrofoil company, the vessels of which plough the waters between Tallinn and Helsinki (adult from €22, 1½ hours) seven times daily May to September. All Linda Line vessels stop sailing in October when the waters ice over.

Linda Line Express hydrofoils arrive and depart from the Linnahall Terminal in Tallinn and the South Port (Makasiinterminaali) in Helsinki. In the Finnish capital, contact **Linda Line** (☎ 09-668 9700; www.lindaline.fi). In Tallinn, purchase tickets from the **Linda Line Express office** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 699 9333; www.lindaliini.ee) in Linnahall Terminal.

Viking Line

Viking Line operates the giant car ferry *Rosella*, which has two departures daily from each port (adult/car from €15/€22, three hours).

The Rosella uses Tallinn Terminal A and Helsinki's Katajanokka terminal. In the Finnish capital, contact the **Viking Line office** (☎ 09-12351; www.vikingline.ee; Mannerheimintie 14). In Tallinn, purchase tickets from the **Viking Line** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 699 9333; www.vikingline.ee) office in Terminal A.

Germany

TO/FROM ESTONIA

Between June and early September Silja Line's passenger ferry, *Finnjet* (one of the world's fastest), sails twice weekly between Tallinn and Rostock (berth from €98, 14

hours). It departs from Terminal D in Tallinn. In Germany, contact **Silja Line** (☎ 0381-350 4350; www.siljaline.de; Am Warnowkai 11, Rostock). In Tallinn, the **Silja Line** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 611 6663; www.silja.com) offices are in Terminal D, and in **Stockmann Kaubamaja** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 611 6661).

TO/FROM LATVIA

A ferry sails twice weekly in each direction between Riga and Kiel (13 hours). Contact **Hanza Maritime Agency** (Map pp192-3; ☎ 732 3569; www.hanza.lv; Eksporta iela 10, Riga) for details. In Germany, tickets are sold by **Baltic Seaways** (☎ 0431-239 8511; Ostuferhafen 22, Kiel).

From Lübeck, Germany, **Lisco Lines** (www.lisco.lt) operates a twice-weekly ferry to/from Riga (car/pullman seat/berth from €80/€60/€91, 34 hours), which also stops at Ventspils. You can buy tickets from **DFDS Tor Line** (www.dfdsstorline.lv) at their Latvian offices in **Riga** (☎ 735 3523; Zivju iela 1, Riga) and **Ventspils** (☎ 360 7593; Plosta iela 7, Ventspils) and their German office in Lübeck (☎ 451-399 270; Unter der Herrenbrücke 2, Lübeck).

Scandlines (www.scandlines.de) in 2005 rerouted their ferries between Germany and Latvia. Now ferries go between Rostock and Ventspils. Ferries depart from each port four times weekly (car/pullman seat/berth from €110/€90/€145). For tickets, contact the **Rostock Scandlines office** (☎ 381-673 1217; www.scandlines.de; Nam Warnowkai 8, Rostock-Seehafen) or in **Klaipėda** (☎ 46-310 561; N Sodo gatvė 1-111).

TO/FROM LITHUANIA

From Kiel, Scandlines and Lisco Lines run a joint daily service to Klaipėda (car/pullman seat/berth from €110/€70/€110, 21 hours). Each ferry has space for just 40 cars, and tickets should be booked well in advance, particularly if you are taking a vehicle.

In Klaipėda, contact **Lisco Lines** (☎ 46-395 050; www.lisco.lt; Perkelos gatvė 10, Klaipėda) or **Scandlines** (Map p348; ☎ 46-310 561; www.scandlines.de; Naujoji Sodo gatvė 1, Klaipėda).

In Kiel, go to **Lisco Baltic Service** (☎ 0431-2097 6400; www.lisco-baltic-service.de; Ostuferhafen 15, Kiel).

Lisco Lines' **Klaipėda** is a mostly cargo ferry that sails twice weekly between Mukran (Sassnitz) in Germany and Klaipėda (18 hours). When space is available, they can take on 12 passengers, with a berth in a double cabin starting around €120. In Klaipėda, contact Lisco Lines. In Germany, tickets are sold by Lisco Baltic Service.

Poland

TO/FROM LITHUANIA

A weekly ferry operates between Gdansk, Poland and Klaipėda (10 to 14 hours). The ferry is operated by **DFDS Tor Line** (www.dfdsstorline.com). In Klaipėda, purchase tickets through **Lisco Lines** (☎ 46-395 050; www.lisco.lt; Perkelos gatvė 10, Klaipėda). In Poland, head to the **DFDS Tor Line office** (☎ 58-340 5019; Gdansk @dfdsstorline.com; Majora Henryka Sucharskiego 70, Westerplatte Quay, Gdansk).

Russia

TO/FROM ESTONIA

Silja Line (☎ 611 6663; www.silja.ee) has a passenger ferry that sails twice weekly between Rostock, Germany, and St Petersburg, stopping at Tallinn along the way. The St Petersburg-bound boat departs from Terminal D in Tallinn (from €20, 13 hours). In Russia, contact **Silja Line** (☎ 7-812 331 9826; www.silja.fi; Vasilyevsky ostrov, Ploshad Morskoy Slav 1, St Petersburg).

TO/FROM LITHUANIA

Lisco Lines operates a weekly ferry connecting Baltysk in the Kaliningrad Region with Klaipėda (seven to 11 hours). For ticket info, contact Klaipėda's **Lisco Lines office** (☎ 46-395 050; www.lisco.lt; Perkelos gatvė 10, Klaipėda). In Kaliningrad city, you can book through **BaltFinn** (☎ 0112-728 401; Suvorova 4).

Sweden

TO/FROM ESTONIA

There are direct sailings daily from Stockholm and Västervik to Tallinn, and a cargo ship that accepts passengers between Paldiski and Kapellskär, northeast of Stockholm and linked to the Swedish capital by bus.

Tallink

Tallink's *M/S Regina Baltica* and *M/S Fantasia* sail every other day (once a day May to September) between Tallinn and Stockholm (adult/car from €32/€53, 17 hours), stopping at the Finnish island of Mariehamn en route. Both ferries make the 17-hour crossing year-round, and leave from Terminal D in Tallinn and the Tallinn terminal at the Free Harbour (Frihamnen) in Stockholm.

Tallink also operates a daily ferry between Paldiski, 52km west of Tallinn, and Kapellskär (adult/car from €20/€53, 11 hours), northeast of Stockholm.

Tallink gets heavily booked, so make your reservation a month or two ahead. Book at Tallinn's **Tallink office** (Map pp70-1; ☎ 640 9808; www.tallink.ee; Laikmaa tänav 5). Alternatively, contact **Tallink's Swedish office** (☎ 08-666 60 01; www.tallink.se; Klaraberdegatan 31, Sweden).

TO/FROM LATVIA

Between mid-April and mid-September the *Baltic Kristina* ferry sails every second day between Nynäshamn, 60km south of Stockholm, and Riga (seat/berth from 35Ls/45Ls, 17 hours). The service is operated by **Riga Sea Line** (R/L; Rigas Jūras Linija; Map pp192-3; ☎ 720 5460; www.rigasealine.lv; Eksporta iela 3a). In Sweden, tickets are sold at **Riga Sea Line** (Rigas Jūras Linija; ☎ 08-5100 1500; Magasin 2, Frihamnen).

Scandlines also has a ferry connecting Ventspils and Nynäshamn, in Sweden. Ferries depart five times weekly (adult from €45, nine hours) from both ports. In Nynäshamn, tickets are sold at **Van Ommeren** (☎ 08-5206 0290; Farjeterrinalem, Nynäshamn) In Ventspils, you can buy tickets through **Wm H Muller Baltic Ltd** (☎ 360 7358; Postu iela 7).

Terrabalt (☎ 342 5756; www.terrabalt.lv; Pier 46, Liepāja) runs ferries from Liepāja to Karlshamn three times weekly (pullman seat/berth from €54/€64, 16 hours). In Sweden, contact **Becoship** (☎ 4541 9080; info@becoship.se; Södra Stillerydsvägen 127, Karlshamn).

TO/FROM LITHUANIA

Ferries between Klaipėda and Karlshamn (pullman seat/berth from €70/€95, 15 hours) make the crossing at least five times weekly. In Klaipėda, contact **Lisco Lines** (☎ 46-395 050; www.lisco.lt; Perkelos gatvė 10, Klaipėda). In Sweden, its agent is **DFDS Tor Line AB** (☎ 0454-33680; karlshamn@dfdsstorline.com; Södra Stillerydsvägen 127, Karlshamn).

Yacht

The Baltics – particularly Estonia with its islands and indented coast – attract hundreds of yachts a year, mainly from Finland and Scandinavia. The **Estonian Marine Tourism Association** (EMTA; Map pp66-7; ☎ 639 8933; www.agentuur.ee/sadamad; Regati 1, Tallinn) has information on sailing to the region, with details on harbour-berth booking and visa services for yachts. Unfortunately, the website isn't kept up to date. In Helsinki, a good contact is the **Estum Sailing Agency** (☎ 09-629 299; fax 09-629 390; Vuorimiehenka 23a, Helsinki).

The harbour at Pärnu was the first in Eastern Europe to get the Blue Flag in 1992. Blue Flag is a green 'eco' label awarded to beaches, harbours and marinas for their cleanliness and amenities. Customs facilities are available at Pirta, Dirhami, Haapsalu, Kuivastu, Kunda, Lehtma, Narva-Jõesuu, Nasva, Paldiski-North, Pärnu, Ruhnu, Roomasaare, Triigi, Vergi and Veere. Approaches to Orjaku, Triigi, Mõntu, Kihnu and Ruhnu should only be made in daylight.

It's also possible to rent yachts throughout the region; see p404 for more info.

GETTING AROUND

AIR

There are plenty of scheduled flights between the three Baltic capitals, listed in the relevant city and town Getting There & Away sections. Flights are reliable but expensive.

Within each country, domestic flights are minimal: Lithuanian Airlines flies between Palanga and Vilnius once weekly mid-May to mid-September. In Estonia, **Avies Air** (☎ 605 8022; www.avies.ee) flies daily to from Tallinn to the islands of Saaremaa and Hiiumaa. Air Livonia operates twice-weekly flights to Ruhnu and flights in summertime to Kihnu from Pärnu. More details are listed in the respective city and town Getting There & Away sections.

BICYCLE

The flatness and small scale of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and the light traffic on most roads make them good cycling territory. On the Estonian islands particularly, you will see cyclists galore in summer. Most bring their own bicycles but there are plenty of places where you can rent a bicycle, including Hiiumaa, Kärda, Palmse, Pärnu, Sagadi, Tartu and Vormsi in Estonia; Riga, Jūrmala, Cēsis, Sigulda, Valmiera, Kolka, Kandava and Sabile in Latvia; and in Vilnius, Trakai, Kaunas, Palanga, Nida, Žemaičių Naumiestis (for exploring Nemunas Delta Regional Park), Druskininkai and Palūšė (in Aukštaitija National Park) in Lithuania. For Baltic cycling routes, see p39.

Cyclists should bring waterproof clothing, and perhaps a tent if touring; you may not find accommodation in some out-of-the-way places. Some bike-hire places,

such as Valmiera's **Eži** (☎ 420 7263; www.ezi.lv; Valdemāra iela; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, to 1pm Sun) in Latvia, rent tents, sleeping bags and other gear you might need when out peddling.

Several travel agencies and organisations, both within and outside the region, organise cycling tours (see p409).

BOAT Ferry

The only ferry link between Baltic countries is the new passenger and vehicle line travelling between Ventspils in Latvia and Mõntu on Saaremaa Island, Estonia. **SLK Ferries** (Estonia ☎ 452 4444; www.slkferries.ee) goes four times weekly from May to mid-September (adult/child/car €18/€12/€25, four hours).

Estonia, with its many islands, has plenty of opportunities for sailing. Combined passenger and vehicle ferries sail from the Estonian mainland to the islands of Vormsi, Hiiumaa and Muhu (which is linked by causeway to Estonia's biggest island, Saaremaa). There are also ferry services between Saaremaa and Hiiumaa, and between Saaremaa and Vilsandi Island. You can also take boat trips to the islands of Saarnaki and Hanikatsi, off southeastern Hiiumaa, and to Abruka and Vahase off Saaremaa's southern coast. Full details of all these services are in the Western Estonia & the Islands section.

From Pärnu, you can travel by boat to Kihnu Island; there are also summer ferries between Saaremaa and Ruhnu. Other summer options are sailing from Tallinn to its surrounding islands of Aegna and Naissar.

Boating opportunities within Latvia are few, although you can catch a car ferry (p232) across the Gauja River to/from Līgatne in the Gauja National Park.

Ferries make the short crossing from Klaipėda to Smiltynė in western Lithuania. In southeastern Lithuania, a steamboat ploughs the Nemunas River between Druskininkai and Liškiava. There's also a seasonal hydrofoil daily along the Nemunas River and the Curonian Lagoon between Kaunas, Nida and Rūsė; in summer you can hire a boat along part of the hydrofoil route or from Nida to Klaipėda. You can also explore the Nemunas Delta by boat.

Yacht

Private yachting is a popular way to get around the Baltic Coast, particularly Esto-

nia's coast with its many islands and bays. Yachts can be rented with or without a skipper from the **Tallinn Olympic Yachting Centre** (Map pp66-7; ☎ 639 8981; www.pirittop.ee; Regati puistee 1, Tallinn). For information and advice on Estonia's dozens of harbours, contact the **Estonian Marine Tourism Association** (EMTA; Map pp66-7; ☎ 639 8933; www.agentuur.ee/sadamad; Regati 1, Tallinn). The EMTA also sells updated navigation charts of the Estonian coast, sold at most Estonian harbours and in Finland at the **Estum Sailing Agency** (☎ 09-629 2999; fax 09-629 390; Vuorimiehenka 23a, SF-00140 Helsinki).

In Latvia, Rīga's **Andrejosta Yacht Club** (Map pp192-3; ☎ 732 3221; Eksporta iela 1a, Andrejosta) hires yachts and assists sailors wanting to navigate the country's other nine yacht ports. Detailed information on these can be found on the website of **Latvian Coast** (☎ 348 0808; www.latviancoast.lv) and in the *Yacht Ports of Latvia* guide, sold at the Jāņa sēta bookshop (Map pp192-3; ☎ 709 2277; Elizabetes iela 83-85) in Rīga. Navigation charts for Latvian waters are sold by the hydrographical service of the **Latvian Maritime Administration** (☎ 706 2101; www.maritimeadministration.lv; Trijādības iela 5, Rīga); a full list of charts is posted on its website.

BUS

The region is well served by buses, although services to off-the-beaten track villages are infrequent. Direct bus services link the three capitals – Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius – and there are plenty of other cross-border services between main towns. To get to Tallinn from Kaunas, you have to change in Panevėžys.

Buses are generally faster than trains and, on the whole, slightly cheaper. Those used for local journeys, up to about two hours long, offer few comforts. Dating from some prehistoric time, many appear to be only fit for the scrap heap. To ensure semisurvival, avoid window seats in rainy, snowy or very cold weather; travel with someone you're prepared to snuggle up to for body warmth; and sit in the seat allocated to you to avoid tangling with a merciless babushka who wants *her* seat that *you're* in. Some shorter routes, however, are serviced by nippier and more modern minibuses, holding about 15 passengers and officially making fewer stops than their big-bus counterparts.

By contrast, buses travelling between the Baltic countries are equal to any long-

distance coaches anywhere else in Europe. **Eurolines** (www.eurolines.ee) and **Ecolines** (www.ecolines.ee) have their appointed agents in each Baltic capital. Eurolines buses boast a higher standard than Ecolines, though tickets cost a bit more. Regardless, both are clean and tout a heating system that functions and can be moderated. Most have a toilet, hot drinks dispenser and TV on board. Many scheduled buses to/from Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius run overnight; a convenient and safe way of travelling, even for solo female travellers.

On buses, carry your luggage on board with you, unless it is too large, in which case you can ask the driver to stash it in the underneath baggage compartment for a small fee.

Tickets & Information

Ticket offices/windows selling national and international tickets are clearly marked in the local language and occasionally in English too. Tickets are always printed in the local language and easy to understand once you know the words for 'seat', 'bus stop' etc.

For long-distance buses originating from where you intend to leave, tickets are sold in advance. For local buses to nearby towns or villages, or for long-distance buses that are in midroute ('in transit'), you normally pay on board. This may mean a bit of a scrum for seats if there are a lot of people waiting.

Most bus and train stations in towns and cities have information windows with staff who generally speak some English.

Timetables & Fares

Timetables can be checked before leaving home on the respective bus company websites or, upon arrival in the region, by checking schedules at the local tourist office. The offices in Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius in particular maintain up-to-the-minute transport schedules. The **In Your Pocket** (www.inyourpocket.com) city guides to the capitals include fairly comprehensive domestic and pan-Baltic bus schedules, updated every two months.

Comprehensive timetables are posted in bus stations' main ticket halls. A rare few need careful decoding. Most simply list the departure time and the days (using either Roman or Arabic numerals, the digit one being Monday) on which the service runs.

Fares vary slightly between the three countries. For a 100km domestic trip you pay around 1.70Ls (€2.55) in Latvia, 14Lt (€4.10) in Lithuania and 70Kr (€4.50) in Estonia; fares differ slightly between bus companies, reflecting the speed of the bus and time of day it arrives/departs. Pan-Baltic trips are marginally more expensive, around €5 to €6 per 100km.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Driving or riding your own vehicle is an attractive option if you are able to bring or rent a car or motorcycle. It makes some of the region's most beautiful – and remote – places far more accessible, enabling you to discover spots that a 'chug-chug' bus or train would not get you to in a short time – or at all. Indeed, driving in the country is a world apart from the capital cities' manic motorists: zigzag along gravel roads, admire the movie-style dust trail in your mirror and wonder where on earth that solitary passer-by you just passed is walking to.

Main roads linking the cities and towns are generally good, distances are not too great and traffic is far from congested. The number of cars per capita in Latvia is among the lowest in Europe, unlike in Estonia, where car owners toppled the European average (about 300 cars per 1000 inhabitants). In more remote areas there are many gravel roads and dirt tracks, but with a wide range of quality road maps with the different grade roads marked you can easily avoid the rougher roads if you don't feel your suspension is up to it.

Bring Your Own Vehicle

You can take your own vehicle to the Baltics by ferry from Finland, Sweden, Denmark or Germany; or by road from Poland, Belarus or Russia (see p397). Alternatively, you can hire a car once in the region.

Driving Licence & Permits

If you are planning to drive to or in the region, an International Driving Permit (IDP) will be useful, although, if you don't have one, your own national licence (if from a European country) should suffice. Note that licences not bearing a photograph of the holder have been known to upset traffic police, so try to get an IDP before you arrive. You will also need your vehicle's

registration document. Accident insurance is compulsory in all three countries.

Fuel & Spare Parts

Petrol stations, run by major oil companies such as Statoil, Shell and Neste, are open 24 hours along all the major roads. Western-grade fuel, including unleaded, is readily available. As elsewhere in the world, the price of petrol has skyrocketed in the Baltics. Count on paying around €0.90 per litre.

Hire

Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius are naturally the easiest places to rent cars, although there are small outlets elsewhere. The major international car-hire companies all have offices in the capitals, often both in town and at the airport, listed in the city and town Getting There & Away sections.

If you are driving across all three Baltic countries, it is cheaper to rent a car in Vilnius. Some companies, such as Avis and Hertz, allow you to pick up a car in one city and drop it off in another.

A variety of different packages and weekend specials is available, so it is worth shopping around. Deals apart, expect to pay around €50 (unlimited mileage) a day in Estonia, and anything from €115 a day (unlimited mileage) with a major rental company to €25 a day with a small private company in the other two capitals.

DOCUMENTS

If you're hiring a car you need a passport and a suitable driving licence, normally an International Driving Permit (IDP), but a national licence from a European country is often acceptable. Some hire companies have minimum ages (usually 19 or 21, but 22 at some places in Estonia) and stipulate that you must have held your licence for at least a year. A major credit card is essential too, as some companies insist on it as the method of payment. Even if they don't, you'll have to leave a very large deposit or make a heavy cash prepayment. See p397 for more on licences and other documents you need if you bring your own vehicle.

Insurance

Third-party motor insurance is compulsory throughout Europe, and the same applies to the now EU Baltic countries. For further

advice and more information contact the **Association of British Insurers** (☎ 020-7600 3333; www.abi.org.uk).

You should get your insurer to issue a Green Card (which may cost extra), an internationally recognised proof of insurance, listing all the countries you intend to visit. You'll need this in the event of an accident outside the country where the vehicle is insured. The European Accident Statement (the 'Constat Amiable' in France) is available from your insurance company and is copied so that each party at an accident can record information for insurance purposes. The Association of British Insurers has more details. Never sign accident statements you cannot understand or read; insist on a translation and sign that only if it's acceptable.

Since EU meetings in late 2004, all the Baltic countries should recognise the Green Card; but if the Green Card doesn't list one of the countries you're visiting, you will have to take out separate third-party cover at the border of the country in question.

It's also wise to take out a European breakdown assistance policy, such as the Five Star Service with **AA** (in UK ☎ 0870 550 0600) or the Eurocover Motoring Assistance with **RAC** (in UK ☎ 0800 550 055; www.rac.co.uk). Non-Europeans might find it cheaper to arrange for international coverage with their own national motoring organisation before travelling.

Road Rules

The whole region drives on the right. In Lithuania, driving with any alcohol at all in your blood is illegal – don't do so after even a sip of a drink. In Estonia, a blood-alcohol level of 0.02% (which means you still can't drink) is the legal limit; in Latvia it is marginally higher at 0.05%. Seat belts are compulsory for drivers and for front-seat passengers. Speed limits in built-up areas are 50km/h in Latvia and Estonia, and 60km/h in Lithuania. Limits outside urban areas vary from 90km/h to 110km/h. In Estonia and Latvia, have your headlights switched on when driving on highways, even during the day. In Lithuania, you must have them on during the day – wherever you are driving – for a period of about four weeks starting from 1 September (apparently timed to coincide with the 'going back to school' rush).

Traffic police are fearsome beings who don't need a reason to pull you over. Expect

Road Distances (km)

Tartu	190																				
Pärnu	130	205																			
Narva	210	194	304																		
Valka/Valga	276	86	140	268																	
Riga	310	253	180	435	167																
Liepāja	530	473	400	655	387	220															
Daugavpils	540	377	410	559	291	230	450														
Ventspils	510	453	380	635	367	200	119	430													
Vilnius	600	543	470	725	457	290	465	167	584												
Kaunas	575	523	460	715	447	280	230	267	349	100											
Klaipėda	620	538	490	745	477	310	155	477	274	310	210										
Panevėžys	460	403	330	585	317	150	270	168	350	140	110	235									
Šiauliai	465	383	310	565	297	130	192	387	330	220	140	155	80								
	Tallinn	Tartu	Pärnu	Narva	Valka/Valga	Riga	Liepāja	Daugavpils	Ventspils	Vilnius	Kaunas	Klaipėda	Panevėžys								

to be asked to stop at least twice on a trip between Riga and Vilnius. They are particularly stringent about speeding. Fines are collected on the spot. Fines vary dramatically and the only way you can ensure an officer is not adding a little pocket money for himself onto the official fine is to ask for a receipt. In Latvia, the fine for exceeding the speed limit by up to 20km/h is around 5Ls, up to 40km/h around 10Ls and more than 50km/h anything up to 60Ls. If you don't have enough cash to pay, your passport and car documents can be confiscated until you have paid the fine at the police station stipulated by the penalising officer.

Note that in Latvia and Estonia it is illegal to use a mobile phone while operating a vehicle; chatting to your mates while driving warrants a hefty fine.

Parking meters are still found in some parts of the Baltics, though both Tallinn and Vilnius have moved toward more advanced parking systems. Here drivers pay for parking via SMS, dialling a number and inputting the car's license plate and location number (posted nearby).

There is an hourly fee of 5Ls to drive into the Old Town of Riga. Driving into the old towns in Tallinn, Vilnius and Kaunas is free, but parking costs 48Kr per hour in Tallinn, 2Lt per hour in Vilnius, and 1Lt per hour in Kaunas. Motorists must also pay a small entrance fee to drive into Latvia's prime seaside resort, Jūrmala (1Ls year-round). The Curonian Spit National Park (p362-70; car, driver and passengers 20Lt, bus passenger or pedestrian 3Lt) in Lithuania also requires an entrance fee from motorists.

Take care driving near trams, trolleybuses and buses in towns. Passengers may run across the road to catch them while they're still in motion. Traffic behind a tram must stop when it opens its doors to let people in and out. Trolleybuses often swing far out into the road when leaving a stop.

HITCHING

Hitching is never entirely safe in any country in the world, and we don't recommend it. Travellers who decide to hitch should understand that they are taking a small but potentially serious risk. People who do

choose to hitch will be safer if they travel in pairs and let someone know where they are planning to go.

Locally, hitching is a popular means of getting from A to B. The **Vilnius Hitchhiking Club** (VHHC; ☎ 5-278 3025; www.autostop.lt; Umedžių gatvė 98-19, Vilnius) reckons the Baltic hitcher's average speed to be between 55km/h and 60km/h. It provides practical information and contacts to travellers hoping to hitch a ride in all three Baltic countries.

LOCAL TRANSPORT Bus, Tram & Trolleybus

A mix of trams, buses and trolleybuses (buses run by electricity from overhead wires) provides thorough public transport around towns and cities in all three countries. All three types of transport get crowded, especially during the early-morning and early-evening rush hours, when so many people cram themselves in that the doors don't shut properly – in Kaunas, some 400 students from the university once squashed into one bus as a publicity stunt to highlight the need for more services!

Trams, trolleybuses and buses all run from about 5.30am to 12.30am, but services get pretty thin in outlying areas after about 7pm. In Estonia, the same ticket is good for all three types of transport; in Lithuania and Latvia, you need different tickets for each type. In all three countries, you validate by punching a flat-fare ticket in one of the ticket punches fixed inside the vehicle. Tickets are sold from news kiosks displaying them in the window and by some drivers (who are easier to find but charge a little more for tickets). Buy five or 10 at once; a single ticket costs 10Kr in Estonia, 0.20Ls in Latvia and 0.90Lt to 1.40Lt in Lithuania. Weekly and monthly travel passes are also available. The system depends on honesty and lends itself to cheating, but there are occasional inspections, with on-the-spot fines if you're caught riding without a punched ticket.

Travelling on all trams, trolleybuses and buses requires a certain etiquette. If you are young, fit and capable of standing on one foot for the duration of your journey, do not sit in the seats at the front – these are only for babushkas and small children. Secondly, plan getting off well ahead of time. The moment the bus/tram rolls away from the stop prior to the one you are getting

off at, start making your way to the door. Pushing, shoving, stamping on toes and elbowing are, of course, allowed.

City buses are supplemented by the route-taxi (*liinitakso* or *marsruuttakso* in Estonian, *marsruta taksobuss* or *mikroautobuss* in Latvian, and *masrutinis* in Lithuanian), minibuses that drop you anywhere along a fixed routes for a flat fare: 15Kr in Tallinn, 0.20Ls to 0.30Ls in Riga and 2Lt in Vilnius.

All airports are served by regular city transport as well as by taxis.

Taxi

Taxis are plentiful and usually cheap: they officially cost 5.50Kr to 7Kr per kilometre in Estonia, 0.30Ls per kilometre in Latvia, and 0.65Lt to 1.30Lt in Lithuania; night-time tariffs, which generally kick in between 10pm and 6am, are higher.

To avoid rip-offs, insist on the meter running. If not, agree on a fixed price before you set off. In any of the cities, it's always cheaper to order a cab by phone.

Train

Suburban trains serve the outskirts of the main cities and some surrounding towns and villages. They're of limited use as city transport for visitors, as they mostly go to residential or industrial areas where there's little to see. But some are useful for day trips to destinations outside the cities.

TRAIN

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have railways, although services have been scaled back significantly in recent years.

Trains are slow and cheap, and not terribly comfortable. You can almost never open the windows, which can make things stuffy (and smelly, depending on your travelling companions), while you stand equal chances of freezing or baking, depending on whether the heating is turned on or not. Local trains, known as suburban or electric, are substantially slower and make more frequent stops than long-distance trains.

Routes

The only route between capitals is the three-times weekly train running between Vilnius and Riga.

Routes within countries include Tallinn–Narva, Tallinn–Pärnu, Tallinn–Tartu, Tallinn–

Viljandi, Rīga–Ventspils, Rīga–Rēzekne, Rīga–Daugavpils, Rīga–Liepāja, Vilnius–Daugavpils–Rēzekne (some terminating at St Petersburg), Vilnius–Druskininkai; Vilnius–Ignalina, Vilnius–Kaunas and Vilnius–Klaipėda. There are other local railways fanning out from the main cities.

Tickets & Information

In Latvia and Lithuania, tickets can be purchased in advance and immediately before departure at train stations. In larger train stations, such as Riga, you can only buy tickets for certain types of trains or destinations at certain windows. Check under Train in the Getting There & Away section of the city you are visiting for details.

Estonia's train stations are deserted places. There's no ticket agent and no services of any kind. You buy your tickets on the train, and don't head to the train station (which is usually quite far from the city centre) unless you know the exact departure time.

Tickets – upon boarding a long-distance train between the Baltics and elsewhere – must be surrendered to the carriage attendant, who will safeguard it for the journey's duration and return it to you 15 minutes before arrival at your final destination (a handy 'alarm clock' if you're on an overnight train).

Timetables & Fares

The railways of Latvia (www.ldz.lv) and Lithuania (www.litrail.lt) maintain updated train schedules on their websites, as does Estonia (www.edel.ee), though it's only in Estonian. Those displayed at train stations generally list the number of the train, departure and arrival times, and the platform from which it leaves. Some list the return journey schedules, the number of minutes a train waits in your station or the time a train left the place it began its journey. Always study the small print on timetables, too, as many trains only run on certain days or between certain dates. Estonia's train stations aren't really stations, just unstaffed waiting areas with little information for travellers.

Train fares vary. Prices per 100km average 60Kr (€3.83) in Estonia, 1.30Ls (€1.88) in Latvia and 10Lt (€2.90) in Lithuania. Once you get into compartment class, fares start rise from 20% to 50%.

TOURS

Single-city, two- or three-city, country, island and so on, tours and excursions are a dime a dozen in all three countries. Key operators include the following:

Estonia

Estonian Holidays (Map pp70-1; ☎ 627 0500; www.holidays.ee; Rüütli tänav 28/30, Tallinn) Organises thematic group tours, including an Estonian cultural heritage tour, a 'crown tour' featuring the sights depicted on Estonian banknotes, North Estonian manor houses, wildlife and agricultural tours.

Estonian Rural Tourism (Map pp66-7; ☎ 600 9999; www.maotourism.ee; Vilmsi tänav 53B, Tallinn) Organises more alternative four- or five-day tours with farmhouse accommodation, aimed at 'green' travellers into nature and the great outdoors.

Haapsalu Travel Service (Map p131; ☎ 472 4180; www.travel-service.ee; Tallinna maantee 1, Haapsalu) Organises tours of six Estonian cities, western Estonia, Vormsi Island as well as a thematic tour of former Soviet military sites in Estonia, and camping and ecological tours through nature reserves across Estonia.

Kumari (☎ 477 8214; www.kumari.ee) Operating out of Maatsalu Nature Reserve, this is one of the best bird-watching and nature tour outfits in Estonia.

Latvia

Country Holidays (Lauku ceļotājs; ☎ 761 7600; www.ceļotajs.lv; Kuģu iela 11, Rīga) Organises bird-watching, walking, berry-picking and a host of other nature-loving expeditions around Latvia.

Latvia Tours (Map p197; ☎ 708 5001; www.latviatours.lv; Kaļķu iela 8, Rīga) Runs a bounty of tours, including a classic seven-day coach tour of the three capitals. From May to September it runs daily day trips from Riga to Sigulda or Rundāle and day trips along the Daugava River to Aglona, Rēzekne and a Latgalian potter's workshop.

Lithuania

Baltic Travel Service (Map p292-3; ☎ 5-212 0220; lcc@bts.lt; Subačiaus gatvė 2, Vilnius) Specialises in countryside tourism, running bird-watching tours, Nemunas Delta trips and the like.

Krantas Travel (☎ 5-231 3314; www.krantas.lt; Plymo gatvė 4, Vilnius) With branch offices in Kaunas and Klaipėda, Krantas organises cycling, culinary, walking and bird-watching tours in Lithuania's national and regional parks.

Liturimex (☎ 5-279 1416; www.liturimex.lt; Basinavičiaus gatvė 11/1, Vilnius) Organises weekend breaks and spa tours to Druskininkai.

Health

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Travel health depends on your predeparture preparations, your daily health care while travelling and how you handle any medical problem that does develop. The Baltic region is, on the whole, a pretty healthy place to travel around, though medical care, particularly outside the capital cities, is not entirely up to Western standards.

BEFORE YOU GO

Illness prevention is the key to staying healthy while abroad. A little planning before departure, particularly for pre-existing illnesses, will save trouble later. See your dentist before a long trip, carry a spare pair of contact lenses and glasses, and take your optical prescription with you: it can be used in the capitals. Bring medications in their original, clearly labelled, containers. A signed and dated letter from your physician describing your medical conditions and medications, including generic names, is also a good idea. If carrying syringes or needles, be sure to have a physician's letter documenting their medical necessity.

INSURANCE

If you're an EU citizen, a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC), available from health centres or, in the UK, post offices, covers you for most medical care. An EHIC

will not cover you for nonemergencies or repatriation. Citizens from other countries should find out if there is a reciprocal arrangement for free medical care between their country and the country visited. If you do need health insurance, strongly consider a policy that covers you for the worst possible scenario, such as an accident requiring an emergency flight home. Find out in advance if your insurance plan will make payments directly to providers or reimburse you later for overseas health expenditures. The former option is generally preferable, as it doesn't require you to pay out of your own pocket in a foreign country.

RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that all travellers should be covered for diphtheria, tetanus, measles, mumps, rubella and polio, regardless of their destination. Since most vaccines don't produce immunity until at least two weeks after they're given, visit a physician at least six weeks before departure. If you intend to spend a lot of time in forested areas, including by the coast where pine forest prevails, it is advisable to get a vaccine against tick-borne encephalitis.

ONLINE RESOURCES

The WHO's publication *International Travel and Health* is revised annually and is available online at www.who.int/ith/. Other useful websites include www.mdtravelhealth.com (travel health recommendations for every country; updated daily), www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk (general travel advice for the layperson), www.ageconcern.org.uk (advice on travel for the elderly) and www.mariestopes.org.uk (information on women's health and contraception).

TRAVEL HEALTH WEBSITES

It's usually a good idea to consult your government's travel health website before departure, if one is available:

Australia www.smarttraveller.gov.au

Canada <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/index.html>

United Kingdom www.doh.gov.uk

United States www.cdc.gov/travel

www.mariestopes.org.uk (information on women's health and contraception).

IN ESTONIA, LATVIA & LITHUANIA

AVAILABILITY & COST OF HEALTH CARE

Practically all pharmacies in the capitals and larger towns stock imported Western medicines. There are few alternatives to the local medical system, which is short on both facilities and training should you have the misfortune to need serious attention. Private clinics offer Western-standard, English-speaking medical care in the capitals but they are very expensive. In an emergency seek your hotel's help first (if you're in one); the bigger hotels may have doctors on call. Emergency care is free in all three countries.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES Tick-Borne Encephalitis

Spread by tick bites, tick-borne encephalitis is a serious infection of the brain. Vaccination is advised for those in risk areas who are unable to avoid tick bites (such as campers, forestry workers and walkers). Two doses of vaccine will give a year's protection, three doses up to three years'.

Typhoid & Hepatitis A

These are spread through contaminated food (particularly shellfish) and water. Typhoid can cause septicaemia (blood poisoning); hepatitis A causes liver inflammation and jaundice. Neither is usually fatal but recovery can be prolonged. Typhoid vaccine (Typhim Vi, Typherix) will give protection for three years. In some countries, the oral vaccine Vivotif is also available. Hepatitis A vaccine (Avaxim, VAQTA, Havrix) is given as an injection; a single dose will give protection for up to a year, and a booster after a year gives 10 years' protection. Hepatitis A and typhoid vaccines can also be given as a single dose vaccine (Hepatyrrix or Viatim).

TRAVELLER'S DIARRHOEA

To prevent diarrhoea, avoid tap water unless it has been boiled, filtered or chemically disinfected (with iodine tablets) and steer clear of ice. Only eat fresh fruits or

vegetables if cooked or peeled; be wary of dairy products that might contain unpasteurised milk. Eat food which is hot through and avoid buffet-style meals. If a restaurant is full of locals the food is probably safe.

If you develop diarrhoea, be sure to drink plenty of fluids, preferably an oral rehydration solution (eg Dioralyte). A few loose stools don't require treatment, but if you start having more than four or five stools a day, you should start taking an antibiotic (usually a quinolone drug) and an anti-diarrhoeal agent (such as Loperamide). If diarrhoea is bloody, persists for more than 72 hours or is accompanied by fever, shaking, chills or severe abdominal pain you should seek medical attention.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS Insect Bites & Stings

Bees and wasps cause real problems only to those with a severe allergy (anaphylaxis). If you have a severe allergy to bee or wasp stings carry an 'epipen' or similar adrenaline injection.

Bed bugs lead to very itchy, lumpy bites. Spraying the mattress with crawling-insect killer after changing bedding will get rid of them.

You should always check all over your body if you have been walking through a potentially tick-infested area. Signs along the Lithuanian coast alert walkers and beachgoers to particularly rampant tick areas. If a tick is found attached, press down around the tick's head with tweezers, grab the head and gently pull upwards. Avoid pulling the rear of the body as this may squeeze the tick's gut contents through the attached mouth parts into the skin, increasing the risk of infection and disease.

Water

Tap water may not be safe to drink so it is best to stick to bottled water, or boil water for 10 minutes, use water purification tablets or a filter. Do not drink water from rivers or lakes as it may contain bacteria or viruses that can cause diarrhoea or vomiting.

TRAVELLING WITH CHILDREN

Make sure the children are up to date with routine vaccinations, and discuss possible travel vaccines well before departure as

some vaccines are not suitable for children under a year.

In hot moist climates any wound or break in the skin is likely to let in infection. The area should be cleaned and kept dry.

Remember to avoid contaminated food and water. If your child has vomiting or diarrhoea, lost fluid and salts must be replaced. It may be helpful to take rehydration powders for reconstituting with boiled water.

Children should be encouraged to avoid and mistrust any dogs or other mammals because of the risk of rabies and other diseases. Any bite, scratch or lick from a warm-blooded, furry animal should be thoroughly cleaned immediately. If there is any possibility that the animal is infected with rabies, immediate medical assistance should be sought.

WOMEN'S HEALTH

Travelling during pregnancy is usually possible but always consult your doctor before planning your trip. The most risky times for travel are during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy and after 30 weeks.

SEXUAL HEALTH

Emergency contraception is most effective if taken within 24 hours after unprotected sex. The **International Planned Parenthood Federation** (www.ippf.org) can advise about the availability of contraception in different countries.

When buying condoms, look for a European CE mark, which means they have been rigorously tested, and then keep them in a cool dry place or they may crack and perish.

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