

Latvia Alpaca Adventure #2

June 3 – 10, 2018

Come and sample Latvian culture and crafts alongside felting workshops. The Latvian nation will be celebrating its 100 years anniversary, so look out for lots of anniversary events and preparations for that.

During the week we will have two felting tutors, Ieva Prane, a Latvian textile artist and Heather Potten, a felting tutor from Edinburgh. Joanna and Ian Storie are the hosts of the Latvian Alpaca Adventure. Ian is the hands on, day to day manager of the alpaca farm where our workshops are held, and willingly shares his love and enthusiasm for all things alpaca. Joanna dabbles in a myriad of activities from mixed media art, specialising in embroidery and art quilts, growing vegetables and herbs (your salads and teas will all be freshly picked and prepared from the garden), and trying to complete a PhD in rural development.

General Details

Latvia has come a long way from its Soviet past and you will find many facilities up to European standards, especially nearer to Riga. Ergli itself is a rural village with basic facilities and not yet geared up for tourists but our hotel is pleasant with friendly staff and plenty of choice for breakfasts. There are two lovely bakeries in the village and supermarkets, but no souvenir shops. We will, however, ensure that you get to see local crafts and culture and taste local foods along the way.

Latvians can still be shy of sharing their knowledge and culture with outsiders and so this is an evolving programme where we work with Latvians to develop the presentation of their skills. This does mean our programme takes time to develop over the year and final details will be available on arrival. However, we assure you of a holiday with a difference, in a warm and inviting atmosphere for those who are prepared to be adaptable. Whether you are an experienced traveller or wanting to branch out for the first time, Joanna, Ian and Heather will be there to look after you.

All transport within Latvia, food and accommodation are included in the price of £1 250 (initial deposit of £500 to secure your place). However, if you wish to experience more of Riga and its wealth of activities, shops and museums we suggest arriving a few days earlier or staying on after the trip.

Programme Details

Our initial meeting place will be in the Riga hotel and details will be sent nearer the time, when we know participants' travel itineraries.

We will be spending the first afternoon and evening in Riga where we will have a short walk around the old town. We are scheduling two activities here and details will be announced when they are confirmed.

The second day we will travel to Sigulda in the afternoon, where there will be the chance to see the old and the new castles along with the craft workshops. Due to our northerly latitude there will be plenty of daylight for evening walks too.

On the Tuesday, Ieva welcomes us into her home, where she will bring her artistic approach to felting in a challenging workshop. Through her enthusiastic teaching, students are encouraged to go beyond their comfort zone to produce innovative textile pieces incorporating felting.

“She [Ieva] is a wonderful and talented person” (Maria)

“Loved the workshop, Ieva was great and I liked being taken beyond my comfort zone.”
(Josephine)

Tuesday evening we head to Ergli to our hotel for the rest of the week.

On Wednesday, Heather begins her workshops. Heather is an excellent and thorough tutor with an eye for colour and will guide us through the process of using raw alpaca fleece from our own farm in a small project (there are options here, which can be discussed once the group is together) before moving onto working on a larger one.

“I enjoyed the cuff workshop, mainly because it's been a while since I've done something small.” (Maria)

“Meeting the alpacas beforehand and learning about the shearing etc made using the fleece more interesting. Felting in the greenhouse was a unique experience, with the soft light and the view through the door.” (Susan)

For the second larger project, beginner felters can work with Heather as she guides you through the process of making a scarf. More experienced felters can choose to work on their own design utilising Heather's felting experience with the raw alpaca fleece and Joanna's experience of mixed textile work. Fleeces from different animals are available to see the difference that each fleece makes to a product. From experience, some work well and others do not.

We will be providing everything you need for the course, but if you would like to bring some silks, or cotton materials then feel free. A button or two for your cuff (if that is the small project you choose to make) but we also have plenty.

There will be different events and excursions during the week with plenty of time to chat, rest, walk around and meet the alpacas, maybe even take one for a walk. Last year we had a visit to a local museum where a choir sang to us, a visit to a moonshine laboratory, goat

cheese tasting, a superb dinner at Marciena Muiza and a visit to the porcelain factory. We hope to enjoy many of these again.

Preparation for the event

The weather: Unfortunately, your guess is as good as ours. At this time of the year we have had hot days around 24C, we have had cold winds, we've had rain when it wasn't forecast and no rain when it was. We've had chilly nights and warm nights too. So the best advice will be to keep your eye on the weather forecasts nearer the time and pack layers. Please also make sure you have suitable footwear for our farm.

The warmer weather and rain we often get at this time of the year means that everything springs into life. The trees blossom, the leaves on the trees unfurl and there is the gentle buzz of bees and often the infernal mosquitoes. Sorry! Sometimes they are a little later in the year, but a warm-ish winter can mean that is not the case. So pack the insect repellent and we will invest in plenty of the anti-mosquito spirals to burn too, if necessary. If you are bringing just carry on luggage, then there are insect repellents at the local pharmacies. Tics are also an issue here as they are increasingly in most rural areas over much of Europe, so make sure the insect repellent is suitable for those too.

Rural Latvia is reminiscent of a time long gone in the UK. Joanna and Ian's farm is an ongoing project, developing slowly over time with sensitivity to and respect for the environment. As such, there is a pond for water (though drinking water is always brought onto the land from the village), a composting toilet (sweetly perfumed with sawdust and essential oils) and, overall, a low-impact approach to farming. The peace and tranquillity, much loved by Latvians, are second to none, as the land extends for a full 33 acres with silver birch trees, wild flowers and abundant wildlife.

For any further information and bookings, please contact Jo and Ian at:

griezites.alpakas@gmail.com