

A field guide to

Latvia.

Cool facts, real places and the stories behind them, from the local guides at openBaltics.



Latvia, *the art-nouveau heart.*

The places, the food, the odd facts and the best months: everything we tell our own friends before they come to visit. Keep it on your phone, or print it for the trip.

Latvia is the geographic and cultural middle of the three: the only one with the great Daugava cutting it open, the only one whose capital was, for a brief and brilliant decade either side of 1900, the largest city in the entire Russian empire after Moscow and St Petersburg. That short boom left Riga with the densest concentration of art-nouveau facades in the world: almost a third of the inner-city buildings, and most of the very best of them on a single five-block stretch around Alberta iela.

Beyond the capital, Latvia is mostly forest. More than half the country is wooded, the population thins out fast, and you can drive for an hour through pines and birches and see almost no one. The Gauja valley in the east is the scenic heart; the Kurzeme coast in the west is the wild one; Jūrmala, twenty minutes from Riga, is a wooden-villa beach resort that people from Moscow have been coming to for a hundred and forty years.

The openBaltics team, Vilnius



The heron

The heron is our host in Latvia. The real ones stand in the shallows of Latvia's rivers and lakes, as unhurried as the country.

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AT A GLANCE

The country in *numbers*.

Riga

CAPITAL

1.9 million

POPULATION

64,600 km²

AREA

53% of land

FOREST COVER

498 km

COASTLINE

May 4, 1990

INDEPENDENCE

750+ in central Riga

ART NOUVEAU BUILDINGS

Gaiziņkalns, 312 m

HIGHEST POINT



Four places that make *Latvia*.



01

Art Nouveau, by the kilometre

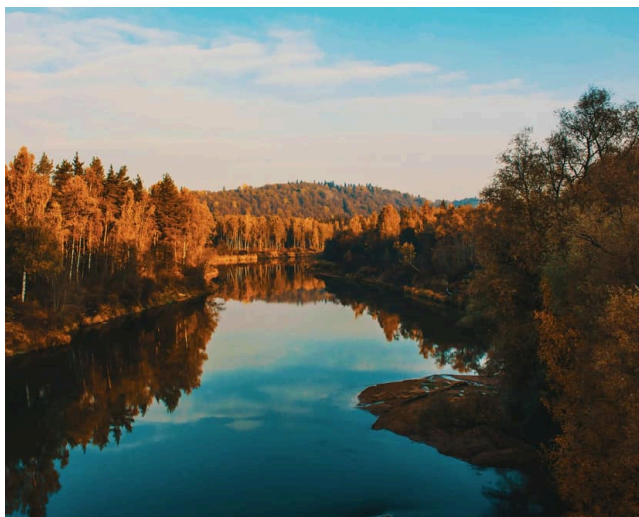
Alberta iela, Elizabetes iela, Strēlnieku iela. The Eisenstein facades on a single short walk are the densest catalogue of jugendstil ornament anywhere in Europe.



02

Riga's Central Market

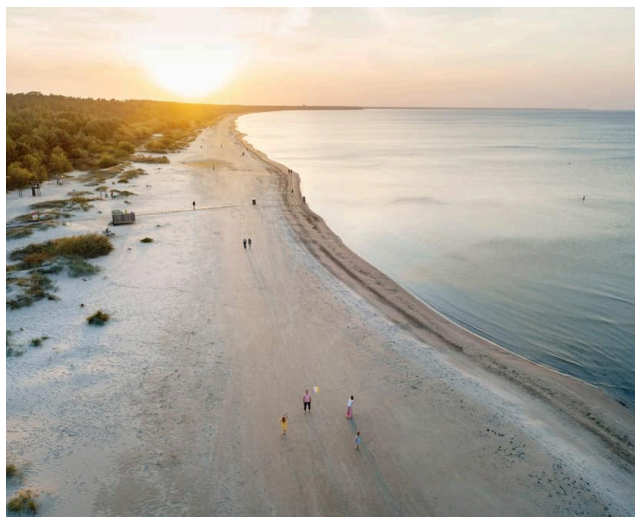
Five converted Zeppelin hangars on the Daugava, full of smoked eel, fresh dill, sauerkraut by the kilo, and the city's true breakfast counters.



03

The Gauja valley

Sigulda, Turaida, Cēsis. Three small towns on a slow green river, with two intact medieval castles and a prehistoric cave the locals were carving names into 800 years ago.



04

Jūrmala in summer

Thirty-three kilometres of wide, white-sand beach behind a wall of pines, with wooden villas you can rent for the week and a chamber-music festival in late July.

Six things that *surprise people.*

1/3

01 A city of faces

More than 750 buildings in central Riga are Art Nouveau, about a third of the centre, the densest concentration of the style anywhere. Look up on Alberta iela: the facades are full of masks and faces.

1510

02 The first Christmas tree?

Riga claims the first decorated Christmas tree, raised on Town Hall Square in 1510, and leans into the story every winter.

Zeppelins

03 A market in airship hangars

Riga Central Market fills five converted Zeppelin hangars on the Daugava: smoked fish, dill, sauerkraut by the kilo, and the city's best breakfast counters.

53%

04 More forest than anything else

More than half of Latvia is forest, one of the highest shares in the EU. Lynx, elk and beaver live in the woods and wetlands.

Song

05 Tens of thousands in one choir

The Song and Dance Festival, recognised by UNESCO as intangible heritage, is a mass choral gathering where tens of thousands sing together.

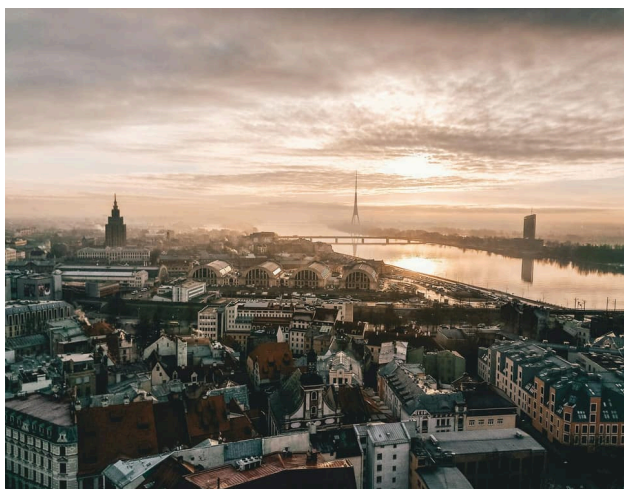
1989

06 Hands across three countries

In 1989 the Baltic Way, a single human chain, linked Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn across the three countries.



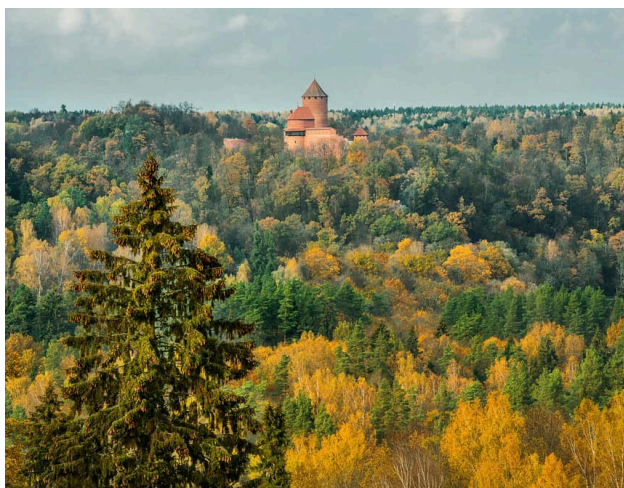
Three bases for *a trip*.



THE CAPITAL AND THE COAST

Riga & the Bay

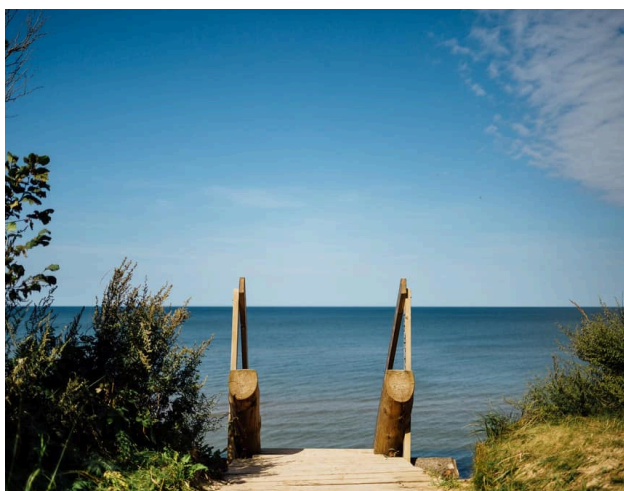
The Hanseatic Old Town, the Art Nouveau quarter, the Central Market, and the long pine-and-sand beach at Jūrmala, twenty minutes by suburban train.



THE GREEN EAST

Vidzeme & the Gauja

Sigulda, Turaida castle, the bobsleigh run at Mežaparks, and the medieval town of Cēsis, all in eastern Latvia. The country's most scenic river valley and oldest national park.



THE WINDY EDGE

Kurzeme & the wild coast

The Liv coast, Cape Kolka where the Baltic and the Gulf meet, the white dunes at Jūrkalne, and Kuldīga's wide, low waterfall (Europe's broadest).



Smoked sprats at the Central Market in Riga.

ON THE TABLE

Black bread, *smoke* *and dill.*

Latvian food is the most rye-bread-centric of the three: dark, almost black sourdough loaves baked in wood-fired ovens, sliced thick, eaten with smoked sprats from a tin or a slab of cold pork and a smear of mustard. The country's quiet obsession is the smokehouse: eel, sprat, perch, mackerel, all hot- or cold-smoked over alder and juniper. In summer, kvass arrives in glasses on every café terrace, and the long white nights of June end with grilled cheese, dill new potatoes, and a bowl of sour-cream herring on every table.

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The year, *month by month.*

Jan QUIET Cold, clear 7h light	Feb QUIET Cold, clear 9h light	Mar QUIET Thaw, mud 12h light	Apr GOOD Quiet spring 14h light
May BEST Bloom, mild 16h light	Jun BEST Jāņi, the midsummer fires 18h light	Jul BEST Jūrmala season, busy 18h light	Aug BEST Warm sea, festival weeks 16h light
Sep BEST Forest gold, mushroom hunts 13h light	Oct GOOD Forest amber 11h light	Nov QUIET Grey, raw 8h light	Dec GOOD Markets, snow 7h light

BEST MONTHS

Late May to September

Late May to September brings the long days and the open coast, and June comes close to white nights. December is the other window, for Riga's Christmas market on the old-town square.



The *practical bits.*

CAPITAL	Riga
LANGUAGE	Latvian
CURRENCY	Euro (€)
TIME ZONE	EET, UTC+2 / EEST UTC+3
FLY IN TO	Riga (RIX), the largest hub of the three
VISA	Schengen, 90/180 days
POWER	230V, type F (Schuko)
TAP WATER	Drinkable in cities; bottled outside
TIPPING	8–10% in restaurants
LANGUAGE TIP	Latvian and Russian are both common; English fluent in tourism and under-40s



Trips we run *in Latvia.*

Planned by people who live here, and changed to fit you.
Every trip can be shortened, stretched or rebuilt.

3 DAYS	A weekend in Riga and Jūrmala openbaltics.com/itinerary/riga-jurmala	FROM €1,155
4 DAYS	Latgale: Daugavpils, Aglona and the Lakes openbaltics.com/itinerary/latgale-lakes	FROM €1,435
5 DAYS	From Rothko to Rundāle openbaltics.com/itinerary/rothko-rundale	FROM €1,715
6 DAYS	Best of Latvia openbaltics.com/itinerary/riga-art-nouveau	FROM €1,995
7 DAYS	Latvia loop self-drive openbaltics.com/itinerary/self-drive-latvia-loop	FROM €640
11 DAYS	The Three Crowns openbaltics.com/itinerary/three-crowns	FROM €2,240

Prices in euros per person sharing a room. Prices as of 20 October 2026.
openbaltics.com/country/lv

Nothing quite right?

Most of our trips start as an email. Tell us how many days you have and what you like, and we will build one around you.

openbaltics.com/plan-a-trip



PLAN IT WITH US

Stay in *the middle*.

Tell us your dates and what you love. A real person replies within one working day with a day-by-day plan and a clear price.

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