



# Latvia

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## Best Places to Eat

- » Istaba, Rīga (p787)
- » Meta-Kafe, Rīga (p787)
- » Pelmeņi XL, Rīga (p788)
- » Ostas Skati, Rīga (p788)

## Best Places to Stay

- » Hotel Bergs, Rīga (p787)
- » Naughty Squirrel, Rīga (p787)

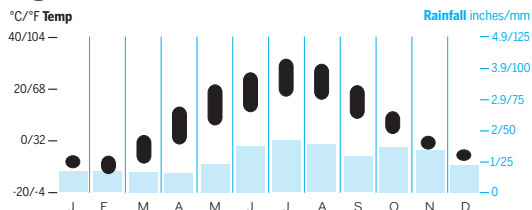
## Why Go?

Tucked between Estonia to the north and Lithuania to the south, Latvia is the meat of the Baltic sandwich. We're not implying that the neighbouring nations are slices of white bread, but Latvia is the savoury middle, loaded with colourful fixings. Thick greens take the form of Gauja Valley pines. Onion-domed cathedrals sprout up above local towns. Cheesy Russian pop blares along coastal beaches. And spicy Rīga adds an extra zing as the country's cosmopolitan nexus, unofficial capital of the entire Baltic.

If that doesn't whet your appetite, hear this: the country's under-the-radar profile makes it the perfect pit stop for those seeking something a bit more authentic than the over-run tourist hubs further afield. So, consider altering your Eastern European itinerary and fill up on little Latvia.

## When to Go

### Rīga



**Dec & Jan Fete**  
the holidays in the birthplace of the Christmas tree, and try some bobsledding.

**Mid-Jun-Aug**  
After an all-night solstice romp, it's off to the coast for beach lazing

**Sep** Hanging on to summer, Rigans sip lattes under heat lamps at the season's last al fresco cafes.

## Connections

Latvia is the link in the Baltic chain, making Rīga a convenient connecting point between Tallinn and Vilnius. Long-distance buses and trains also connect the capital to St Petersburg, Moscow and Warsaw, and ferry services shuttle passengers to Sweden and Germany. Riga is the hub of air-Baltic, which offers direct service to over 50 European cities.

### ITINERARIES

#### Three Days

Fill your first two days with a feast of Rīga's architectural eye candy, and spend your third day hiking between Sigulda's castles, sunbathing in scintillating Jūrmala, or snapping photos of Rundāle's opulent palace.

#### One Week

After a few days in the capital swing by Jūrmala on your way up the horn of Cape Kolka for saunas, sunsets and solitude. Glide through western Latvia, comparing its ultrabucolic townships to Rundāle's majestic grounds, then blaze a trail across eastern Latvia for a rousing trip back in time spiced with adrenalin sports.

## Essential Food & Drink

» **Black Balzām** Goethe called it the 'elixir of life'. The 45% proof concoction is a secret recipe of a dozen fairy-tale ingredients, including wormwood and linden blossoms. A shot a day keeps the doctor away, or so say most of Latvia's pensioners. Try mixing it with glass of cola to take off the edge.

» **Mushrooms** Not a sport but a national obsession; mushroom picking takes the country by storm during the first showers of autumn.

» **Alus** For such a tiny nation there's definitely no shortage of *alus* (beer) – each major town has its own brew. You can't go wrong with Užavas (Ventspils' contribution).

» **Smoked fish** Dozens of fish shacks dot the Kurzeme coast – look for the veritable smoke signals rising above the tree line. Grab 'em to go; they make the perfect afternoon snack.

» **Kvass** Single-handedly responsible for the decline of Coca Cola at the turn of the 21st century, Kvass is a beloved beverage made from fermented rye bread. It's surprisingly popular with kids.

### AT A GLANCE

- » **Currency** lats (Ls)
- » **Language** Latvian, Russian
- » **Money** ATMs all over Rīga and smaller cities
- » **Visas** Schengen rules apply; see p1319

## Fast Facts

- » **Area** 64,589 sq km
- » **Capital** Rīga
- » **Country code** 371
- » **Emergency** 112

## Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	0.51Ls
Canada	C\$1	0.51Ls
Euro Zone	€1	0.71Ls
Japan	¥100	0.59Ls
New Zealand	NZ\$1	0.39Ls
UK	UK£1	0.80Ls
USA	US\$1	0.49Ls

## Set Your Budget

- » **Budget hotel room** 25Ls
- » **Two-course evening meal** 10Ls
- » **Museum entrance** 1.50Ls
- » **Beer** 1.20Ls in a bar or restaurant
- » **City transport ticket** 0.70Ls

## Resources

- » **1188** ([www.1188.lv](http://www.1188.lv))
- » **Latvia Institute** ([www.li.lv](http://www.li.lv))
- » **Latvia Tourism Development Agency** ([www.latviatourism.lv](http://www.latviatourism.lv))