

# Travel guide to Latvia



Latvia ❖  
travel

# Key information



**Capital**  
Riga



**Official language**  
Latvian



**Area**  
64 589 km<sup>2</sup>



**Population**  
1.830 million (2023)



**Density**  
30 km<sup>2</sup>



**Emergency number**  
112



**Power sockets**  
type F, 220V



**Time zone**  
UTC +2 hours



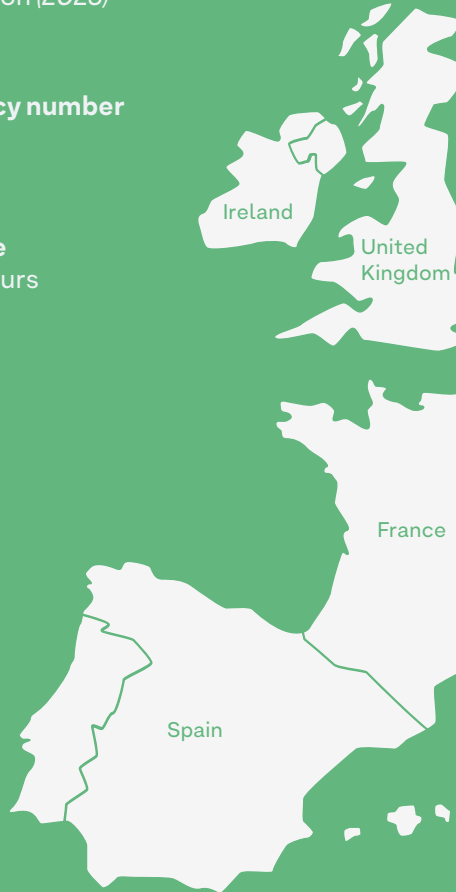
**Currency**  
EUR



**International membership**  
EU and NATO since 2004  
Schengen since 2007  
WTO since 1998  
OECD since 2016



**Right-handed traffic**  
**Speed limit:**  
50km/h urban areas  
90km/h on main highways  
unless posted otherwise





Norway

Finland

Sweden

Estonia

DK

LATVIA

Lithuania

NL

Poland

BE

Germany

Czech  
Republic

Ukraine

CH

Austria

Italy

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# About us

The Latvia Travel Team of the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia (LIAA) is the national tourist board.

## Our fundamental objectives

- Boost and support the development of tourism products and services in Latvia.
- Drive international attention and tourism to Latvia.
- Strengthen the competitiveness of Latvia's tourism industry.
- Inspire individuals to not only visit Latvia, but stay longer and immerse themselves to get a better understanding of people, culture and place.

## Our team

- Produces marketing collateral and campaigns to promote Latvia as a leisure travel and business tourism (MICE) destination.
- Arranges familiarization (FAM) trips for event organisers, tour operators and travel agents.
- Organises tours for media representatives and content creators.
- Represents Latvia at international trade and consumer events.
- Coordinates the national financial support mechanism for sports, cultural and MICE events in Latvia (*funding is available to businesses and organisations registered in Latvia*).
- Hosts an open access photo and video database.
- Runs educational and networking events for the Latvian tourism industry.



Investment and  
Development  
Agency of Latvia

[www.latvia.travel/en](http://www.latvia.travel/en)



QR code for  
the seasonal  
newsletter



## Well-connected to the world and each other

Neither places, nor people are far from each other in Latvia. Once you land at Riga International Airport, arrive at the port or coach station, even the furthest points in the country are reachable in three to four hours' time by road and rail.

A city break to Riga is easy to combine with day trips to the beach, forested national parks or charming smaller towns

which encourage spending a longer time exploring Latvia in depth.

Making arrangements is easy as everyone knows someone who knows someone. With a population of just under two million, instead of the global six degrees of separation, in Latvia we speak of no one being more than two handshakes (or a tweet) away.

# Nature, culture and heritage inspire us to innovate

You may have heard that we excel in fields like 5G innovation, space research and quantum computing. Latvians are a nation of doers.

Several attractions give insight into our talents. Science, tech and innovation enthusiasts may enjoy:

- **Ventspils International Radio Astronomy Centre** – a Soviet-era establishment, which has pivoted to cutting-edge space research [↩](#)
- **Baldone Observatory** – a functioning research institution, offering tours and workshops at the site of one of the largest Schmidt telescopes in the world
- **The Cēsis Space Education Centre** – a brand new, purpose-built establishment designed to introduce visitors to space research, the potential of space, its influence on Earth and people's lives

But you can also come across the fruits of local innovation at shops. Many companies find inspiration in nature, creating unusual consumables. Madara Cosmetics, for example, produces organic skincare with ingredients like birch sap, freshwater mud and chanterelle extract. Fermentful makes a vegan kefir alternative from green buckwheat, and Nutriboom freeze-dries pickled vegetables to create a healthy snack. All ideal souvenirs.







## Blessed with four distinct seasons

Latvians indulge in the outdoors throughout the year, enjoying the four distinct seasons that the country is blessed with. The favourable Northern European climate and landscapes have nurtured Olympic medal-winning teams in beach volleyball, BMX and bobsleigh, talents in ice hockey, basketball and biathlon.

Spring is a time of awakening when nature trails attract hikers to witness up close how new life emerges and birds return from their winter getaways. Summer sees locals load up on vitamin D at the beach, on the lakes and rivers so suited to boating, bathing and stand-

up paddle boarding. In autumn, foraging for mushrooms is a popular pastime, and rubber boots, long sleeves and baskets become the fashion of the season.

Winter is by no means a sleepy time of the year. Locals stay active by engaging in seasonal sports like skiing, skating and tobogganing. At the end of a long day out in the cold nothing warms you up like a mug of hot blackcurrant juice with a dash of the legendary Riga Black Balsam, or a warming session in the *pirts* (sauna).

# Pure northern nature and plenty of space to breathe

Firmly in the European North, Latvia is home to the likes of roe deer, lynx and woodpeckers who live in its dense forests of birch trees, pines, firs and fellow non-tropical species. Woodland, natural meadows, agricultural lands and pastures peppered with deep blue lakes, winding rivers and boglands – such are the classic Latvian landscapes. The 500-kilometre coastline is another jewel in Latvia's crown.

Latvia's varied terrains have inspired several themed long distance hiking routes that illustrate the surprising diversity of this compact destination:

- **Mežtaka or the Forest Trail**, which invites combining hikes with forest bathing, wildlife watching and camping
- **Jūrtaka or The Baltic Coastal Hiking Route** – a route along the Baltic Sea, introducing hikers to the steep dunes of Kurzeme, rocky shores in Vidzeme and miles of white sand beaches
- **Ezertaka or the Lake hiking trail** – a trail that takes in 134 lakes in the region of Latgale, also known as the “Land of Blue Lakes”
- **Camino Latvia** – the local stretch of the Camino de Santiago that snakes through forests and along the beach





# From pagan roots to complex contemporary identity: a brief history of Latvia

The architecture, heritage sites and museums of Latvia guide visitors on a journey through time, revealing the historical events that have touched, shaped and bruised the place and its people.

Around 9000 BC, the first people started to live on what is now Latvian soil. Around 3000 BC, the first Finno-Ugric tribes arrived, followed by the Baltic tribes. Our pagan ancestors lived in tune with the rhythms of nature until German crusaders sought to convert them to Christianity.

The 12th century marked the start of the tumultuous crusades. The conquered lands became Livonia, and the ruling German aristocracy introduced a feudal system

which would stay in place for centuries to come. The medieval castles in Cēsis, Sigulda and Ventspils and other towns shed light on this complex period in time.

But the neighbouring empires too had their eye on these precious territories and their people. In the 16th century, the Livonian Wars involved Russia, Sweden and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. For a while, the territory of Latvia was divided between different foreign powers.

The Great Northern War brought more destruction, and the Russian Empire gained control of Latvia in the 18th century. The opulent manor houses and palaces of the time give insight into the lives of the ruling elites.



By the 19th century, Latvians were actively showing their discontent at being subjugated. Eventually, the manor system was abolished. National sentiment began to grow in strength culminating in the founding of an independent Republic of Latvia in 1918.

The events of World War II and the ensuing Soviet occupation interrupted this independence. However, in 1990 Latvia

declared its freedom once again after years of a successful Singing Revolution – the Baltic people’s peaceful revolt against the occupying regime.

Today, Latvia is a member of the European Union, NATO and the Schengen area. Its people have found a way to transform a complicated past into a bright future, finding inspiration in nature, culture and the arts.





# A worldly cultural scene that engages, energises and inspires

Riga is home to the renowned Latvian National Opera and Ballet, the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra, major theatres and art museums but the capital city is far from the only point of interest for culture-loving travellers. Recent years have seen the opening of purpose-built event venues in Liepāja Cēsis, Ventspils and Rēzekne that offer varied programmes balancing between the hyperlocal and global. In Jūrmala, the Dzintari Concert Hall is a legendary establishment, providing entertainment and enlightenment since the late 19th century.

In summer, open-air music festivals happen across the country. In Riga, the Positivus music festival draws major global stars for two days of live performances on an island in the

river Daugava. The Early Music Festival takes place against the backdrop of the flamboyant Rundāle Palace, the sounds of the Sansusī alternative chamber music festival fill the forests of Southern Latvia's Aknīste, and the popular music festival Summer Sound rocks the beach in Liepāja.

Art events too give reason to explore the country beyond the capital. Every year, for example, the Cēsis Art Festival surprises visitors with pop-up venues like open-air cinemas in the woods. In nearby Valmiera, the Kurtuve contemporary art space stages events on the premises of a former boiler house, and in Riga, the Survival Kit contemporary art festival fills forgotten buildings with new meaning.



# A simple and sincere local cuisine guided by the four seasons

Dill and caraway seeds may be the most expressive spices in the Latvian pantry but local cuisine is less about surprising taste explosions and more about the consistent quality of produce and the deep satisfaction and rich nutrition it provides. Think dense rye bread from the depths of a wood-fired oven, wild mushrooms straight from the woods and catfish fresh from the Daugava river. Such heroes of the local cuisine have sustained Latvians for centuries.

Today, inventive chefs find new ways to combine local ingredients with foreign flavours, bringing out the best from the humble produce. At the same time, ancestral methods like smoking, pickling and fermenting have never really gone out of fashion, so contemporary cuisine is very much informed by tradition.

In the drinks cabinet, you will find local beer, wine and cider. Although winemakers are

experimenting with grapes, Latvian wines are typically fruit wines with raspberry, rhubarb and quince being popular varieties. Regional cider is crisp and acidic, staying true to the flavour of the apple at its heart. Several breweries, wineries and cideries open their doors to visitors for tours and tastings.

Interesting non-alcoholic drinks include the birch and maple sap collected fresh in spring and fermented to enjoy later in the year. Also worth exploring is the world of herbal tea. Based on the knowledge passed down from generation to generation, herbalists can advise on the properties of each plant and how best to combine them.

For an unforgettable introduction to today's finest Latvian cuisine, several Michelin-starred restaurants await.





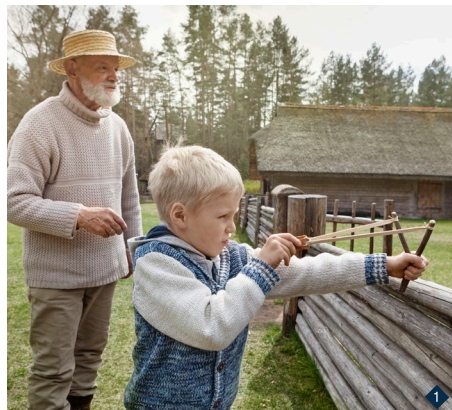
# The rich cultural heritage continues to infuse our daily lives

Our heritage is not filed away, collecting dust in an archive. Folk dancing, choral singing and handicrafts are still popular hobbies and significant social activities. Many locals still earn a living from their craft, and numerous artisans invite visitors into their workshops and studios. Weavers showcase their skills, tapestries and clothing, potters not only sell their wares but teach the craft too, and carpenters reveal the tips and tricks of their trade.

At certain times of the year, Latvians still come together to celebrate ancient festivities honouring the solstices and equinoxes that guided our ancestors' lives. Midsummer is arguably the most popular, and sees people flocking to the countryside to gather around bonfires, singing, enjoying special cheese and beer, and awaiting the sunrise in a celebration of fertility. At Midsummer, as well as the autumn harvest festival of Mīkēļi, farmers' markets take place in town squares across the

country – a rare occasion to see the array of traditional folk costumes.

The Ethnographic Open-Air Museum and Valmiermuiža brewery often host themed events for travellers looking to connect with tradition. [↗](#)



# Ancient and contemporary wellbeing practices keep us in good spirits

Before the advent of the sanatorium and modern-day spa, Latvians had the *pirts* or sauna. As well as being a functional space for cleansing the body, it fosters cleansing the mind and soul. While there is no single recipe for enjoying the *pirts*, it usually involves some mix of heat, water, steam and herbal tea. For the most profound experience, enrol a trained sauna master. They guide the process ensuring one's comfort and safety and skillfully navigate the contrast between hot and cold.

Several guest houses and wellness retreats now offer a menu of *pirts* rituals to enjoy alone, as a couple or group. Ziedlejas, for example, is an architecture-award-winning resort with themed saunas and cabins for spending the night immersed in nature, and the Meža spa

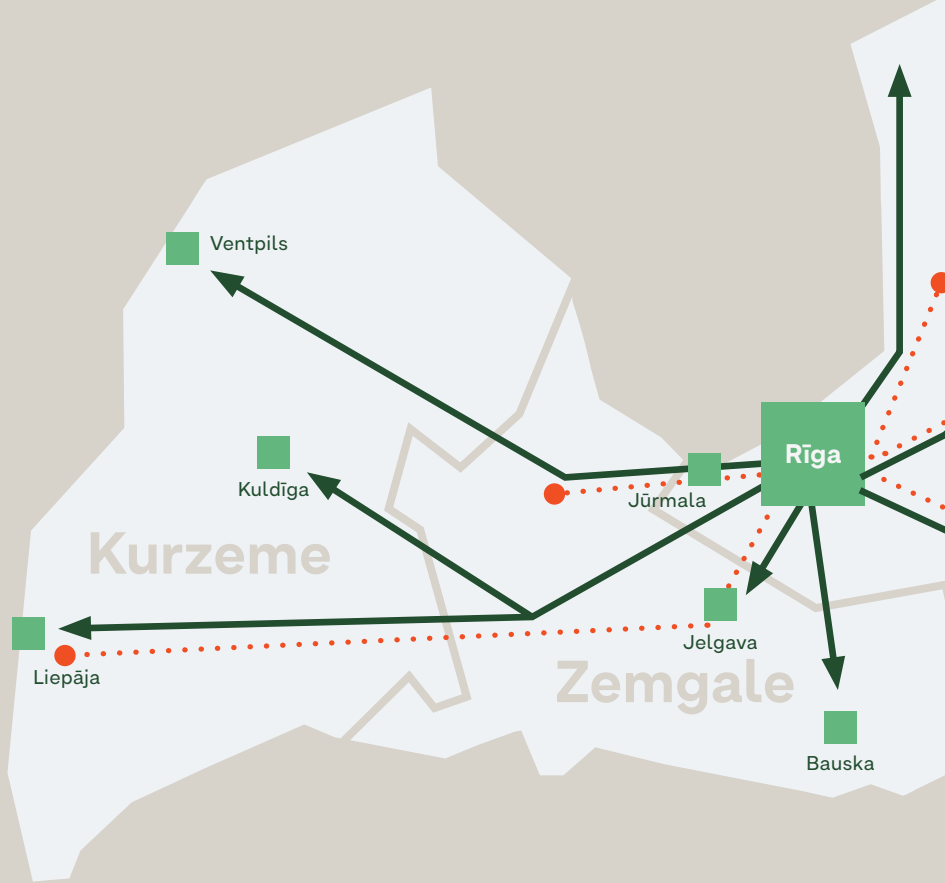
is a small centre of wellbeing in the woods near the sea. Even in Riga, one can enjoy the *pirts*. The Riga Pirts is a wooden shack on the Daugava riverfront with a view out to the National Library of Latvia.

Today, of course, modern spa centres too offer an array of relaxing and rejuvenating experiences, putting a local spin on treatments embracing the powers of amber, curative mud honey and herbal scrubs.

The resort town of Jūrmala is well known for its spa hotels, Riga has an array, and several manor hotels like Liepupe Manor and Berķene Manor have spa facilities. The Milk Manor Berghof offers dairy-themed treatments.



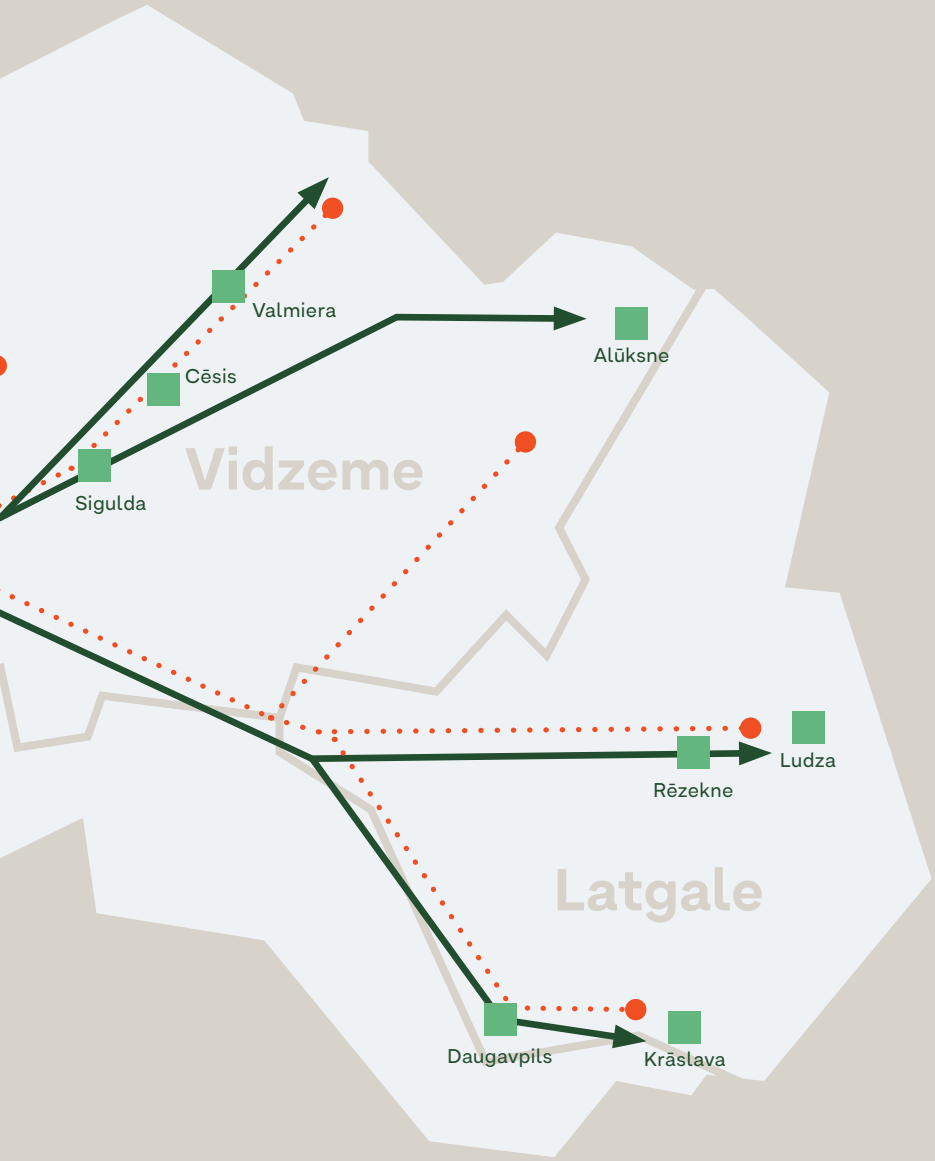
# Travel guide



Main highways



Main railways








# Riga – the compact but action-filled capital of Latvia

## Vecrīga the UNESCO-listed old town

The historical heart of Riga is where the ancient port city's story first began in 1201. Its charming cobblestone streets, remarkable facades and churches shed light on what this "Baltic metropolis" has experienced in its more than 800 years of existence. 

As a member of the Hanseatic League Riga prospered from trade in the 13th-15th centuries. While many of the earliest buildings were destroyed by war or fire, the sense of prosperity was never lost. New masterpieces arose, reflecting the trends of the time and the influence of foreign cultures.

In the old town one sees fine examples of Baroque and Renaissance architecture


beside the remaining medieval monuments. With the industrial developments of the 19th century, Riga boomed yet again, acquiring its neoclassical wooden buildings and later Art Nouveau gems.

Today's old town is an amalgamation of the past and present. It is home to some of Riga's leading hotels, restaurants and bars, giving a new lease of life to its historical premises. Major attractions like the **Museum of the Occupation of Latvia**, **Riga Cathedral**, and **the Museum of Decorative Arts and Design** are also found in the old town.


A canal borders the old town, marking the site of the ancient city walls, beyond which now lies the Centrs neighbourhood.

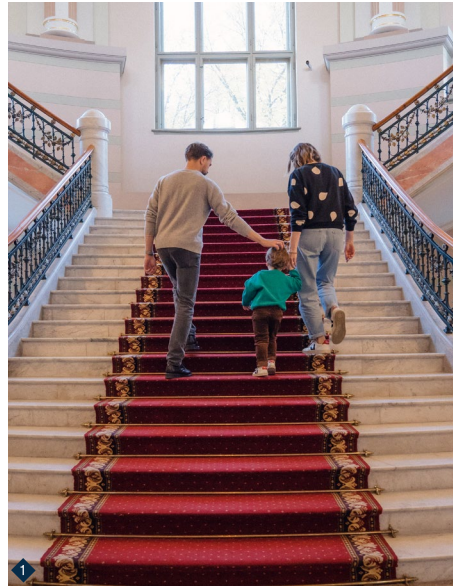
## Centrs Art Nouveau, museums and dining

Within walking distance of Vecrīga is the Centrs neighbourhood – one of the most elegant parts of Riga. It showcases some of the city's finest examples of 19th and 20th century architecture and urban planning practices.

Owls, lions and other animals peer down from the intricate Art Nouveau  facades that speak of a prosperous time in Riga's past. Folksy touches distinguish buildings designed in the style of National Romanticism – a historical attempt to establish a Latvian form of architecture. Of course, today, both Soviet-era additions and modern creations intersperse these historical gems, shaping an eclectic medley.


Behind the facades are people's homes and offices. As both a residential and commercial area, Centrs has a large concentration of shops, restaurants and entertainment opportunities.


It is home to must-sees such as the **Latvian National Opera and Ballet**, the **Latvian National Museum of Art** , and **Riga Art Nouveau Centre**, several other museums, cinemas and theatres.





## Ķīpsala wooden architecture, museums and restaurants with a view

An island on the River Daugava, Ķīpsala is a largely residential neighbourhood best known for its charming collection of historical wooden buildings.  On a stroll around the island visitors will come across several sites of interest such as:

- **The Žanis Lipke Memorial**  an architectural gem and fascinating museum dedicated to a brave local resident. Žanis Lipke, who once lived on the site, risked his life to shelter condemned Jews during World War II
- **Ola Foundation** – a private art space and education centre in a striking round glass-fronted building

The island's two restaurants – Fabrikas restorāns and Osta – offer some of the best waterfront views in Riga.




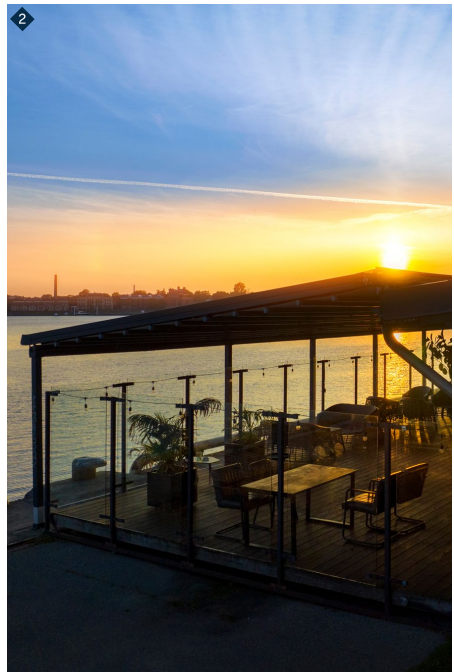




## Andrejsala trendy restaurants and nightlife in an ex-industrial port area

Andrejsala is a post-industrial area on the waterfront, boasting restaurants with some of Riga's best outdoor terraces for cocktails at sundown.  In summer, it comes to life with open-air concerts and street food festivals. It's a trendy destination for food and nightlife.

Sunset strolls to the pier  and picnics are popular among couples and friends.

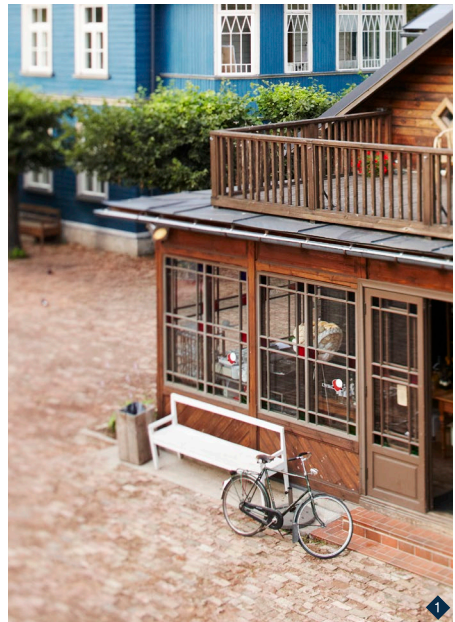


## Āgenskalns wooden architecture and bustling neighbourhood markets

In the atmospheric neighbourhood of Āgenskalns, tree-lined streets shelter historical wooden villas and apartment buildings. While largely residential, the area is far from sleepy. Just recently, the **Āgenskalns Market**  was completely overhauled and now draws people from across the city to its street food stalls, cocktail bars and flea markets. Nearby, the **Kalnciema Street Quarter**  – a cluster of renovated wooden buildings – comes to life with a farmers' and craft market on Saturdays and open-air concerts in summer.

Though technically just beyond the borders of Āgenskalns, the striking building and exhibitions of the **National Library of Latvia**, the **Latvian Railway History Museum**, and **Botanical Garden** of the University of Latvia add further reasons to explore this, the left bank of the River Daugava.


With several hotels and restaurants in the area, Āgenskalns offers a pleasant alternative to staying in the city centre, which remains easily accessible by public transport or bike.








## Mežaparks majestic villas, a lakeside forest park and Riga Zoo

On the shores of Lake Ķīšezers  lies one of Riga's greenest neighbourhoods with some of the hottest real estate – grand early-to-mid-20th century villas and modern architectural masterpieces. Mežaparks was one of Europe's earliest garden cities. It is both the name of the neighbourhood and the sprawling forest park it is home to.

Families and outdoor enthusiasts venture to Mežaparks for watersports, disc golf and other energising activities. Mežaparks is also home to **Riga Zoo** with local and tropical animal species aplenty.

Every five years, Mežaparks fills with the sounds of choral singing as thousands descend on its open-air stage to mark the grand finale of the Song and Dance Festival  –

a national celebration of the Latvian heritage and identity. On a regular day, the stage is open to the public as an event venue and impressive showcase of Latvian architecture.




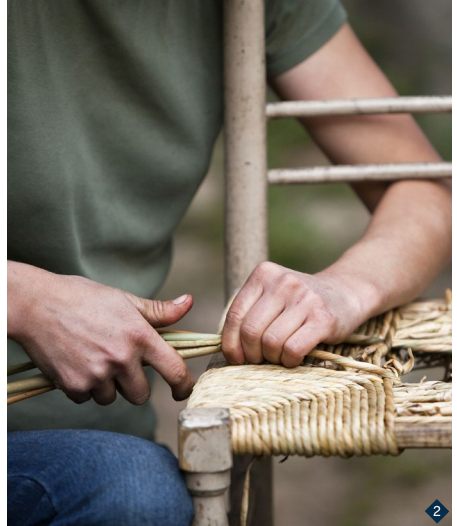
## The Ethnographic Open-Air Museum Riga's rural paradise

The Ethnographic Open-Air Museum  showcases over a hundred traditional buildings from across Latvia. Its sprawling site sits on the wooded shores of **Lake Jugla** on the outskirts of Riga and asks to be explored on foot. For short-stay visitors focused on Riga, the museum serves as an introduction to rural Latvia and the landscapes beyond the city.

The display illustrates the domestic lives, livelihoods and aesthetic code of our ancestors, many of whom resided in isolated and largely self-sufficient farmsteads. Highlights include the wooden church from 1704 and a 19th century windmill.

**Priedes krogs**, the on-site inn, is an authentic roadside tavern from the 19th century and serves hearty local fare – the perfect opportunity to taste meats from a wood-fired oven, grey peas with lard, and rye bread trifle.

The museum stages regular events, such as the annual arts and crafts fair in June, solstice and equinox celebrations. Craft demonstrations can be arranged for visitors to witness the skill of basket weavers, blacksmiths, potters and fellow artisans. 







## Jūrmala – best for Baltic-style beach holidays

### Former fishing community turned beach and spa resort




A far cry from Southern Europe's overcrowded resorts, Jūrmala offers a Latvian take on the beach holiday. Instead of palm trees, towering pines line the dunes in this resort town acclaimed for its mineral waters, curative muds and lively cultural agenda. Its architecture – a mix of charming wooden cottages and villas, monumental mid-20th century sanatoriums and flashy contemporary creations.

Once a fishing settlement, Jūrmala first became popular among holidaymakers in the 1830s and continues to attract day trippers, long-stay visitors and second home owners who spread out across the town's 24-kilometre-long coastline.

Thanks to its constant popularity, Jūrmala has its fair share of beach clubs, bars and restaurants serving Latvian, Central Asian and other cuisines with a side of nightlife.  It is a delight for summer beach holidays and rejuvenating spa getaways in winter.

## Coastal landscapes rich in healing natural resources

Jūrmala flourished with the discovery of the curative properties of its mud and mineral waters in the 19th century. It is thanks to the peculiar coastal habitats and natural phenomena that Jūrmala is such an encouraging environment for spa breaks restorative retreats and healthy holidays.

Its beaches, the fresh pine-scented air and walking trails encourage connecting with nature. Hiking in the **Ragakāpa Nature Park**  the beautifully restored **Ķemeri Resort Park**  and **Ķemeri National Park** is rejuvenating at all times of the year and best followed by a swim in the Baltic Sea.  In winter, those not brave enough to have a dip in its chilly waters may enjoy the unusual opportunity to ski along the beach.







## Miles of well-marked nature trails at the outstanding Ķemeri National Park

Ķemeri National Park  was founded to preserve the ancient raised bogs, valuable forest ecosystems, dunes, marshes and mineral waters on the coast of the Gulf of Riga. The enchanting park is home to several rare and endangered species, such as the lynx, pond bat and lesser spotted eagle.

Numerous marked trails allow discovering the park's treasures while maintaining them for generations to come. **The Lake Kanjeris Reed Trail** traverses an overgrown lagoon-type lake guiding hikers through the reeds. The three-kilometre-long **Lake Sloka Nature Trail** leads through several types of forest, and the **Raganu or Witches' Swamp Trail** introduces visitors to a smelly yet fascinating area rich in sulphur streams.

Arguably the most popular trail is the **Great Ķemeri Bog Boardwalk**, taking visitors on a journey through an 8000-year-old bog. A nature photographers' dream, the trail sees the keenest enthusiasts gather at sunrise and sunset for a magical golden hour experience.

In the company of a trained guide, visitors can also venture deeper into the bog beyond the wooden walkway. For this experience, hikers wear snowshoes at all times of the year.

Throughout the park, birdwatching towers provide comfortable conditions for trying to spot the corncrake, sea eagle and other bird species.

## Array of exciting indoor and outdoor pursuits in addition to beaches

Along with all you can do at its beaches and along its nature trails, Jūrmala has its own golf course, water park, wake park and equipment rental points for discovering the town by bike or boat. The **Open-Air Museum** shares insight into the significance of fishing to the town and its community. Families with children will find plenty to do.

Also, hitting the spa is far from the only indoor activity Jūrmala can offer. Other opportunities include:

- **Jūrmala City Museum** with a quirky exhibition on how the town grew to become a resort
- **Dzintari Concert Hall** – a legendary seafront venue, hosting an eclectic international programme

- **Dubulti Art Station** – a gallery in a functioning railway station whose building, inspired by the shape of a wave, is a 1970s style icon 







# Kurzeme


## the surprising westernmost region of Latvia

### Beaches, ancient manors and vineyards

Named after the seafaring Kurši or Curonians, Kurzeme or Courland prides itself on a pristine coastline that led to the development of its quaint fishing settlements and port cities of Ventspils and Liepāja.

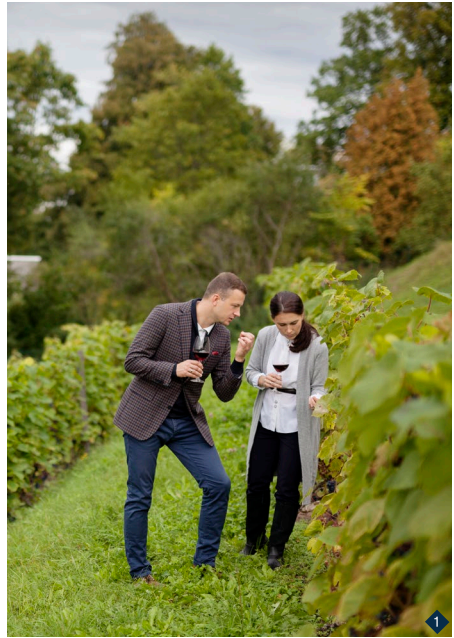
Today, people flock to its beaches for rejuvenating holidays.

The picturesque town of **Pāvilosta** is a magnet for surfers and fellow adrenaline seekers, while smaller villages like Jūrkalne and Mazirbe are sleepier, as if designed for relaxation.

Inland, Kurzeme's landscapes are enriched with manors, which hark back to when it was part of the powerful Duchy of Courland and Semigallia. Now, several, like the luxurious **Rūmene Manor** and curious **Kukši Manor**  are boutique hotels with restaurants where you can savour the wines that the region is also known for.

The town of **Sabile** is Latvia's "capital of wine" and was, for many years, home to the world's northernmost vineyard.  Producers like Abavas vīni offer tastings there. It is also home to a cidery.

Along with the local drinks, Kurzeme boasts regional delicacies, not all of which are fish-related. The *sklandrausis* is a potato and carrot pie, and is best enjoyed in **Alsunga** – the centre of the Suiti cultural space. The Suiti are a small Catholic community with distinct traditions like vocal drone singing.





## The magnificent Slītere National Park and home of the Liv community

At Slītere National Park,  the Baltic Sea laps at the shores of a very special protected natural area. A wildlife watchers' dream, the park's diverse coastal biotopes shelter several of Latvia's endangered species, such as the European pond turtle, smooth snake and natterjack toad. The park is also on the migratory route of thousands of birds, and the annual Bird Days see ornithologists and enthusiasts flock here from near and far. Among the flora growing in the park are wild orchids, the Baltic Ivy and English Yew.

A number of trails guide hikers through particularly scenic areas of the park. Cycling and boating are also recommended as ways to enjoy the park responsibly. Highlights include:

- **Cape Kolka** – the point where the waters of the open Baltic Sea meet those of the Gulf of Riga
- **Slītere Lighthouse** – an impressive 19th century lighthouse now open as an observation platform and visitor centre
- **Pēterezera Nature Trail** that takes visitors across the ancient dunes, past three lakes and marshland

This area on the West Coast of Latvia is also home to the indigenous Livs – a Balto-Finnic people. The Liv People's House in the village of Mazirbe houses an exhibition on the community, and the villages of Košrags and Kolka give insight into their heritage.





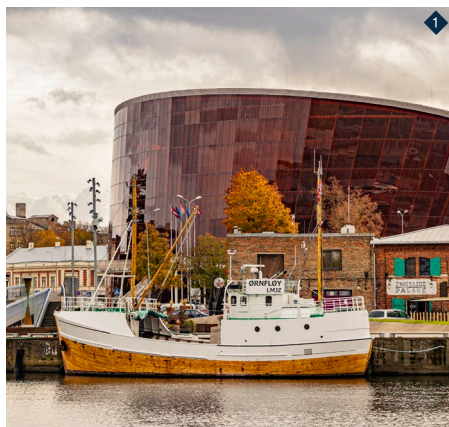
## Liepāja an elegant culturally endowed city on the coast

The so-called “city where the wind is born” sits on the edge of the Baltic Sea, benefiting from fresh air, the catch of the day and beaches. Once a fishing settlement, the coastal city grew to become a major trade centre and popular spa resort. For a time, it served as a Soviet army garrison town. Each of these historical identities has shaped the Liepāja of today – a designated **European Capital of Culture 2027**.

Its Art Nouveau architecture – buildings like **Pētertirgus Market** and **Liepāja Theatre** – speak of the prosperous early 20th century. Its wooden buildings range from humble to extravagant, hinting at the lifestyles of both historical blue-collar workers and the aristocracy who holidayed here. The newly opened **Madame Hoyer’s Guest House museum** of 17th to 19th century interiors provides fascinating insight beyond the facades.


Of a different era, the **Karosta neighbourhood** reflects Liepāja’s military past, is home to strangely beautiful abandoned forts and a former prison now open for chilling visits and overnight stays.


At the modern end of the architectural spectrum is the **Great Amber concert hall**  – an orange-coloured glass gem. Surrounded by bars and restaurants, it makes for a wonderful night out.





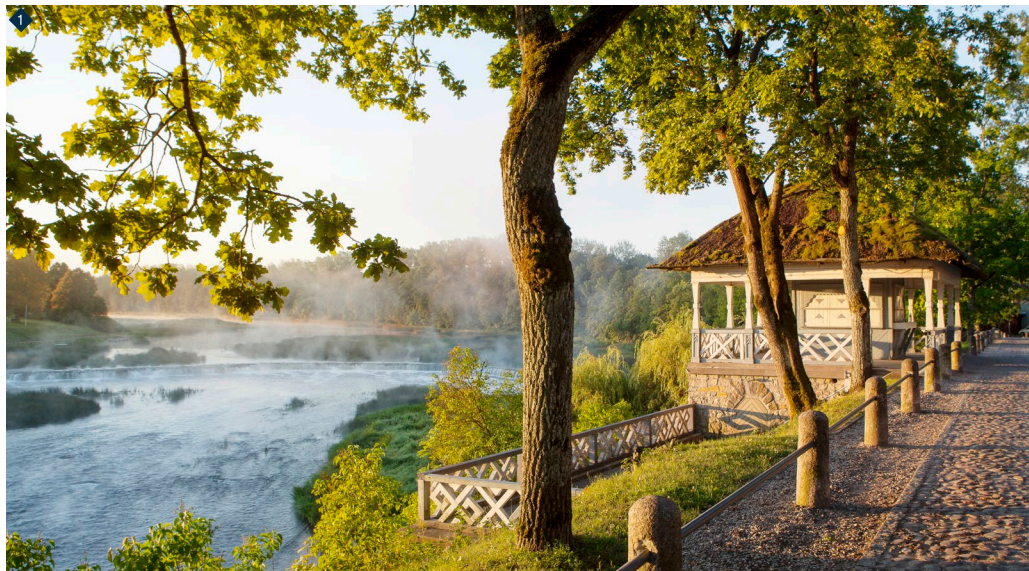
## Kuldīga charming UNESCO-listed old town and creative community

Once the historical capital of Courland, still today Kuldīga retains its air of significance. Positioned on the River Venta that leads to the Baltic Sea, it was a booming trade town. While quieter now, it draws young professionals and families looking for a relaxed but inspiring place to live, and tourists attracted by its well-preserved, UNESCO-listed old town  and inventive local businesses.

Several times a year, crowds flock to its prized events. In spring, the Lido zivis festival celebrates the curious sight of fish “flying” over the Venta Rapids  to reach better spawning grounds, and July welcomes the town fair. Both see a busy schedule of farmers’ and crafts markets, live performances and creative workshops filling the cobblestone streets, quaint courtyards and venues like the freshly renovated old **Needle Factory** – just one example of the town’s transformations.

Indeed, Kuldīga boasts an enthusiastic community, which sees the potential in its historical buildings. This is also visible at the **Kaļķu Street Quarter** – an ex-industrial area now housing a brewery, coffee roastery, restaurants and the Klavins Piano workshop.

Businesses just beyond the town’s borders embody the same spirit. **Kabile Manor**, for example, is now the site of a family-run winery.



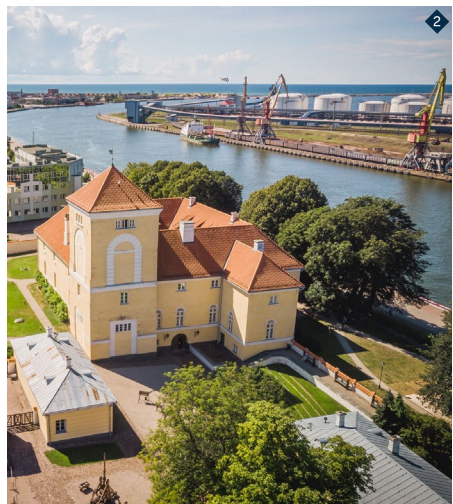


## Ventspils a family-friendly city on the coast

Once an industrial heavyweight, the port city of Ventspils has spent the last few decades successfully reinventing itself into the family-friendly tourist hotspot that it is today. Its beaches provide natural entertainment but the city also prides itself on an array of thoughtfully curated attractions, such as:

- **The Vizium science centre** designed to foster the next generation of Einsteins, Newtons and Curies ①
- **The well-preserved Castle of the Livonian Order** housing the Ventspils Museum on the history of the thriving city ②
- **The Seaside Open-Air museum and Seashore Park** whose major draw is an ancient steam railway taking passengers on a ride through the pretty coastal scenery

In summer, Ventspils stages the popular Sea Festival in honour of the Baltic Sea, the sustenance it provides and fishermen who source it. The city's squares and promenades come to life with markets, concerts and games. At other times of the year the newly opened Latvija concert hall offers an engaging programme of performances by local and international artists.





# Vidzeme

## the hilly northernmost region of Latvia

### For nature lovers, adventurers and culture buffs

As well as being the hilliest of Latvia's regions, Vidzeme enjoys a scenic and serene coastline. Ancient farmsteads, medieval monuments manors and lovely small towns and villages enrich its natural landscapes, of which many are part of the **Gauja National Park**.

Vidzeme's natural qualities and established infrastructure have historically drawn adventure seekers. Its fast-flowing rivers encourage canoeing and rafting, the Green Railways network of hiking and cycling trails

allows discovering the scenery along the region's old railway lines, and outdoor activity centres offer thrilling attractions in the forested wilderness.

While larger towns like Cēsis, Sigulda and Alūksne offer an array of hotels and guest houses, rural farm stays, campsites and holiday homes beyond town borders invite visitors seeking a deeper connection with nature. Many farms and family businesses open their doors to visitors for tours and tastings and keep the region's excellent restaurants stocked with fresh ingredients.

[www.vidzeme.com](http://www.vidzeme.com)


[www.entergauja.com](http://www.entergauja.com)






1

## Gauja National Park a magnet for outdoor enthusiasts

The largest and oldest national park in Latvia preserves a magnificent stretch of the Gauja and its valley , surrounding habitats and their inhabitants, among which moose wild boar and foxes. One of the park's distinctive features is the sandstone cliffs lining the Gauja, Amata, Brasla and smaller rivers.

The park attracts adventure seekers who enjoy its network of hiking trails, cycle and boating routes. From spring to autumn, the one-day canoe trip from Cēsis to Sigulda is a popular introduction to the area , while in winter people flock to the park's slopes for skiing and snowboarding.

Along with its ample opportunities for outdoor entertainment, the park is home to various cultural heritage sites, such as:

- **Āraiši Archaeological Park** – home to a reconstructed 9th-10th century lake fortress
- **Ungurmuīža** – a Baroque-style wooden manor now open as a hotel and restaurant
- **Turaida Museum Reserve** – Latvia's most-visited museum, based around a 13th century stone castle and hosting exhibitions on archaeology, ancient livelihoods and folk song






## Līgatne intriguing industrial heritage and beautiful scenery

Līgatne flourished with the development of a paper mill in the late 19th and early 20th century. The mill's management built distinctive apartment houses for its workers, which still stand today in the scenic surroundings of the **Līgatne river valley**. One historical apartment is now open to visitors, and several are holiday rentals with the town's excellent nature trails on their doorstep.

Being in Gauja National Park, Līgatne is rich in sandstone cliffs. In the past, residents dug cellars into the cliffs for storing food – a curious feature not seen anywhere else in the country. Today, many stand empty, however, several serve the Pavāru māja restaurant – a major draw for foodies, serving bold contemporary Latvian cuisine from seasonal produce. The restaurant occupies the town's former maternity hospital.

Indeed, Līgatne boasts many one-of-a-kind attractions:

- **Zeit** – an industrial-chic hotel on the premises of an old helmet factory
- **Vienkoči park** – home to a woodcraft museum, collection of carvings and model buildings
- **The Secret Soviet Bunker** built during the Cold War to shelter the elites in case of nuclear attack
- **Līgatne Nature Trails** – a wildlife park, home to lynx, brown bears and other local fauna 
- **A manually-powered ferry** across the River Gauja






## Sigulda a thrilling hotspot for adventurers

Sigulda is the gateway to Gauja National Park, and its hotels and restaurants make it a comfortable base for exploring the panoramic area. Riding the town's cable car across the River Gauja and its valley is a must to take in the full splendour of the densely forested scenery.

More adventurous visitors can even fly across the river on a zipline, and that's not Sigulda's only attraction for adrenaline seekers. It is also home to:

- **Aerodium** – a vertical wind tunnel that allows you to fly like a bird 
- **The Bobsleigh and luge track**, which offers rides down the 1420 metre track
- **Tarzāns adventure park** with an outdoor obstacle course and toboggan track



Along with being a hub for enjoying the outdoors, Sigulda is a site of historical significance. **Sigulda Castle** fosters learning about the town's past, and the neighbouring creative quarter offers craft workshops in jewellery making, leatherworking and pottery. Events take place here throughout the year.





## Cēsis medieval with a modern twist

Cēsis has one of the best-preserved medieval town centres in the Baltics, with a castle at its very heart. Far from sleepy, the centre's cobblestone streets are lined with cafes, boutiques and beauty salons. In recent years, Cēsis has attracted a whole new wave of residents, many of whom are escaping the hustle and bustle of the capital while still seeking comfort and community. The town is thriving.

Part of its appeal lies in the historical charm and the noticeable presence of nature. A sprawling park  surrounds **Cēsis Castle**.  Further out, the **Cīrulīši Nature Trails** lead walkers past the ski slopes along the River Gauja. The few remaining riverside villas hint at the early 20th century when the forested area was a resort. Today, three of them form the Villa Santa hotel with its own spa and restaurant.


In the centre, the Vanadziņa māja hotel and restaurant also occupies a rebuilt wooden house, and Kest restaurant has taken over the old fire station in an illustration of how Cēsis is reinventing itself.








## Valmiera thriving university town on the banks of the Gauja

Valmiera is a university town with a youthful energy and an outdoorsy population. On the banks of the River Gauja , it benefits from abundant green space, and the riverfront is one of the best spots to take in the natural beauty. There, the Barefoot trail offers an unusual way to immerse oneself in nature by hiking shoe-free. Visitors can also rent stand-up paddle boards or take a ride on the Gauja "river tram" to discover the town from the water.

Valmiera also draws foodies with a number of gourmet establishments, such as:

- **Akustika** – an artsy restaurant and concert venue in the old post office
- **Valmiermuža** – a brewery with an on-site restaurant. It offers tours and tastings and hosts regular markets, concerts and solstice celebrations


- **Wineries, the Adzelvieši hemp farm  and Silkalni healing herb farm** in the vicinity of Valmiera


Among Valmiera's remaining historical attractions are the **Livonian Order castle ruins** and **St. Simon's Church**.



## Alūksne a verdant lakeside gem

Alūksne sits on the southern end of its eponymous lake, profiting from a hilly lakeside landscape and islands. No wonder Baron von Vietinghoff chose to build a residence on this site of abundant natural beauty.

His intricate 19th century **Tudor Neo-Gothic style palace**  still stands on the grounds of a landscaped garden dotted in historical monuments. From there, marked paths lead to **Pilssala island** with the ruins of an **ancient Livonian castle** and seasonal tourism facilities – a tour boat stop, zipline across the lake and cafe.

Another element significant to the identity of Alūksne is the railway. The town was once an important point on trade routes. Still today, a **narrow gauge railway** runs from Alūksne to Gulbene – the only one in the Baltics to continue daily services. .

Its station now houses an award-winning museum on the history of the railway and people whose lives it has touched. Nearby, the boutique Bahnhofs Hotel offers accommodation in an Art Nouveau mansion.







# Latgale

## the multicultural easternmost region of Latvia

### Lovely locals, lakes and cuisine

Known as the “**Land of Blue Lakes**”, Latgale is home to Latvia’s largest, deepest and most islanded lakes. Today, the naturally rich region is home to a multicultural and multi-faith community reflected in the numerous Catholic Orthodox, Old Believers’ and Lutheran houses of worship that dot its landscape. The most well-known is the brilliant white **Aglona Basilica**, built in the late Baroque style. Every August, pilgrims flock here for the Assumption of Mary. It is the centre of Catholicism in Latvia.

Latgale locals are renowned for their

hospitality and the distinct Latgalian dialect which some say is a language in itself. Their sincerity and generosity is well-felt at places specialised in the regional cuisine. The Klajumi horse ranch, Rekovas dzirnavas and Dzīles home restaurant, for example, welcome groups to dine on the deeply satisfying local comfort foods like *gulbešņiki* (stuffed potato fritters) and *kļockas* (curd-filled donuts). *Šmakovka* – the regional moonshine – too is a delicacy and has a whole four museums dedicated to it.

Along with being talented cooks, Latgalians excel at crafts. The region is particularly known for its colourful pottery. Many artisans are happy to host visitors at their workshops.



## Rural charm at Rāzna National Park

Rāzna National Park was founded to preserve and honour the regional Latgalian landscapes with their hillforts, lakes, forests, historical homesteads and places of worship. At the heart of the sprawling, 596 km<sup>2</sup> park is Lake Rāzna, affectionately called the “**Sea of Latgale**”. Several guest houses on its shores offer boat and bike rental for exploring the area. The tower at the top of **Lielais Liepukalns hill** is a must, rewarding climbers with spectacular views across the treetops towards the city of Rēzekne and the Latvian border.

Nearby, Lake **Ežezers** is the most island-rich lake in Latvia. On one side of the lake is **Piļori oak grove** with several 300–400 year old trees guarding a scenic rest area complete with a jetty for swimming.

Along with being an idyllic setting for outdoor pursuits, Rāzna National Park offers insights into the history and heritage of the Latgale region. Farmers, potters and fellow craftsmen invite curious guests into their homes and workshops. **Lūznava manor** – an unusual Art Nouveau masterpiece – is now open as a museum, event venue and artists' residence.





## Daugavpils an intriguing melting pot of faiths

Latvia's second largest city is compact but compelling. One of its symbols is **Baznīcu kalns (Church Hill)** where Lutheran, Catholic Orthodox and Old Believers' houses of worship stand beside each other illustrating the diversity of the city's multicultural residents and the significance of their faith.

Another symbol is the early 19th century **Daugavpils Fortress**,  which was built in preparation of Napoleon's invasion. Today, parts of the fortress have been restored, and it houses several history exhibitions, a gallery and the cutting-edge **Rothko Museum**.  The abstract painter was born in the city.

Daugavpils' historical town centre features a rare cluster of buildings in the Classicism and Eclecticism styles. Many of the city's hotels and restaurants are found in or near the area, such as the Hotel Latgola with its top-floor Plaza restaurant offering panoramic views of the city.

Several other attractions add to the appeal of Daugavpils, such as:


- **The Šmakovka Museum** – an interactive space dedicated to the local moonshine
- **Daugavpils Lead Shot Factory** – an ammunition factory with the oldest shot tower in Europe that still works to this day






## Rēzekne the centre of Latgalian culture

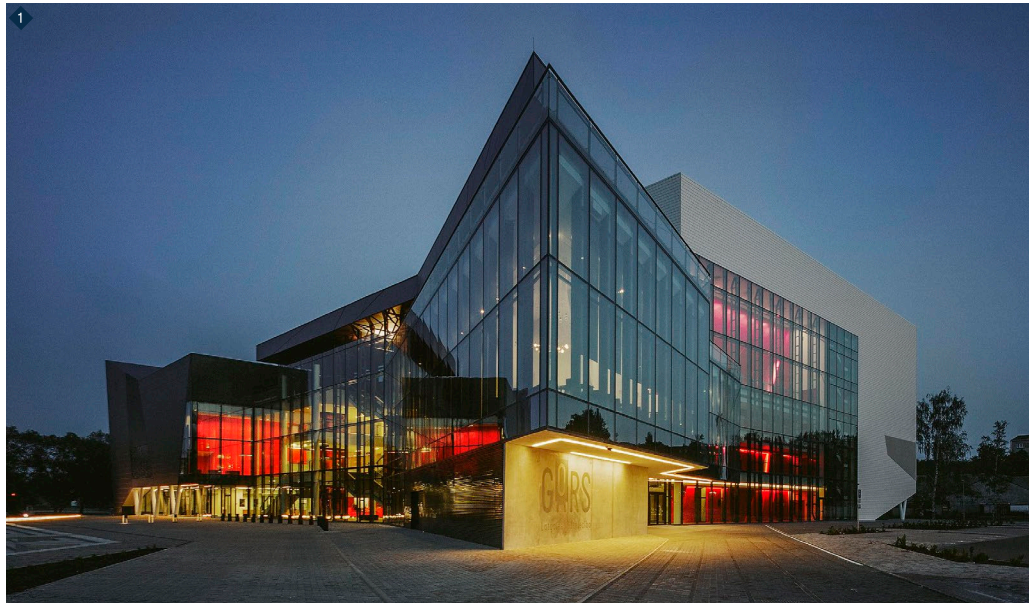
While Rēzekne is an important centre for the preservation of Latgalian culture and heritage, it is also a modern multicultural city. At its heart, the **Pilskalns hill** – the site of an ancient hillfort and later **Livonian Order Castle** – sheds light into the city's past and provides a platform for observing the city of today.

Two vivid landmarks – the Zeimuļs creative services centre and the so-called **GORS**  **Embassy of Latgale, a concert hall and culture centre**, are striking examples of the city's contemporary architecture and identity.

A victim of World War II, Rēzekne lost much of its historical buildings, but Latgales iela and other streets around it still retain some of the red brick facades of the 19th and early 20th century, along with the towering **Cathedral of the Sacred Heart of Jesus**.

**The Green Synagogue**  dates back to 1845 and is the oldest wooden building in Rēzekne. Today, it houses an exhibition on the history of the local Jewish community.


As a relatively large city, Rēzekne has a handful of hotels and restaurants, making it a good base for exploring the region.








## Ludza the oldest town in Latvia

Surrounded by lakes, Ludza enjoys a prime position for immersing oneself in the essence of Latgale. On a hilltop at the heart of Ludza the **medieval castle ruins**  offer a vantage point for admiring the lake-dotted landscapes and historical townscape with its red brick and timber buildings, the **Catholic Church of the Assumption** and **Classicism-style Orthodox Cathedral**. It is among the most scenic of Latvia's towns.

Visitors must also visit:

- **Ludza Craft Centre** for craft demonstrations, interactive workshops and traditional meals 
- **Ludza Great Synagogue** – a striking example of the regional wooden architecture dating back to 1800. At the turn of the 20th century, 59% of Ludza's population was Jewish, and the town was referred to as the “Latvian Jerusalem”



## Krāslava traditional cuisine and crafts on the banks of the Daugava

The development of Krāslava has a lot to do with the Plater dynasty, which acquired Krāslava in the 17th century, aspiring to make it the spiritual, commercial and cultural centre of Latgale.

Today, the 18th century **Count Plater palace complex**  forms the backbone of the town's tourism offering. The manor ensemble houses the Krāslava Crafts Centre, Latgale Culinary Heritage Centre and a porcelain doll collection. Mere minutes away is the **St. Ludwig Roman Catholic Church** – a vivid example of Latgalian Baroque architecture.

Right on Krāslava's doorstep is the **Daugavas loki nature park** centred around the scenic bends of the River Daugava whose landscapes are part of Latvia's Cultural Canon. On its banks is the **Slutišķi Old Believers' village**  a showcase of the lifestyle, architecture and craftsmanship of this religious community.

Also near Krāslava is the **Andrupene farmstead** – a cluster of magnificently preserved 20th century farm buildings, now operating as a museum and activity centre with traditional food tastings, folk group performances and cooking workshops.







# Zemgale

## the aristocratic and agricultural south of Latvia

### The bread basket of Latvia

Zemgale's largely flat landscape is known for its fertile farmland, leading to its nickname of the "bread basket of Latvia". Amidst the plains are several extravagant palaces and manor houses – the former residences of the once-ruling elites.

Its active farming community and enthusiastic entrepreneurs make Zemgale a fitting choice for food and drink tasting tours. Visitors can, for example, try their hand at baking bread, learn about the health properties and flavour profile of sea buckthorn, and savour local

fruit wines. The annual Milk, Bread and Honey Festival in the city of Jelgava is a celebration of the local farmers, artisans and producers and the nourishment they provide.

No longer housing aristocracy, today many of Zemgale's manor houses, palaces and castles are either open as museums or have been transformed into smart hotels with character.

**Abgunste Manor**, for example, is a popular wedding venue and runs artist residencies, while **Mazmežotne Manor Hotel** hosts enticing concerts and has an on-site spa for relaxing rural getaways.



## Tērvete Nature Park a firm family favourite

A children's dream, Tērvete Nature Park is a forested wonderland inspired by Sprīdītis – a character in a much-loved Latvian fairytale. Visitors get to explore Fairytale Forest with its wooden sculptures, Dwarf Village with its model buildings and Amusement Square with its fun and challenging obstacle courses. The newest part of the park – the Land of Kurbads – is geared towards slightly older visitors. One of the attractions is the Skills Bike Park with a three-kilometre-long trail for cycling.

Additionally, other family-friendly businesses have popped up in the area, making it great for a several-day stay. These are:



- **The Tērvete Tarzan Park obstacle course**
- **Tērvete Net Park** – an elevated playground among the trees
- **Tērvetes tauriņi butterfly centre**

The scenic area boasts several trendy glamping sites, cabins and holiday apartments for families with children and other travellers looking to spend time away from the city.

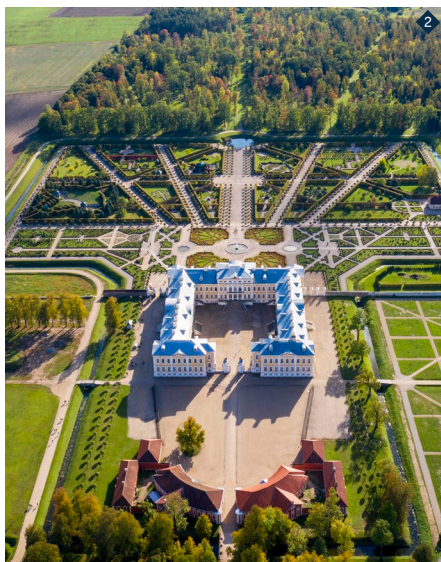




## Pilsrundāle home of the great Rundāle Palace



One of Latvia's architectural wonders, the lavish Rundāle Palace  was built between 1736 and 1740 as the summer residence of Ernst Johann von Biron, the Duke of Courland. An immaculate French garden  accompanies the Baroque masterpiece, which is the work of architect **Francesco Bartolomeo Rastrelli** – also known for Saint Petersburg's Winter Palace. In summer and early autumn the blooming rose collection adds to the palace's charm.

Rundāle Palace offers on-site dining and event facilities, and has several guest houses and restaurants nearby. It is a popular stopover when travelling between Latvia and Lithuania.



## Jelgava

### Baroque wonders, artisanal delights and festivals

On the shores of the rivers Lielupe and Driksa, Jelgava benefits from a pleasant waterfront promenade and two islands for leisurely strolls. Once the capital of the Duchy of Courland, the lively city is home to several remarkable historical landmarks. The 18th century **Jelgava Palace**  is the largest Baroque castle in the Baltics. Nearby, the **Holy Trinity Church Tower**  keeps a watchful eye on the city and introduces visitors to local history via a series of entertaining exhibitions on topics like bridal fashion through the ages. While a large part of the city was destroyed in World War II, it has since successfully reinvented itself.

The family-friendly city also plays host to several much-loved events. In winter, the International Ice Sculpture Festival, and in summer the International Sand Sculpture Festival see professional sculptors gather from around the world. Visitors can enjoy their creations in the company of live music.

Other sites of interest include:

- **Jelgava Old Town House** – a painstakingly restored 18th century building with an exhibition on the regional timber architecture
- **The House of Latvian traditions and crafts** – a centre offering hands-on workshops in local heritage, weaving and baking bread




2








## Bauska castle on the river, old town and curious museums

At the scenic confluence of the rivers Mūsa and Mēmele is Bauska with its impressive castle complex, consisting of the ruins of a 15th century **Livonian Order castle**  and the 16th century residence of the then-ruling Kettler family. The museum offers several interactive programmes like historical dance classes and fashion shows for visitors to get a feel of what life was once like here for the aristocrats.

The castle is a stone's throw from Bauska's old town, clustered around the restored 17th century **Town Hall**.  While the town is small, together with its surroundings, Bauska offers no shortage of attractions, such as:

- **Bauska Motor Museum** – a collection of passenger, cargo and military vehicles

- **The Miķelis recreation complex** – a museum of retro vehicles and authentic rural farmstead with on-site hotel and restaurant
- **Ceplis** – a vast old lime kiln being transformed into an arts and culture centre



# Credits

## Photographers

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# Tourism Associations

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**Latvia Convention  
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**Latvian Nature Tourism  
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[www.dabaturisms.lv](http://www.dabaturisms.lv)

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**Association of Latvian  
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**Latvian Health  
Tourism Cluster**

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**Riga Investment and  
Tourism Agency  
(LIVE RIGA)**

[www.liveriga.com](http://www.liveriga.com)

[travel@riga.lv](mailto:travel@riga.lv)



# Regional Tourism Associations

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**Gauja National Park  
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"Enter Gauja"**

[www.entergauja.com](http://www.entergauja.com)

[info@entergauja.com](mailto:info@entergauja.com)

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**Kurzeme Tourism  
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**Vidzeme Tourism  
Association**

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**Zemgale Tourism  
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[www.travelzemgale.lv](http://www.travelzemgale.lv)

[info@travelzemgale.lv](mailto:info@travelzemgale.lv)

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**Tourism Association  
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[www.exitriga.lv](http://www.exitriga.lv)

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**Latgale region Tourism  
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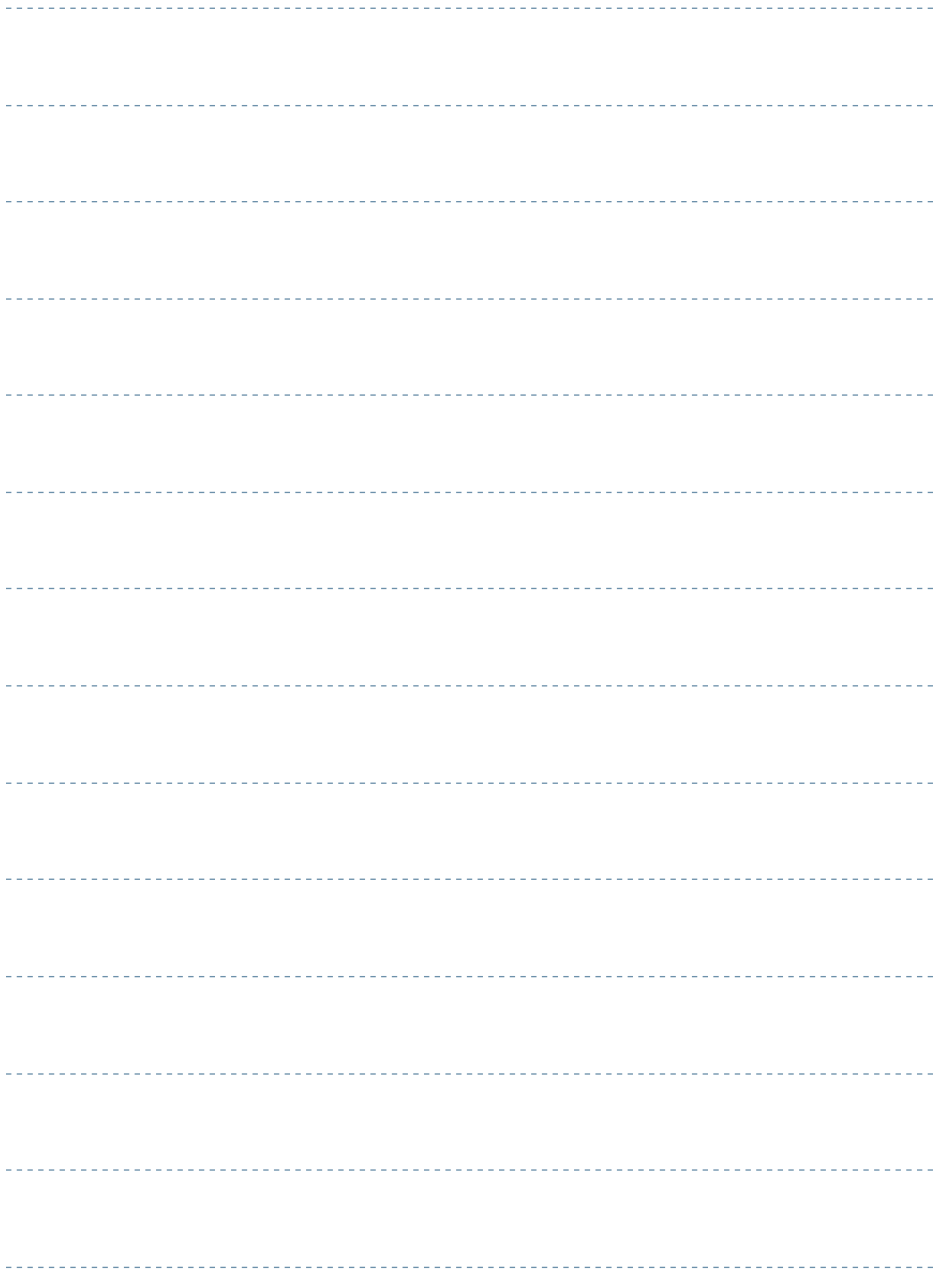


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