

GO RURAL

PRACTICAL GUIDE
FOR TRAVELLERS VISITING
SOUTH COAST FINLAND,
ESTONIA, LATVIA



Photo by Visit Finland

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Finland, Estonia and Latvia – three neighbouring countries in the North of Europe and Scandinavia, on the shores of the Baltic Sea. This brochure will help independent travellers plan a holiday trip in the South of Finland, Estonia and Latvia beyond traditional touristic routes and to discover the real countryside.

Finns, Estonians and Latvians share similarities in mentality and way of life, but each country is still proud of its unique identity. All three countries are safe and easy to travel around – there is a good road and transport network, and there are many guest houses and country hotels, even in remote country areas, to welcome guests.

In this brochure, you will find the key information that is necessary to plan a trip – a map of the Baltic Sea countries with airports and sea ports marked, names and contacts of airlines, ferry and bus companies and car hire, and suggestions for holiday themes in the countryside. Besides, we have provided a number of web links to useful sources of more detailed information.

**Let this brochure inspire
you for a holiday trip!**





Gulf of Bothnia

Gulf of Finland

Helsinki - Stockholm, Tallinn-Stockholm

Riga - Stockholm

Ventspils - Nyråshamn

Liepāja - Travemünde

Klaipėda - Kiel

BALTIC SEA

STOCKHOLM

HELSINKI
HELSINGFORS

Tallinn

Riga

Klaipėda

SWEDEN

ESTONIA

RUSSIA

LATVIA

LITHUANIA

Västerås

Göteborg

Öland

Grönhögen

Ljusdal

Ockelbo

Sandviken

Åre

Enköping

Sigtuna

Nyköping

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Åmål

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1 / GETTING THERE AND AROUND

IT IS VERY EASY TO VISIT ALL THREE COUNTRIES IN ONE TRIP FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS:

relatively short travelling distances between and within countries due to their relatively small size, no border formalities between them since they all belong to the European Union and the same time zone, the same currency, and similar climate.

To reach our destination, Helsinki in Finland is the main gateway. From there it is possible to travel within Finland, and to Estonia and Latvia by air, sea and land. The main airports are located in capitals: Helsinki, Tallinn and Riga. Several ferry ports connect the countries with other interesting destinations, for example Sweden. The ferry ports are located in the cities of Helsinki in Finland, Tallinn in Estonia, and Riga, Liepāja and Ventspils in Latvia, local ferries connect the Estonian islands with the mainland. There are good bus services between Riga and Tallinn and smooth ferry services between Tallinn and Helsinki. Tickets are also available to buy online.

Sites in the countryside can be reached by hired car, public transportation or through a pick-up service from the accommodation provider. When travelling by local public transportation it is recommended to check schedules in advance and pre-arrange pick-up transfers from bus or train stations with the hosts in the countryside.

Driving is easy outside cities because of little heavy traffic. There is a reasonably good network of petrol stations. Good road maps are essential in addition to navigation. In the countryside some roads are gravel, not paved. Driving is slower on these.



AIRLINES

Finnair

Finland's flagship carrier, with its Helsinki hub as a gateway between the Far East and Europe. Direct flights from Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya and Fukuoka.

www.finnair.com

Japan airlines

Japan's top airline, one of the world's premier carriers.

www.jal.com

airBaltic

The national Latvian airline offering cheap flights to over 50 destinations in Europe and beyond from Riga, Vilnius and Tallinn.

www.airbaltic.com

Nordica

The national Estonian airline in cooperation with LOT Polish Airlines.

www.nordica.ee



CAR RENTAL

Avis, Budget, Sixt, Hertz and other international car rental companies with a wide worldwide network and standardised level of service operate throughout the region. Driving licences issued in Japan are valid for tourists to drive in Finland, Estonia and Latvia. Driving is on the right side. Headlights must be on at all times.



COACHES

Lux Express: www.luxexpress.eu

Ecolines: www.ecolines.eu

Euroline: www.euroline.eu

The bus trip between Tallinn and Riga takes approximately 4.5 hours.



FERRIES

Tallink Silja Line

The leading provider of high-quality mini-cruise and passenger transport services in the northern Baltic Sea region. Routes: Helsinki – Tallinn, Helsinki – Stockholm, Riga – Stockholm, Tallinn - Stockholm.

www.tallinksilja.com

Viking Line

A market-leading brand in passenger traffic on the northern Baltic Sea. Routes: Helsinki – Tallinn; Helsinki – Stockholm.

www.vikingline.com

Eckerö Line

Estonian ferry line and a travel agency. Route: Tallinn - Helsinki

www.eckeroline.ee/en

Local ferries in Estonia

Local ferries operate between the islands and mainland Estonia: Kihnu and other small islands

www.veeteed.com

The islands of Muhu, Hiiumaa and Saaremaa

www.praamid.ee



LOCAL BUSES AND TRAINS:

FINLAND:

Buses: www.matkahuolto.fi/en/ is a comprehensive portal for most of the long distance coaches. www.onnibus.com/en/index.htm Onnibus is a low cost service provider.

Trains: All the trains in Finland are operated by the national railway company, VR: www.vr.fi/en You can find your way with all the public transport from one portal: www.perille.fi.

ESTONIA:

Buses: www.tpilet.ee (regional transport and online tickets) www.peatus.ee (route search, city transport, regional transport)

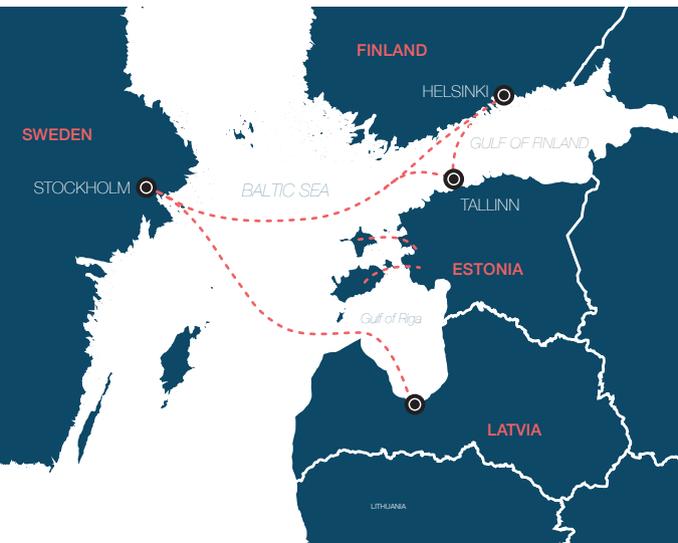
Trains: www.elron.ee

LATVIA:

Buses: www.autoosta.lv Buses are the most convenient means for reaching local destinations outside Riga sub-urban area.

Trains: www.pv.lv Train travel is most convenient for travelling to destinations such as Jūrmala, Gauja National Park and Daugavpils.

Enquiry service, including public transport: www.1188.lv



2 / GENERAL INFORMATION

	Finland	Estonia	Latvia
Capital	Helsinki	Tallinn	Riga
Territory km²	338 424	45 227	64 573
Population	5 487 308	1 315 635	2 023 825
Population density: inhabitants per km ²	17	28.4	31
Language	Finnish Inhabitants also speak English, Swedish, or Russian.	Estonian Inhabitants also speak English, German or Russian.	Latvian Inhabitants also speak English, German
Currency	EUR	EUR	EUR
Country code	+358	+372	+371
Local time	GMT + 2 hours	GMT + 2 hours	GMT + 2 hours
Climate	Warm summers, spring and autumn relatively mild, cold winters. The warmest month is July with average temperature +17 °C, the coldest months - January with average temperature -4 °C.		



GOOD TO KNOW



There are Tourist Information Centres in cities, towns and many rural villages. They offer maps, guidebooks, guide services and advice to tourists.

- Credit cards in use: Visa card, Master card. Cash and card payments are accepted in shops. When visiting the countryside it is advised to be prepared for using cash as card payments might not be accepted in all places. ATMs are easy to find in cities and towns.
 - People in cities and young people usually speak English as their first foreign language. In the countryside, older generations might not speak any foreign language. Even if so, out of their natural hospitality they will always do their best to understand visitors and take good care.
 - Prepaid SIM-cards are available from grocery stores and other distributors.
 - There is a good Wi-fi network coverage, however, in some remote rural areas internet might not always be available.
 - Driving is on the right side of the road.
 - European C-type sockets.
 - Tap water is drinkable.
 - Finland, Estonia and Latvia are considered to be a safe destination.
- National speed limits:
Finland - 50 km/h in built-up areas and 80 km/h outside if no other speed limit is signposted.
Estonia and Latvia - 50 km/h in built-up areas and 90 km/h outside if no other speed limit is signposted.



3 / GUIDE TO SEASONAL ACTIVITIES:

We have four distinct seasons – spring, summer, autumn, winter. Each season has its own specific activities like mushrooming, berry picking, collecting herbs, ice-fishing and different agricultural jobs as well as traditional and seasonal celebrations.



WINTER MONTHS: December, January, February

The coldest months of a year still brightened up by the Christmas spirit – beautifully decorated Christmas trees, mulled wine, artisan markets and Christmas music. Christian traditions and pre-Christian winter solstice traditions co-exist and merge during this season. The snow enables all kinds of outdoor activities – downhill and cross-country skiing, ice-fishing, snowmobile rides. Driving is very specific on ice-covered roads, therefore in winter it is safer to rely on transfers services.



SPRING MONTHS: March, April, May

The time of nature's awakening after a cold winter. Best time for bird watching – flocks of migrating cranes, swans, wild geese, storks can be observed on their return home for nesting. Birch sap starts circulating in the trees and this time of a year is a unique opportunity to enjoy fresh saps with their invigorating and healthy effects. Beautiful landscapes as the countryside turns green, white and yellow with young leaves and blossoms of cherry, plum and apple trees.



SUMMER MONTHS: June, July, August

The warmest months to enjoy walking, cycling, boating, riding or simply being outdoors and indulging in nature's beauty. The best time to enjoy a great variety of seasonal foods – greenery, vegetables, fruit and berries, fish. The Midsummer celebration period between June 21-23 highlights the summer. Forests are rich in berries and with the second half of August the mushrooming season starts. Berry picking, mushrooming and walking is allowed in forests under the law of everyman's rights in Finland. In Latvia it is generally allowed in state owned forests. In Estonia, it is permitted to access natural and cultural landscapes on foot, by bicycle, skis, boat or on horseback. Unmarked and unrestricted private property may be accessed any time for picking berries, mushrooms, medicinal plants, fallen or dried branches, unless the owner forbids it verbally.



AUTUMN MONTHS: September, October, November

While the first half of September is usually mild and good for mushrooming and other outdoor activities, at the end of the month tree leaves turn bright yellow and red with the first frosty nights and the colours play a magnificent landscape show worth seeing. October and November are the darkest months of a year, therefore outdoor activities are changed for cultural life like concerts, shows, art performances in cities and towns.





4 / CAPITAL CITIES – HELSINKI, TALLINN, RIGA



HELSINKI



TALLINN

HELSINKI

A green city with Nordic exoticism. Helsinki is characterized by modern architecture and trendy design, hot fashion labels and large cultural events and festivals which take place right in the heart of the city. The Suomenlinna fortress at the entrance of Helsinki's harbour is a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Helsinki tourist information centre:
Pohjoisesplanadi 19, Helsinki.
Phone: +358 (0)9 3101 3300
E-mail: tourist.info@hel.fi
Website: www.visithelsinki.fi

TALLINN

Tallinn is a city of contrasts. It is a medieval Hanseatic town situated side by side with the 21st century city of modern glass buildings. The Old Town of Tallinn is an outstanding and exceptionally well preserved example of a medieval northern European trading city and a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Tallinn tourist information centre:
Niguliste 2, 10146 Tallinn, Estonia
Phone: + 372 645 7777
E-mail: visit@tallinn.ee
Website: www.visittallinn.ee

RIGA

Riga is the Baltic metropolis, featuring a picturesque old town, a UNESCO World Heritage Art Nouveau architecture, and cosy cafés alongside the buzz of a big city. Many young people from all over Europe have discovered Riga as the fun town for the new generation.

Riga tourist information centre:
Rātslaukums 6, Riga
Phone: +371 6703 7900
E-mail: info@rigatic.lv
Website: www.LiveRiga.com

Hotels in the cities are certified in accordance with EU, Nordic and Baltic classification standards. Certification is not compulsory and a range of high quality concept hotels operate, including: spa, boutique and design hotels. Budget accommodation is available in hostels.



RIGA



5 / WHAT TO DO AND SEE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

Traditionally, in rural areas people live in stand-alone farmsteads or small villages. There are also charming small towns, full of history and peaceful ambience. To feel the real spirit of the countryside, choose a countryside place to stay and enjoy the variety of activities on site and in local surroundings. Guest houses, manor hotels and country hotels offer pick-up transfers, meals, local excursions to nature attractions, open farms, craft shops, nature based guided activities, spa services and other experiences of nature, local life and culture. We are happy to share with our visitors a variety of experiences rooted in old traditions and skills that we still use in everyday life. You will see and might even try learning how to bake bread, how to weave, how to milk a cow, how to collect and use medicinal herbs, how to forge a nail or make a wooden barrel. For countryside visits pre-booking is always required.

More information can be found from the web sites of the tourism organisations:

www.countryholidays.lv - Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania
www.maaturism.ee - Estonia
www.visitsouthcoastfinland.fi - South Finland



ACCOMMODATION

There is a variety of accommodation available in the countryside. Rooms in manor hotels are furnished with much attention to detail, design and style. Country homes and cottages offer comfortable and functional rooms. In all places guest accommodation are in SGL, TWIN or DBL rooms with shower or bath. In many places morning coffee or dinner can be served on a terrace with a view over a lake or wide rolling landscape for you to enjoy the beauty of the surrounding nature. Breakfast is almost always included in guest houses and country hotels. Self-catering accommodation with fully equipped kitchen is also available.

FOOD

Breakfast is almost always included with accommodation while lunch and dinner can be pre-ordered. Menus are often based on locally grown and seasonal foods. Traditionally meals in Finland, Estonia and Latvia include beef and pork meat, fish, eggs, cooked and fresh vegetables, fresh salad, cheese, white and black bread. Various dietary requirements can be met upon prior arrangement. We diversify our seasonal menus with wild mushrooms, wild grasses, herb teas, birch sap and fish from lakes and rivers. More information: www.balticseaculinary.com



OPEN FARMS, HOME FOOD PRODUCERS AND SELF-SUSTAINING FARMS

They relate to various food production sectors, receive visitors, and offer their products for tasting and sales. Production facilities are registered with food and hygiene authorities, many products are certified as bio or eco foods and production processes are often open for demonstrating to visitors. Enjoy country goodies such as cheese, fruit, berries, homemade sausages, smoked fish, mushrooms, bread, honey, beer and homemade wine.

Visit self-sustaining farms if you wish to see real countryside life – with farm animals, gardens and fields. Guests can feel like a part of the family and try their hand at daily chores: feeding goats, weeding, picking berries and apples, making cheese. Wholesome country food will be served at the family's table while dietary requirements and tastes of guests will be respected. Natural farms may also offer accommodation, the rooms might be simple but functional and cosy. WC and shower facilities are provided.



More information:

www.countryholidays.lv –
section Countryside Goodies



CRAFT WORKSHOPS

Visit craftsmen to watch demonstration of traditional skills, see exposition of their works and try out your hand at ancient crafts and skills such as making clay pots, churning butter, using a bow and arrow, forging a nail at a blacksmith's shop. Purchase practical and design elements made by craftspeople at workshops and souvenir shops.



SPA

Many country hotels, manors and guest houses specialise in SPA services offering high-quality spa procedures so that you can relax and restore yourself. Added value is provided by fresh air, lovely natural and rural landscapes, and the sounds of nature. People have known for centuries how to use nature materials for their health and wellbeing, and some of this is adapted in modern spa and health treatments, for example, milk or birch sap baths, combined with massage.



SAUNA TRADITIONS

Sauna is an intrinsic part of living in the countryside and of national culture in Finland, Estonia and Latvia. There are considerable differences in sauna traditions and practices in each country. UNESCO has inscribed the Võrumaa smoke sauna tradition, practiced in southern Estonia, on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Sauna restores the body in physical and spiritual terms. A sauna ritual is an adventure on various levels – healing and purifying the body, concentrating the emotions, learning about yourself, and even experiencing a positive change in your consciousness. Sauna rituals are offered by certified and experienced experts, and the rituals make use of gifts from the environment – branch and plant switches, scrubs and body masks from natural and local raw materials. Herbal teas are also offered. Sauna rituals can be experienced under guidance of a professional sauna expert as many hosts have inherited sauna traditions passed down the generations or attended special sauna schools.

More information:

saunafromfinland.fi/en/
www.visitfinland.com/article/join-the-finns-in-the-sauna/
www.visitfinland.com/article/10-sauna-tips-for-beginners/



MUSHROOMING AND BERRY PICKING

Our countries are rich in forests so staying in the countryside in August or September must involve mushrooming as a seasonal activity. In our forests we have chanterelles, russulas, Chestnut Bolete (Gyroporus castaneus), Lurid Bolete (Boletus luridus), edible tree-fungus – Sheep polypore (popular in Scandinavian cooking) (Albatrellus ovinus), Golden corall (Ramaria aurea), (Hapalopilus croceus), European bolete (Boletus edulis), golden Coral Tooth (Hericium coralloides). Local people know edible mushrooms well and will show their special mushrooming spots to guests. In early autumn serving mushroom dishes is a leading trend in home kitchens as well as restaurant menus.



WEDDING CELEBRATIONS

Castle and manor hotels as well as guest houses specialise in services for wedding ceremonies and celebrations. Young couples pronounce the sacred vows in front of an outdoor altar surrounded by beautiful countryside. Wedding banquets are professionally serviced by restaurants and wedding organisers.



NATIONAL PARKS

National parks welcome visitors who enjoy nature and share the feeling of responsibility to preserve and protect it. Wild animals can be seen in their natural habitats, unique landscapes, rare plants are all nature values that are attractively explained by nature guides. Nature experiences usually include walks in specially appointed nature trails with wooden boardwalks and viewing platforms in beautiful landscape areas, hiking along the seashore, enjoying magnificent moments like sunrise or sunset by the sea, listening to the sounds of nature and admiring its colours.

Natural parks have their visitor centres offering tourist information and guidance.



Photo by Outdoors Finland





6 / SOUVENIRS AND GIFTS

Hand-made and home-grown products from the countryside carry the true spirit of the country. Traditional products that originate from the past are still in use today. Pottery, natural textiles, knitwear, woodworking products, wax candles, herb teas, natural honey and other handmade and home-made things are favourite gifts. Souvenirs and gifts can be bought in specialised handicraft design shops in cities, in tourist information centres, at country outdoor markets in rural communities, from specialised home-producer shops and directly from producers while visiting them.



FINLAND: Popular souvenirs in Finland are for example, **Finnish design** (Iittala, Fiskars, Marimekko), **Muumin figures** or **local food** produce.

ESTONIA: **Hand-made textiles and knitwear:** colourful mittens and socks, knitted sweaters, woollen slippers are favourites.

Wooden souvenirs: in souvenir shops you'll nearly always find a corner with wooden craft pieces, famously these are made from juniper and you'll know this wood by its very fragrant scent. Look for butter knives, tiny jewellery boxes, key chains, and trivets. Estonian artists are often inspired by nature, which means that wood and animals are often featured, there are also wooden phone covers, wooden bow ties, animal-shaped rings and etc.

Food souvenirs: look for chocolates, marzipan, kama (a mixture of roasted barley, rye, oat and pea flour eaten with buttermilk as a filling breakfast), dried fruit crisps, elk and wild boar meat sausages, sprats or black bread, craft beer and famous local liqueurs. You'll also find lots of jams, juices and dried berries there too.

LATVIA: **Hand-made textiles:** authentic colours and patterns are used in contemporary designs of apparel. Natural materials like wool and linen are favourites.

Pottery: clay pottery is a famous tradition and still in practical use. Mugs, plates and bowls in a variety of designs are used to serve food in traditional styles.

Herb teas: herb teas are popular, especially to go with sauna rituals. Herb farms produce high quality teas and mix various plants according to set recipes for medicinal and beauty treatment purposes as well as simply to offer tasty hot drinks.

Honey: there is a great variety of honey sorts depending on the harvesting time and plants in the vicinity of bee-hives. Apiaries are located in pristine natural locations and the honey is pure and natural.

Jewellery: jewellery made of bronze, silver and other metals present ancient signs and symbols. Each one has a particular meaning and traditions of wearing.





7 / HELPFUL LINKS TO PLAN YOUR TRIP

TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR TRIP, ASK ADVICE FROM
PROFESSIONAL RURAL TOURISM ASSOCIATIONS –
EXPERTS IN RURAL HOLIDAYS:

Southern Finland, Estonia, Latvia
www.balticsea.countryholidays.info

Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania
www.countryholidays.lv

Estonia
www.maaturism.ee

Southern Finland
www.visitsouthcoastfinland.fi

GENERAL COUNTRY INFORMATION:

official tourism website of Finland | www.visitfinland.com

official tourism website of Estonia | www.visitestonia.com

official tourism website of Latvia | www.latvia.travel/ja





ABOUT THE PROJECT

CAITO - META CLUSTER FOR ATTRACTING
THE JAPANESE TOURISM MARKET

Project overall objective: to promote and support rural tourism companies to enter Japanese tourism market by strengthening their capacity and cooperation in the three Baltic Sea countries: Latvia, Estonia, and South Coast Finland.

www.balticsea.countryholidays.info



EUROPEAN UNION
European Regional Development Fund



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More information can be found from the web sites
of the tourism organisations:

Southern Finland, Latvia, Estonia
www.balticsea.countryholidays.info

Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania
www.countryholidays.lv

Estonia
www.maaturism.ee

Southern Finland
www.visitsouthcoastfinland.fi

