

International conference “Military Heritage Tourism
Innovative Approaches and Baltic Cooperation” /
March 25–26, 2026

Military Heritage Tourism Trends. Visitor Demand and Future Opportunities

28.10.2025.

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VIDZEME UNIVERSITY
OF APPLIED SCIENCES

MEMBER OF

E³UDRES²

Date:

March 25-26, 2026

Venue:

Hotel Jūrmala Spa & Conference Centre,
Jomas street 47/49, Jūrmala, Latvia

Participants:

tourism professionals and entrepreneurs,
historians from Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia

REGISTRATION
by filling out the
application form

March 24, Tuesday

20:00 GET TOGETHER IN THE HOTEL JŪRMALA SPA FOR WELCOME DRINK AND SNACKS
(Cocktail bar “Seaside”, on the hotel’s 11th floor)



Interreg  Co-funded by
the European Union

Latvia – Lithuania

The project “Extending the Baltic military heritage tourism product in Lithuania and South Latvia” (Military Heritage II, project number LL-00052) is being implemented with the support of the European Union under the Interreg VI-A Latvia–Lithuania Programme 2021–2027.



Interreg  Co-funded by
the European Union

Estonia – Latvia

The project “Improved Accessibility of the Latvian-Estonian Military Heritage Tourism Product” (ML-HER ACCESSIBLE, project number EE-LV00094) is being implemented with the support of the European Union under the Interreg VI-A Estonia–Latvia Programme 2021–2027.



This event is organised with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the Latvian Country Tourism Association “Lauku ceļotājs” and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

Military Heritage Tourism

Defining **military heritage tourism** clearly requires looking at it from two angles: **what is being offered** (product perspective) and **how it is experienced and interpreted** (consumer perspective).

definition of the term

Dictionary of Travel and Tourism Terminology (2nd ed.) (2005) X

Dictionary of Leisure, Travel and Tourism (3d ed.) (2005) X

Dictionary of Tourism and Hospitality Terms (Latvia) (2008) X

mileage /'maɪlɪdʒ/ *noun* TRAVEL the distance travelled in miles

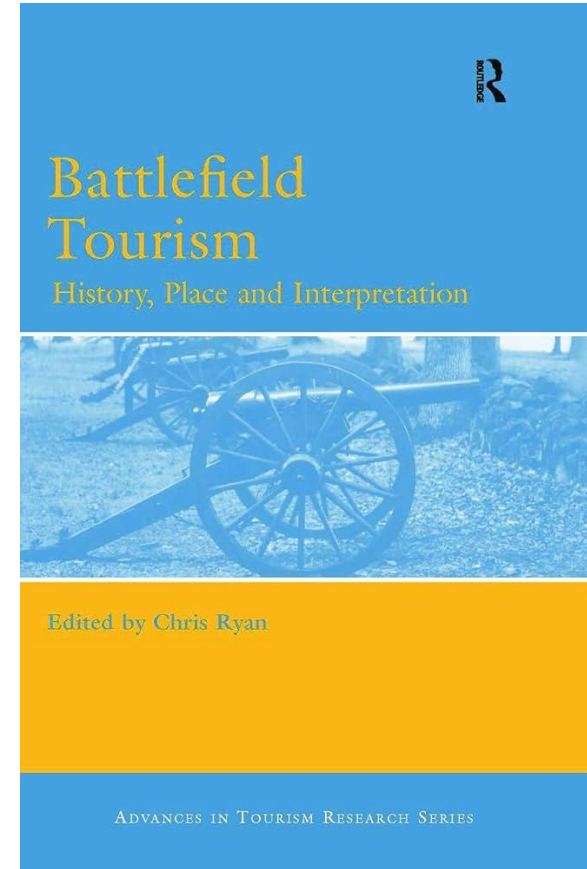
mileage allowance /'maɪlɪdʒ ə,laʊəns/ *noun* BUSINESS money paid per mile as expenses to someone who uses their own car for business travel

milk /mɪlk/ *noun* DAIRY a white liquid produced by female mammals for feeding their young, especially the milk produced by cows
■ *verb* to take the milk from an animal

milk bar /'mɪlk bɑː/ *noun* CATERING a bar which serves milk, other milk products such as ice cream, and non-alcoholic drinks

Academic References

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 - **Stone, P. R.** (2006). A dark tourism spectrum: Towards a typology of death and macabre related tourist sites, attractions and exhibitions. *Tourism, 54*(2), 145–160.
 - **Ryan, C.** (Ed.). (2007). *Battlefield tourism: History, place and interpretation*.
 - **Winter, C.** (2009). Tourism, social memory and the Great War. *Annals of Tourism Research, 36*(4), 607–626.
 - **Winter, C.** (2011). First World War battlefield visitors: Motivations and characteristics. *Journal of Heritage Tourism, 6*(3), 219–233.
 - **Ashworth, G. J.** (2008). The memorialization of violence and tragedy: Human trauma as heritage. *Tourism Recreation Research, 33*(3), 231–239.
 - **Baldwin, F., & Sharpley, R.** (2009). Battlefield tourism: Bringing organised violence back to life. In R. Sharpley & P. R. Stone (Eds.), *The darker side of travel: The theory and practice of dark tourism* (pp. 186–200). Channel View Publications.
 - **Dunkley, R., Morgan, N., & Westwood, S.** (2011). Visiting the trenches: Exploring meanings and motivations in battlefield tourism. *Tourism Management, 32*(4), 860–868.
 - **Miles, W. F. S.** (2014). Battlefield sites as dark tourism attractions: An analysis of experience. *Journal of Heritage Tourism, 9*(2), 134–147.
- and more...



Product Perspective (Supply)

Tangible heritage (primary core)

- Battlefields (e.g., Waterloo, Normandy, Ložmetējkalns)
- Fortifications, castles, bunkers, trenches
- Military bases (historic or decommissioned)
- Warships, submarines, aircraft (museum or preserved)
- Military cemeteries and memorials
- Museums focused on wars, armies, or defense

Intangible heritage

- Stories of soldiers, civilians, resistance movements
- Military traditions, rituals, commemorations
- Reenactments and living history events
- Oral histories, archives, and narratives

Designed tourism products

- Guided battlefield tours
- Military-themed routes or trails
- Interpretation centers
- Educational programs (e.g., WWI tours)

Tourism products and experiences built around tangible and intangible heritage related to military history, conflict, defense systems, and armed forces.

If there is **no heritage interpretation or historical framing**, it is *not* military heritage tourism.

What to exclude

- **Purely entertainment militarized leisure** (paintball, airsoft, unless historically interpretive)
- **Active military operations** (visits to functioning bases without heritage interpretation)
- **Weapons fascination without context** (gun shows or shooting ranges lacking historical heritage framing)
- **General dark tourism not tied to military context** (natural disasters, crime tourism etc. unless linked to war or military conflict)

Consumer Perspective (Demand)

Visitor motivations

Educational & cognitive

- Learning about wars, strategies, geopolitics
- Understanding historical consequences

Commemorative & emotional, personal quest

- Paying respects (e.g., visiting graves, memorials)
- Family connections (ancestry, veterans)

Experiential & immersive

- Walking battlefields
- Participating in reenactments
- Visiting preserved sites

Identity & cultural interest

- National history
- Heritage pride or reflection

Military heritage tourism is the intentional travel experience motivated by an interest in understanding, commemorating, or engaging with military history and its human, cultural, and political meanings.

What to exclude (consumer side)

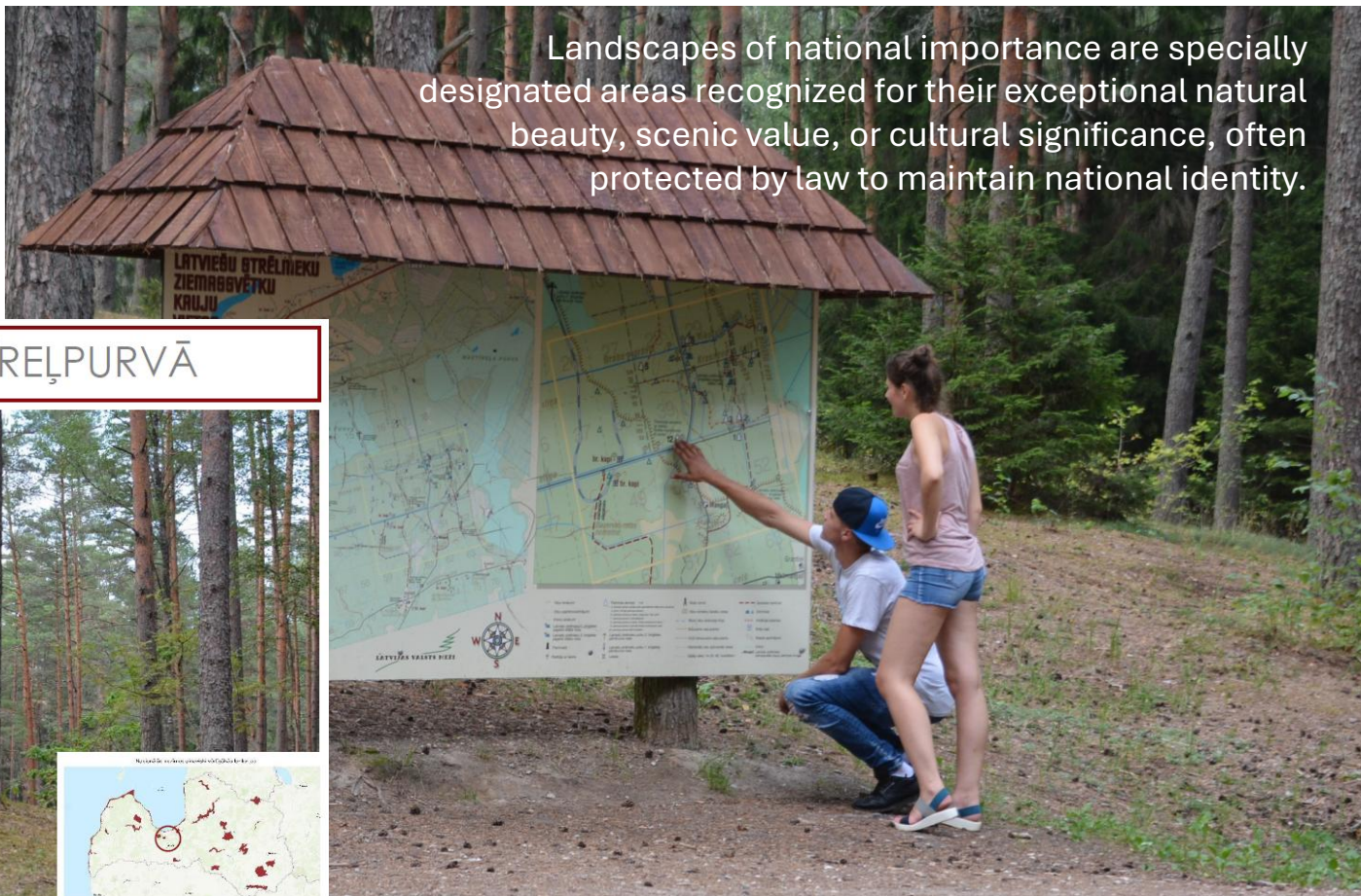
- **Thrill-seeking only** (“War as adventure” without reflective intent)
- **Pure gaming mindset** (treating sites like entertainment playgrounds)
- **Incidental tourists** (people visiting a castle for architecture only without military meaning or picnic site near battlefield)

If the visitor is **not engaging with military meaning**, it falls outside the concept.

National landscape narrative

Landscapes of national importance are specially designated areas recognized for their exceptional natural beauty, scenic value, or cultural significance, often protected by law to maintain national identity.

LOŽMETĒJKALNS TĪREĻPURVĀ



Military Heritage Tourism explained

Military heritage tourism is a form of cultural tourism that involves the production and consumption of experiences centered on the interpretation, preservation, and engagement with tangible and intangible military heritage, where both the supply (sites, narratives, products) and demand (visitor motivations) are oriented toward understanding, remembering, or experiencing military history and its impacts.

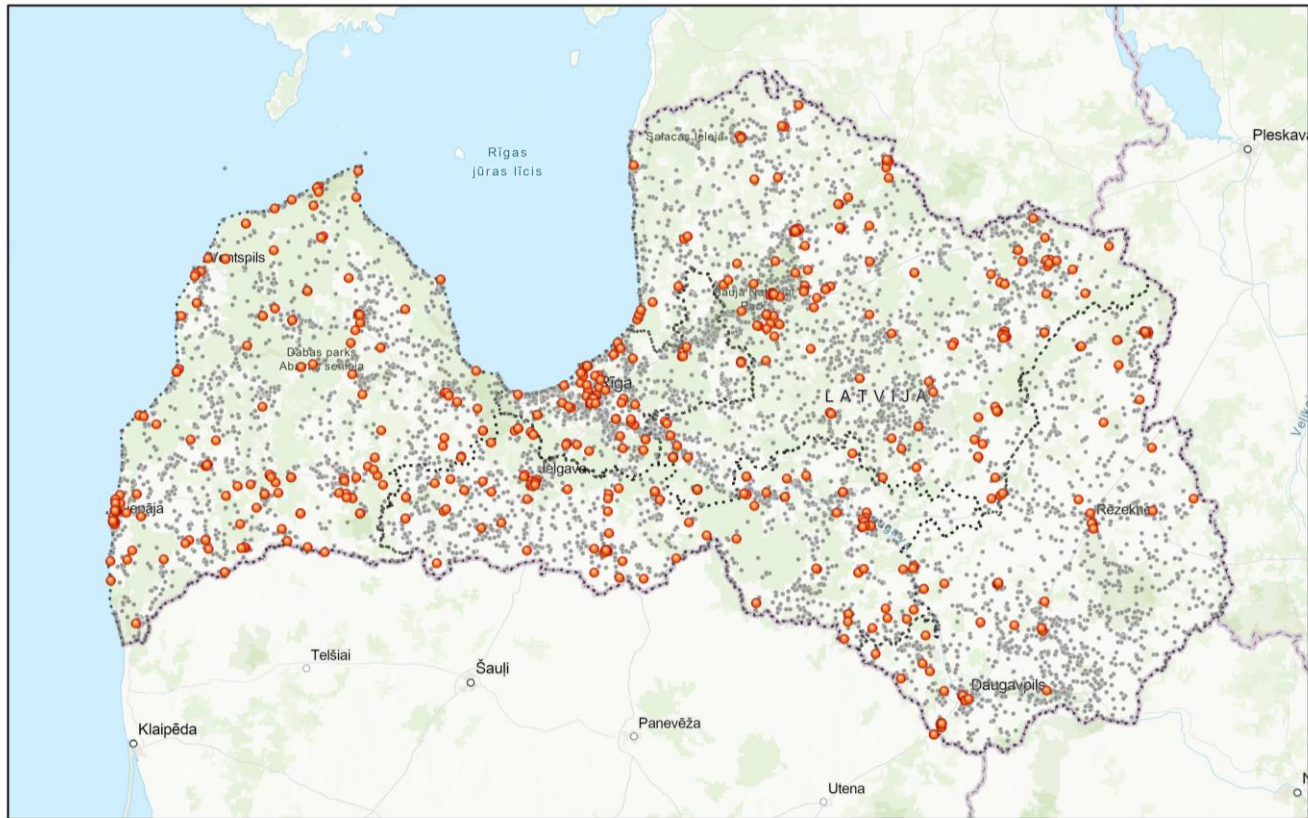
Overlaps with other tourism types

- **Dark tourism** – overlap when death or trauma is central
- **Cultural heritage tourism** – broader category
- **War tourism** – narrower, sometimes more event-focused

Military heritage tourism is defined by **heritage + interpretation + intentional engagement**

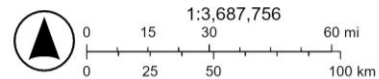
The **cultural heritage of Europe** is ‘one of the oldest and most important generators of tourism.’
(Thorburn, 1986)

Cultural tourism has become recognized as an important **agent of economic and social change** in Europe.
(G.Richards, 1996)



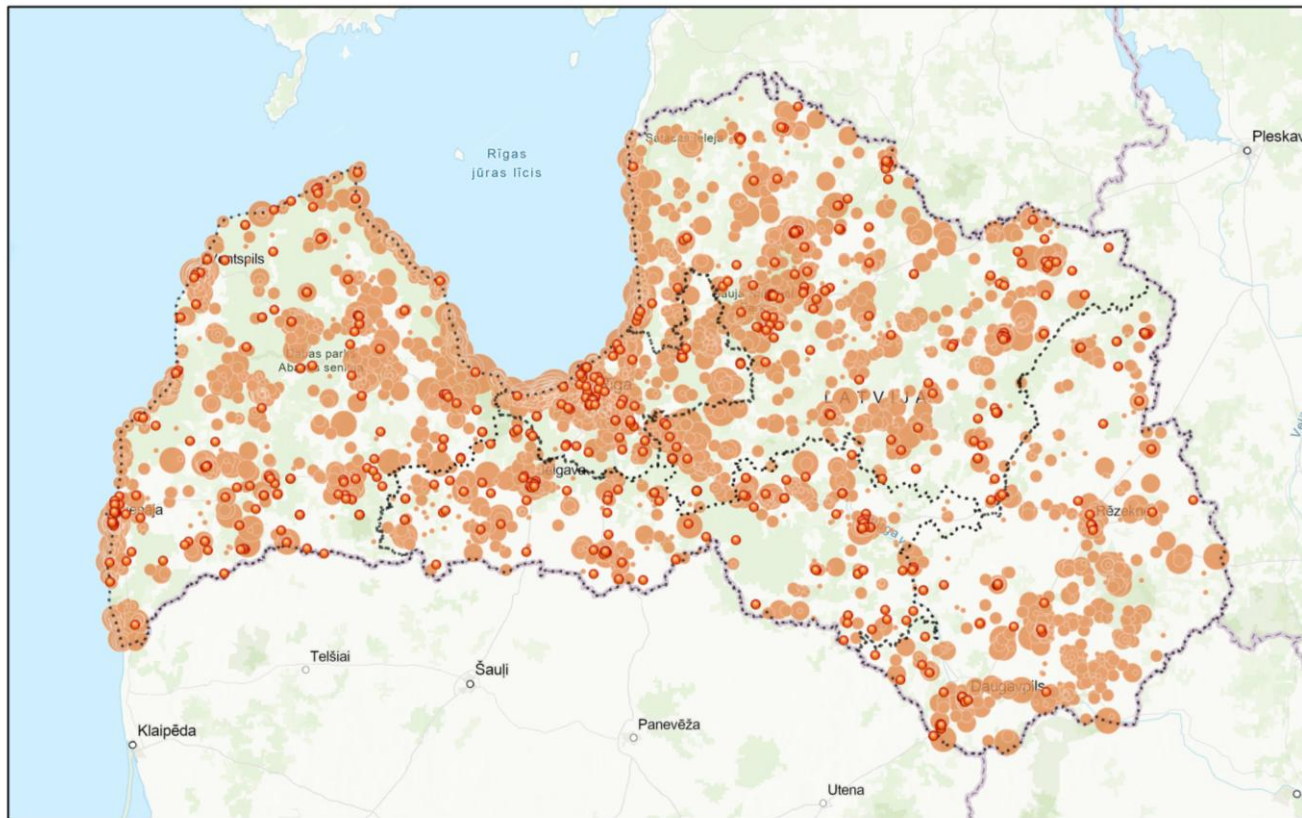
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- military heritage sites
 - tourist attraction - point of interest
 - region
- World_Hillshade

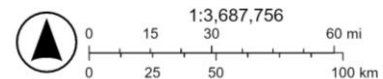


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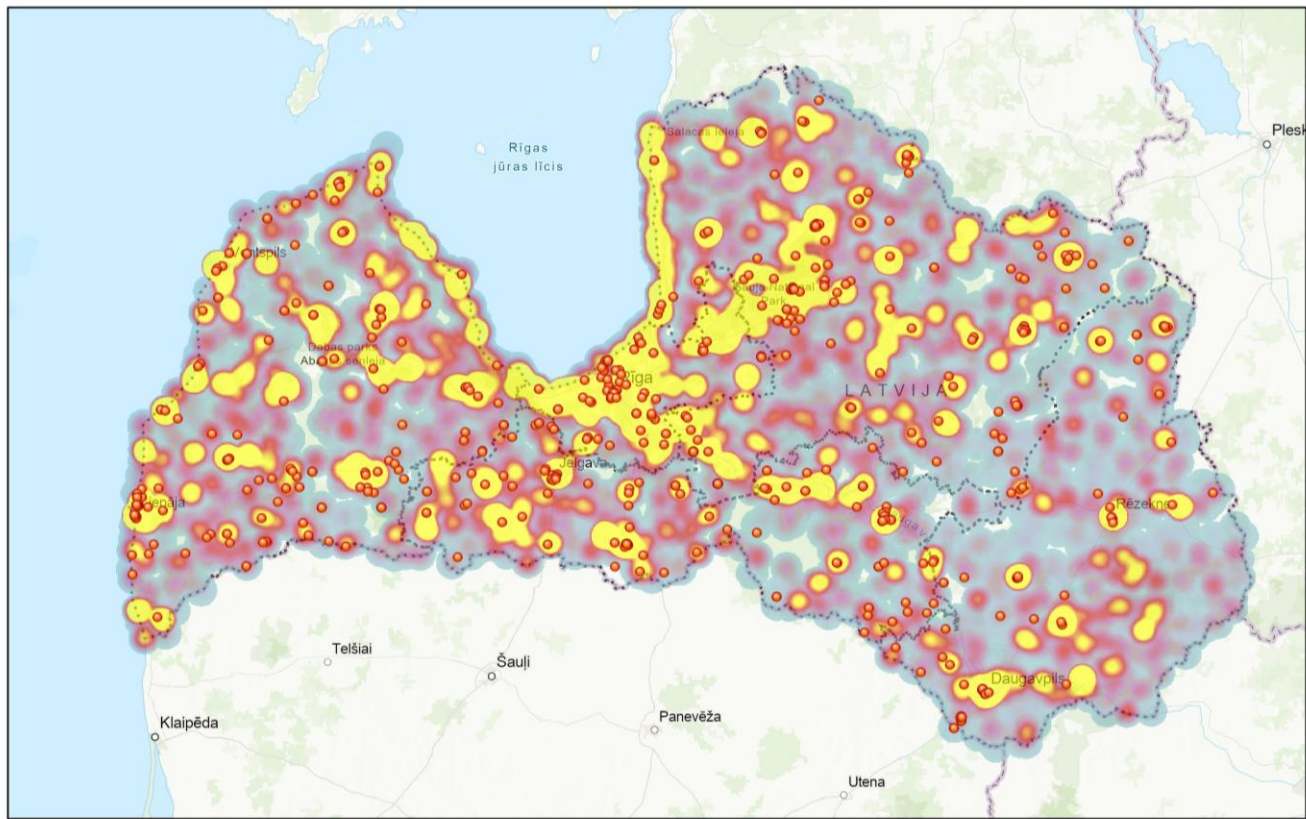


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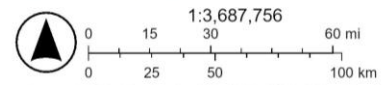
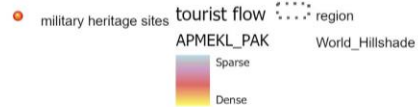


VIA HESPI, Andris Klepers. Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community, Esri.

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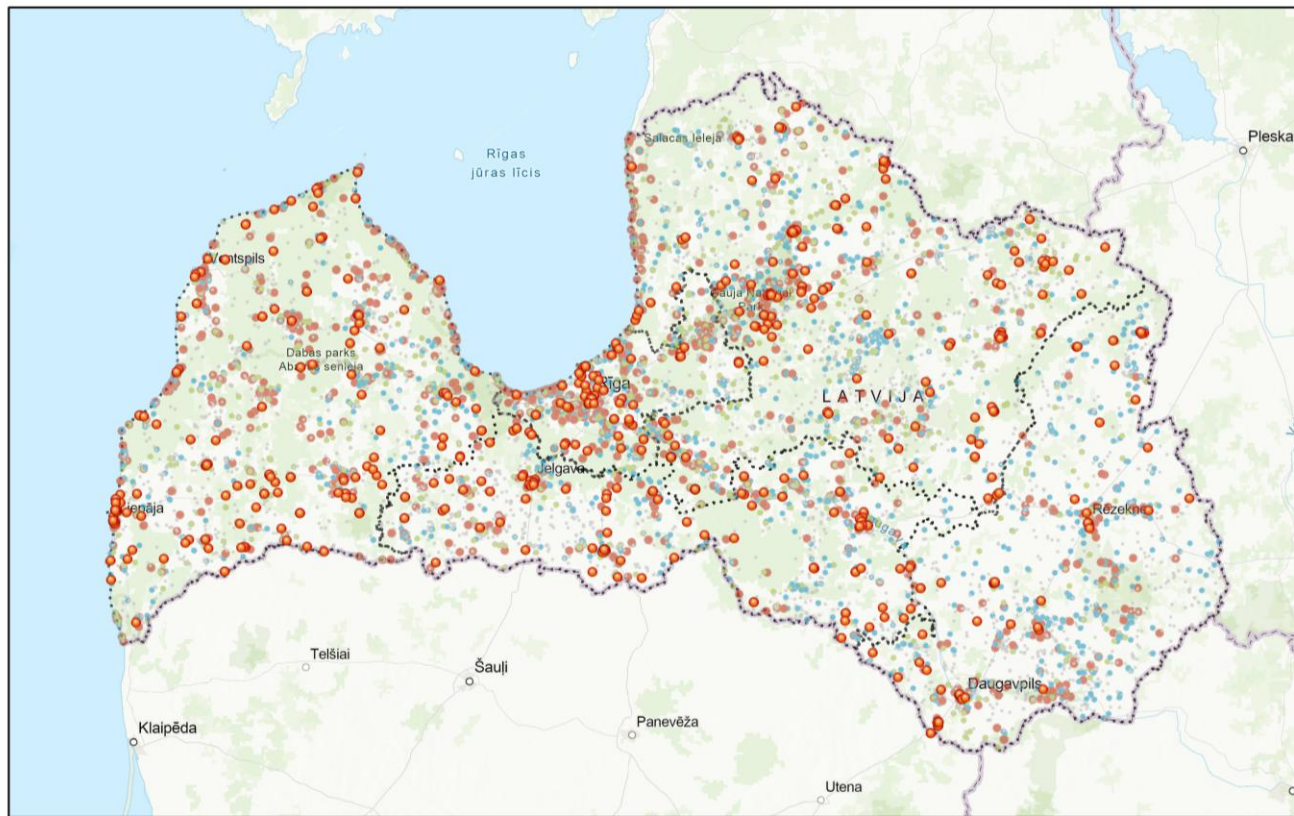


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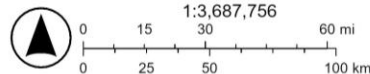


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- military heritage sites
- local
- export

- Baltic
- non-commercial

- region
- World_Hillshade



Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community, Esri, USGS

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Interpretation is integral to heritage tourism. Timothy and Boyd (2003) and du Cros and McKercher (2015) argue that the **interpretation of heritage plays an important role in the process of self-identification with a destination.**

du Cros and McKercher (2015) emphasize the **importance of the role of the narrative** that the hosts (should) provide to their guests. This narrative can act as a bridge that allows tourists to better understand the role and the significance of the heritage to the destination, and eventually to themselves, thus succeeding in their quest to connect themselves to their place of origin.

Growing demand driven by geopolitical awareness



Demand is rising due to **increased public exposure to conflicts via media and social platforms**

- Tourists seek to *understand contemporary conflicts through historical analogies*
- War-related tourism has seen **“robust growth driven by... geopolitical awareness”**

From past-oriented remembrance to present-oriented interpretation

War Tourism Market Size and Share Forecast Outlook (2025 to 2035)

The War Tourism Market will have consistent growth from 2025 to 2035 based on increasing demand for visiting old battlefields on tour, going to memorials of war, and observing conflict zones. The market is now worth USD 530.6 million in 2025 and will increase to USD 927.1 million by 2035 at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 5.7% over the forecast period.

One of the most significant impelling factors in this market is the rising pattern of heritage and history tourism, whereby visitors seek opportunities to tour war battlefields, museums, and war monuments. The trend has been driven partly by increasing global knowledge of past wars, additional documentary shows, and education courses aiming to promote battlefield tourism. The governments and travel boards are not far behind and are helping as well by safeguarding war locations, renovating historical sites, and developing rich experiences for visiting tourists interested in military history.

Blurring boundary: heritage ↔ active conflict

Increase in visits not only to historical sites but also **recent or ongoing conflict zones**

This creates a continuum:

- Classical heritage (WWI, WWII)
- Post-conflict heritage (e.g. Balkans)
- Live conflict tourism (Ukraine, Middle East)

Transformation into socio-political practice

Military tourism is no longer just cultural tourism — it functions as:

- **Memory politics tool**
- **Public diplomacy instrument**
- **Nation-building mechanism**

Example:






- In Ukraine, it contributes to **“patriotic education... and economic revitalization”**

Tourism becomes part of geopolitical narrative construction

AGRARIAN ECONOMICS

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MILITARY TOURISM AS A MECHANISM FOR REVITALIZING DEOCCUPIED RURAL TERRITORIES OF UKRAINE

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Abstract

The article analyzes the current state, transformational processes, and development prospects of military tourism in Ukraine amid the full-scale war. Particular attention is paid to changes in the tourism industry in frontline regions that have suffered significant destruction due to hostilities and temporary occupation. Military tourism is considered a form of memorialization, a tool of public diplomacy, and a mechanism for local development. The study aims to identify the factors influencing the growth of military tourism, assess the readiness of local communities to host tourist groups, and examine the practices of tourism companies operating in de-occupied territories. Qualitative and quantitative research methods were applied: semi-structured interviews, regional sample observation, content analysis of open-ended responses, and statistical data analysis using IBM SPSS Statistics 21. The survey results of two respondent groups (local population and tourism business representatives) indicate the multifaceted perception of military tourism. On the one hand, it is associated with the opportunity to preserve the memory of wartime events, promote patriotic education, and stimulate economic revitalization. On the other hand, it raises concerns about the ethical boundaries of such activities, safety issues, and the privacy of those affected. The article also incorporates international experience and demonstrates how war-related tours shape a new interaction model between memory, business, and communities. Thus, military tourism in Ukraine is acquiring the features of an integrated socio-cultural practice that combines knowledge, empathy, commemoration, and economic support for affected communities.

Ethical tension intensification & experience economy & immersion

There is increasing debate around:

- Commodification of suffering
- Voyeurism vs education
- Timing (too soon vs necessary remembrance)

Military tourism is increasingly **morally contested and politically charged**

Driven by broader tourism trends:

Experiential travel
Authenticity-seeking

Shift from passive museum visits to **embodied, emotional experiences**
Growth of battlefield walking
reenactments & storytelling-led tours



Technological augmentation (proto–metaverse tourism)

Technology is “redefining war tourism experiences”

Use of AR/VR battle reconstructions, AI storytelling, digital overlays on sites



These allow:

- Re-creation of destroyed or inaccessible sites
- Safe engagement with violent pasts

Europe

Europe has a dominant market share in the war tourism industry because of its long war history, famous battlefields, and intact military sites. Destinations like Normandy, Auschwitz, and the Berlin Wall draw war tourists in their numbers from France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. Historical preservation is an important aspect of the European Union, and thus, war sites are kept both informative and respectful. Most war museums, heritage sites, and tours emphasize historical integrity and cultural respect, integrating war tourism into the region's heritage sector. Yet, the growing demand to modernize facilities without sacrificing historical integrity presents a challenge to the industry. Sophisticated digital experiences, including virtual reality battlefield recreations and AI-driven historical commentaries, are emerging as trendy devices to engage contemporary audiences while avoiding physical changes to sites.

Regionalization and proximity tourism

Strong growth in **Eastern Europe / Baltic / post-Soviet spaces**

Linked to:

- accessibility
- renewed geopolitical relevance
- EU-funded heritage routes
- carbon-footprint shame

*Military heritage routes foster **public understanding of complex history***



Latvia – Lithuania

News About the project

Home > News > History Beyond Textbooks – Military Heritage Tourism in Zemgale



History Beyond Textbooks

January 6, 2026

With the aim of strengthening the role of military heritage tourism offer in Lithuania and Southern Latvia Zemgale Planning Region is among the project partner opportunities of Zemgale have been significantly pronounced

Metamodernism and military heritage tourism

Metamodernism (oscillation between sincerity and irony, emotion and distance) is *highly relevant* to this niche.

Tourists:

- Seek *authentic emotional connection* (mourning, empathy)
- But also consume via media & social content (distance, irony)
- Visiting a battlefield – reflection
- Posting it on Instagram – mediated detachment

Collapse of temporal distance: **heritage becomes “present history”** (WWII sites interpreted through Ukraine war or Cold War sites reactivated symbolically)

“Informed naivety” and search for meaning

- Tourists *know* heritage is curated & constructed
- Yet still pursue **meaningful engagement**

Military heritage sites become:

- Spaces for **existential reflection**
- Not just historical learning

Affective intensity and reflexivity

Desire for emotional impact (trauma, tragedy), but also critical awareness. This explains popularity of immersive exhibitions & personal stories over grand narratives

Role of Media and Geopolitics

Mediatization of conflict

Wars are now:

- live-streamed
- constantly narrated
- emotionally accessible

This creates **pre-visit familiarity and emotional priming**

Social media amplification

Influencers and vloggers normalize:

- visiting dangerous places
- documenting conflict zones

Tourism demand is partly **algorithm-driven**

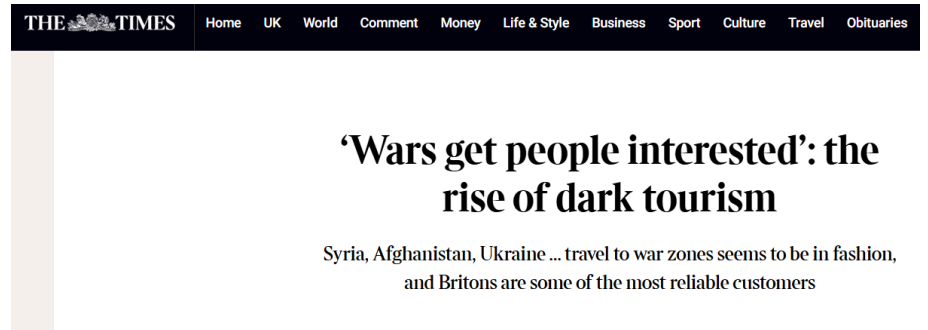
Hybridization of roles

Tourists increasingly act as witnesses & content creators (informal journalists)

Attention economy of war

Conflict visibility increases: curiosity & symbolic importance of sites

News evidence rising interest in visiting war zones linked to global unrest



Military heritage tourism is evolving from a **retrospective heritage practice** into a **real-time, mediated, and politically embedded cultural phenomenon** shaped by **metamodern sensibilities** and **ongoing geopolitical instability**.

