  

Press release

**“Strong Yesterday, Free Today”**

**Military Heritage Tourism Invites you to Learn about History in the Present-Day Context**

When we launched a Military Heritage tourism project in Latvia and Estonia, we could not have imagined that soon we would be watching a new war in which a nation here in Europe has to prove and defend its right to a national identity and the independence of its country. The heroism of Ukrainians today reminds us of things which Estonians and Latvians have experienced during their more than 100-year-old history, starting with the achievement of their independence and then the restoration of same.

**Reasons to talk about military heritage**

How did Latvia and Estonia become independent countries? What were they before that? Did someone present freedom to us as a gift? Why were we so spiteful a century ago that we didn’t want to live under the Russian tsars, the German Kaiser or, more recently, the Soviet Union?

We have to know our own history before we can tell the rest of the world about the answers to these questions. Our country might have more beautiful buildings, cities, parks and roads, and we would have better lives, if the past did not involve so many trenches, bunkers, battle sites, memorials to fallen soldiers, secret occupant army units and closed military territories with missile bases. These former military objects still exist, and each has its own story to tell. This is a living history book, and when we find these historically important places and learn stories that are based on facts and evidence, we can better understand the fact that freedom has a price which our ancestors paid and our contemporaries are still paying. We can explain with conviction that the preservation of a national and statehood identity does not mean Nazism or genocide against other nations. It is important to make sure that no one questions our right and ability to be free and independent countries.

**Military heritage tourism**

Travellers are invited to visit places where important historical events happened in Latvia and Estonia. These cover the beginning of World War I in 1914, the achievement of independence for both countries in 1918, and the recovery of said independence in 1990 and 1991. Visitors have access to more than 600 military heritage sites in Latvia and Estonia, including museums, fortifications, military equipment, trails, bunkers, battlegrounds, military towns, infrastructure and memorial sites. Each location relates to a specific period of history:

* World War I/ Wars of Independence 1914-1920
* World War II, 1939-1945
* National partisan movement - forest brothers 1944- ~1957
* Under Soviet occupation/ On the way to the restoration of Independence 1945-1991.

**The military heritage guidebook**

We have released a military heritage tourism guidebook for Latvia and Estonia, listing military heritage locations, expositions, excursions with guides, hikes and driving to places where military events occurred, stories and meals at a campfire, spending the night at a forest brothers bunker, etc. The guidebook includes a map which denotes 173 military heritage places in Latvia, as well as 12 recommended travel routes. You can download this guidebook here: <https://militaryheritagetourism.info/en/info/publications>

**The military heritage tourism website** [**https://militaryheritagetourism.info/en**](https://militaryheritagetourism.info/en)

This website lists more than 600 military heritage sites, arranging them along a timeline so as to focus on the most important historical events, individuals and stories. The timeline emphasises 156 events, and the website presents 145 topics which relate to the history of military heritage. There is a broader description of each location, and contact information is provided. The website also includes more than 200 stories submitted by history enthusiasts. Visitors to the website have engaged in discussions in the comments section, updating facts and adding new nuances to the stories that are there. In the stories section, we are not pretending that we only present historically confirmed and objective facts. Instead it seemed important to preserve people’s own historical memories. We hope that others will add their memories and stories to the comments section, as well.

**Military heritage exhibitions and objects preparing for the tourism season**

Several military heritage objects in Latvia and Estonia have been improved in the recent past. There are also new and improved objects in both countries which are awaiting visitors:

* Ezere local history repository “Muitas Nams” (Customs House) features a modern and interactive exhibition about the end of war in Latvia;
* Mežgarciems has a viewing platform and four information stands about military activities around Carnikava and along the Vidzeme coastline from 1917 to Soviet times, as well as other additional infrastructure;
* Samples of authentic Soviet military uniforms have been used to sew new uniforms for guides at the hidden Soviet bunker in Līgatne, which also has a new ventilation system;
* Several former military objects in Estonia have information stands - The Coastal Battery No 315 command post in the village of Saare on Saaremaa Island; one at a former military base near Lake Karujärve on the island; one at a fragment of a military trench on Muhu Island from the age of World War I;
* Information plates with descriptions and audio guide opportunities will be present at several military heritage objects in Kurzeme and at Mangaļsala at the beginning of this summer.

We wish everyone successful trips that are full of new discoveries!

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