

Latvia

European Destinations of Excellence



MAGNETIC
LATVIA



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Introduction

Unspoiled nature is one of Latvia's greatest qualities. The Baltic Sea, fragrant pine forests, tranquil lakes, rolling hills and meandering rivers are all located just a short drive from the capital, Riga. The calmly beautiful landscapes have for centuries served as a place for locals to restore their energy and find inspiration.

In the country's towns and cities you will find architecture ranging from robust medieval castles to quaint wooden cottages, from the plasticity of Art Nouveau to slick glass surfaces. The museums in Latvia will tell you stories about Hanseatic trade routes, the conquests of Swedish and Polish kings, and life behind the Iron Curtain. Having historically developed at the crossroads between the East, the West, and the North, Latvia's cultural landscape is an intricate and unique composition of local customs and foreign influences.

Traditional crafts that are long-lost in other countries thrive in Latvia, and are even honoured and incorporated into modern design practices. Visit a potter's, woodworker's or blacksmith's workshop to learn about each trade, or try your hand at creating something yourself!

Eating local and organic food is not a luxury in Latvia. Markets provide fresh, locally grown ingredients and restaurants serve both traditional and modern takes on local dishes. Each region has its own unique flavours to try.

In this booklet you will find nine outstanding places to visit, all deemed winners of the European Destinations of Excellence award. Welcome to Latvia!

1. Veclaicene Protected Landscape Area



Veclaicene

In Northern Vidzeme, in the hilliest part of Alūksne Upland, lies the Protected Landscape Area of Veclaicene with blue lakes, grassy meadows, and ancient forests. The area includes three separate nature reserves that offer serenity to people and a sanctuary to hundreds of species of rare and protected birds, invertebrates, and insects.

The Korneti–Pelļi Subglacial Ravine is one of the longest and most scenic of its kind in Latvia. It stretches for 26 km and comprises twelve lakes up to 35 m deep. On the northern shore of Lake Pilskalns you'll find the exceptionally steep Drusku Pilskalns (Drusku Castle Mound). Archaeological digs show that people lived here already around 2000 years B.C. The highest point of Alūksne Upland is the hill Dēliņkalns (271,5 m), which has a sightseeing tower built on top.

There are several nature trails of various lengths designated to hiking and cycling, as well as campsites, guesthouses, and local farms that offer organic food – make sure to make reservations in advance. You can also learn about Latvian beekeeping traditions by visiting the Mišu Honey Museum that collects and restores historical apiary equipment and photos. It is advisable to carry an ID, or passport with you at all times when visiting the Veclaicene Protected Landscape Area, as several of the trails cross the Latvian–Estonian border.

The biggest town in the region is the romantic and green Alūksne. Don't miss the narrow-gauge railway museum Alūksne Bānītis Station where visitors can take a virtual train ride in an interactive exhibition.

Veclaicene Tourism Information Point

Korneti village, Veclaicene parish, Alūksne county
+371 64329028; +371 6520232
veclaicene@aluksne.lv
www.veclaicene.lv

Alūksne Tourism Information Centre

Pils iela 25A, Alūksne
+371 64322804
tic@aluksne.lv
www.visitaluksne.lv

2. Cēsis



Cēsis



Cēsis Medieval Castle

Cēsis Tourism Information Centre

Baznīcas iela 1, Cēsis
+371 28318318
info@cesis.lv
turisms.cesis.lv

Exhibition Burning Conscience

Pils iela 12, Cēsis
FB: @sirdsapzinasugunsurs

Over 800 years old, the medieval Old Town of Cēsis has many charming streets and courtyards to discover. The pride and symbol of Cēsis is the well-preserved Medieval Castle, once the mightiest stronghold in Livonia. Together with the adjoining 18th century manor house of Count Sievers they provide a captivating historical exhibition and an exciting opportunity to explore. In the summer season you can try your hand at medieval games or crafts, or walk around in the castle's fragrant herb garden. Just steps from the castle the exhibition Burning Conscience introduces visitors to a more recent history. The exhibition has collected stories of courageous acts of resistance to the Soviet and Nazi totalitarian regimes putting them on display in a former KGB holding cell block.

For a town of such a modest size, Cēsis has a remarkable cultural scene. Its Concert Hall is the musical centre of the Vidzeme region and regularly hosts classical and pop music concerts as well as theatre and dance performances. Every July art connoisseurs gather at the annual Cēsis Art Festival — a month-long celebration of visual arts, music, theatre, and cinema held at locations throughout the town and its scenic surroundings.

The beautiful River Gauja with its steep cliffs, hidden caves, and serene oxbow lakes is within walking distance from the city centre. Walking along the scenic Cīruļīši Nature Trails is the perfect introduction to the natural beauty of the ancient Gauja Valley

Vidzeme Concert Hall Cēsis

Raunas iela 12, Cēsis
www.cesukoncertzale.lv

Cēsis Art Festival

www.cesufestivals.lv

Gauja National Park

www.entergauja.com

3. Līgatne



Vienkoču Park



Līgatne Nature Trails

The history of Līgatne is inseparable from the history of the Paper Mill that was founded there in 1815 and which operated until 2015. In the mid-19th century it was the main manufacturer of quality writing paper in the Russian Empire. Workers at the Paper Mill had excellent living conditions: each family was provided with an individual apartment, free electricity and other amenities. The workers' village has some of the oldest wooden row houses in Latvia and they are still inhabited to this day.

Līgatne is located in the Gauja National Park, an area of outstanding natural beauty and a perfect hiking destination. Climb the hilly Heritage Trail in the centre of Līgatne to see the Paper Mill village and to peek into the storage caves that locals have carved into the sandstone cliffs over the decades. Head to the Līgatne Nature Trails to catch a glimpse of the local wildlife — roe deer, wild boars, bears, foxes, elks, and lynx.

Those interested in woodcraft will find Vienkoču Park a captivating destination replete with sculptures, log boats, and models of historic buildings created by master woodworker Rihards Vidzickis. In the Woodcraft Museum visitors can learn about the history of the craft and partake in workshops.

The history of the Soviet era is told by a well-preserved, nine-metre-deep nuclear bunker with an authentic 1980s atmosphere. You can go on a guided tour, or play a secret agent-themed game here.

Līgatne Tourism Information Centre

Sprīgu iela 2, Līgatne
+371 64153169; +371 29189707
info@visitligatne.lv
www.visitligatne.lv

Līgatne Nature Trails

www.ligatnesdabastakas.lv

Vienkoču Park

www.vienkoci.lv

Secret Soviet Bunker

www.bunkurs.lv

4. Latgalian Pottery



Aglona Basilica



Latgalian Pottery

Voguls Family Ceramics Workshop

Ceplīši, Lendžu pagasts, Rēzeknes novads
www.voguls.lv

Rēzeknes Aprīnķa Pūdņiki (Ceramists of Rezekne Region)

Atbrīvošanas aleja 95, Rēzekne

Daugavpils Clay Art Centre

18. novembra iela 8, Daugavpils
www.dnmm.lv

Latgale is the easternmost region of Latvia with spectacular nature and a diverse culture. Latgalians take pride in their rich craftsmanship traditions, especially pottery. Latgalian ceramics have always been highly valued, and a black, smoke-fired bowl or a vase glazed in green and brown hues can be found in almost every home in Latvia.

Latgalian pottery can serve both a functional, or decorative purpose. The craft of turning pots and bowls has been perfected over thousands of years, and each shape has a distinctive use and a special name. Home decor items are a more recent addition — twisted candelabras, bird-shaped whistles, and decorative, painted plates to hang on the wall have only been made since the 1930s.

Pottery is a craft that is often passed on from one generation to the next, and there are many well-known pottery families in Latgale: Ušpelis, Čerņavskis, Vilcāns, and Paulāns. Many of these, like the Voguls' family ceramics workshop in Ceplīši, welcome visitors by appointment.

Every April, Pottery Days are organised in Rēzekne county and many pottery studios open their doors to visitors. There are also turning and firing demonstrations, masterclasses, exhibitions and markets. Lielais Latgaļu Tirgus (the Big Latgalian Fair) takes place near the ruins of the medieval castle in Ludza every year around Midsummer. There are permanent exhibitions of traditional crafts in history museums and crafts centres in every Latgalian city. The Latgale Art and Craft Centre in Līvāni also displays items produced by the legendary Līvāni Glass Factory.

Latgale Art and Craft Centre

Domes iela 1, Līvāni
www.livanustikls.lv

Ludza Craftsmen Centre

Tālavijas iela 27a, Ludza
www.ludzasamatnieki.lv

5. Jūrmala



Jūrmala



Beach in Jūrmala

Jūrmala Tourism Information Centre

Lienes iela 5, Majori, Jūrmala
+371 67147900
info@jurmala.lv
www.visitjurmala.lv

Ķemeri National Park

www.kemerunacionalaisparks.lv

Jūrmala is a seaside resort with sandy beaches, slender pine trees, and charming wooden architecture. Holidaymakers began flocking to Jūrmala in the middle of the 19th century, and the summer houses they built display the ornate aesthetics of Neoclassicism, Art Nouveau, and National Romanticism.

The city stretches between the River Lielupe and the Gulf of Riga, and a third of its area is forested. Take in the fresh air at Dzintaru Mežaparks (Dzintari Forest Park) where you can climb a 33.5-metre-high lookout tower, go for a hike in the dunes of Ragakāpa Nature Park or watch the sunrise at the Great Ķemeri Bog Boardwalk.

The beach in Jūrmala is over 20 km long and has the finest, whitest sand one could wish for. There are areas for peaceful sunbathing as well as many sports facilities and beach bars. Līvu Akvaparks, the biggest water park in the Baltics, is open all year round.

In addition to its natural and architectural assets, Jūrmala also prides itself on its rich programme of culture and entertainment. The Dzintari Concert Hall is an elegant wooden heritage building that draws top symphony, opera, pop and jazz acts, and is one of the main venues for the Riga Jūrmala Music Festival.

Jomas Iela, Jūrmala's kilometre-long pedestrian boulevard, offers an array of bars, cafés and restaurants to choose from. For an overnight stay, check into one of the city's many spa hotels — medicinal mud baths, mineral water treatments and massages are part of Jūrmala's historical appeal.

Riga Jūrmala Music Festival

www.riga-jurmala.com

Līvu Aquapark

Viestura iela 24, Jūrmala
www.akvaparks.lv

Dzintari Concert Hall

Turaidas iela 1, Dzintari
www.dzintarukonzertzale.lv

6. The Culinary Heritage of Latgale



Kļockas



Shmakovka Museum

Farmstead of Andrupene Museum

Andrupene gemeente, Dagda
FB: @Andrupeneslaukuseta

Aglona Bread Museum

Daugavpils iela 7, Aglona
www.aglona.travel

Latgalians are known not only for their distinctive language, but also for their hospitality. The food here is hearty and plentiful, and unique to the region. Typical Latgalian dishes include “kupāti” — fried sausages, served with sautéed pickled cabbage; “bulbešņiki” or “gulbešņiki” — potato balls with minced meat, carrots or cabbage filling; and “kļockas” or “asuškas” — doughnuts with cottage cheese and cream. The many lakes in Latgale are rich in fish, and oven-roasted perch and pike are a local delicacy.

The Latgale Culinary Heritage Centre in Krāslava unites over thirty regional catering companies, guest houses, and home producers. It also collects traditional recipes and organises farmers’ markets in various locations with home-made cheeses, smoked meats, honey, and herbal teas. Most of the farms in its network offer unique gastronomic experiences to guests, you should, however, make bookings in advance.

The founder of the Aglona Bread Museum, Vija Kudiņa, has collected hundreds of historical breadmaking tools — flails, bread-shovels, or peels, and kneading troughs. She guides her guests through the entire process of making rye bread — from grinding the grains to tasting the warm, freshly baked bread. The strong alcoholic drink “šmakovka” has two museums dedicated to the distillation process— one in Daugavpils and one in Malnava. Both offer tastings and show visitors around the machinery required to produce the beverage.

Latgale Culinary Heritage Centre

Pils iela 6, Krāslava
www.kulinaraismantojums.lv

Shmakovka Museum

Rīgas iela 22a (Vienības nams), Daugavpils
www.smakovka.lv

Latgale Shmakovka Distillery

Kļavu iela 11, Malnava, Kārsavas novads
www.latgalessmakovka.lv

Latgale Region website

www.latgale.travel

7. Liepāja



The Great Amber Concert Hall



Karosta, Liepāja

Liepāja Tourism Information Centre

Rožu laukums 5/6, Liepāja
+371 63480808; +371 29402111
info@liepaja.travel
www.liepaja.travel

Liepāja is a windy port city with an artistic soul on the west coast of Latvia. In the city centre, tall Art Nouveau buildings stand side-by-side with 19th century imperial-style red brick houses, many of them created by the prolific architect Paul Max Bertschy. Cross the unique metal swing bridge over Karostas Kanāls (the Karosta Canal) and you'll find yourself in a formerly restricted military port area with an eerie, yet photogenic, mixture of intricately decorated Russian Empire army barracks, grim Soviet-era apartment blocks, and the golden cupolas of the St. Nicholas Orthodox Maritime Cathedral.

Liepāja's most recent architectural icon is the Great Amber Concert Hall, designed by Austrian architect Volker Giencke. Clad in orange-tinted glass, the Great Amber comprises eight stories with large open interior spaces reminiscent of a cruise ship. The concert hall hosts various classical music, jazz, and pop performances year round, and in September the annual Liepāja Art Forum puts the spotlight on performing arts.

The robust character of Liepāja is best enjoyed on the go — stroll down the Ostas Promenāde (the Harbour Promenade) to watch the colourful fishing boats, or cycle through Jūrmalas Parks (the Seaside Park) to take in the view of the open sea. The many birds of the Liepāja Lake can be conveniently observed from the nature trail on Zirgu Sala (Horse Island).

Liepāja pays close attention to ensure that all the main attractions, including the beach, are universally accessible — tactile paving, maps and signs are available throughout the city.

The Great Amber Concert Hall

Radio iela 8, Liepāja
www.lielaisdzintars.lv

Liepāja Holy Trinity Cathedral

Lielā iela 9, Liepāja
www.trinitatis.lv

Karosta Prison tours

www.karostascietums.lv

8. Kuldīga



Kuldīga

Kuldīga Art House

1905. gada iela 6, Kuldīga

FB: @Makslasnams

Kuldīga Artists' Residence

Pils iela 2, Kuldīga

FB: @kuldigaresidenceev

Visiting Kuldīga feels like travelling back in time. Its romantic cobblestone streets lined with wooden Baroque buildings form an exceptionally well-preserved 17th–18th century ensemble — the only one of this kind remaining in the Baltic states. In the early 17th century Kuldīga (then — Goldingen) was the capital of the Duchy of Courland. The town's long history is explained in an exhibition at the Kuldīga District Museum. One of the museum's floors is designed as the apartment of a wealthy family from the beginning of the 20th century. The surrounding scenery is impressive too — Kuldīga is built next to Ventas Rumba, Europe's widest waterfall. Together with the elegant 19th century brick bridge over river Venta, it is a view to remember!

Enjoy the scenic surroundings while dining at one of Kuldīga's trendy restaurants and cosy cafes that serve delicious meals and snacks. Try "sklandraušī" — the traditional sweet carrot and potato pies that are part of the cultural heritage of the Kurzeme region.

The Kuldīga Synagogue, built in 1875 during the reign of Tsar Alexander II, today serves as a library and concert hall with displays commemorating the local Jewish community. The former prayer house has been transformed into the Art House, where various exhibitions and concerts are frequently held. You can also enjoy visual art exhibitions and design workshops at the Kuldīga Artists' Residence. Every Friday and Saturday evening in the summers, the Goldingen Knight Cinema operates under the night skies in Pilsētas Dārzs (the Town Garden).

Kuldīga Tourism Information Centre

Baznīcas iela 5, Kuldīga

+371 63322259; +371 29334403

tourinfo@kuldiga.lv

www.visitkuldiga.com

Kuldīga District Museum & Goldingen Knight Cinema

Pils iela 5, Kuldīga

www.kuldigasmuzejs.lv

Kuldīga Restoration Centre

FB: @kuldigasrestauracijascentrs

9. Tērvete Nature Park



Tērvete Nature Park

The Nature Park in Tērvete is a magical forest full of adventures and fairy tales for the whole family. Its main natural assets are the picturesque valley of the Tērvete River which has some of the oldest pine trees in Latvia. In the Middle Ages, Tērvete was a mighty stronghold of the Semigallians, who maintained their independence up until the 13th century.

More than a hundred wooden sculptures are located all around the nature park, many based on characters from books by the well-known Latvian writer Anna Brigadere. The fearless Sprīdītis, the dancing ogre Lutausis, the curious Annele, and the Forest King and his court can all be found here. There are many themed areas to visit: the Dwarf Forest with a miniature dwarf town, a large playground and picnic area, the Witch Forest with huge spiders, and a replica of a Semigallian wooden castle. Despite the hilly terrain, many of the paths in the park are accessible for people in wheelchairs, or with prams.

The adventure park Gaisa Takas (Skyways) challenges adventurers of all ages to test their strength and agility on paths built between trees made of rope and wood. The Tērvete Reservoir is rich in carp and offers visitors the opportunity to rent fishing boats and paddleboats. There are also areas designated for swimming here.

To find out more about the life and work of Anna Brigadere, visit the museum dedicated to her in Sprīdīši — the beautiful 19th century countryside home where the writer spent her later years.

Tērvete Nature Park

www.mammadaba.lv

Tērvete Tourism Information Centre

+371 63726212; +371 28309394

tervetetic@inbox.lv

Anna Brigadere Museum Sprīdīši

www.spridisi.lv

About Latvia

BUS

Latvia has an extensive coach transport network with almost all major European and Russian cities. The Riga Coach Terminal is located next to the Central Market. From here, buses depart for all parts of Latvia. The level of comfort and price varies according to individual routes and operators. Some routes are served by minibuses and express buses. Tickets can be bought at the ticket desk inside the station as well onboard for cash if space permits. For tourists convenience there is an information centre located in the main terminal building.

Riga Coach Terminal

Address: Prāgas iela 1, Riga
Bus schedules: www.autoosta.lv , www.1188.lv
Online booking: www.bezrindas.lv, www.buseurope.eu
Information line: +371 90000009 (pay per minute)
Ticket desk opening hours: 6:00 – 22:00

Riga International Airport bus: No.22

Travel time: 30 min (approximately)
Bus schedules, tickets: www.rigassatiksme.lv

Plane

The Riga airport is the fastest growing airport in Europe and offers direct flights to more than 80 cities of the world. The main destinations with approximate flight times are:

Less than 1 hour	1-2 hours	More than 2 hours
Helsinki, Minsk, Stockholm, Tallinn, St. Petersburg,, Tampere, Vilnius, Warsaw	Berlin, Copenhagen, Dusseldorf, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Kiev, Moscow, Oslo, Prague, Vienna	Amsterdam, Barcelona, Brussels, Geneva, Istanbul, London, Manchester, Milan, Munich, Paris, Rome, Tashkent, Tel Aviv

Cycling routes

The bike is a great choice to get to know Latvia. There are three International EuroVelo routes (Euro Velo 10, 11 and 13), five Greenways (routes of non-motorized tourism along former railway tracks), two national and more than 80 regional routes within Latvia.

Eurovelo: www.eurovelo.com
Greenways: www.greenrailways.eu

Ferry

The major ports of Latvia have ferry connections with other ports in the Baltic Sea Region.

Freeport of Riga

www.rop.lv

Ferry lines

Riga–Stockholm: www.tallink.lv
Ventspils – Nynäshamn: www.stenaline.lv
Liepāja – Travemünde: www.stenaline.lv

Latvia also has number of smaller ports, open to those who prefer traveling by yacht. A list of contact information of yacht ports and wharfs: www.seaclub.lv

Car

Vehicles drive on the right-hand side of the road. The speed limit for motor transport in urban areas is 50 km/h, outside urban areas — 90 km/h, some sections 100 km/h. Short-distance lights must be used all year round including daylight hours. Blood alcohol while driving must not exceed 0.2‰. Seatbelts and baby car seats must be used at all times. Non-EU residents entering Latvia by car must have a European Green Card insurance.

Road Traffic Safety Department (CSDD):

www.csdd.lv

Parking in Riga:

www.rigassatiksme.lv, www.europark.lv

Car rentals:

www.sixt.lv, www.avis.lv , www.ambercar.eu

Latvian Automotive Club (LAMB):

www.lamb.lv

Hiking routes

Do not miss the opportunity to walk along the coast of the Baltic Sea while traveling around. The Baltic coastal walking route is the first long-distance walking route in the Baltic countries. The hiking route is part of the E9 and starts at the Lithuanian-Latvian border in the village of Nida in Latvia and ends in the port of Tallinn in Estonia.

European Ramblers Association:

www.era-ewv-ferp.org/latvia

www.latvia.travel

 EnjoyLatvia



With the contribution of
the COSME Programme
of the European Union

Photography: Alūksnes TIC, Baltic Pictures, Aleksandrs Muižnieks, Alex Mazurov, Jānis Bautra, Dreamstime, Garijs Polskis, Valdis Ošiņš, Daugavpils TIC, Kārlis Volkovskis, Jānis Bautra, Valdis Skudre, Sandris Kuzmickis

Cover Photo: Reinis Hofmanis

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