



CHRIS GULKER,
InMenlo founder, dies at 59 | PAGE 3

The Almanac

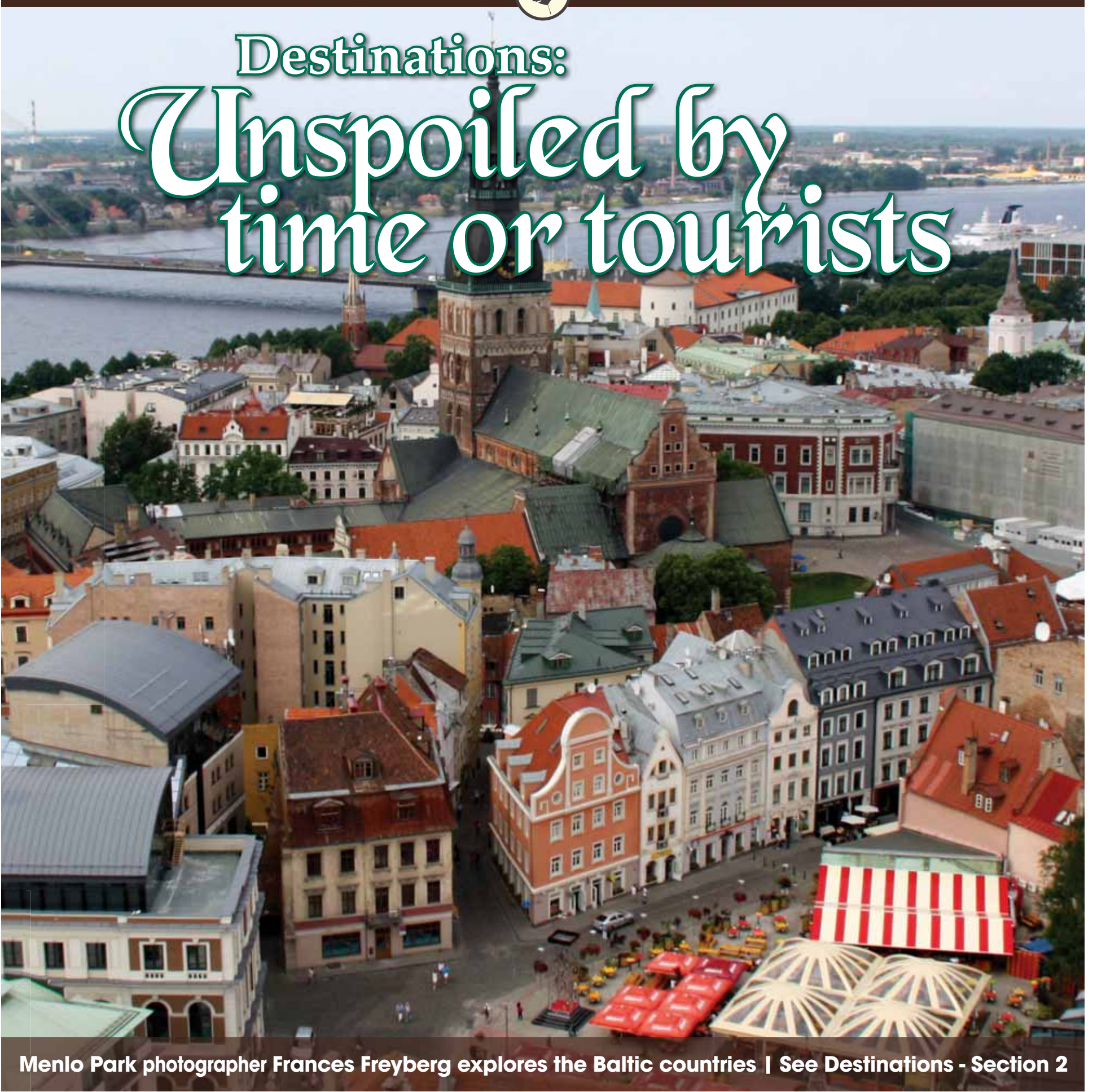
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Destinations: Unspoiled by time or tourists



Menlo Park photographer Frances Freyberg explores the Baltic countries | See Destinations - Section 2

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A special section on travel and adventure by local people. ■ November 3, 2010

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Unspoiled by time or tourists

Menlo Park photographer Frances Freyberg explores the Baltic countries

Story and photos by Frances Freyberg

Among the delights of independent travel are the unplanned stops: to walk through a castle ruin on a hillside, to visit a windswept patch of coastline, to sample fresh fruits from an outdoor market.

Like many of their former Eastern Bloc neighbors, the Baltic countries — Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania — don't appear on the radar of the average American tourist.

That's good news for you, because this history-rich and architecturally diverse northern European region is as unspoiled by the tourist masses as its delightful countryside is unspoiled by time.

Architectural collage

Touring each country's capital city is a distinct architectural adventure. Tallinn, Estonia, is centered on its small medieval Old Town, with narrow cobblestone alleyways, colorful gabled homes, and grand

Gothic cathedrals, all tucked behind the old city walls. Tallinn plays up its medieval past with a summer festival and market, where restaurant staff and street vendors dress and act the part.

Riga, Latvia, is a haven of stately Art Nouveau buildings within an eclectic mix of old and new architectural styles. Larger and busier than Tallinn's, Riga's Old Town is a maze of winding streets lined with outdoor cafes and a wide variety of museums and shops. In the late summer evenings, locals and visitors alike fill the main squares to enjoy live music over a glass of wine.

Vilnius, Lithuania, is renowned for the ornate Baroque architecture within its sprawling Old Town. In addition to its many historic churches and cathedrals, Vilnius hosts a 16th century university and an alternative art community, which lend the city a young and vibrant atmosphere.

The three countries are also home to castles and palaces galore. In the Latvian countryside outside of Riga, visitors can take their pick of Baroque-Rococo or neoclassical palaces, or of 13th-19th century castles that dot the area. One of the most visited castles in the region is the picturesque Trakai Island Castle in Lithuania.

Suited for cycling

The Baltic countries are located on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea, across from southern Sweden. Together, they boast more than 2,700 miles of coastline, including thousands of offshore islands.

The mainland is mostly flat, with lowlands to the

The three Baltic countries are located on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea, across from southern Sweden. **Above:** Visitors come from nearby Vilnius, Lithuania, to see Trakai Island Castle and to boat or swim in Lake Galve.

west and gently rolling hills to the east. Inland highlights include the pristine lakes of eastern Latvia and Lithuania, as well as Estonia's unique wetlands that feature swamps, marshes and bogs.

Outdoors enthusiasts will find the flat terrain and quiet roads are nicely suited for cycling (but be prepared for well-kept gravel!), while the many lakes lend themselves to recreation such as canoeing and kayaking. National and regional parks cover all three countries and are refreshingly uncrowded, providing ample hiking and camping space for those who can brave the bugs

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About the author:

Frances Freyberg of Menlo Park is a photographer specializing in vibrant color portraits of people, wildlife, nature and architecture from her travels to more than 50 countries. Her photographs can be found in the Portola Art Gallery at the Allied Arts Guild in Menlo Park, in private collections, and online at francesfreyberg.com.

On the cover:

Frances Freyberg took this picture of Riga's Old Town and the Daugava River in Latvia from the steeple of St. Peter's Church.



