

EUROPE · CITY BREAKS · ARCHITECTURE · HISTORY · BEACHES

Latvia

Riga combines a UNESCO-listed medieval core with some of Europe's richest Art Nouveau streets, while the rest of Latvia is forest, lakes and long, empty Baltic beaches. Add the castles and sandstone cliffs of the Gauja valley, Rundāle's baroque palace and Kuldīga's riverside old town, and it makes an easy, good-value summer trip.

 Before you go, read the UK government's travel advice for Latvia and entry requirements (visas, passport validity). Last updated by FCDO 11 August 2026.

 CAPITAL Riga	 CURRENCY Euro (EUR) £1 ≈ €1.19	 LANGUAGE Latvian, Russian	 BEST TIME May–Sep
 DAILY BUDGET £45–£200 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type C, F 230V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 2h 50m direct ~£60–£200 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+2 standard time

Latvia sits between Estonia and Lithuania, with nearly 500 km of Baltic coast and more than half its land under forest. Riga, home to roughly a third of the population, is the natural base and the largest city in the Baltic states. A first trip often pairs three days there with day trips to the resort of Jūrmala and Rundāle Palace, then heads north-east into the Gauja valley for Sigulda and medieval Cēsis, or west into Kurzeme for Kuldīga, windswept Cape Kolka and Liepāja. Latgale in the east, with Daugavpils, Catholic Aglona and a scattering of lakes, feels distinct again.

Summer is short but glorious, with sunsets after 10pm in June and towns emptying for the Midsummer holiday. Prices are well below Scandinavia's, and buses reach most places cheaply. Riga draws weekend groups, but walk ten minutes from the old town and the city calms quickly. Outside the capital, guesthouses, saunas and lakeside campsites set a slow pace. It suits city-breakers, cyclists and nature lovers. Visitors are often surprised by Riga's Central Market, housed in former Zeppelin hangars, and by how much Russian is still heard in the capital.

Top 5 highlights

1

HISTORY

Riga Old Town

Ride the lift up St Peter's Church tower for views over the steep roofs of Vecrīga, then walk past the rebuilt House of the Blackheads, the Three Brothers' medieval houses and the Swedish Gate.

2

ARCHITECTURE

Riga's Art Nouveau district

Around a third of central Riga's buildings are Art Nouveau; on Alberta iela and Elizabetes iela, Mikhail Eisenstein's façades bristle with screaming masks, sphinxes and peacocks, and a museum shows a restored apartment.

3

NATURE

Gauja National Park

Latvia's oldest national park follows the Gauja river past sandstone cliffs and pine forest; base yourself in Sigulda for Turaida's red-brick castle and the bobsleigh track, or medieval Cēsis for castle ruins and canoeing.

4

ARCHITECTURE

Rundāle Palace

Designed by Bartolomeo Rastrelli, architect of St Petersburg's Winter Palace, for Duke Ernst Johann von Biron, this baroque and rococo palace has restored state rooms and formal French-style gardens with a large rose garden.

5

HISTORY

Kuldīga

A UNESCO-listed town of wooden houses and red-tiled roofs on the Venta river, where the Ventas rumba, often called Europe's widest waterfall, spans roughly 250 m; in spring, fish leap the rapid.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Riga

≈ 860,000 people

The Baltic's biggest city: medieval spires, a Central Market in former Zeppelin hangars and street after street of Art Nouveau façades. Allow three days.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Daugavpils

≈ 78,000 people

Latvia's second city, near the Lithuanian and Belarusian borders, is largely Russian-speaking; its 19th-century fortress houses the Mark Rothko Art Centre, honouring the painter born here.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Liepāja

≈ 67,000 people

A breezy Baltic port with a long white-sand beach, a strong music scene and Karosta, the former naval quarter whose military prison now runs tours.

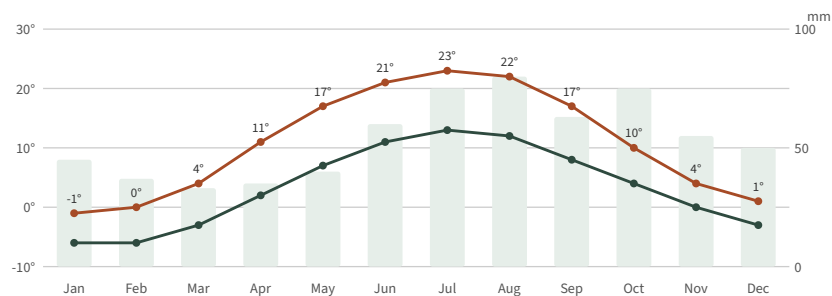
Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

When to go to Latvia

Best time: **May–Sep.**

**Average climate in Riga**

— High °C
 — Low °C
 ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Jun	Jāņi (Midsummer) On 23–24 June Latvians head to the countryside to wear oak-leaf and flower crowns, light bonfires, sing folk songs and stay up through the shortest night.
Jun–Jul	Song and Dance Festival Held every five years, next due in 2028: tens of thousands of singers and dancers in folk costume perform in Riga, a tradition recognised by UNESCO.
Dec	Riga Christmas Market Dome Square and Esplanāde fill with stalls of mulled wine, gingerbread and crafts; Riga claims the first decorated Christmas tree, in 1510.

How much does Latvia cost?

SHOESTRING £45 per person / day ≈ €53.57 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £100 per person / day ≈ €119 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £200 per person / day ≈ €238 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Grey peas with bacon Pelēkie zirņi ar speķi: hearty grey peas fried with smoked bacon and onion, often served with a glass of kefir; a Christmas tradition and canteen staple.	Sklandrausis Sweet Livonian pie of rye pastry filled with mashed potato and carrot, spiced with cinnamon and protected as a traditional EU speciality.	Rupjmaize Dense, dark rye bread, slightly sweet and sour, served with almost every meal and turned into a dessert layered with cream and berries.
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Getting around

Riga has trams, trolleybuses and buses, and Bolt is the go-to ride-hailing app. Intercity buses from Riga's coach station reach almost everywhere, while trains run to Jūrmala, Sigulda, Cēsis and Daugavpils. In the countryside a hire car makes the Kurzeme coast far easier. Bus 22 runs from the airport to the centre, and Stena Line ferries cross from Ventspils to Nynäshamn, near Stockholm.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE  C F 230V — bring a UK-to-C/F adapter	EMERGENCY NUMBERS Ambulance: 113 Fire: 112 Police: 110 Riga Tourist Police: +371 6718 1818 Source: FCDO “Getting help”
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DIALLING CODE

+371

TIME ZONE

UTC+2 (standard time)

TAP WATER

Generally safe to drink

DRIVING

On the right

TIPPING

Around 10% is normal in restaurants with table service if not already on the bill; round up taxi fares and leave small change in cafés.

ETIQUETTE

Latvians can seem reserved at first but are warm hosts. Bring an odd number of flowers, as even numbers are for funerals, and take your shoes off in people's homes.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Riga International Airport (RIX), Riga

Visas & entry for Latvia

Shown for a British passport.

No visa needed

You can travel without a visa to the Schengen area, which includes Latvia, for up to 90 days in any 180-day period. This applies if you travel: as a tourist; to visit family or friends; to attend business meetings, cultural or sports events; for short-term studies or training.

The requirements for working in Latvia are different.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Tetanus

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Rabies

Tick-borne encephalitis

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

No yellow fever certificate is required to enter.

MALARIA

No malaria risk

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Latvia

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Wed 18 Nov 2026	Republic of Latvia Proclamation Day
Thu 24 Dec 2026	Christmas Eve
Fri 25 Dec 2026	Christmas Day
Sat 26 Dec 2026	Second Day of Christmas
Thu 31 Dec 2026	New Year's Eve
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Fri 26 Mar 2027	Good Friday
Sun 28 Mar 2027	Easter Sunday
Mon 29 Mar 2027	Easter Monday
Sat 1 May 2027	Constitutional Assembly Convocation Day · Labour Day
Tue 4 May 2027	Restoration of Independence Day
Sun 9 May 2027	Mother's Day
Sun 16 May 2027	Pentecost
Wed 23 Jun 2027	Midsummer Eve
Thu 24 Jun 2027	Midsummer Day

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Latvian

ENGLISH	LATVIAN	SAY IT
Hello	Labdien	<i>LAHB-dee-en</i>
Thank you	Paldies	<i>PAHL-dee-es</i>
Please	Lūdzu	<i>LOOD-zoo</i>
Excuse me	Atvainojiet	<i>AHT-vai-noh-yee-et</i>
How much is this?	Cik tas maksā?	<i>tsik tahs MAHK-sah</i>

Know before you go

Start conversations in Latvian or English rather than Russian: although Russian is widely understood, especially in Riga and Latgale, language remains a sensitive subject.

Riga's Old Town fills with stag parties on summer weekends; for quieter evenings stay in the Art Nouveau quarter or the Quiet Centre (Klusais centrs).

Book early for Midsummer (23–24 June): many shops, restaurants and museums close for the holiday while much of the country heads to the countryside.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.