



LIVE
RĪGA

RĪGA



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Riga's skyline

WELCOME TO RIGA, CITY OF INSPIRATION BY THE BALTIC SEA

The first unforgettable impression that most visitors get of the Latvian capital is its majestic skyline, as viewed from the left bank of the Daugava River. The slender Gothic spires of the Old Town's numerous churches attest to the city's long history that dates back to the 13th century. The panorama's pleasing harmony is just the most visible indication of the superb aesthetic sense that has shaped much of the city's architecture up to the present day.

Nowhere is that aesthetic more pronounced than in Centrs, the central part of Riga, which is the city's economic, financial, and cultural core, as well as a UNESCO designated World Heritage Site. One will find a breathtaking range of architectural styles in the historic centre – from Baroque to Classicism, from Renaissance to Art

Deco, from Romanesque to National Romanticism. Furthermore, Riga's wealth of Jugendstil or Art Nouveau buildings, complete with their fantastically ornate flourishes, stands out as unparalleled anywhere in the world. Yet equally unique are the many 19th century wooden buildings that have proudly withstood the pressures of commercialization and gentrification, retaining their place in Riga's architectural cornucopia and currently undergoing state-of-the-art facelifts.

But Riga is much more than just its history. Proud of its heritage, it is a thoroughly modern city with a highly developed infrastructure and opportunities for a variety of activities and entertainment. A city with rich musical traditions, today it boasts an excellent opera, several world-class choirs and outstanding classical

orchestras, not to forget jazz, rock, and blues ensembles, plus a variety of other popular music bands performing both in concert halls and clubs.

At the vanguard of dramatic art not only locally but on the European scale, the New Riga Theatre has much to offer to locals and visitors alike. Riga's museums are definitely not dusty repositories of the past, but are instead putting an increasing emphasis on interactive displays and modern technologies, while the many art galleries compete with each other in trying to predict the trends of the future. Add to that the varied shopping venues and myriad cafés, restaurants, bars, and nightclubs, and you get Riga in all its lively variety.

What has always been central to the energy of the city, however, is its people. Located by an important waterway - the Daugava River - connecting the city to the Gulf of Riga and the Baltic Sea and thus to far-off lands, Riga has always been a transportation hub and a crossroads, where different cultures meet and intersect.

Among its more than 700 000 inhabitants there are Latvians, Russians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Poles, Jews, and other ethnic groups. All have left and are still leaving their mark on the customs, cuisine, and the very appearance of Riga. While the city's relatively compact, urban space is ethnically mixed, it features many distinct neighborhoods, each with its own unique history and landmarks.

Among Riga's many treasures are its beautiful, well-tended gardens and parks, which occupy a substantial part of the city's territory. In fact, there are several good-sized forests within the city limits, where the locals love to take Sunday strolls, jog, watch birds, pick mushrooms in the autumn, and go skiing in the winter. In the spring, when the city's many orchards are in bloom, white petals can be seen drifting through the air; then come the purples and pinks of lilacs, which are particularly spectacular along the crooked, dreamy side-streets of Pārdaugava, on the left bank of the river, to be followed in late June by the pale honey of blossoming lindens that line Riga's stately boulevards.

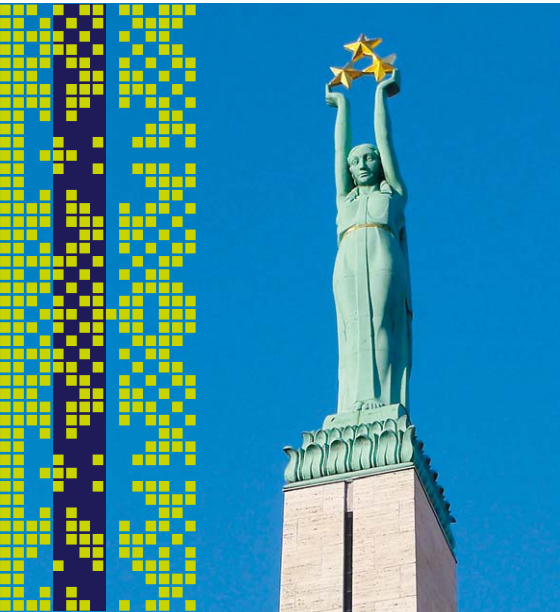
HAVING ENDURED MANY CHANGES AND ECONOMIC UPHEAVALS, RIGA REMAINS A LIVELY, SPIRITED, AND FUTURE-ORIENTED CITY WITH ITS OWN DISTINCT AURA, CHARM AND STYLE.



Jāņa iela

ICONS OF RIGA

LIKE ANY METROPOLIS WITH A LONG AND ILLUSTRIOUS HISTORY, RIGA HAS ITS SHARE OF ICONS – LANDMARKS, SYMBOLS AND LEGENDS. THIS BRIEF LIST WILL HELP YOU TO FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF WITH SOME OF THEM AND TO ACQUIRE A FEEL OF THE CITY'S TIMELESS SPIRIT.



Freedom Monument

Even the most cynical Latvians retain some reverence for the Freedom Monument, one of Riga's central landmarks. Unveiled in 1935 and financed entirely from public donations, the stone and metal structure was originally built in memory of those who fell during Latvia's War of Independence, which lasted from 1918-1920. The monument rapidly became the main symbol of Latvia's statehood, national unity and independence. The motto "For the Fatherland and Freedom" is inscribed upon the base.



House of the Blackheads

This spectacular building is one of the most photographed in Riga. Located in the Townhall square, opposite to the City Council. The original building was erected in the 14th century for the Brotherhood of Blackheads – single German merchants. The house was bombed during the II World War and completely destroyed. Reconstruction of the House of Blackheads started only in 1995 and was completed four years later. Since 2012 this is the primary workplace for the president of Latvia during the renovation works in the Riga Castle.

Dome Cathedral

In terms of age, size, and overall majesty, nothing in Riga can equal the Dome Cathedral, the largest medieval church in the Baltic States. The Dome's interior holds many unique treasures that offer insights





into the art history of the Baltic region. The Dome's famous organ – once the largest in the world – was constructed in 1884 and has more than 6700 pipes.

Wörmann Garden (Vērmanes dārzs) public park

This central park was created by the widow of a wealthy merchant in 1817. It is known affectionately as Vērmanītis – the diminutive of Anna Wörmann's surname that has since been Latvianized and turned into a toponym. Guarded by two lions, a monument to Anna now stands in a circular rose bed. On the Merķeļa street side, posing like the dandy he sometimes was, is a bronze of Kārlis Padegs, one of Riga's most fascinating, early 20th-century artists.

Cobblestone streets

Cobblestones have covered Riga's streets for more than five centuries. They are simultaneously loved (real Rigans sometimes call themselves cobblestone kids) and lamented – like when the heel of a woman's shoe catches in a narrow gap between the stones.

Laima Clock

The Laima Clock, erected in 1924 and located close to the Freedom Monument, may very well be the most popular rendezvous point in Riga. The logo of the



most popular local confectioner, Laima, appeared on the clock during the 1930s.

Sakta flower market

Latvians often present flowers as gifts when visiting their friends and family members. This national, floral cult amazes tourists



and reflects a Northern weakness for these living embodiments of the sun and its warmth.

Mangaļsala Jetty

Mangaļsala is the first part of Riga that visiting ships reach as they enter the city from the Baltic Sea. The jetty on Mangaļsala is located right where Latvia's "river of fate," the Daugava, flows into the Gulf of Riga. The best place to experience the wonder of the place where these two great bodies of water meet is by standing right on the jetty. At sunset, if you walk along the concrete "tongue" that stretches into the sea for several hundred meters, it feels like you're walking on water.

Bearslayer

Bearslayer (Lāčplēsis) is Latvia's mythological superman, whose superhuman exploits have been recounted to practically all Latvian children for as far back as anyone can remember. During the late 19th century, Latvian poet Andrejs

Pumpurs penned the classic and legendary Bearslayer epos, based on popular Latvian folktales that he himself had once heard.

Brethren Cemetery

The Brethren Cemetery, with its powerful artistic expression of Latvia's national struggle for self-determination, is a sacred place for many Latvians. On the last Sunday in November, when people light candles at the fog-shrouded graves of their loved ones, hundreds bring candles to the statue of Mother Latvia at the Brethren Cemetery, between the Forest (Meža kapi) and Rainis (Raiņa kapi) cemeteries in Riga.

The remains of more than 2000 of fallen soldiers of the First World War (1915-1918) and the War of Independence (1918-1920) have been buried here. Between 1924 and 1936, the sculptor Kārlis Zāle – who also designed the Freedom Monument – developed this remarkable cemetery, together with other artists and architects.

RIGA'S ARCHITECTURE – SPLENDID IN ITS DIVERSITY

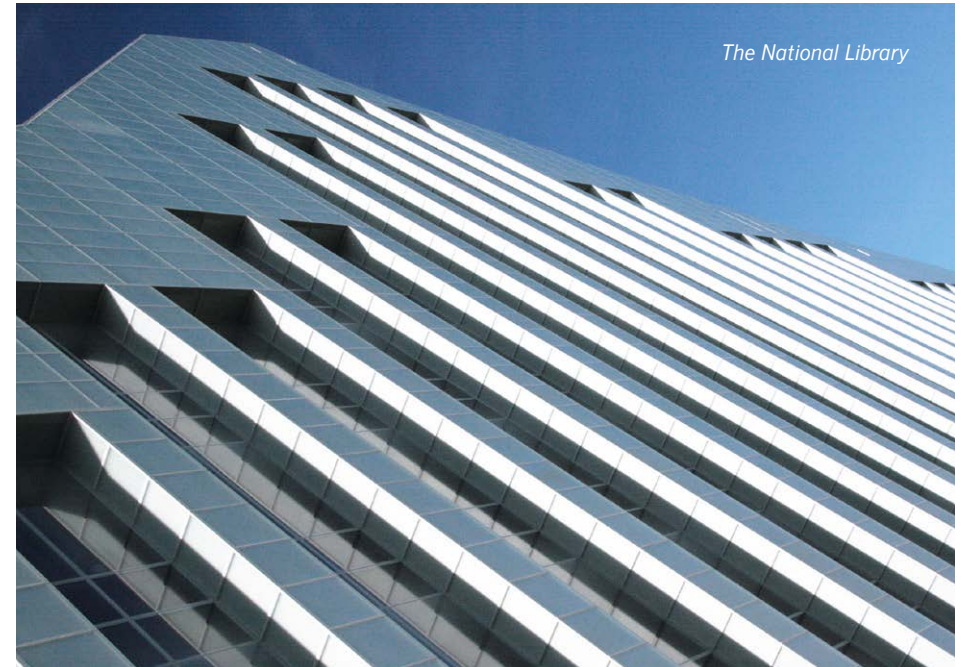
RIGA'S DIVERSE ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE SPANS ALMOST THE ENTIRE RANGE OF THE CITY'S 800-YEAR HISTORY, FROM THE 13TH CENTURY TO THE PRESENT. WITH OVER 4000 MAGNIFICENT BUILDINGS REPRESENTING A VARIETY OF ARTISTIC STYLES, RIGA'S HISTORIC CENTRE WAS DECLARED A WORLD HERITAGE SITE BY UNESCO IN 1997.



Old Town's classic skyline

Old Town lies at the heart of the city and is the best place to see how every historical era has left its mark. The oldest surviving buildings were built as houses of worship in the Gothic and Romanesque traditions, with subsequent renovations conducted in Baroque and other styles.

The stately, church steeples of these landmark buildings are the most prominent features of Riga's classic skyline, along with the stalwart **Riga Castle** by the riverfront. You can catch a breathtaking, bird's-eye view of the city's rooftops from the spire of **St Peter's Church**, which for nearly two centuries was the tallest wooden structure in Europe.



The National Library

As you stroll through the Old Town's winding cobblestone streets, you will discover numerous other elegant buildings – including the **Three Brother's Building Complex** on M. Pils iela, the Neiburgs Hotel on Jauniela and the recently rebuilt **House of Blackheads** on Rātslaukums – reflecting traces of Baroque, Renaissance, Classicist, Art Nouveau, and other architectural styles.

see sites in Riga.

Old Town is enclosed on one side by the Daugava River, and on the other by the city canal, with its ring of parks and green boulevards. Beyond the vanal various, eclectically-built neighbourhoods dating from the 19th century to the present lie.

Art Nouveau pearls

Riga stands out as one of the most prominent Art Nouveau (Jugendstil) centres in the world, with over 800 buildings erected in that style at the turn of the 20th century. It would probably not be an exaggeration to say that one can spot at least three noteworthy Art Nouveau buildings from any place in the city's historic centre.

The building of the **Art Museum "Riga Bourse"** is an architectural monument of national importance. It was built from 1852 to 1855, following Venetian renaissance palaco forms symbolising wealth and abundance. The building was completely restored and now houses the Art Museum. Splendid interior with plenty of gilded surfaces and artificial marble makes the Art Museum "Riga Bourse" one of the must

Here one can see shining examples of different branches of this architectural style, starting with the splendidly ornate building facades on Alberta iela and ending with unique, National Romanticism pearls designed by the first generation of Latvian architects.

Riga is also known for its eclectically-constructed buildings, many of them are residential apartment houses, which encompass elements from several architectural styles. Among the prominent edifices built in a single style are the **Latvian National Museum of Art** (built in Neo-Baroque style) and the red-brick **Latvian Academy of Arts** right beside it (built in Neo-Gothic style).

Wooden architecture gems

Wood is a plentiful resource in Latvia and other Northern European countries, which is why a considerable number of buildings in Riga were built of this material during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Although many wooden structures have not withstood the ravages of time and have since been torn down, some neighbourhoods outside of the historic city centre (notably in Pārdaugava, on the left bank of the Daugava River) have retained the unique atmosphere conveyed by thoughtfully constructed wooden residences.

A number of wooden buildings in Ķīpsala and on Kalnciema iela have been painstakingly restored to their former splendour, as a shining indication that the simple, wooden houses of yesteryear can still be put to practical use in the current era.

The modern era

Riga has retained certain vestiges of its turn-of-the-century industrial heritage. The

busy **Central Market** complex is housed in former zeppelin hangars dating from the First World War. Nearby, a group of formerly neglected warehouses by the riverfront was recently turned into the Spīķeri creative quarter, which has now become a vibrant business and cultural centre.

During the 1920's and 1930's, modern functionalist architecture made its lasting mark upon the city. It was during this period that such nationally significant sculptural complexes as the **Freedom Monument** and the **Brethren Cemetery** came into being.

The buildings that were constructed in Latvia's capital city after the Second World War were of varying quality and artistic merit. Nevertheless, some of these edifices have been skilfully refurbished, generating a renewed interest in the city's Soviet-era architecture. Among the most illustrious examples are the **Daile Theatre**, the **Museum of the Occupation** of Latvia and the **Latvian Academy of Sciences** building.

The National Library building designed by the renowned architect Gunnar Birkerts is an excellent example of contemporary architecture. The distinctive 68 meters high pyramidal construction creates impressive 21st century skyline on the left bank of the river. The total area of the building is 44 000 m² where 6,5 million printed works will be stored. After the opening at the end of 2013, the National Library will become one of the most important cultural centres in Riga.



A THRIVING ARTS AND CULTURE SCENE

FOR CENTURIES, RIGA HAS BEEN A CITY WITH AN UNDYING, CREATIVE SPIRIT. THE ARTS HAVE ALWAYS FOUND MEANS TO FLOURISH IN ONE FORM OR ANOTHER. CURRENTLY RIGA IS EXPERIENCING AN ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL REVIVAL OF PARTICULAR INTENSITY.



Opera lovers will be enthralled by the electrifying performances at the **Latvian National Opera** (Latvijas Nacionālā opera), which have gained wide acclaim both in Latvia and abroad. An average of six new productions is presented each year, retaining a balance between opera and ballet. In total, the opera sees over 200 performances and several symphonic and chamber music concerts a season. The best moments of the previous season can be enjoyed every summer at the **Riga Opera Festival**.

Riga has been a city of inspiration for many artists, including composer Richard Wagner, who drew insights for the construction of the Bayreuth Festspielhaus, while working as a conductor at the Riga German Theatre. Among Riga's most illustrious native sons and daughters one might mention the ballet star

Mikhail Barishnikov, master conductor Mariss Jansons, opera divas Elīna Garanča and Kristīne Opolais, virtuoso violinist Gidon Kremer and producer highly-acclaimed in Europe Alvis Hermanis. Whenever these world-famous stars hold a performance in their native city, it is always a special and emotional event.

Classical music aficionados will not be disappointed by the programme and concerts of the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra, the Sinfonietta Riga chamber orchestra and Kremerata Baltica, which will please even the most discriminating listeners.

Since its opening on 20th of August 2011 the **Art Museum "Riga Bourse"** (Mākslas muzejs "Rīgas Birža") is positioned as a point of cultural exchange, where excellence is more important than national origin. The



museum wants to be a point of contact between East and West, as well as for dialogue between the classical and the contemporary in the sense of both exhibits and form of perception. Another aspect of the new museum is harmony between the acquisition of knowledge and recreation, as well as the breaking down of barriers between various forms of culture. The permanent exposition features Western European paintings from 16th - 19th century and Western European porcelain.

Art Nouveau lovers should definitely visit the Riga Art Nouveau Museum situated in the apartment of the renowned Latvian architect Konstantins Peksens in his designed building on 12 Alberta Street. The apartment – from the stairway resting-place to the dishes in the living room – is a perfect example of Art Nouveau. Here you can study the expression of Art Nouveau in Riga and learn a lot of surprising facts. The museum will make you feel that you are traveling through time.

Latvian and European 20th and 2st century **art exhibitions** regularly take place at the museum's Arsenāls exhibition hall and at the Riga Art Space (Rīgas Mākslas telpa). Numerous **art galleries** will introduce you to the latest currents in Latvian painting, photography, design and multimedia art.

Other museums in Riga also host fascinating exhibitions, such as the Natural History Museum of Latvia (Dabas muzejs), which is a genuine oasis of nature in the middle of civilisation - in the centre of Riga. Human evolution, stuffed animals and birds from all over the world, collections of insects, plants and minerals, a journey into the history of Earth, recreation of volcanic eruption, studies of the sky, multiple exhibitions, modern and interactive displays, quizzes and stories - a visit to the museum will be fondly remembered both by children and adults.

The **Latvian Ethnographic Open-Air Museum** (Latvijas Etnogrāfiskais brīvdabas muzejs), for its part, is located in a beautiful pine forest on the shores of Lake Jugla. The authentic, wooden 18th and 19th-century homesteads of Latvian farmers, fishermen and craftsmen will take you back to another era when all food was local and motor traffic did not yet exist.

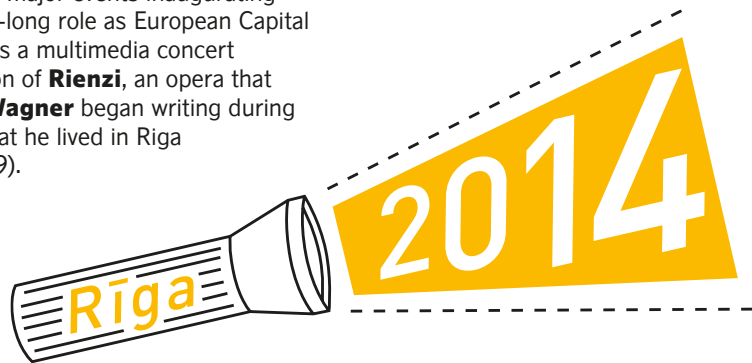
History buffs will gain a valuable insight into Riga's 810-year history at the **Riga Museum of History and Navigation** (Rīgas Vēstures un kuģniecības muzejs) and the **Latvian National History Museum** (Latvijas Nacionālais vēstures muzejs).

WELCOME TO RIGA 2014!

Offering a new understanding of culture as a trigger for positive change, Riga introduces itself as **European Capital of Culture** for 2014 with its programme Force Majeure.

There will be almost 200 events for Rigans and city visitors to enjoy during 2014. The inauguration of the **Force Majeure** programme will take place from 17-19 January. Its central event will be a **human chain** extending from the old National Library building in downtown Riga to the library's sparkling new quarters on the opposite bank of the Daugava River.

Among the major events inaugurating Riga's year-long role as European Capital of Culture is a multimedia concert presentation of **Rienzi**, an opera that **Richard Wagner** began writing during the time that he lived in Riga (1837-1839).



In addition, two completely new Latvian operas will be presented. On 9 March, listeners will be treated to the premiere performance of the opera **Chess** by **Kristaps Pētersons**. It is based on the life story of one of Riga's most famous sons, Mikhail Tal, who became the world chess champion in 1960. The life story of theatre and film critic Valentīna Freimane inspired composer **Arturs Maskats** to write the opera Valentīna, which will premiere on 30 September.

1914 was a year that changed the history of Europe, with the outbreak of the First World War. An exhibition entitled 1914 will be on view at the Arsenāls exhibition hall from 17 January. It will pull together art, culture and history, bringing to life personal stories through the eyes of both World War I and contemporary artists.

From the end of April until June, a retrospective of works by Latvian-American Abstract Realism artist **Vija Celmiņš** will be held at the Riga Bourse (Rīgas Bīrža), followed by a showing of more than 200 works by Soviet-Latvian Constructivist artist **Gustav Klucis** – 22 August - 23 November.

In 2014, Latvian festivals marking the summer solstice and **Midsummer's Eve** will be among the largest in all of Europe, with the main festivities taking place in Riga and its partner city of Sigulda.

July will host the largest number of musical performances in 2014. Among the highlights are the **World Choir Games** from 9 to 19 July, up to 20,000 participants are expected, representing 90 nations. Several world-class music



The Latvian National Library during the Staro Rīga light festival. Photo: Delfi.

and opera stars from Latvia will perform together on one stage at a gala concert **Born in Riga** on the 6th of July at the foot of the Latvian National Opera.

Also, in July, the National Library of Latvia will organise a unique book exhibition entitled **The Book 1514-2014**, covering the past 500 years of book-printing history.

An ancient amber trade route once linked the Baltic Sea with the Mediterranean and Black Seas. Throughout the year, Riga's inhabitants and their visitors will be able to follow the new **Amber Way** among the Latvian capital's museums and galleries.

In 2009, the **Survival Kit** festival of contemporary art led to the establishment of various new creative initiatives and creative quarters. This year, from 1-15 September, the event will feature art exhibitions in unusual places, objects placed in urban environments and creative projects involving the public.

The largest light festival in Northern Europe, **Staro Rīga**, takes place this year from 14-18 November, offering an exciting international programme of light and multi-media installations.

Whichever of the events you choose to attend, be open-minded and prepared to experience the unexpected!



EIROPAS KULTŪRAS GALVAPILSĒTA
EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE



EUROPEAN CAPITAL
OF CULTURE

ANNUAL EVENTS

RIGA HOSTS A NUMBER OF EXCITING, ANNUAL CULTURAL EVENTS. WHATEVER THE SEASON, THERE IS ALWAYS SOMETHING TO SEE, HEAR OR DO ON THE RIGA'S LIVELY CULTURE SCENE.



Nordea Riga Marathon

Riga's annual marathon has become an increasingly popular sports event, drawing thousands of participants from numerous countries. Runners of all ages course past some of Riga's most beautiful tourist spots filling the atmosphere along the 42-kilometre race with a thrilling sense of exhilaration.

The majority of the participants actually choose to run much shorter distances – either the mini marathon (5 km), the half marathon (21 km), or the relay race (with four participants per team). This thrilling sports venue has taken place every year on the third Sunday in May since 1991.
www.nordearigasmaratons.lv

Latvia's Nationwide Song and Dance Celebration

The largest and most impressive cultural festival in Latvia is the Nationwide Song and Dance Celebration, which usually takes

place once every five years and lasts an entire week.

Among the highlights of this monumental event is a colourful procession of the celebration's participants. Dressed in folk costumes, some 30 000 performers file past thousands of more cheering onlookers through the streets of the city.

The culmination of the celebration is the gala concert in Mežaparks. The electrifying atmosphere generated by thousands of singers and dancers on a single open-air stage is a powerful, emotional experience that is not soon forgotten. The next Nationwide Song and Dance Celebrations are scheduled to take place in 2013 and 2018.
www.dziesmusvetki.lv

Riga Festival

The Riga Festival is a major event that is organised in the Latvian capital city in June each year. Year after year, the organisers



of the festival expand on what is a truly splendid cultural programme. Concerts are staged by the most outstanding artists from Latvia and other countries. There are theatrical performances, art exhibitions, multimedia events, open-air performances, as well as events for children.

www.rigasfestivals.lv

Riga Opera Festival

The Riga Opera Festival was one of the first large-scale opera festivals to be held in Northern Europe and has become an eagerly awaited, annual event by both Latvian audience and opera-lovers from abroad.

Every summer, the festival marks the end of the Latvian National Opera's performance season with an overview of the best moments of the previous year, offering fans a chance to relive their favourite scenes or see what they've missed.

The high quality of the opera's productions (including its innovative stage design) has been noted outside of the country, and has helped the opera to attract brilliant guest conductors and soloists to Riga.

www.opera.lv

Forest of Sound (Skaņu mežs)

If you wish to get a taste of the latest in musical experimentation, make sure to at-

tend Riga's annual Forest of Sound (Skaņu mežs) untamed music festival. This international event combines the latest developments in contemporary culture with the most recent technological advances – in the form of experimental music and sound.

A number of world class musical dreamers and dissidents have performed at the festival over the years, to considerable critical acclaim.

www.skanez.lv

White Night (Baltā nakts) cultural festival

Partly because it is free and accessible to all the White Night (Baltā nakts) is one of the most popular annual cultural events in Riga. Concentrating on contemporary forms of art it unites cultural enthusiasts of all ages, from children to senior citizens.

On this particular night – usually at the beginning of September – exhibitions and performances to suit all tastes take place in the strangest variety of places, including empty stores and abandoned factories, as well as at more conventional exhibition halls and clubs.

Latvia's White Night is part of the European White Nights (Eiropas Baltās naktis) international cultural project.

www.baltanakts.lv



Autumn Chamber Music Festival

When the leaves begin to change colour in Latvia, music lovers can experience the autumn spirit at the Autumn Chamber Music Festival. The festival's slogan, *tete-à-tete*, is a nod towards the intimacy of the relationships between performers and the audience. The Autumn Chamber Music Festival offers stunning performances of the world's most beloved chamber music compositions. www.latvijaskoncerti.lv

Baltijas Pērle (Baltic Pearl) film festival

The strength of Baltijas Pērle is in its programme, especially its classic movies and retrospectives. However, it also features "digests" of films that have recently triumphed in the great European film festivals at Cannes, Berlin and Venice.

The festival is the perfect venue for those who wish to see the greatest treasures discovered on the European festival circuit. Baltijas Pērle takes place every autumn www.balticpearl.lv

Arēna New Music Festival

The annual Arēna New Music Festival seeks to provide live venues for musical works that have been penned during the past few years, mainly by composers from Latvia. The range of music performed at this festival is very wide, ranging from elec-

troacoustic compositions to large format symphony and vocal symphony works. World class performers and composers from other countries have also performed at this unconventional event. www.arenafest.lv

Staro Rīga Light Festival

With the help of modern light and video technology the annual festival Staro Rīga will present around one hundred outdoor installations - building lights, multimedia projections in parks, on high-rise buildings and monuments. The play of light makes the autumn drabness disappear and opens up a completely different view of the city. www.staro.lv

The festival "Christmas Tree Trail"

This original and artistic festival in an urban environment is an exhibition of traditional or completely avant-garde visions of the Christmas tree. More than 20 outdoor installations are copyright works by students of the Latvian Academy of Art or works by authors selected during the festival's annual competition. The "Christmas Tree Trail" is a way to celebrate the legend of Riga as the capital of the first decorated Christmas Tree. www.eglufestivals.lv

ACCOMMODATION TO SUIT ALL BUDGETS AND TASTES

IT IS NO SECRET THAT THE HOTEL IN WHICH ONE STAYS LEAVES A LASTING IMPRESSION ABOUT THE CITY THAT ONE IS VISITING. SOMETIMES AN EXPLORATION OF THE HOTEL ITSELF CAN TURN OUT TO BE A VOYAGE WITHIN A VOYAGE.

Riga has a wide selection of accommodations to suit all budgets and tastes – from luxury, royal class suites for demanding travellers, to charming, mid-range hotels for families with children, to low-budget hostels for students and backpackers.

High-class **Hotel Bergs** is nestled within the Berga Bazārs, a village-like enclave with boutiques and restaurants built during the 19th century. Located on the site of a former cabbage-patch, it is now the best-known, five-star hotel in Riga, as well as a member of the Small Luxury Hotels of the World alliance.

Riga is one of the few European capital cities where one can enjoy magnificent views of lush, green parks from the hotel window during the summer months. You can opt for a bird's-eye panorama of the city's rooftops and boulevards from **Radisson Blu Hotel Latvija**, or a close-up view of chess players honing their skills on the park benches of the Vērmanes Garden from **Radisson Blu Elizabete Hotel**, or

look down on the peaceful serenity of the Esplanāde and Bastejkalns parks from the **Radisson Blu Rīdzene Hotel**.

Dome Hotel & Spa in the very heart of Old Riga boasts of the first green wall in the city, as well as a rooftop terrace with one of the finest views of the Dome Cathedral. Nearby, **Neiburgs Hotel** operates from one of the most lavish Art Nouveau buildings in the city.

Budget travellers have given consistently favourable reviews to Riga's hostels.

Whatever your budget and tastes, you are sure to find the accommodation that will suit your needs in Riga.



Hotel Bergs



Dome Hotel & SPA

RIGA – DELIGHTFULLY DELICIOUS DESTINATION

SINCE ITS FOUNDATION MORE THAN 800 YEARS AGO, RIGA HAS STOOD AT A CROSSROADS, AS A MEETING POINT FOR VARIOUS NATIONS AND CULTURES. THIS IS REFLECTED IN THE DIVERSE CUISINE OF RIGA'S FINE RESTAURANTS AND MAKES RIGA THE GASTRONOMIC CAPITAL OF THE BALTICS.

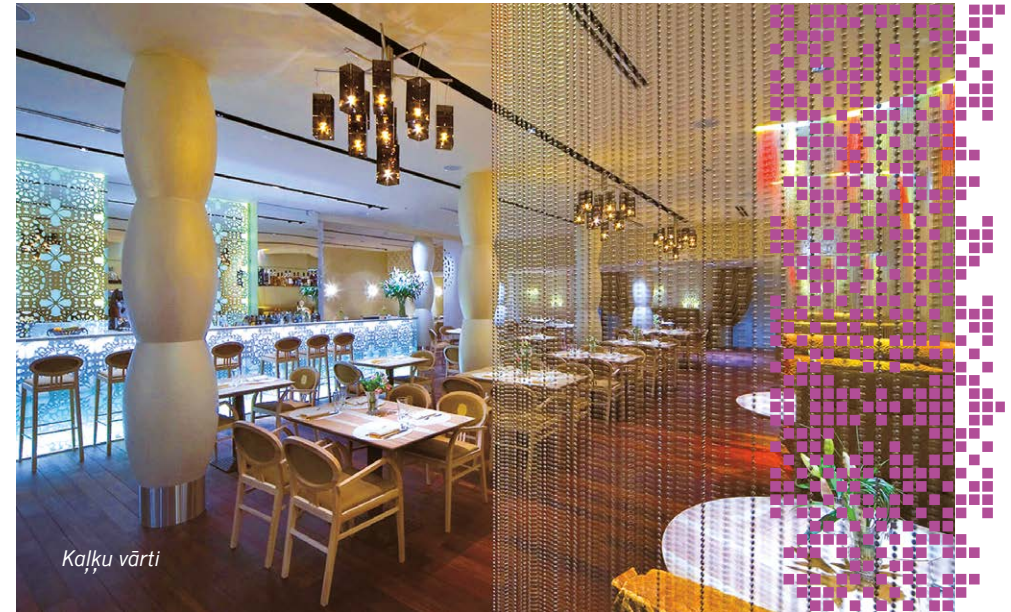


Such local, Latvian food as herring, flounder and trout, pearl-barley and chanterelles, seasonal fruits, vegetables and berries are served under the inspiration of recipes introduced from other countries, both near and far.

Naturally, the real stars in the domain of fine dining are the city's master chefs. One of the best-known virtuosos on Riga's gastronomic scene is Mārtiņš Rītiņš. A passionate pioneer of the Slow Food movement in Latvia, Rītiņš makes a point of using wholesome, seasonal and locally

obtained products, and blending the best Latvian traditions with an inspiration that knows no borders. Many prominent guests have savoured his outstanding cuisine in the restaurant **Vincents**, including Akihito, the Emperor of Japan, Prince Charles and singer Elton John.

In the restaurant **Kaļķu Vārti** gourmet chef Raimonds Zommers is forging a bold, new path for modern Latvian cooking, combining time-honoured traditions with worldly innovation and healthy eating.



Bibliotēka No1 is one of the best restaurants in Riga and the chef Māris Jansons is a true maestro of contemporary Latvian cuisine.

Riga is also a place, where one can still encounter the authentic cuisine of the former Soviet era. One first-rate, Soviet-style Armenian restaurant is located in a former residential flat. One of the very best shashlik eateries in Riga offers superb, skewered meat under the friendly eye of the Georgian proprietor and his family.

Clearly, the ambience that surrounds you while you enjoy your meal is almost as important as the food itself. In this regard, Riga also offers a wide array of venues to choose from.

You may choose to dine on the shortest street in the Old Town, where you will have

no difficulty finding an eating establishment that operates there.

Wine lovers will enjoy the great selection of wines from Europe and New World in the very popular wine bars in Riga – **Garage**, **Vīna Studija** and **Tinto**.

The restaurants with the best postcard panorama of Riga's skyline are located across the river in Ķīpsala. **Fabrikas restorāns** and restaurant **Ostas skati** both offer a great, riverside view of the Old Town and port, with the scene changing continually, depending on the weather, lighting and time of day. Further towards the end of the island, boats, yachts and ships share the horizon with the majestic, old Andrejsala power plant. Ducks, seagulls and other waterfowl add to the charm.

SHOPPING IN RIGA

SHOPPING IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF ANY VOYAGE ABROAD, AS WELL AS A WONDERFUL WAY TO ACQUAINT ONESELF WITH THE PLACE THAT ONE IS VISITING. RIGA HAS A WEALTH OF SMALL, DISTINCTIVE SHOPS THAT OFFER FIRST-RATE SOUVENIRS AND GIFTS, MANY OF THEM MADE RIGHT HERE IN LATVIA BY LOCAL ARTISTS.



Look out for tastefully designed clothing and accessories, stylish jewellery, naturally made eco-cosmetics and contemporary, interior design items such as light fixtures and decorative objects.

Berga Bazārs is a great place to shop, a city within a city in the very centre of Riga. Here you will find various, fine boutiques, galleries, arcades, cafés and restaurants – each with its own, special character. A colorful farmers' market, where only naturally grown, ecological food products are sold, takes place here on the second and fourth Saturday of each month and is

becoming an increasingly popular event.

Riga's vintage stores and antique shops offer a treasure trove of items from a bygone age, including religious icons and Soviet-era relics dating from the 1950's to the 1980's.

One of the best ways to get the feel of the place that you are visiting is by taking a trip to the local market. While a trip to the legendary Central Market is an experience by itself, there are also other, smaller markets in the city where you can take in the lively atmosphere. The markets are



among the best places to obtain such local, gastronomic souvenirs as dark, rye bread, hemp butter, homemade cottage cheese, smoked fish, natural honey and various herbal teas, whose healing properties are held in high regard by the local population.

As a leading European metropolis, Riga has a large number of boutiques that offer a wide selection of clothing and accessories to suit all tastes and price ranges – from the most popular, low - and mid - range designer brands to higher end, luxury brands. During the past few years, factory outlet stores have also opened their

doors, offering French and Italian fashion brand clothing and accessories, as well as more alternative brands for discriminate consumers, at very affordable prices. The city's largest shopping centers carry a wide choice of wares for those in search of clothing, household or interior design items.

Latvian design traditions, like those in Scandinavia, have an extended history. The renewal of Latvia's independence in 1991 was accompanied by an explosion of creative activity in many areas, including fashion and design.

During the past few years, the rest of the world has also begun to notice Latvia's talented designers and innovative brands, which stand out with their originality and high quality.

RIIJA

A place not to be missed is the Latvian design and lifestyle barn RIIJA, a boutique store in the heart of Riga with an eclectic offering of products by Latvian designers ranging from refined washed linen bedding, towels and freestyle clothing to original furniture, tableware and lighting fixtures. A visit to RIIJA is an opportunity to discover products crafted by Latvian designers that are elegant examples of the local lifestyle and will leave you yearning to take them home as authentic gems unique to Latvia. *Tērbatas street 6/8.*

KLASE

Shop KLASE offers Latvian designer clothing, shoes, bags and accessories for ladies, gentlemen and children, distinguished by high quality. Collections are small, most things the shop offers are unique, created in just one copy from natural materials such as linen, silk, cotton, mohair, wool. *Elizabetes street 85a, in Bergs Bazaar.*

HOBBYWOOL

Latvia takes pride in long craftsmanship traditions, including knitting and crochet. Hobbywool offers qualitative wool and hand-made woolen garments and shows that self-made woolen clothing can be stylish and visually attractive and that knitting and crochet are an interesting hobby. *Mazā Pils street 6.*

Green studio PIENENE

Green studio "Pienene" (dandelion) symbolizes the beauty of Latvia and all

that is natural. The shop sells all natural cosmetics produced in Latvia as well as paper design items, pottery from Latgale and porcelain from Piebalga; it is characterized by pleasant atmosphere and tasteful interior design.

Also on offer: dishware made of glass bottles, ecological toys (Oltes Toys, Patte), linen textiles, ecological bedding products from "Orgamint", buckwheat pillows, and much more.

Kungu street 7/9.

AMORALLE

AMORALLE turns a woman into a queen – high quality materials, lace and silk transform into luxurious stockings, underwear and silk nightwear. All accessories are made in Latvia and handcrafted. AMORALLE emphasizes the quality and modernity of its accessories – each model is made very carefully and every year AMORALLE presents several leg wear and nightwear collections.

Brīvības street 71. (SockBox)

ELĪNA DOBELE

Footwear idea cherished by Latvian designers – a design footwear atelier, where original women and men shoes are made in limited edition. The footwear design is not based on endeavors to keep up with the mass fashion trends, but to experiment with the form and color not forgetting comfort of wearing. ELĪNA DOBELE is the first design footwear atelier and label in the Baltic States.

Store ZoFa, Antonijas street 22

HEALTH, WELLNESS, SPA AND BEAUTY SERVICES

ALONG WITH ITS TRADITIONAL TOURIST ATTRACTIONS, RIGA OFFERS A FULL RANGE OF HEALTH, WELLNESS, SPA AND BEAUTY SERVICES FOR THE VISITOR. THIS IS A CITY WHERE YOU CAN EXPERIENCE CHAKRA REBALANCING WITH AMBER CRYSTALS, RELAXING MESSAGES AND WATER THERAPY SESSIONS.



Some spas offer a unique mask treatment with naturally occurring mud that is well known in the Baltic region for its cleansing and revitalizing properties. These restorative and effective spa procedures for the face and the body are tailored to the individual client and provide for a truly enjoyable experience, from which you will feel pleasantly rejuvenated and ready to return to the frenzied pace of everyday life. ESPA Riga and Taka SPA are an excellent choice to enjoy a SPA day in Riga.

Riga also has some of the best hair stylists and beauticians in Eastern Europe, as an increasing number of visitors are discovering.

In the sphere of health tourism, many foreign travelers are opting to have elective procedures conducted in Riga, which is known for its highly qualified specialists and physicians, who routinely perform complex, specialized surgeries such as joint replacement, dental surgery and cosmetic surgery, at affordable rates. Those who are tired of wearing glasses or contact lenses often turn to Riga's critically acclaimed eye clinics, which are among the best in Northern Europe. The medical staff at Riga's private practices is professional and attentive, as becomes high-quality clinics that offer advanced services. Numerous appreciative clients from Scandinavia and elsewhere have returned home happy and satisfied.

BUSINESS TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES IN RIGA

WHY CHOOSE THE LATVIAN CAPITAL TO HOST YOUR NEXT MEETING? QUITE SIMPLY, RIGA IS THE PERFECT FIT. THE CITY IS THE RIGHT SIZE FOR EITHER SMALL BOARD MEETINGS, WITH ONLY A HANDFUL OF COLLEAGUES, OR LARGE CONFERENCES WITH OVER A THOUSAND PARTICIPANTS – ANYONE CAN BE EASILY ACCOMMODATED.

Riga is compact enough to be traversed on foot, minimising travel times, and large enough to offer a variety of options for venues and accommodations. These include not only a wide range of hotels – from classical masterpieces to boutique design hotels – but also many different types of conference facilities, with services available for competitive prices that are far lower than other cities in the region.

This sheer variety is an essential aspect of Riga, and draws thousands of travellers from around the globe every month. These visitors take advantage of the quick and easy connections to Riga, with direct flights from almost a hundred international cities and daily ferry service from Stockholm. In Riga, visitors appreciate the stunning range of architectural styles and the rich, multicultural heritage bestowed by the city's eight-hundred-year history. This has helped turn the modern-day city into a vibrant cosmopolitan capital, home to a variety of residents and a wealth of different features. Your meeting can also benefit from this diversity, as it is possible to organise your board meeting, conference, kick-off event, and gala dinner in settings from various historical periods – from medieval castles in the countryside, to opulent Baroque ballrooms in Old Riga, to Soviet-themed events in historic Communist-era spaces.

Whatever kind of event you choose, Riga's experienced conference experts will help you plan it down to the last detail, be it a gourmet dinner in a country manor or a gala

concert featuring a star musician. Conference facilities in Riga are fully equipped with the latest high-tech equipment, including broadband internet access and first-class catering services. And if you choose, you can even take your conference outside to one of the city's verdant parks and gardens, which feature ample WiFi connections from outdoor access points. In fact, sustainable conferences are Riga's specialty, as it is possible to walk to and from almost all the venues in the city, minimising your carbon footprint, or to stay in an eco-friendly Green-Key hotel, protecting the planet's resources. You can even cater your events with fresh, organic products from the city's farmers' markets, enjoying the full bounty of the Latvian nature.

Of course, you can also appreciate Latvian nature up close, by hosting your meetings or conferences in a rustic settings during any of the region's four distinct seasons. Latvia is filled with glittering blue lakes and swiftly flowing rivers, and has more than five hundred kilometres of pristine coastline. Meetings or conferences can be organised at any of these countryside locations, in any season. And after a long day of meetings, you can take your employees for a seaside picnic to sample local culinary delicacies, or offer a day of fishing or boating in the gulf as a much-deserved break from their everyday routine. These events can then be followed up with a short ride back to Riga and a sumptuous dinner at one of the city's fine gourmet restaurants – a contrast in settings that perfectly exemplifies the diversity of milieus and the variety of offerings that define this fascinating, ever-changing city.

Finding the Right Place

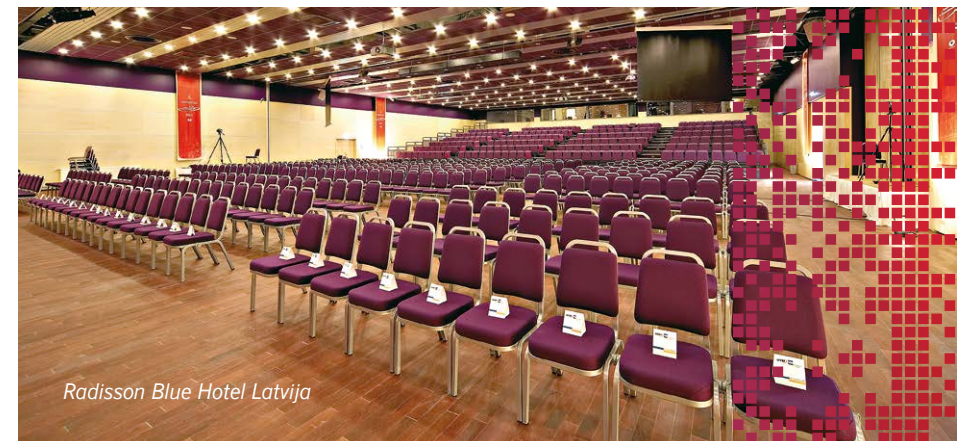
Every meeting planner knows that finding a talented and dependable Destination Management Company (DMC) or Professional Conference Organiser (PCO) is a critical component in the success of an international event. An excellent DMC or PCO must not only offer a full-service operation, but must also have a complete understanding and passion for the destination. A DMC or PCO needs to provide imagination, expertise, creativity, and sometimes influence in order to carry out distinctive and exclusive programmes for meetings, congresses, and conferences.

But what exactly does a DMC do, and how can you find the right onsite partner to act as your "right arm" in Riga, Latvia? Most DMCs provide a wide array of products and services that will meet and, ideally, exceed your delegates' needs. Services cover logistical roles ranging from meet and greet, transportation services, local tours, and day trips to booking of hotels, conference venues, catering companies, AV, florists, customised programmes, theme events, and entertainment. Acting as a cultural liaison, a good DMC can also provide its local knowledge at the registration desk, giving

the planner and delegates an added sense of comfort and security. A PCO takes on the role of coordinator and consultant, and is responsible for logistics and administration in the organisation and preparation of meetings.

There are undoubtedly many advantages to working with a local DMC or PCO. But how do you go about finding a professional organisation with the expertise, adequate infrastructure, and staffing to provide you with exceptional service? Several research options are available to you, such as professional association directories. Most truly professional DMCs or PCOs belong to one of the associations mentioned in the section Service Suppliers – such as MEET RIGA, MPI, ICCA, SITE, and Euomic – or belong to a globally recognised travel management company like American Express Travel, Carlson Wagonlit, HRG, and BCD. According to Latvian legislation, DMCs and PCOs must have a license that is equal to full travel agency services. When searching for a DMC or PCO, check the list of suppliers on our website.

For more information see www.MeetRiga.com



ACTIVE LEISURE FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

ONE OF RIGA'S MOST ATTRACTIVE FEATURES IS ITS PROXIMITY TO SCENIC, UNSPOILED, NATURAL LANDSCAPES. REFRESHINGLY GREEN PARKS AND GARDENS, LUSH, PINE FORESTS AND WHITE, SANDY BEACHES CAN ALL BE REACHED WITHIN A HALF-HOUR FROM THE CITY CENTRE.



There are also plenty of opportunities for active leisure during the winter months, with outdoor skating rinks and cross-country ski trails located right in the city itself. One can even go on horseback riding excursions across the snow-covered fields of Mārupe.

One of the best ways to get a feel of Latvia's capital city is by bicycle. **Baltic Bike's** bicycle rental centres are located in various parts of the city, which makes cycling excursions particularly convenient. You can start your bicycle trip in one part of the city and drop off your rented bike in another.

The massive, forest park named **Mežaparks**, with its fragrant pine trees and numerous footpaths, is a popular recreational destination for pedestrians, cyclists and roller skaters, as well as families with children. Its rural feel can make one easily forget that Riga's city centre is just a few kilometres away. If you don't feel like walking, then you can breeze through the park grounds on a ride vehicle that serves the park's visitors.

A playground, amusement rides, trampolines and toy cars are sure to provide hours of fun for the park's younger visitors, as will the nearby **Riga Zoo**, which



plans to celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2012. Home to some 2500 different animals, the zoo is particularly proud of its four, graceful Rothschild giraffes, which live in one of the most modern giraffe houses in Europe.

Not far away, **Lake Ķīšezers** beckons to those who are fond of swimming and other water sports. You can also explore the shoreline by rowboat.

The Latvian **Open-Air Ethnographic Museum** on the shores of Lake Jugla is one of the oldest in Europe. Open year-round, it offers the visitor a fascinating glimpse of Latvia's cultural and architectural history, as well as a unique trip through centuries past. As you amble through dozens of traditional, farming and fishing homesteads, you can visit a number of craftsmen's workshops and try your hand at weaving or pottery. No trip to the museum is complete without a short ride on the ground's traditional, Latvian wooden swing.

The **Zirgzandales Horseback Riding Centre** provides a radical change of scene for those who have spent the day working in the city. Located only 14 km from the

Old Town, in the Mārupe suburb of Riga, here a genuinely rural setting is entered, which one can enjoy either on horseback, by sleigh or by carriage.

Zirgzandales offers horseback riding excursions to the swamps and peat bogs of Mārupe and Olaine, which are home to the largest colony of migrating cranes in the Riga area. Chances are that you may also spot some of the local wildlife such as deer, fox, rabbit and wild boar along the way.

During the summer months, you have a unique opportunity to see Riga from an unusual point of view by taking a canoe trip along the Riga Canal or Daugava River. The canoe rental facility **Riga Boats** is located in Andrejsala where anyone can hire two-person canoes for a trip on Riga's waterways.

You can also take a scenic boat trip on the **Darling**, which travels beneath 15 bridges. The trip begins at Bastejkalns, a park at the edge of Old Riga near the Powder Tower. Behind the Newlyweds' Bridge is Riga's largest waterfall (not very large, in fact, but pretty all the same), followed by the Freedom Monument, the National Opera and one's first glimpse of the Daugava River

JŪRMALA AND ITS WHITE, SANDY BEACHES

JŪRMALA IS ONE OF THE FINEST RESORT TOWNS IN NORTHERN EUROPE AND CAN BE REACHED IN ONLY 20 TO 40 MINUTES BY ROAD OR BY RAIL FROM THE CENTRE OF RIGA. ITS WHITE, SANDY BEACHES, PINE-COVERED FORESTS, MINERAL SPRINGS AND NATURALLY OCCURRING, MEDICINAL MUD HAS MADE IT A FAVOURITE TOURIST AND SPA DESTINATION SINCE THE LATE 1700's.



The centrepiece of Jūrmala is its legendary beach, a 26-kilometre stretch of pristine, white sand that is bordered by numerous cafes, restaurants, hotels, health spas and private villas. The sandy relief also extends around the city's southern border along the shores of the Lielupe River, where boating, sailing, fishing and other water sports activities take place.

The portion of the beach running through the Jaunkēmeri and Majori sections of the city is Blue Flag certified, meaning that it conforms to strict water and safety standards. It is staffed by lifeguards during the summer season and is equipped with playgrounds, benches, football fields, volleyball courts, pedal boat rental centres and changing stalls. A number of cafes and restaurants are located right by the beach

or within close walking distance. Kite and wind surfers usually gather further west from the city centre at the beach section in Pumpuri.

The Jūrmala beach and its dunes are a great place to relax and sunbathe. The wet, stretch of sand along the waterfront is firm and hard, making it suitable for extended walks and bicycle rides along the seashore.

During the windy spring and autumn seasons, the impressive sight of white-capped waves crashing into the shoreline recalls the untamed forces of nature at work. Once the storms have subsided, amber seekers scour the beachfront in the hopes of finding pieces of this unique, yellowish stone washed up along the coastline. Although there are less visitors to Jūrmala

during the winter months, the city's beach, sand dunes and forests remain a favourite destination for cross-country skiers. Ice sculpture festivals are also occasionally held, and one of the favourite sights at the end of winter, if it has been cold enough, is the huge mounds of ice formations driven to shore by the wind from the sea. In the springtime, the budding willow catkins in the dunes along the beach are suretime harbingers of Easter and the upcoming, summer season.

Jūrmala is well-known for its sanatoriums and spa centres, which offer a number of wellness and health procedures, including hot baths in mud that is locally obtained and said to have healing, medicinal properties.

Architecturally, Jūrmala is home to a great number of beautiful villas built at the turn of the 20th century. Many of these residences were built of wood in the Art Nouveau (Jugendstil) style, including its National Romanticism branch. Various elements of Classicism, Historicism, Functionalism and other architectural styles are also evident. The itineraries for nine, different walking tours of this resort town can be accessed in the Jūrmala city website: www.tourism.jurmala.lv, as well as at the city's Tourism Information Centre on Lienes iela 5.

Jūrmala has long been a favourite vacation spot for those with a creative bent. Many famous authors, poets, painters and composers have spent their summers here, providing an additional impetus to the city's active, cultural scene. Exhibitions of all kinds regularly take place at the Jūrmala City Museum. The Dzintaru outdoor concert hall hosts musical performances all summer long. The New Wave music festival is a major event that draws pop stars from all over the world. The Summertime international music festival is organised by Latvia's most famous opera diva Inese Galante, bringing together an entire pleiade of opera and jazz virtuosos, chamber music singers and instrument soloists. Academic music concerts are regularly held at the Lutheran church in Dubulti, while literature buffs can visit the memorial museum devoted to Latvia's most famous literary couple, the poets Rainis and Aspazija.

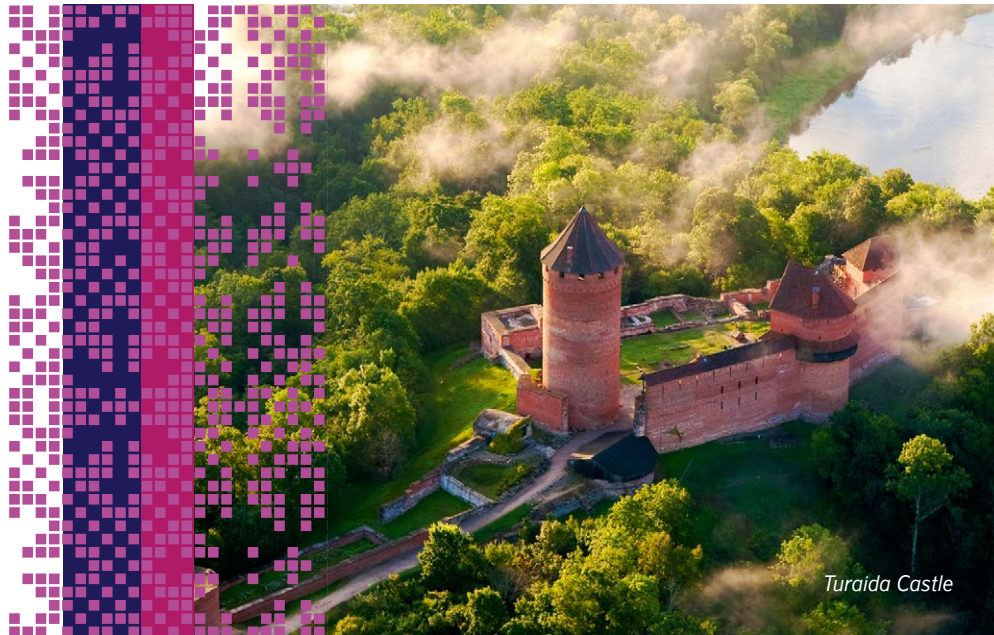
The pedestrian walkway on Jomas iela is lined with stores, restaurants and cafes, and is a popular summer destination. Forest park of Dzintari Dzintaru Mežaparks is an ideal location for family trips, with various facilities, that are particularly suited for children.

As a sports, vacation, recreation, tourism and cultural centre, Jūrmala is a seaside resort that is well worth the visit.



SIGULDA THRILLS

SIGULDA OFFERS BREATHTAKING MOUNTAIN SLOPES FOR THOSE SEEKING ADRENALINE. SIGULDA PLEASURES WITH LONG EXCITING JOURNEYS INTO THE PAST. SIGULDA PLAYS EMOTIONALLY EXCITING MUSICAL EVENTS FOR DIFFERENT TASTES.



Turaida Castle

Situated on both banks of the ancient valley of the Gauja River, Sigulda is one of the most beautiful cities in Latvia. It has enticed visitors from all over the world to see the breathtaking view across the valley with their own eyes and discover the unique attractions that are situated in large numbers at close range all over Sigulda and its surroundings for centuries.

Exciting legends and mighty castles

If you wish to be carried away by history, Sigulda is the right place. Since the time

when the tribes of Balts and Livs fought with the German crusaders, Sigulda has boasted of exciting legends and mighty castles, which are situated in the distance of a cannon shot from each other. Related events unfold the story of the 13th century, when as a result of the collision of interests of the Bishop of Riga and the Order of the Brothers of the Sword, each of the banks of the river Gauja became the possession of a different party. Nowadays **Sigulda castle** tells the story of Livonian Order, but in **Turaida Castle** the most popular museum

in Latvia - **Turaida Museum Reserve** is located with exhibitions, which tell of the events in Latvia and in the Baltic States, starting from the 11th century.

Go explore the nature!

A great part of Sigulda area includes the **Gauja National Park** – biggest and oldest in Latvia. It was established in 1973 in order to protect the flora and fauna biodiversity. If you want to get closer to nature, the Gauja National Park offers exciting routes with a variety of travelling modes. You can go walking, you can ride a bike, and you can choose the boat or go for a Nordic walk and discover the best sights.

Sigulda - a partner of Riga in the status of the European Capital of Culture of 2014

Music likes to revisit here. It is not known whether it is the proximity of the Gauja, intoxicating blossoming of the bird-cherry or all of it together including the time itself that has a calmer pace than

elsewhere, however a wide range of musical performance can be enjoyed in Sigulda.

Capital of adventures

Hosting a wide range of different unique attractions, Sigulda is a capital of adventures. Whether it would be mankind's age-old dream of flying or devotion to the true joys of winter, Sigulda has made every effort to provide exhilarating activities for every traveller. Are you ready for it? Vertical wind tunnel "**Aerodium**", bungee jumping from the cable car, adventure parks, bobsleigh and luge track that are open for tourists and a lot more adventures – only one hour drive from Riga!

www.tourism.sigulda.lv



HOW TO WEATHER THE SEASONS IN RIGA

ONE OF THE MYTHS ABOUT LATVIA IS THAT IT IS EXTREMELY COLD IN WINTER; TOO DAMP AND WINDY IN SPRING AND AUTUMN, RAINY AND COOL IN SUMMER. ALL THAT MAY BE THE CASE, BUT CERTAINLY NOT EVERY YEAR.



Christmas market in Livu Square

We also get mild winters and sweltering summers, long sunny autumns and warm springs. Since we never know what to expect, our life is never dull. It is true that about half of each year is quite dark here, with precious few daylight hours, but then there is summer when the sun hardly goes down at all. Be that as it may, we have learned to adjust and make the best of any

season, any weather, and our festivities – both traditional and recently developed – are of great help throughout the year.

We start the year as people who follow the Gregorian calendar do all over the world: rushing in the **New Year** with a lot of merriment and noise. In recent years, Rigans gather near the Freedom Monument

at the foot of Bastejkalns, which once was part of the city's fortification system, to watch fireworks being shot from its highest point.

Seeing how there is a substantial gap between the winter holiday season and the one that comes in spring, our ancestors in their wisdom devised **Meteņi**, a carnival-like festival that celebrates the end of winter and is remotely related to Mardi Gras, Fasching, and other such festivals elsewhere in the world, albeit much smaller in its scale. In Riga these days, **Meteņi** is primarily celebrated at the Open-Air Museum, where the local folk music bands lead the singing and dancing in an environment that offers a window to the past.

Many Rigans, especially those with small children, return to the Open-Air Museum at **Easter** time when there is more music, singing and dancing as well as the traditional egg rolling competitions, swinging on large wooden swings (to prevent mosquitoes from biting in the summer – an important precaution to take), and the opportunity to peruse local crafts and sample local foods.

Of all the Soviet-era holidays, only one really survives (though unofficially), and that is the **International Women's Day** on the 8th of March, a holiday that **Mother's Day**, observed a couple of months later, has not quite replaced. On this day, one can observe worried-looking men scurrying about with flowers, cakes, and bottles of sparkling wine all purchased in hopes to woo or placate some female being or other. The other time associated with streets virtually blooming with flowers is **1st of September**, the traditional beginning of the school year, when schoolchildren present flowers to their teachers. This, however, does not mean that flowers appear only on

these two occasions. A visit to the “flower row” at the beginning of Tērbatas iela, a place the locals call *Saktas puķu tirdziņš*, will leave you amazed at the sheer number and variety of flowers sold, not to mention the fact that buying and selling is going on twenty-four hours a day, year round. Rigans need their flowers to be always available: flowers are used to complement birthday and house-warming presents, to express love and condolences, to thank someone, to make a statement, or for no reason at all.

As the high point of the Latvian year, when **Jāņi**, or **Midsummer's Night**, rolls around, the flower row is supplemented by a busy market in Dome Square. In addition to wildflowers, which are abundant in late June in Latvian fields and meadows, one can also taste the traditional Jāņi foods: the round caraway cheese, home baked bread, and beer. Men (especially if their name happens to be Jānis, the Latvian equivalent to John) can purchase oak leaf wreaths and women those made of daisies, bluebells, and clover. Wearing these gifts of nature on your head will make you fit right in with Jāņi revellers. In Riga the festival is celebrated in various parks, especially those with some elevation (the better to greet the rising sun around four in the morning) or by a body of water that can beautifully reflect your Jāņi bonfire and allow you to take a refreshing dip in the water at dawn, all part of the ritual.

If not before Jāņi, then as a rule after, the water is warm enough for swimming in the Gulf of Riga as well. Many Rigans exit the city for the summer, some moving just a few kilometres west to Jūrmala, Latvia's prime seaside resort, which is easily accessible by train, taxi, or car. This is the season for picnics and those without summer cottages can find places to make a bonfire and grill some meat practically within city limits.

As the summer draws to a close and schoolchildren and university students start drifting back to the city, Riga celebrates **City Days**, a festival that was launched at Riga's 800th anniversary in 2001 and has gained in popularity ever since. One of the highlights of the festival is the competition among companies in the fireworks business: the prize for the lucky winner is the opportunity to provide fireworks on **18th of November** when Latvia celebrates its independence and statehood, both established in 1918. Prior to this national holiday, Rigans mark the **anniversary of the Latvian armed forces**. This dark November night is less so because of the hundreds and thousands of candles lit alongside the Riga Castle wall and floated down the river. A week later the annual festival of lights is launched

with imaginative displays, many of them the work of professional artists placed throughout the city and illuminating it throughout **Christmas** and New Year's.

As elsewhere in the world, the holiday season really begins in late November as Christmas markets are being set up and large Christmas trees lit throughout the city.

This yearly calendar of seasonal holidays, festivals and celebrations shows how nimbly Rigans accommodate and adjust to the burdens and pleasures of a year that ranges from those dark, inclement conditions of winter to the luscious, bright bounty of spring and summer. With every season marked off by one or more holidays and festivals, a visit any time of year is well rewarded.



Midsummer market in Dome Square

Address List

Arsenāls Exhibition Hall, Torņa iela 1
 Berga Bazārs, the quarter between Marijas iela, Dzirnauvu iela and Elizabetes iela
 Bibliotēka No1, Tērbatas iela 2
 Blachead's House, Rātslaukums 7 (Town Hall Square)
 Brethren Cemetery, Aizsaules iela 1b
 Central Market, Nēģu iela 7
 City Hall, Rātslaukums 1 (Town Hall Square)
 Daile Theatre, Brīvības iela 75
 Dome Hotel & SPA, Miesnieku iela 4
 ESPA Rīga, Baznīcas iela 4a
 Etnographic Open Air Museum, Brīvības gatve 440
 Fabrika restaurant, Balasta dambis 70
 Garage, Elizabetes iela 83/85 Berga Bazārs
 Hotel Bergs, Elizabetes iela 83/85 Bergs Bazaars
 Hotel Neiburgs, Jauniela 25/27
 Kaļķu vārti, Kaļķu iela 11
 Kalnciema iela quarter, Kalnciema iela 35
 kim?, Maskavas iela 12/1
 Latvian Academy of Arts, Kalpaka bulvāris 13
 Latvian Academy of Sciences, Akadēmijas laukums 1
 Latvian National History Museum, Pils laukums 3
 Latvian National Museum of Art, K.Valdemāra iela 10a
 Latvian National Opera, Aspazijas bulvāris 3
 Museum of Occupation of Latvia, Strēlnieku laukums 1 (Raiņa bulvāris 7 during renovation)
 Museum of Art "Riga Bourse", Doma laukums 6
 Ostas skati restaurant, Matrožu iela 15
 Radisson Blu Hotel Elizabete, Elizabetes iela 73
 Radisson Blu hotel Latvija, Elizabetes iela 55
 Riga Art Space, Kungu iela 3
 Riga Castle, Pils laukums 3
 Riga Motor Museum, Eizenšteina iela 6
 Riga Museum of History and Navigation, Palasta iela 4
 Riga Zoo, Meža prospekts 1
 RIJJA, Tērbatas iela 6/8
 St.Peter's Church, Skārņu iela 19
 Taka SPA, Kronvalda bulvāris 3a
 Tinto, Elizabetes iela 61
 The Dome Hotel & SPA, Miesnieku iela 4
 Three Brothers Complex, Mazā Pils iela 19
 Vincents restaurant, Elizabetes iela 19
 Vīna Studija, Elizabetes iela 10 and Stabu 30

Concept and design

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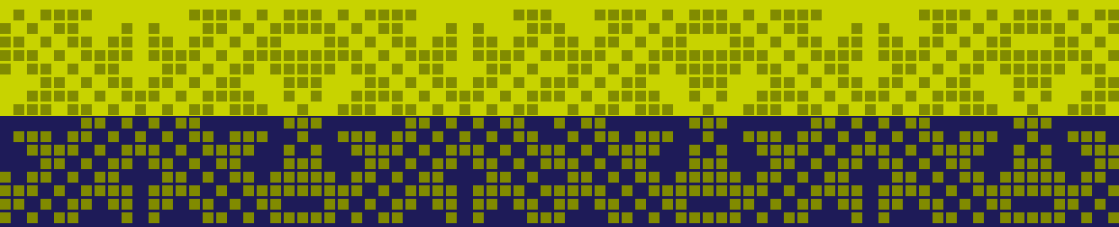
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