Churches

A visit to a church in Latvia is a cultural and historical journey through the centuries, complete with their specific artistic, architectural styles. The varied sacred architecture has been built in places where several faiths coexisted, and each region of Latvia had its individual architectural features.
Churches in Riga

Church steeples - an integral part of the skyline of Riga’s Old Town, are a symbol of the capital of Latvia.

Congregations in Riga and Latvia – Catholics, Lutherans, Orthodox, Baptists, Old Believers.
Most remarkable churches in Riga

- **Riga Cathedral** – the most important church in the capital city, which is rightfully proud of the church organ that is considered one of the most valuable historical organs in the world
- **St. Peter’s Church** has the highest observation tower in the Old Town, 72 metres high
- **St. Jacob’s Catholic Cathedral** – here and in St. Peter’s Church, the first sermons in Riga were read in 1522 that marked the beginning of the Reformation in Latvia
- **Nativity of Christ Cathedral** – the largest Orthodox church in Riga, which during the Soviet rule housed a Centre of Knowledge and a planetarium

During the Soviet period, in order to stymie the importance of faith and religion churches were often used for other purposes, for instance, the **Church of England Congregation of St. Saviour’s** housed a student club, whereas many other church buildings were used as warehouses. By now, all churches in Latvia have had their status restored.

**Roosters on church steeples**

The oldest churches in Riga’s Old Town, the ones closest to the River Daugava, have roosters atop their steeples, not crosses.

There are three explanations for the roosters decorating spires:

- According to pagan traditions, a rooster’s crowing scares the devil away
- In Christian tradition, a rooster symbolises watchfulness and vigilance, and keeping watch out for the Lord
- In practice, roosters were often used as weather vanes, setting the tone for Riga, a port city called by many sailing ships

**Churches in Latgale**

In **Latgale**, there are many Old Believer and Orthodox churches that are so exotic to a Westerner, touching and enchanting by the simplicity and colourfulness of the ancient wooden buildings. Tourists can also learn about the daily lives of **Old Believers at the Slutiski Ethnographic Old Believers’ village**.

**Aglona Basilica** is the key Catholic shrine, bringing together hundreds of thousands of pilgrims every year on August 15, the day of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Built in Baroque style, the church takes great pride in the Our Lady of Aglona’s Miracle icon, which is uncovered only on the most important occasions during religious festivities.
Jersika Revelation of Christ Church is not just the only iron church in Latvia, it is also a “travelling” church. Built at the beginning of the 19th century in Ukraine, Odessa, it was moved to Daugavpils in the 1860s, and has been located in Jersika since the beginning of the 20th century.

Churches in Kurzeme

The Alsunga Saint Michael Roman Catholic Church has been included in the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage as part of Kurzeme’s Alsunga, a community of Catholics in the Lutheran Kurzeme. Since the beginning of the 19th century, Alsunga or Alsvanga has been the main centre of Catholicism in the entire Kurzeme.

The Karosta area of Liepaja, the largest military zone of the Tsarist Russia in the Baltics, is where the magnificent St. Nicholas’s Orthodox Naval Cathedral stands with its impressive gilded domes.

Riga Cathedral

Riga Cathedral is one of the oldest sacred buildings of the medieval period in Latvia and also the Baltics.
Aglona Basilica is the major Roman Catholic shrine of Latvia. Pilgrims flock to Aglona on August 15 each year to celebrate the Assumption...

**Riga St Peter’s Church**

Riga’s tallest church with a tower offering a breathtaking view of the red roofs of Old Town, the modern part of the city, Riga Bay and the...

**Cesis St. John’s Church**

St. John's Church is one of the oldest medieval architectural monuments in Latvia. Church was built in the beginning of 13th century during...

**Riga Nativity of Christ Orthodox Cathedral**
The Riga Nativity of Christ Cathedral is the largest Orthodox church in Riga, which has withstood the Soviet-era as a planetarium and...

St Simon Church in Valmiera

Architecture of St Simon's Church combines the Romanesque and Gothic styles. The church boasts 15th-16th century burial plaques of the...

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