Visby (Sweden)

Visby is one of the very first Hanseatic cities. A treaty from 1161 between Gotland and Lübeck could be regarded as the birth of the Hanse. During the 13th century Visby grew and became the most important city in Northern Europe. Many imposing churches, convents, commercial buildings and a city wall were built. In 1361 the city became Danish and over the next three centuries, trade took new routes and the importance of Visby was lost.

Thanks to many peaceful centuries, the Medieval city remains to a great extent intact. Visby is therefore listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, considered to be one of the best preserved Hanseatic cities. Today’s visitors can enjoy the authenticity of a Hanseatic city with a rich cultural life all year round, along with shops and restaurants of high quality and many comfortable hotels.

Find out more at: www.gotland.com/en/

Kuldīga (Latvia)

Kuldīga (Goldingen) was first mentioned in documents of the Hanseatic League in the middle of the 14th century. German craftsmen and merchants settled and took charge of trading. Kuldīga’s trade lines stretched across the Baltic Sea, even reaching the North Sea. Some merchants went to foreign lands with their own boats along the Venta River delivering cereals, meat, butter, lard, hides, waxes, honey and other goods. In return, the tiles and the bells for St. Catherine’s Church were brought from Lübeck. Trading also favoured cultural interaction between Kuldīga and other Hanseatic cities.

Nowadays, Kuldīga still maintains its old charm in both architecture and everyday life. Kuldīga gathers craftsmen and artisans from near and far to its greatest annual festival – “Duke Jacob’s Fair” that is held ever since the Hanseatic times in honour of the Duke of Courland Jacob.

Find out more at: visit.kuldiga.lv/en/

Straupe (Latvia)

Straupe (Roop) was first mentioned in the 13th century, when the Von Rosen family built Liezstraupe Castle on the bank of the Brasla River. Around the castle a village was established where craftsmen and merchants settled down.

Being located at the crossing point of trade routes, it ensured economic development for Straupe and the town became a member of the Hanseatic League.

Nowadays, Straupe is a village with rich cultural heritage and beautiful nature where peace and harmony prevail. The recognition of Straupe is provided by its inhabitants – masterful craftsmen who combine their skills with modern solutions. Since 2008 the unique “Straupe Farmers’ Market” takes place to restore the Hanseatic traditions. Drawing together local and neighbouring domestic producers, craftsmen and merchants, Straupe gets back on the international trade map, supporting the recognition of Hanseatic historic values today.

Find out more at: hansa.pargaujasnovads.lv/en/

Pärnu (Estonia)

People have lived at the mouth of the Pärnu River for 11,000 years. In 1251, the first town was established on the right bank of the river. A dozen years later it was vandalised, and the Order Town, New-Pärnu, was established on the left bank. Since Pärnu (Perina) laid on profitable trade routes, the town played an important part in the Hanseatic trade in the 14th century. Medieval Pärnu was seriously damaged in wars and fires during the 16th and 17th centuries.

Since the 19th century great attention has been paid to creating parks and designing Pärnu into a resort. Today, Pärnu has eight spa hotels that provide high-quality treatment and relaxation services. The city is also famous for its white sandy beach, numerous parks and interesting architecture. Pärnu has also great opportunities for active and cultural holidays.

Find out more at: www.visitparnu.com

Valmiera (Latvia)

Impressive cultural heritage along with untouched nature has always made Valmiera (Wolmar) an appealing destination on the banks of the Gauja River.

Valmiera was first mentioned as a city in documents in 1283. It was famous for the best wax in northern lands, fresh seasonal honey, excellent fur artisans, hemp rope weavers and industrious grain threshers. Thus, Valmiera was included in the Hanseatic League to become a politically and economically important center in Livonia.

Even today an annual market is held in October, bringing together hundreds of craftsmen. Visitors and locals can get hands-on experiences of the fine crafts. You can learn to manufacture wooden barrels, find out how the delicious “Valmiermuižas alus” beer is brewed. In the Valmiera Museum you can see metalworkers’ old tools, a Hanseatic tradesman’s boat, discover how the knights lived and take a look at the black clay workshop.

Find out more at: www.visit.valmiera.lv/en/

Koknese (Latvia)

In 1209 Bishop Albert ordered the construction of castle walls on a hill between Perse and Daugava Rivers. A settlement emerged near the castle and in 1277 Koknese (Kokenhusen) received town privileges. Soon Koknese joined the Hanseatic League and different currencies were accepted for payments.

The castle ruins and the surrounding landscape were dramatically changed in 1967 due to the construction of the Plavas Hydroelectric Power Plant. Since then, waters of Daugava attain the castle. Nowadays, Koknese offers boat trips to the craft’s workshop and accommodation on the bank of Daugava. A memorial site “Garden of Destiny” on an island in the Daugava reflects the history of Latvia. The traditional Festival “Catfish wake celebration” lets us feel the spirit of the Middle Ages and Koknese’s vigorous activity that allows preserving the historical habitat through generations.

Find out more at: www.visitkoknese.lv