

Latvian
Culture

History
and
Tradition

Discover
the
Rich
Heritage

of
this
Beautiful
Country

Join
us
for
an
Unforgettable
Experience

Explore
the
Land
of
the
Latvians

and
Experience
the
Beauty
of
Nature

Discover
the
Rich
Cultural
Heritage
of
Latvia

Latvia
IN BRIEF

IN BRIEF





Republic of Latvia LATVIJAS REPUBLIKA

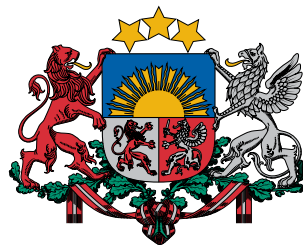
Latvian: Latvija
Lithuanian: Latvija
Estonian: Lāti
German: Lettland
French: Lettonie
Spanish: Letonia
Russian: Латвия
Swedish: Latvia
Chinese: 拉脫維亞
Japanese: ラトビア
Arabic: ايڤتال

COUNTRY CODE: LV
CALLING CODE: +371
INTERNET TLD: .LV (.EU)
TIME ZONE: EET (UTC+2) EEST (UTC+3)
WEIGHTS AND MEASURES: Metric

The Republic of Latvia was founded on November 18, 1918. It has been continuously recognised as a sovereign state since 1920 despite occupations and rule by the Soviet Union (1940-1941, 1945-1991) and Nazi Germany (1941-1945). On August 21, 1991

Latvia declared the restoration of its de facto independence, re-established international diplomatic ties, and joined the United Nations. Latvia joined the WTO in 1998 and in 2004 became a member of the European Union and NATO.

The name “Latvija” comes from the ancient Latgallians, one of four Indo-European Baltic tribes, who along with Couronians, Selonians and Semigallians formed the ethnic core of today’s Latvian people.



The Coat of Arms

Latvia's coat of arms combines the traditional heraldic symbols of Latvian statehood and national identity – three stars, the sun, the sea and oak leaves. Latvia's historical districts of Kurzeme and Zemgale are represented by a red lion, while Vidzeme and Latgale are depicted by a silver griffin.



The Flag

The maroon-white-maroon flag of Latvia is one of the oldest in the world and dates back to a battle near Cesis in the 13th century. According to one legend, it originated from a white sheet used to carry a mortally wounded Latvian tribal chief from the battlefield. Soaked with his blood on two sides, his soldiers hoisted the warrior's sheet as a banner as it led them to victory.



NATIONAL HOLIDAY

November 18, the date of the proclamation of Latvia's independence in 1918.

LATVIA IN BRIEF

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 is 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.

AREA:

64,589 sq. km or 24,937 sq. miles.

Regions:

Kurzeme, Zemgale, Vidzeme, Latgale.

Total national border length:

1,862 km.

Length of Latvia's Baltic coastline:

494 km.

Largest lake:

Lubāns, 80.7 sq. km.

Deepest lake:

Drīdzis, 65.1 metres.

Longest river within Latvian territory:

the Gauja, 452 km.

Largest river to flow through

Latvian territory:

the Daugava, total length 1,005 km, of which 352 km within Latvian territory.

Highest point:

Gaiziņkalns, 311.6 metres.

1 km = 0.62 mile; 1 m = 39.37 inches

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.



CLIMATE

Latvia's weather features a temperate maritime climate, with mild summers, moderate winters and frequently high levels of humidity and precipitation.

- Summer: June - August.
- Winter: December - February.
- The average temperature
- In summer: 15.8°C (in the capital 16.1°C),
- In winter: -4.5°C (in the capital -3.8°C).
- The warmest month: July,
- The coldest month: January.
- The average precipitation amount:
 - In summer: 195 mm,
 - In winter: 116 mm.

LATVIA
THE BEST



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.



LATVIA

POPULATION

Latvians are the indigenous people of Latvia, and the Finno-Ugric Livs (or Livonians) are the only indigenous minority. Latvia's present ethnic mix is largely a result of massive post-war immigration, which resulted in a decline in the share of ethnic Latvians from 77% in 1935 to 52% in 1989.

Population in 2007: 2, 270,000
Urban: 66% Rural:32%

Ethnic composition:

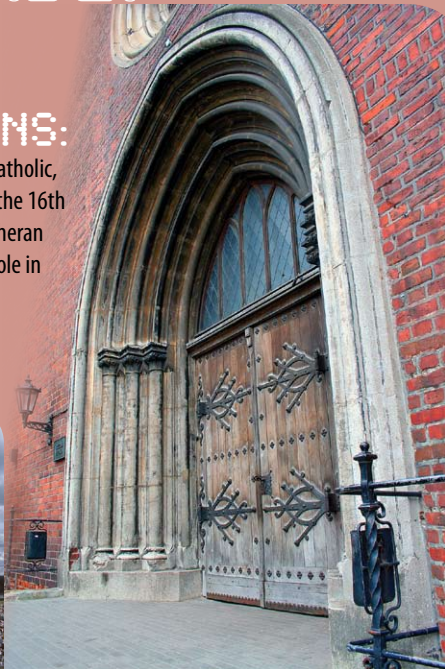
- 59% Latvian,
- 28% Russian,
- 3.7% Belorussian,
- 2.5% Ukrainian,
- 2.4% Polish,
- 1.4% Lithuanian,
- 0.4% Jewish,
- 0.4% Roma,
- 2.2% other nationalities.



IN BRIEF

LARGEST RELIGIOUS CONFESSIONS:

Evangelic Lutheran, Roman Catholic, and Russian Orthodox. Since the 16th century Reformation, the Lutheran church has played a leading role in Latvia.



EDUCATION

Latvia has traditionally had one of the highest per capita ratio of students in the world. The state guarantees free primary and secondary school education and offers scholarships for higher education. Foreign students from EU countries pay the same fees as permanent residents of Latvia, and degrees from Latvian educational institutions are recognized internationally. Doctorates can be received in the social sciences, natural sciences, and law, as well as technical and humanitarian sciences. Latvia also has state-financed ethnic minority schools or classes where courses are taught in Belorussian, Estonian, Hebrew, Lithuanian, Polish, Roma, Russian and Ukrainian.



GOVERNMENT

Latvia is a democratic, parliamentary republic. Legislative power is in the hands of the single chamber *Saeima*, which has 100 deputies. Parliamentary elections are held every 4 years. Latvia's head of state, the President, is elected by the Saeima for a period of 4 years. The President signs laws, chooses the Prime Minister (who heads the government) and performs representative functions.

Electoral System:

Latvia has proportional representation based on party lists and a 5% vote threshold. There is universal suffrage for Latvian citizens over the age of 18.



IN BRIEF



FOREIGN POLICY

Latvia joined the European Union and NATO in 2004, and has been an active member both in promoting global security and prosperity, while reducing crises and conflict. Cooperation with its neighbours in the Baltic Sea region is a priority, and development of strategic global ties is a goal.





THE CAPITAL OF RIGA

Latvia's political, economic and culture centre is in Riga, where more than one third of Latvia's population (717 thousand) lives and works. Riga's elegant Old Town and distinctive Art Nouveau architecture serve as a stimulating setting for a vibrant modern business and cultural life. Founded in 1201, this former Hanseatic League member is one of the oldest medieval cities in Europe and has been listed by UNESCO as one of the world's most important cultural and natural sites. As one of the new stars of the dynamic Baltic Sea region, Riga has hosted a NATO summit, world hockey championship, the Eurovision Song Contest and many other large-scale international events. Riga's International Airport is one of the fastest growing travel hubs in Europe.



Largest Towns and Cities:

- Riga – 717,000
- Daugavpils – 106,000
- Liepāja – 85,000
- Jelgava – 65,000
- Jūrmala – 55,000
- Rēzekne – 36,000
- Ventspils – 43,000

Of the 77 towns and cities in Latvia, 23 cities have a population of over 10,000.



PORTS

Latvia's three major ports of Riga, Ventspils and Liepāja service a wide range of global shipping needs. Ventspils is one of the busiest ports in the Baltic Sea region and one of Europe's leading ports in terms of cargo turnover.



TRADE

The countries of the EU remain Latvia's main trading partners (78% in 2007), while trade with CIS countries (12%) continues to expand. Wood and metal products, machinery, electrical equipment and mineral products are Latvia's main exports.



IN BRIEF

PRODUCTION SECTORS

Information technologies, chemical and pharmaceutical industries, electronics, mechanical engineering, timber and construction, food processing, textiles, fishery and agriculture.



CURRENCY

Name: Lats

Code: LVL

Symbol: Ls



FINANCIAL SECTOR

The Bank of Latvia is the central bank of Latvia and a participant in the European System of Central Banks. Since joining the EU more than 20 commercial banks have been operating in Latvia, offering a full array of banking services. Many banks have established an extensive network of ATM's throughout the country and offer international Internet and mobile banking services.

Latvia's national currency is the *lats* consisting of 100 santims. Banknotes have nominal values of 5, 10, 20, 50, 100 and 500 lats, while coins have nominal values of 1, 2, 5, 10, 20 and 50 santims, and 1,2 and 100 lats. The *lats* was reintroduced in 1993 and has been one of Europe's most stable and secure currencies.



LATVIAN FOODS

Among Latvia's traditionally most popular national foods are caraway cheese, grey peas with bacon, bacon-filled pastries and a special rye bread prepared to ancient recipes. Latvian rye bread is a staple for most of the population and is one of Latvia's most popular food 'souvenirs'.

LATVIA IN BRIEF

'JĀNI' - THE MOST LATVIAN HOLIDAY

In Latvia, celebration of the summer solstice is oldest and most beloved traditional holiday. The nearly three-day long midsummer fest concludes on June 24th, the day known to Latvians as '*Jāni*'. Most leave the cities to gather with family and friends around thousands of bonfires, where special foods, beverages, songs, dances and rituals celebrate the movement of the setting and rising of the midnight sun.



DISTINGUISHED INDIVIDUALS

WRITER:

Rainis (real name Jānis Pliekšāns, 1865-1929), Latvia's most distinguished and celebrated writer of poetry and plays, and "Man of the 20th Century of Latvia".

COMPOSERS:

Andrejs Jurjāns (1856-1922) and **Jāzeps Vītols** (1863-1948), the founders of the Latvian national style of classical instrumental music.

PAINTERS:

Janis Rozentāls (1866-1916) and **Vilhelms Purvītis** (1872-1945) are the most widely recognized and respected Latvian painters. Rozentāls developed Latvian genre and portrait painting, while Purvītis distinguished himself with landscapes.

SCIENTIST:

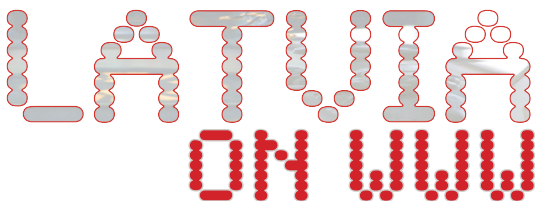
Davids Hieronims Grindelis (1776-1836) was the first Latvian natural scientist, chemist, pharmacist and doctor.

ATHLETES:

Jānis Lūsis (1939) the only Latvian athlete (javelin) to win all three Olympic medals — gold, silver and bronze. **Uljana Semjonova** (1952), the tallest female basketball player in Olympic history and 3-time World Champion. **Jānis (John) Konrāds** (1942), Riga-born swimmer who in the 1950's broke 31 different world records. **Jelena Prokopčuka** (1976) 2-time winner of the New York Marathon (2005, 2006).

POPULAR MUSIC:

Raimonds Pauls (1936) composer, pianist and band leader who has written over 500 songs and compositions, many recorded internationally. **Marija Naumova (Marie N)**, winner of the 2003 Eurovision Song Contest.



Government

Chancery of the President

<http://www.president.lv>

Saeima, the Parliament of Latvia

<http://www.saeima.lv>

Cabinet of Ministers of Latvia

<http://www.mk.gov.lv>

Ministry of Agriculture

<http://www.zm.gov.lv>

Ministry of Culture

<http://www.km.gov.lv>

Ministry of Defence

<http://www.mod.gov.lv>

Ministry of Economics

<http://www.em.gov.lv>

Ministry of Education and Science

<http://www.izm.gov.lv>

Ministry of Environment

<http://www.vidm.gov.lv>

Ministry of Finance

<http://www.fm.gov.lv>

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

<http://www.mfa.gov.lv>

Ministry of Health Care

<http://www.vm.gov.lv>

Ministry of Interior

<http://www.iem.gov.lv>

Ministry of Justice

<http://www.tm.gov.lv>

Ministry of Regional Development
and Local Governments

<http://www.rapl.m.gov.lv>

Ministry of Transport

<http://www.sam.gov.lv>

Ministry of Welfare

<http://www.lm.gov.lv>

Statistics

Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, statistics of Latvia

<http://www.csb.lv>

Tourism, economics and investment

Latvian Tourism Development Agency, tourism information

<http://www.latviatourism.lv/>

Investment and Development

Agency of Latvia

<http://www.liaa.gov.lv>

Culture

visual arts

<http://www.gallery.lv>

music

<http://www.music.lv>

theatre and dance

<http://www.theatre.lv>

literature

<http://www.literature.lv>

opera

<http://www.opera.lv>

Museums

Latvian Museum Association, Museum Guide

<http://www.muzeji.lv>

Libraries

National Library of Latvia, electronic catalogue

<http://www.lnb.lv>

Archives and genealogy

Directorate General of Latvia's State Archives

(includes genealogical inquiries)

<http://www.arhivi.lv>

Sports

Latvian Olympic Committee and sports-related links

<http://www.lov.lv>

Nature

Nature of Latvia and nature-related links

<http://www.daba.lv>

National and international news

Latvian News Agency LETA

<http://www.leta.lv>



LATVIJAS INSTITŪTS

The Latvian Institute promotes knowledge about Latvia abroad. It produces publications in several languages on many aspects of Latvia.

LATVIA IN BRIEF



For further information please contact the Latvian Embassy or Consulate in your country, or the Latvian Institute:

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