

THIS IS LATVIA



Republic of Latvia
LATVIJAS REPUBLIKA

The Republic of Latvia is founded on November 18, 1918

Location: Latvia is situated in Northern Europe, on the coast of the Baltic Sea.

The Territory of Latvia: 64,589 square kilometers (24,938 square miles).

International code: LV

Constitution: democratic parliamentary republic

The parliament, called the Saeima consists of 100 elected MPs.

President: Valdis Zatlers (since 8 July, 2007)

Official language: Latvian

Total population: 2 274 700 (uz 07.2007)

Capital city: Riga (with 723931 inhabitants)

Administrative organisation: 7 cities, 65 towns, 26 regions, 11 districts, 467 parishes

Traditionally divided into 4 regions: Vidzeme, Latgale, Kurzeme and Zemgale

Largest cities apart from Riga: Daugavpils, Jelgava, Jurmala, Liepaja, Rezekne, Ventspils

Major ports: Ventspils, Riga, Liepaja

Ethnic composition: Latvians - 59.0% (1348344), Russians - 28.3% (646567), Belorussians - 3.7% (85434), Ukrainians - 2.5% (57794), Poles- 2.4% (54831), Lithuanians - 1.4% (31034), Others - 2.1% (uz 01.04.2007)

Religion: Non-religious - 35%, Lutheran - 24%, Catholic - 18%, Orthodox - 15%, Others - 8%

Currency: Lats (LVL), 1 lats = 100 santimi

Time: GMT +2, from April to November GMT +3

Internet domain: .lv

International telephone code: +371

Electricity supply: 220 volts, 50 Hz European-style 2-pin plugs

Geography

Latvia is the central country of the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) and is located in North-eastern Europe on the east coast of the Baltic Sea. Its geographic coordinates are 57°00'N latitude and 25°00'E longitude. It consists of fertile lowland plains and moderate hills, with most of its territory less than 100 metres above sea level. It has an extensive network of rivers, thousands of lakes and hundreds of kilometres of undeveloped seashore lined by pine forests, dunes, and continuous white sand beaches.



Location

Latvia is bordered by Estonia to the north, Russia to the east, Lithuania to the south and the Baltic Sea to the west. Its strategic location has made it an international crossroad for trade, commerce and cultural exchange since ancient times. Vikings followed the 'Amber Road' through Latvian territory along the Daugava River to reach Byzantium and the Mediterranean Sea.

Nature

With over 44 percent of its territory covered by forests, a vast network of free flowing rivers and thousands of lakes, Latvia is one of Europe's best preserved havens for a wide variety of wildlife. Over 27 thousand species of flora and fauna thrive in natural settings that are still relatively undisturbed by man. Many rare species, such as the black stork and lesser spotted eagle, make their homes in Latvia's mixed forests, marshes and meadows. There is also an abundance of otters, beavers, lynx and wolves, as well as great concentrations of deer, elk, fox and wild boar. Bird-watching is particularly rewarding in Latvia, especially in the coastal areas and wetlands during annual migration periods.

Official Language: Latvian

Latvian is a Baltic language that belongs to the Indo-European language family. Its only linguistic relative is Lithuanian, and is considered to be among the oldest and least changed of all living Indo-European languages in the world. It is estimated that 1,5 million people worldwide use Latvian as their primary language. English and Russian are widely spoken throughout Latvia, while German, French and the Scandinavian languages are also frequently heard.

Most Common Foreign Languages:

English, Russian, and German.

Rīga - The Capital

Rīga, the oldest city in Latvia, has developed into an important economic, political and cultural centre since the Middle Ages. When the formation of an independent Latvian Republic occurred in 1918, Rīga became the capital. Today more than half of Latvia's population lives in Rīga, as well as the country's largest manufacturing concerns, as well as central government and administration boards. Amongst the 50 museums to be found in Rīga the oldest and largest are the Museum of History and Shipping, the Museum of Natural Sciences, the Museum of Latvian History, the National Art Gallery, and the Latvian Ethnographic open-air-museum. The National Opera and Latvia's most professional theatres are also situated in Rīga.

Rīga's 800 - year history has left its mark on the face of the city, where Middle Age dwellings and church towers coexist with art nouveau and eclectic architecture. Rīga's park land boulevard zone and the wooden buildings of the Pārdaugava region emit a unique charm. The value of Rīga's cultural and historical significance has been verified by the fact that its old city centre has been included in UNESCO's list of the world's most important cultural and natural sites.



The most popular things to see in Riga

Riga Old Town

Established in 1201, the old centre of Riga was encircled by fortifications until the mid 19th century. Here are the oldest buildings in Riga: the Dome Cathedral, St. Peter's Church, St. John's Church, St. Jacob's Church, the 'Three Brothers' houses, and Riga Castle, which also houses the Latvian History Museum and the Foreign Art Museum. The centerpiece of Rātslaukums Square is the reconstructed Blackheads' House, which was destroyed in World War II and is now owned by Riga Council.

T. +371 67037900, tourinfo@riga.lv, www.rigatourism.com

Riga - Jugendstil Metropolis

Riga's Jugendstil buildings amaze everyone both in their quantity and their high quality of workmanship. Although Alberta and Elizabetes Streets are particularly well-known for Jugendstil architecture, these beautiful buildings can be seen in all parts of the city that were built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

T. +371 67037900, tourinfo@riga.lv, www.rigatourism.com

Latvian Open-Air Museum

The Latvian Open-Air Museum, established in 1924, is one of the oldest open-air museums in Europe. Walk through traditional farmsteads, fishermen's dwellings, and craft workshops from all corners of Latvia. In addition, the museum has two wooden churches, a tavern, windmill, and other rural buildings. There are craft fairs and organ and folk music concerts in the museum during the summer. 18 master craftsmen and artisans work at the museum: weavers, blacksmiths, woodworkers, basket makers, potters, bee-keepers and others.

T. +371 67994106, +371 67994510, info@brivdabas-muzejs.lv, www.muzejs.lv

Transport

Airport, Riga International Airport (R1A) is located about 13 km from the city centre. One can get there by taxi or by special airport bus number 22 and 22A, which run every 30 min and cost Ls 0.80. Taxi to the city centre costs around Ls 7.00.

Airport information: Tel: +371 7207009, office@riga-airport.com, www.riga-airport.com

Ferry: Free Port of Riga, Eksporta iela 3a, Tel: +371 7326200, Fax: +371 7326195

Train information: Tel: +371 5832134, www.ldz.lv

Central Station, Stacijas laukums, Tel: + 371 5832141

Urban Public Transport. Trams, trolleybuses, buses and route minibuses are available in Riga. Tickets for the price of 50 santims are sold in Narvesen and Plus Punkts kiosks. Tickets for buses, trams and trolleybuses can be bought on board from a ticket agent; the price is 50 santims per ride and 40 - 50 in minibuses. Public transportation service usually begins around 5.00 6.00 a.m. and continues until midnight.

Information, Tel: +371 8001010; +371 8000006, www.ttp.lv

Riga International Bus Station, Pragas iela 1, Tel: + 371 9000009, www.autoosta.lv

Taxi. One can get a taxi at taxi stands or with the assistance of the reception desk at a hotel or flag down in the street. All taxis have meters and they are obliged to run accordingly. You can request the receipt at the



end of the ride. Taxi fare is normally stable: from 6.00 to 22.00 it's 0.50 Ls per kilometre. You can order taxi by phone + 3718008294, +3718001010, +3718001313, www.rtp.lv

If you wish to take a taxi for a longer ride outside the city the price can be negotiated and they might charge return fare even if you don't return with them. It is better to agree to a chauffeur driven car from the car rental agencies.

Traffic

Road traffic regulations:

- vehicles drive on the right-hand side of the road
- speed limit in residential areas is 50 km/h
- speed limit outside residential areas is 90 km/h
- vehicles are required to drive with lights turned on at all times of day and night
- seatbelts must be used at all times
- all vehicles not exceeding 3,5 t fully laden have to be equipped with winter tyres. It is forbidden to drive with spiked tires from 1st May to 1st September
- the maximum permitted alcohol concentration in the blood is 0.50 mg for drivers with more than two years experience and 0.20 mg for drivers with less than two years experience.

The driver must be able to produce the following documents if requested by police or border guards:

- standard European vehicle driving licence or other licence meeting the requirements of the convention on road safety (1968) in the respective transport category.
- vehicle registration document.
- third party insurance cover, border crossing contract or green card (it is possible to purchase appropriate insurance at border crossing points).
- up-to-date technical registration document.

The same regulations and documentation requirements apply to motorcyclists.

Traffic Rules and Regulations LV/ RU

Normative Documents LV

EMERGENCY NUMBERS IN CASE OF ACCIDENT:

Ambulance: 03 from a landline or 112 from a mobile phone

Police: 02 or 112 from a mobile phone

Currency

The official currency is Latvian lats (LVL). Payments can be made by means of cash or credit or debit cards. Payment cards are widely accepted in banks, hotels, larger shops, restaurants and cafes. All major payment cards are familiar including Eurocard, Mastercard, Visa, JCB, Diner's Club, American Express and Eurocheque. ATM cash machines are widely distributed in cities and towns. Travellers' cheques such as American Express, Thomas Cook and Visa can be bought for the world's most common currencies. In some shops, hotels and bars, travellers' cheques can be used as a mean of payment. This will be indicated by the display of the appropriate symbols on the entrance doors or windows. Travellers' cheques can be exchanged in any bank or branches of Thomas Cook and American Express agencies.

Latvian banks and their retail branches are usually open from 09.00-17.00 (some 18.00) and their branches at supermarkets stay open until 20.00 or 21.00 on weekdays.

Currency exchange bureaus can be found in all banks, at the airport, train and bus stations, in some hotels and in some shops. Many currency exchange bureaus around Riga city centre are open around the clock.
Set exchange rate: EURO 1.00 - LVL 0.702804 at Latvian banks.

Visas

Countries whose citizens do not require a visa to enter Latvia: United States of America, Andorra, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bolivia, Brasilia, Brunei, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Chile, Denmark, France, Greece, Guatemala, Honduras, Hong Kong, Croatia, Estonia, Ireland, Island, Italy, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, Canada, Cyprus, Korea, Costa Rica, Great Britain, Lithuania, Lichtenstein, Luxemburg, Macao, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, Monaco, Nicaragua, The Netherlands, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Poland, Portugal, Rumania, Salvador, San Marino, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Finland, Spain, Switzerland, Hungary, Uruguay, Vatican, Germany, Venezuela, Sweden.

Permitted period to remain in Latvia without a visa is 90 days in half a year, counting from the first day of entry. Citizens from above mentioned countries are allowed to stay longer than 90 days if they have registered themselves at the immigration office and have received a permit from them.

In order to receive a Latvian visa one should apply at Latvian embassies and consulates abroad. Some honorary consuls are authorised to issue visas, too.

Links

Wide range of information about Latvia, its society, culture & history. - <http://www.li.lv>
Official portal of tourism in Latvia - <http://www.latviatourism.lv>

