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Culture and Customs of the Baltic States (Cultures and Customs of the World)

Kevin C. O'Connor Ph.D.

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The Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are thriving after hundreds of years of German colonization, numerous wars of conquest, and demographic Russification. Their cultures have survived, perhaps through a conscious effort to sustain many of their most ancient customs and traditions. Though the Baltic States are responding to modern and postmodern international trends, contemporary developments in the region's cultural life are part of an ongoing conversation about the way in which the Balts understand their histories, destinies, and national identities. This timely overview of the reemerging states portrays the Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians as they see themselves—through a historical lens.

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The approach in each of the topical chapters is to generalize what is common among the three states and then to focus on each country in turn. Chapters on the land, people, and history; religion; marriage, family, gender, and education; holidays, cuisine, and leisure activities; language, folklore, and literature; media and cinema; performing arts; and art are a superb introduction to the Baltics and to the unique aspects of the countries. Lithuania's culture has been heavily influenced by Poland, and the capital, Vilnius, was a thriving center of Jewish learning until the Nazi years. Latvia is the most ethnically diverse and Russian-influenced. Estonia sees itself as a European country, indeed, Scandinavian.

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