Latgale Culinary Heritage Centre wins EDEN competition

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One of the more recent tourism trends in Latvia is gastronomy. Obviously, this is also the case in other countries too, as increasingly more people these days choose to eat healthy food, preferring fresh and seasonal products. The gastronomy tourist is ready to savour traditional cuisine that often features dishes that are healthy but bland, but sometimes - scrumptious.
Latvia is an excellent choice for this type of tourist. Wherever they go in Latvia, they will experience not just great food, but also the opportunity to find more about it and learn to make a traditional Latvian meal on their own.

This is illustrated by a hefty number of participants in European Destinations of Excellence’s (EDEN) competition: Tourism and Local Gastronomy. The jury travelled to many places in Latvia, and it took quite a while for the members to agree on which competitor was the winner.

Now that has been settled. Emerging as the winner of the Tourism and Local Gastronomy contest in Latvia is Latgale Culinary Heritage Centre (Latgales kulinārā mantojuma centrs). Inese Šīrava, Acting Director at the Latvian Tourism Development Agency, comments: “People have been working on the culinary heritage of Latgale for years now. Both local tourists, and especially foreigners, look for something authentic, characteristic of the given place only. Latgale offers tourists a great chance to acquaint themselves with delicatessen characteristic of the region, and I wish the region every success in continuing with these efforts.”

Visitors to the Latgale Culinary Heritage Centre in Kraslava and elsewhere in Latgale have multiple opportunities to taste the local, homemade bread, hemp butter, traditional smoked lard, fresh cheese, foamy beer and kvas from local breweries, šmakovka – vodka that is only characteristic of eastern Latvia, and much more.

The other remarkably successful participants in the national round of the competition include Liepaja, traditionally known as the city of winds and music, but also known – for several years now – for its special “Liepajas mencins” (Liepaja-style cod). It is made of locally-caught cod, smoked and served with potatoes, onions and cream on special ceramic dishes - an unforgettable experience for the taste buds.

Likewise, the Town of Tukums, proud of its traditional cuisine, was remarkably successful during the competition. Visitors to the city can taste the special Tukums meat rolls, and those romantically-inclined – Tukums Rose cocktail.

Dundaga, a town in Kurzeme due north of Tukums, is known as the birthplace of the sklandrausis, another regional specialty. Sklandrausis is a tart made of unleavened rye dough filled with carrot and potato mash, seasoned with caraway seeds. Sklandrausis has been included in the European Commission’s Traditional Specialty Guaranteed register, and there is no other place in the world where you could eat this tart. Dundaga, another notable entry in the EDEN’s Tourism and Local
Gastronomy competition, will not only treat tourists to sklandrausis, but also demonstrate its preparation.

Yet another successful participant in the competition is Bauska, a town located in Zemgale – the breadbasket of Latvia, known for the various food products it produces. Bauska is home to the brewery Bauskas alus, canned food production, the popular fudge Melna brunete, freshly-squeezed fruit and vegetable juices, and much more. Bauska’s entry for the competition was the Gastronomic Trip through the Centuries. And that is no exaggeration – there is a huge restored castle in Bauska, where you can try some foodstuffs from the Middle Ages. In the vicinity, there are many places where traditional dishes made according to century-old recipes are made, while visitors to Rozmala Mill can bake pies themselves. Bauska is also known among connoisseurs for its contemporary food fare.