

## Introducing Riga

Although proud Estonians and Lithuanians would certainly beg to differ, Latvia's cosmopolitan metropolis has long been considered the capital of the Baltics. A port of call for crusaders, soldiers, tourists and merchants for the past eight centuries, Riga is much more than the geographical centre of this little-known region. With a population of nearly 800,000 people, it's one of the largest cities in northern Europe although few would ever guess by looking at a map.

News coverage of Riga and Latvia is usually limited to 85-year-old war criminals and the rights of the nation's large Russian minority, but the tide is turning with accession to NATO and the EU around the corner, not to mention its qualification for Euro 2004 football championship in Portugal.

Art nouveau and medieval architecture are always visible, quality restaurants abound and bars and clubs of ten stay open indefinitely as long as you have the cash to keep the taps flowing. Whether it's business or pleasure, Riga has something for everyone and best of all you'll have it all to yourself as even the most intrepid of travellers seldom stray this far from the continent's more travelled tourist routes.

**Restaurants  
Bars  
Clubs  
Sights  
Culture  
Hotels  
Transport  
and a whole host of other useful information**



## Instant Riga



This small .pdf guide has been written to aid the traveller to Riga who doesn't need or want to carry an encyclopedia-sized guidebook around in their pocket. A bold experiment in travel writing, the best (and the worst) bits of Riga have been boiled down and generally condensed into one fun-sized read for the lightweight traveller.

## Alcohol

Latvia has some of the worst rates of alcoholism in the world, but we hope you enjoy a drink in moderation while you're here. The most popular beer by far is Aldaris, but other good brews include Tērvetes, Cēsu, Užavas and Piebalgas. Latvijas Balzams produces a very wide selection of good local liquors. Try their Melnais Balzams (Black Balsam), a potent cure for stomach aches and hangovers.

## Communism

Although Latvia was once an involuntary Soviet republic, visitors should not come to Riga with high hopes of seeing grand statues from that bygone era. Most of these ugly monuments have been removed. A monument dedicated to the Soviet liberation of Riga is located on the other side of the Daugava and is still used as a rallying point for red flag wavers who long for the good old days of repression and steady pensions.

## Health & Safety

The World Health Organisation has listed Latvia as a hot zone for untreatable strains of tuberculosis. Another caution: all tap water should be boiled before consumption. When visiting rural areas one should be aware that cases of tick-borne encephalitis have increased. We advise vaccination against this disease. Unfortunately, muggings have also been on the rise in Riga. After supporting the Latvian economy by buying beer, some local expats have been rewarded by being beaten up and robbed. We hate to heap any extra pressure on the single male or female, but try to avoid going home unaccompanied.

## Money

The national currency, the lat (Ls), replaced the transitional Latvian ruble in April 1993. There are 100 santīmi to the lat, with 1, 2, 5, 10, 20, 50 santīmi and 1 and 2 lat coins. Bank notes come in denominations of 5, 10, 20, 50, 100 and 500 lats. Currency exchange booths are everywhere accepting many foreign bank notes. Major hotels, restaurants and shops accept credit cards and cash machines are also prevalent.

## Visas

Citizens from Andorra, Australia, Bulgaria, Canada, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech, Estonia, EU countries, Hong Kong, Hungary, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malta, Monaco, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Korea, Switzerland, Uruguay, USA and Vatican City do not require a visa to enter Latvia and may stay up to 90 days within a period of six months to one year depending on nationality. For updates visit [www.am.gov.lv](http://www.am.gov.lv). If you wish to stay in Latvia for more than 90 days you need a residency permit. For assistance obtaining residency permits or special visas call the Foreigners' Service Centre of the Citizenship and Migration Board, F-2, Alunāna 1, tel. 721 96 56, [aad@pmp.gov.lv](mailto:aad@pmp.gov.lv), [www.pmp.gov.lv](http://www.pmp.gov.lv). Open Mon, Thu 09:00 - 19:00, Tue, Fri 09:00 - 16:30, Wed 10:00 - 16:30. Closed Sat, Sun.

### Instant Riga

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## Arriving

Arriving in Riga has become rather easy, but there are still things to know. Change money before heading into town, since paying in foreign currency is a sure way to get ripped off. Immediately buy a 2, 3, or 5Ls Lattetekom phone card or a 5 or 10Ls Interkarte prepaid card for all public phonebooths. Places selling phone cards are marked with a *Telekarte* sign.

## By plane

The **airport** (*Iidosta*) is some 8km south-west of the Riga city centre. **Baggage claim** and **customs** are fairly quick. The **currency exchange** (open 06:00 - 22:00) office is on the left side after leaving the sliding doors of the customs area. There is also a Visa/EC/MasterCard cash machine. The **baggage room** is at the end of the hall to the right of the exit. Store luggage for 0.50Ls/day. The hotel reservation desk is in the arrivals hall.

**Getting to town:** A queue of eager taxis will be waiting for you outside the arrivals hall. A typical ride to Old Riga or the city centre should cost no more than 6Ls. Bus N°22 goes to the city centre (Strēlnieku laukums and the train station) every 20 minutes. Express bus N°22A departs for the Orthodox Cathedral on an erratic timeframe. Exit the airport arrivals hall and walk across the parking lot to find the bus stop and schedule. More info at [www.riga-airport.com](http://www.riga-airport.com).

## Tourist information

### City of Riga Information Centre

Rātslaukums 6, tel. 704 43 77, fax 704 43 78, [tourinfo@rc.lv](mailto:tourinfo@rc.lv), [www.rigatourism.com](http://www.rigatourism.com). Open 10:00 - 19:00.



## Riga card

Tourists can purchase the Riga Card, which provides free use of trams and trolleybuses, free admission or discounts at museums, specials on car rental, discounts at restaurants, souvenir shops and much more. The Riga Card also comes with a free copy of *Riga In Your Pocket*, and is available at major hotels and larger travel companies. Prices: 24hrs - 8Ls, 48hrs - 12Ls, 72hrs - 16Ls. Children under 16 half price.

**Riga Card Office** (Tūrisma Travel Agency)  
Lācplēša 29, tel./fax 721 72 17.

## By train

The train station (*centrālā stacija*) underwent massive renovations, and has been modernised with a spacious Central Hall and many shopping and eating options. International trains arrive at platform 2. Follow signs down to the Central Hall (*Centrālā zāle*), under which are pay **toilets** (0.10Ls) and a **baggage room** (0.50-1 Ls/day) with lockers (0.60Ls/day), open 04:30-00:00. **Exchange money** at the currency exchanges (*valūtas maiņas*) or the Parex or the Hansabank in the central hall. There are several bank machines in the terminal. The **information office** is open 08:00 - 20:00. **Getting to town.** You are right beside Old Riga. Turn left when leaving the station and head toward the black spire of St. Peter's Church, the centre of Old Riga.

## By bus

The **bus terminal** (*autoosta*) sits just a few hundred metres from the train station and adjacent to the central market. Open 05:00 - 24:00. There is a **currency exchange** in the ticket hall, open 08:00 - 20:00. Check your bags at the **baggage room** on the left side in the hall. Open 05:30 - 23:00. There is a Visa/EC/Mastercard cash machine in the bus station. **Getting to town.** Tram N°7 stops in front of the bus station; ride it one stop into the centre. To get there by foot, turn left, walk through the underpass and follow the signs 'veerģa-Vaiņņu iela' into Old Riga.

## By ferry

The ferry terminal and yacht harbour lie less than 1km north of Old Riga. **Change money** in the terminal. Open 09:00 - 18:00. **Getting to town.** Take trams N°7, 5 or 9, at the Ausekļa stop two stops to the centre of Riga.

## By car

The situation on Latvia's **land borders** with its Baltic neighbours has slightly improved. Individual cars can jump the queue of waiting lorries, but the crossing still can require up to one hour depending on traffic.

## Hotels

Finding one's place in Riga takes some planning. There seem to be two very distinct options: abundant luxury hotels pamper business travellers and abuse company's expense accounts, while sparse, often in convenient budget housing builds character in backpackers. Those who don't identify with either extreme and long for affordable and central beds will need to book ahead in the high season. Unless noted, prices include breakfast and 18% VAT.

## Cream of the crop

**Grand Palace Hotel Piis 12**, tel. 704 40 00, fax 704 40 01, [grandpalace@schlossle-hotels.com](http://grandpalace@schlossle-hotels.com), [www.schlossle-hotels.com](http://www.schlossle-hotels.com). The regal entrance has seen the likes of Catherine Deneuve and rocker Sting pass through it on their way to some of the most attractive rooms in Riga. All are lavishly decorated in blue, white and gold, and truly are fit for a king. Satellite TV, internet access, minibar, trouser press, safe and full bathroom are all standard, with a fitness centre, sauna and steam room also available. The staff and restaurants are excellent. 56 rooms (60 doubles 126 - 153Ls, 3 junior suites 233Ls, 3 suites 324Ls).

**Hotel de Rome Kalķu 28**, tel. 708 76 00, fax 708 76 06, [reservation@derome.lv](mailto:reservation@derome.lv), [www.derome.lv](http://www.derome.lv). This hotel has all the amenities you could wish for, not to mention unbeatable views and the most central location imaginable. The open lobby area appears to defy the notion that space is limited in the Old City. And even though you have Riga at your fingertips, you don't even have to go outside to enjoy the four-star Otto Schwarz restaurant upstairs. 88 rooms (6 singles 91Ls, 63 doubles 100Ls, 18 suites 125Ls, 1 apartment 500Ls). Special discounts from 15.12.2003 to 11.01.2004.

### Radisson-SAS Daugava

**Kuģu 24**, tel. 706 11 11, fax 706 11 00, [info.riga@radissonsas.com](mailto:info.riga@radissonsas.com), [www.radissonsas.com](http://www.radissonsas.com). Radisson hotels across the globe have a reputation for excellence and Riga's is by no means an exception. Singles and doubles are spacious and include cable TV, minibar and full bathroom. Business travellers can choose business class rooms or suites, which are more spacious and include a few extra perks like two phone lines for internet access and other amenities. Fitness centre, pool and conference rooms available as well as two restaurants. 361 rooms (104 singles 90Ls, 160 doubles 103Ls, 53 junior suites 110 - 122Ls, 31 suites 219 - 756Ls, 13 apartments).

## Upmarket

**Ainavas Boutique Hotel (Landscapes) Peldu 23**, tel. 781 43 16, fax 781 43 17, [reservations@ainavas.lv](mailto:reservations@ainavas.lv), [www.ainavas.lv](http://www.ainavas.lv). This self-proclaimed boutique hotel is completely unique to Riga. Each room single, double or suite is decorated according to the colours, tones and moods of the beautiful Latvian landscape picture hanging over the bed. In addition to inspiring interior design, each room includes a phone, satellite TV with e-mail capabilities, data port and private bathroom with bath. Although one would be hard pressed to find a reason for leaving one's room, guests can also enjoy a drink in front of a roaring fire in the 15th century lobby bar or in the charming courtyard. 21 rooms (4 singles 60Ls, 9 doubles 77Ls, 5 junior suites 87Ls, 3 suites 96Ls).

**Centra Audēju 1**, tel. 722 64 41, fax 750 32 81, [hotel@centra.lv](mailto:hotel@centra.lv), [www.centra.lv](http://www.centra.lv). The refined modern lobby sets the tone for this luxury hotel, and leaves no trace that it used to house a raging nightclub. All rooms sport glamorous high ceilings, and the suites on the 3rd and 4th floors sport glamorous high ceilings. Rooms offer phenomenal views of Old Riga, and are equipped to please the pickiest of guests, with satellite TV, dataport and a general air of understated elegance. 26 rooms (16 singles 50Ls, 14 doubles 60Ls, 5 junior suites 70Ls, 5 suites 80Ls).

**Elizabetes Nams Elizabetes 27**, tel. 750 92 92, fax 750 92 90, [hotel@elizabetesnams.lv](mailto:hotel@elizabetesnams.lv), [www.elizabetesnams.lv](http://www.elizabetesnams.lv). This tastefully appointed restored wooden building in the quiet centre of Riga seems to be an excellent place for the weary traveller to unwind. Each room has different features, so you'll find what you need on one of its three floors. The accent is on wood and light tones and there's also a stylish dining area in the cellar. 19 rooms (8 singles 35-45Ls, 10 doubles 45-55Ls, 1 apartment 85Ls).

### Konventa Sēta

**I-2, Kalēju 9/11**, tel. 708 75 01/708 75 31, fax 708 75 06, [www.konventa.lv](http://www.konventa.lv). With foundations that were once part of the medieval city wall, the Convent Yard stands its ground against Riga's many hotels. A maze of hallways joins the three adjacent buildings, and leads to pleasant, homey rooms that integrate original oak beams in the décor and have satellite TV. Handicapped and non-smoking rooms are also available, and the staff are so sweet, you won't want to leave. 141 rooms (9 singles 46Ls, 108 doubles 55Ls, 14 junior suites 60Ls, 10 suites 70Ls, 62 apartments).

### Metropole

**Aspazijas bulv. 36/38**, tel. 722 54 11, fax 721 61 40, [metropole@metropole.lv](mailto:metropole@metropole.lv), [www.metropole.lv](http://www.metropole.lv). The oldest continuously running hotel in Riga, the Metropole was completely renovated with materials imported from Sweden. The Scandinavian influence is evident in every aspect of the hotel, whether it is the design of the rooms or the cuisine offered in the restaurant. All rooms, smoking and non-smoking, are complete with satellite TV, mini-bar, trouser press, large bathrooms and are tastefully decorated in pleasant pastel colours. Restaurant, conference rooms, sauna and new fitness and business centres. 82 rooms (42 singles from 37Ls, 36 doubles from 44Ls, 4 suites from 75Ls).

**Reval Hotel Latvija Elizabetes 55**, tel. 777 22 22, fax 777 22 21, [latvija.sales@revalhotels.com](mailto:latvija.sales@revalhotels.com), [www.revalhotels.com](http://www.revalhotels.com). The Reval Group has completely transformed this one-time Int-Tourist skyscraper into one of Latvia's premier hotels. All rooms include phone, minibar, hairdryer, climate control and satellite TV through which you can play games and even send e-mail. Business class suites are more spacious and include a few extra amenities. Allergy and smoke-free accommodation is also at your disposal, as well as two bars, a restaurant, shops, conference facilities with simultaneous translation and room service. Don't miss the view from the 26th floor bar or from the 27th floor sauna. 382 rooms (29 singles 69-99Ls, 343 doubles 79-99Ls, 8 triples 89-115Ls, 2 junior suites 95-99Ls).

### Riga

**Aspazijas bulv. 22**, tel. 704 42 22, fax 704 42 41, [info@hotelriga.lv](mailto:info@hotelriga.lv), [www.hotelriga.lv](http://www.hotelriga.lv). One of Latvia's largest hotels, this immense building on the edge of Old Riga recently completed a massive overhaul. All the rooms have been tastefully remodelled with modern interiors and an overall light atmosphere. Non-smoking rooms are available, as well as rooms with internet dataport. A currency exchange, souvenir shop, conference facilities, bar and sauna are all available on the premises. 235 rooms (111 singles 50-60Ls, 107 doubles 65-75Ls, 13 junior suites 85Ls, 4 suites 100Ls).

**Viesturs I-3, Mucenieku 5, tel. 735 60 60, fax 735 60 61, reservation@hotelviesturs.lv, www.hotelviesturs.lv.** Although the modest staff claims it wasn't their original objective, what they've created is nothing short of a boutique hotel. Each room is decorated in a different style with unique lighting fixtures, furniture and even designer sinks and toilets. You can take the lift to your floor, but we recommend the winding stairs so you can fully appreciate the ancient exposed stone walls of this medieval building. Those who can't do without luxury can opt for the suite with a sauna, jacuzzi and private rooftop terrace with fantastic views of Old Riga. All rooms have a phone, minibar and satellite TV. 13 rooms (1 single 47Ls, 11 doubles 57Ls, 1 suite 109Ls)  

## Mid-Range

**Avitar Valdemāra 127, tel. 736 44 44, fax 736 49 88, avitar@apollo.lv, www.avitar.lv.** In designing the place, the owners used four as the magic number—no matter its size, each room has an area for sleeping, eating, relaxing and working. Originally intended to be apartments, most of the large accommodations have two rooms, and amenities like a water kettle, refrigerator, phone, cable TV and private bathrooms with showers. 37 rooms (17 singles 30-44Ls, 17 doubles 40-66Ls, 20 junior suites 50-66Ls, 17 suites 70Ls, 3 apartments 66Ls).   

**Forums Valņu 45, tel. 781 46 80, fax 781 46 82, reservation@hotelforums.lv, www.hotelforums.lv.** This modern hotel located on the edge of Old Riga offers elegantly decorated rooms with dark red and gold upholstered wooden furnishings, satellite TV, writing desk, phone and private bathrooms with bath. Although almost all of the rooms are spacious and comfortable we recommend you splurge on the top-floor suite with its own sauna or the two luxurious rooms with large tiled balconies with views of the city and the river. 30 rooms (23 doubles 37-48Ls, 4 triples 57Ls, 3 junior suites 60Ls).   

**Laine Skolas 11, tel. 728 98 23/728 88 16, fax 728 76 58, info@laine.lv, www.laine.lv.** From the sunny staff to the unique, spacious and colourful interior, Laine is a superb, central find. Most rooms offer satellite TV, minibar and private bathrooms, though the less expensive route is to share showers and toilets. Take in the Riga skyline from newer top floor rooms, or lose yourself in the detailed bathroom tiling. 38 rooms (3 singles 30-40Ls, 9 doubles 40-60Ls, 20 junior suites 35-43Ls, 2 suites 51-58Ls, 4 apartments 50-55Ls).   

## Bed & Breakfast

**Lenz B-3, Lenču 2, tel. 733 33 43, fax 733 13 78, pasts@lenz.lv.** This B&B located in a quiet residential neighbourhood is only a stone's throw from the city's most impressive Art Nouveau buildings and offers bright and spacious rooms within renovated apartments on three floors. Bathrooms are shared and a full kitchen is also available as well as a computer with internet access. 12 rooms (singles 27Ls, doubles 32Ls).

## Hostels

**Old Town Hostel J-3, Kalēju 50, tel. 614 72 14, fax 727 88 09, oldtown@hostel.lv, www.oldtownhostel.lv.** This hostel is the first of its kind in Riga. It's located in the old city only a stone's throw from the bus station and, not less important in our humble opinion, stumbling distance from Riga's best pubs and clubs. Rooms are completely new and they only cost 8Ls per person, which also includes the use of a washing machine on the fourth floor. Showers and toilets have been completely renovated and the beds are brand new and relatively wide. No curfew. (beds in dorm rooms 8-12Ls/ person, doubles 25Ls/room).   

## Getting around

### Car rental

**Baltic Car Lease - Sixt Franchisee Airport, tel. 720 71 21, fax 720 71 31, car.rent@carlease.lv, www.e-sixt.lv.** Open 09:00-18:00, Fri 09:00-17:00. Also on Kalju 28 (Hotel de Rome), tel. 722 40 22. Open 09:00-18:00. Closed Sat, Sun. **National Car Rental Airport arrival hall, tel. 720 77 10; 24-hour service tel. 921 75 35/720 77 09.** Open 09:00-20:30, Sat 11:00-18:00, Sun 11:00-20:30.

### Ferries

**Passenger Terminal Eksporta 1, tel. 720 54 60, Rīgas Jūras Linija Eksporta 3a, tel. 720 54 60, fax 720 54 61, booking@rigasealine.lv, www.rigasealine.lv.** Three weekly ferries sailing to Stockholm on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays or Saturdays. The trip takes roughly 17 hours. Ticket prices currently start from as low as 20Ls in one direction.

### Long-Distance buses

**Bus Station (Autoosta) Prāgas 1, tel. 900 00 09, www.autoosta.lv.** The bus station is open from 05:00-24:00. For information try info counter №1. Some ticket sellers also speak English. Riga is linked to major European cities in the East and West. The bus is quicker and cheaper than the train. The ticket offices sell tickets to all local and some foreign destinations. For buses to Kyiv, Moscow, and Western Europe call the following: **Ecolines Bus station, Prāgas 1, tel. 721 45 12, ecolines@colines.lv, www.ecolines.lv.** Open 07:00-21:30. Also on C-5, Čaka 45, tel. 731 51 92. **Eurolines Bus station, tel. 721 40 80, fax 750 31 34, info@eurolines.lv, www.eurolines.lv.** Open 08:00-23:00, Sun 09:00-23:00. **Nordeka Dzirciema 121, tel. 746 46 20, fax 746 87 02, nordeka@nordeka.lv.**

### Public transport

Riga has eight tram lines, 23 trolleybus routes and 39 bus routes. A ride anywhere in the city costs a flat 0.20Ls. Separate tickets are needed for trams, trolleybuses and buses and can be bought only on the *konduktors* on board. Cards valid for one month of travel can be bought at most kiosks. Trams, trolleybuses and buses run from 05:30 to 24:00. Some routes have a night service every hour. For 0.20-0.30Ls you can take the taksobuss or mikroautobuss, which is a bit more comfortable and heated! Read more about routes and departure times in English on the Tram & Trolleybus Authority's website [www.ttp.lv](http://www.ttp.lv).


### Taxis

All licensed cabs will have special yellow licence plates. For shorter journeys try not to pay more than 1.50Ls. Taxis can almost always be found, day or night, in front of the Hotel de Rome and at the cab stand on Grēcinieku iela off of Strēlnieku laukums. **Rīga Taxi Tel. 800 10 10.** **Rīgas Taksometru Parks Tel. 800 13 13.**


## Restaurants


Pork and potatoes still may reign in Riga, but the last years have brought immense variety to the dining scene. Between genuine sushi bars and real ethnic establishments there are also weaker attempts at exoticism, and prices aren't as low as one would expect in Eastern Europe. Tipping has become more expected, and 10% seems like a fair cut. Figures in brackets indicate the average cost of a main dish only. Here's a list of our favourites in alphabetical order.

**Ai Karamba! Pulkveža Brieža 2, tel. 733 46 72.** This Canadian-owned eatery with the Simpsons-esque Spanish name is the closest thing to an American diner in Riga. You can't help but feel cool sitting here. A bit pricey for a diner, but hey, the ketchup's free! The upstairs features a semi-private chill-out room, and the walls are covered with funky American kitsch. **Open 08:00-24:00, Sun 10:00-24:00. (3Ls) **

**Aragats Miera 15, tel. 737 34 45.** Travel to Yerevan without leaving Riga. Allow David and Lubova to treat you to mouth-watering *hashlama* (mutton and vegetable soup) and delicious shashliks. Your hosts will even chop up your food for you. Don't leave without trying one of its speciality wines or coffees. **Open 13:00-22:00. Closed Mon. (6Ls) **

**Bergs Elizabetes 83/85 (Berga bazārs), tel. 777 09 49.** This is one of the few places in Riga where appetisers in many cases are more expensive than the main courses. But with such offerings as pea, spinach and garlic soup with scallops and 'Bloody Mary' gashpacho with watermelon ice cubes, one can hardly argue with the logic of its pricing policy. As for the atmosphere, it's like dining on a chessboard encased in glass with great views of Riga's trendiest shopping plaza. **Open 12:00-24:00. (5-9Ls) **


**Charlestons Blaumaņa 38/40, tel. 777 05 73.** There's something about Latvian-Canadian food in Riga. They've set up some of the most popular restaurants in town, as is the case with this establishment's owner, Elmārs Tannis. With affordable dishes like real Caesar salad, ribs, and superb pasta, Charlestons is good for impressing friends or treating yourself, especially with international lunch specials for 3.50Ls. Do not attempt to play the piano - it's where they hide the cash. Must be a Canadian thing. **Open 12:00-24:00. (4Ls) **

**Fabrikas restorāns B-2, Balasta dambis 70, tel. 787 38 04.** Amid cobble stone streets and restored 19th century houses and factories you'll find this chic restaurant run by the same people who brought you that staple of fine dining, Melnie Mūki. The menu is excellent and were it not for the spectacular views of the harbour and Old Riga's spires, one might think they've stumbled into a quiet Scandinavian fishing village. **(5-7Ls) **

**Francu Maiznica Basteja bulv. 8, tel. 791 31 77.** Parlez-vous cholesterol? Expat Bernard Larané's French bakery brings kilos of buttery pastries to Old Riga, including the closest thing to a Parisian *pain au chocolat* at this side of the Baltic. Fresh bread, homemade pâté, quiches, strong coffee, and real orange juice also make this boulangerie a favourite retreat. **Open 07:30-20:30, Sun 10:00-19:00.**

**Habibi Peldu 24, tel. 722 85 51.** Laid-back decadence at its best. Kick back on comfy Middle Eastern-style sofas and pillows, smoke from an authentic hookah and watch gorgeous belly dancers do their thing in the evenings. The pipe will set you back several hard-earned lats, but who said decadence comes cheap? Oh yes, they also serve food and drinks. **Open 12:00-24:00. (3Ls)**

## Hundreds of restaurants at [www.inyourpocket.com](http://www.inyourpocket.com)

**Iguana C-4, Elizabetes 85a (Berga Bazārs), tel. 728 50 04.** With its rustic wooden interior, ceiling fans whirring high above, American rock music and complete lack of Euro-design, Iguana could definitely hold its own with restaurants in the States. The cuisine on the other hand is a more complex affair - part BBQ, part international fusion. For example, grilled lamb sausages on a bed of Indian curry-mustard rice. Also serve classics like nachos and salads, not to mention cocktails and beer. **Open 10:00-24:00, Fri, Sat 10:00-02:00. (3-5Ls) **

**Kabuki C-4, Barona 14, tel. 728 20 52.** This trendy sushi bar and Japanese restaurant is so chic it could easily hold its own in San Francisco or New York. Sashimi, and nigiri sushi as well as hand rolls are all available as are rice noodle dishes, soups and main courses. The undecided can grab a seat in the back and pick up whatever catches their fancy as it passes by on the conveyor belt (0.50-2.50Ls/portion). **Open 12:00-24:00. Also on C-5, Terbatas 46, tel. 784 27 28. Open 12:00-22:30. (5-10Ls) **

**Kiploku Krogis (Garlic Bar) Jēkaba 3/5 (entrance from Mazā Pils), tel. 721 14 51.** Tip the wait staff generously, not just because they are courteous, but because they cope with the most offensive smelling things in town. Garlic's potent presence is in everything, from the appetiser plate to the salmon, and even the ice cream. The intimate atmosphere makes it a swell place for a date and the parsley sprigs with the bill will help to sweeten your breath before a goodnight kiss. **Open 11:00-23:00. (3Ls) **

### Latvian cuisine

**Alus Ordenis Raiņa 15, tel. 781 41 90.** Although the food is a bit pricey for Latvian cuisine, the menu does offer some hard-to-find local dishes like *cūku pupas* (bread beans in butter sauce), fried herring and burlis' glands'. All of the standard pork ribs, steaks and other artery clogging delicacies are also served in this charming brick cellar as well as beer in big ceramic mugs. Menus are in English and German, so it will no doubt be a hit with tourists looking for an authentic experience. **Open 12:00-24:00. (2-4Ls) **

**Alus Sēta Tirgoņu 6, tel. 722 24 31.** The most central of the Lido peoples' Latvian theme restaurants has a buffet where you order your chicken or pork shashlik and scoop up heaps of potatoes, Latvian gey peas, sour cream and salad. Have an Uzāvas draught beer or home-brewed Lido ale to wash it all down. **Open 10:00-01:00. (3Ls) **

**Lido Atpūtas Centrs Krasta 76, tel. 750 44 20.** If Paul Bunyon built a log cabin in Latvia it would look like this! Mr. Kirsons of the Lido Empire has outdone him self with the biggest buffet of home cooking in this country has ever seen. Enter the tremendous cellar and discover another restaurant with two bars which serve beer brewed on the premises. Weekends are family days with various activities for the kids including ice-skating and there's live singing and dancing every night from 19:00. Take bus №107a from Abrenes directly or tram №77 or 19 to the Dzeržu street and walk about 10 minutes in the direction of the huge windmill. **Open 10:00-23:00. (3Ls) **

**Staburags Čaka 55, tel. 729 97 87.** If there were such a thing as a Latvian heaven, this place would come a close second. Feat on huge portions of traditional Latvian food in an immense labyrinth of oak-furnished rooms and niches and wash it down with some of the country's best beer. In case you're curious, the ceramic jugs on each table are for bones, not flowers. **Open 12:00-24:00. (3Ls) **

**Kokanda B-5, Bruninieku 12, tel. 731.34.61.** A large gentleman with Central Asian features and a tiny traditional hat atop his head of ten mills about the doorway waiting for guests to arrive at Riga's only Uzbek restaurant. Most Westerners can't pronounce the grill-meat dishes and stews that are served here, so we won't attempt to spell them. In short, the colourful pictures of mosques and exotic landscapes are beautiful and the food is tasty and inexpensive, so why not give it a whirl? **Open 11:00 - 23:00, Sun 12:00 - 22:00, (2 - 3Ls) [€]**

### Melnie Mūki (Black Monks)

**Jāna sēta 1, tel. 721.50.06.** Housed in the brick-walled remnants of a medieval cloister, the Black Monks has quickly become a favourite of the most particular and frugal gourmets in town. The one-time personal chef to the previous president has not only created an amazing menu of dishes from across the globe, he also explains the history of his best recipes and where he acquired them. **Open 12:00 - 02:00, (4Ls) [€]**

**Neo Stacijas iaukums 2 (Central station clock tower), tel. 707.30.73.** Cooler than the Matrix character, this cocktail bar and restaurant in the top floors of the station clock tower offers a funky interior and some of the best panoramic views of the city we've seen. The menu is equally appealing to the eye as a photo accompanies all dishes listed. European cuisine and sushi are on offer and vegetarians will love the selection of meat-free salads and sandwiches. **Open 10:00 - 02:00, (4Ls) [€]**

**Slāvu Restorāns (Slavjanski) Blaumaņa 9, tel. 728.39.74.** Although the interior has a modern feel, there's enough timber to satisfy the most nostalgic *traktīr* (country tavern) enthusiast. Start with Russian tea accompanied by a poppy seed ring covered in jam and a glass of *mors*, a traditional cranberry drink. A multitude of delicious dishes are offered, but we recommend the grilled trout. **Open 12:00 - 23:00, (3Ls) [€]**

**Spotīkač Antonijs 12, tel. 750.59.55.** Although the West usually equates Ukraine with software piracy and mining accidents, in the East it's renowned for its incredible hospitality and its curious love of baconfat. Here you'll get the latter variety. The wait staff sport grins from ear to ear, the food is deliciously authentic and the interior looks like it was stolen from an ethnographic museum. Ask for a shot of *spotīkač* - homemade fruit vodka. **Open 11:00 - 23:00, (3Ls) [€]**

**Sue's Indian Raja Vecpilsētas 3, tel. 721.26.14.** All dishes, like the tandoori and curry, are so veritably Indian, it's almost overwhelming. This is hardly Baltic-modified cuisine, which is why the bill won't be small, but will reflect one of the best dining investments in the city. Although many of them have *Indo* European roots, most locals still shy away, which means you, expats and tourists, will have the peaceful interior all to yourself. **Open 12:00 - 23:00, (6Ls) [€]**

**Vairāk Saules C-4, Dzirnava 60, tel. 728.28.78.** The name means 'more sun', but we prefer the title 'more places like this please.' Although the uniformed staff, colourful menus and interior design give this restaurant a slightly corporate chain feel, the service is genuinely friendly and the food, whether it be pizzas, pastas, turkey breasts or authentic Tyrolean sausages, is fantastic. It also provides a kids' menu for the little ones. **Open 09:00 - 23:00, (2 - 4Ls) [€] [A]**

## Internet cafés

**Dualnet Cafe Peldu 17, tel. 781.44.40.** Drinks of the alcoholic and virgin variety as well as 15 computers for 0.80 - 1.15/hour depending on the time of day. **Open 24hrs, [€]**  
**Skonto Datu Sistēma (Bītkaks) Elizabetes 75, tel. 728.28.76, info@binet.lv.** 0.50Ls for 15min, 2Ls/h, 8 computers, coffee, beer and liquor! **Open 09:30 - 22:00, Sat, Sun 10:00 - 20:00.**

## Cheap & Quick

**Olé Audēju 1, tel. 722.95.63.** If you're expecting bullfights or football enthusiasts, then don't bother coming. If it's Riga's best buffet you're searching for, then pick up a plate and pile it high with sweet and sour chicken, steamed vegetables in Roquefort cheese sauce, aubergine Parmesan and other delicious dishes for under 3Ls. Also open for breakfast. **Olé! Olé! Olé! Open 07:30 - 17:00. Closed Sat, Sun, (2 - 3Ls) [€] [A]**

**Šēpavārs Vilhelms (Chef William) Šķūņu 6.** Help yourself to cheese, meat, potato, banana or plain pancakes, lash them with your cream or a variety of jams and gobble them down seated between walls made to look like lumpy pancake batter. We wonder what weird incident prompted the management to put the 'no shower' and 'no horses' signs on the window. **Open 09:00 - 22:00, Sat 10:00 - 23:00, Sun 10:00 - 22:00, (2Ls) [€] [A]**

## Vincents

**Elizabetes 19, tel. 733.26.34/733.28.30.** A culinary institution in Riga for several years, Vincents has hosted heads of state, captains of industry and stars of the stage and screen from around the world. In addition to an ever-changing menu of delicacies, renowned chef Mārtiņš Rītiņš has also created a separate sushi menu and a two to three course business lunch for 6 - 8Ls. **Open 11:00 - 24:00, (8Ls) [€] [A]**

## Expat watering holes

**A. Suns Elizabetes 83/85 (Berga bazārs), tel. 728.84.18.** This industrial-style, expat favourite in Berga bazārs has practically attained cult status. Always busy and frequently crowded, the proprietors can only be elated as customers wolf down American-style pub grub and countless glasses of beer. A great place for watching big-screen sports or meeting up with friends. **Open 10:00 - 01:00, Fri 10:00 - 03:00, Sat 11:00 - 03:00, Sun 11:00 - 01:00, (3Ls) [€]**

**Dickens Pub Grēcinieku 9/1, tel. 721.30.87, www.dickens.lv.** With this convincing Brit pub, Riga has more in common with London than just grey skies. Here, it's all about foreign businessmen mingling, embassy staff unwinding, and local women looking to improve their English. There's a malt vinegar for your fish and chips, English ales for your thirst, and a real dartboard for practicing your game. **Open 11:00 - 01:00, Fri, Sat 11:00 - 02:00, (2 - 4Ls) [€]**

**Lidojošā Varde (The Flying Frog) Elizabetes 31a, tel. 732.11.84.** A long-time staple in the city, this three-roomed cellar hangout is filled with more than just frogs — though there are lots of them, even in the bathrooms. Build your own burger, chow on unparalleled chicken wings, or go healthy with grilled dishes and salads. There's even a play area for kids and small adults. **Open 10:00 - 24:00, (3 - 4Ls) [€] [A]**

### Salt & Pepper

**13. janvāra 33, tel. 722.68.36.** Originality and good taste are in great abundance in this stylish riverfront restaurant/bar. S&P defies the notion that Old Riga means cramped quarters. A 2Ls breakfast buffet with an unlimited dose of caffeine and an extensive take away menu are major draws. Speak clearly and be specific with your order or you can expect the wait staff to improvise. You can also reserve a table with its own beer tap to avoid the hassle of ordering your next brew. **Open 08:00 - 24:00, Sat, Sun 09:00 - 24:00. [€]**

## Bars

### Editor's pick

**Tim McShane's I-2, Tirgoņu 10, tel. 722.24.38.** The 28 beers on draught may send an already tipsy Irishman reeling, but McShane's has much more to offer than Riga's best beer selection. Overhauled with new local owners, a responsive staff, a respectable menu and an inviting interior, it may have found the right formula for success. It's now large enough to switch between live entertainment, karaoke, and a disco, and offers a non-smoking room. **Open 12:00 - 01:00, Fri, Sat 12:00 - 04:00, (3Ls) [€] [A]**

## Bars & Pubs

### Bar One

**Elizabetes 10b, tel. 733.30.58.** At first glance this bar located in one of the city's most beautiful buildings looks more like a lounge or someone's cellar recreation room, but Bar One is actually Riga's best destination for sports from English Premiership football to American NFL games. As we go to press, it isn't serving food, but we've been promised good pub grub and all day breakfasts soon, so let's keep our fingers crossed. It's also the most likely candidate for the Superbowl. **Open 08:00 - 24:00, Fri 08:00 - 03:00, Sat 11:00 - 03:00, Sun 12:00 - 24:00. [€]**

### Barons Sports Bar

**Barona 108, tel. 729.97.07, www.barons.lv.** Although the only sport Krišjānis Barons excelled at was dodging cow pies while collecting folk songs in the countryside, this Barons pulls out all the stops for the sports enthusiast or at least the people that like to drink and watch sports. Spread out over three floors, this bar offers enough TV sets to keep its patrons' gazes fixed, including a huge screen in the back hall where fans can bet on live matches. Tasty European food is on offer, as well as an expensive domestic and foreign draught beers. **Open 11:00 - 23:00, Fri, Sat 11:00 - 01:00, (3Ls) [€] [A]**

### B-Bārs

**I-1, Doma laukums 2, tel. 722.88.42.** Riga's second Balsams bar is already a hit with the in crowd and with good reason. The stylish brown interior of leather couches and chairs spread out over three rooms is warm and inviting, the cocktails, including the ones made with Latvia's national drink, are among the best the city has to offer and were it not for the chef's apparent affection for oil, the pricey international cuisine would also get top marks. **Open 08:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 08:00 - 03:00. [€]**

### de Lacy's

**I-2, Šķūņu 4, tel. 722.90.45.** Named after an Irishman from County Limerick who fought in wars all over Europe and ended up settling in Livonia, Riga's most recent attempt at an expat pub has strong ammunition against its competitors. Patrons can sip Guinness and Murphy's stout under hanging football, rugby and hurling jerseys and watch Sky Sports on the TV behind the bar. Burgers, steaks, excellent chicken wings and other standard bar food are on offer as well as an Irish breakfast that is now worthy of its name. **Open 11:00 - 01:00, Fri, Sat 11:00 - 02:00, Sun 11:00 - 24:00, (3 - 4Ls) [€]**

**FC Barcelona Antonijas 26, tel. 733.34.95.** A long way from Spain, this bright orange bar across the street from the Skonto stadium lacks paella, but certainly has no shortage of thirsty Latvian football fans. Inexpensive foreign and domestic beer on draught, as well as cheap meals and satellite sports events. **Open 10:00 - 22:00, (3Ls) [€]**

**Jameson Bar Barona 52, tel. 727.60.59.** An orange glow illuminates everything in this tiny bar which would no doubt get on your nerves were it not for the strong cocktails that suppress your sensory overload. The menu is unexpectedly interesting and Jameson and Murphy's Red are readily available making one wonder if this isn't an attempt at an upscale Irish pub a la Temple Bar in Dublin. **Open 10:00 - 01:00, Sun 12:00 - 23:00. [€]**

**Orange Bar Jāna sēta 5, tel. 722.84.23.** The bar that promised to be Riga's new Bohemian retreat is certainly laid back, offering a fairly cheap menu of snacks and mains with clever names. But that's not why people come here. If you can squeeze in through the door on weekend nights then you'll witness a scene more reminiscent of biza than Riga. Beautiful patrons dancing on the tables, champagne bottles in hand, are the norm, not the exception. Finding a seat is near impossible as is a place to leave your coat, but these are small annoyances in the grand scheme of things. **Open 10:00 - 01:00, Fri 10:00 - 05:00, Sat 12:00 - 05:00, Sun 12:00 - 01:00.**

**Paldies Dievam Piektdiena Ir Klāt (Thank God It's Friday) 11. Novembra krastmaļa 9, tel. 750.39.64.** Unlike any other place in Riga, this establishment is more Caribbean than a rum cocktail and has more colour than Austin Powers' wardrobe. Renowned bartender Artis Bīkšis mixes up drinks so tasty it's hard to pace yourself. In case you can't, don't worry, the exotic bikini-clad women dancing on the bar in the evenings are not an illusion. **Open 09:00 - 01:00, Fri 09:00 - 02:00, Sat 09:00 - 04:00, Sun 12:00 - 01:00. [€]**

**Rigas Balzams Torņa 4 (Jēkaba kazarmas), tel. 721.44.94.** Frequented by day by the diplomats and embassy staff who also work in the Jacob's Barracks, this bar/restaurant provides a warm, intimate setting a few steps steep down from the old city wall. Named after the national drink of Latvia, Balzams offers far more than just potent elixirs. The atmosphere is convivial in the evenings, with well-heeled locals having a good time with cocktails made from the bitter black herbal liquor which is actually better than it sounds when mixed with something else. We prefer it with black current juice. **Open 08:30 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 08:30 - 01:00. [€]**

**Runcis (Tomcat) Jāna sēta 1, tel. 722.41.98.** The kind of place where you wish everybody knew your name. It's totally Latvian in its beer, food, and frequenters, who are usually playing chess, playing cards and exchanging anecdotes. If the thought of seeing another tourist makes you queasy, head here to hide. **Open 11:00 - 01:00, Sat, Sun 12:00 - 01:00. [A]**

**Skyline Bar Elizabetes 55 (Reval Hotel Latvija - 26th floor), tel. 777.22.22.** Getting a window seat requires patience and slick moves, but the view of the city from the 26th floor is worth throwing a few elbows. Intimidation will get you nowhere with the staff, however, who are often slow to part with their ample selection of beer and hard stuff. Perhaps it's because they must fight the tide of stunning single women trying to reach the men in suits. **Open 15:00 - 02:00. [€] [A]**

## Pool & Billiards

**Aia Audēju 11, tel. 722.39.57.** A labyrinth of pool tables. 2Ls/h. **Open 13:00 - 03:00.**

**Klondaika Tel. 722.68.88, www.klondaika.lv.** Pool 0.50 - 0.70Ls/game. **Open 09:00 - 06:00.** Also on C-4, Elizabetes 61, tel. 728.63.80. **Open 09:00 - 07:00.**

### Melnais Kaksis

**Meistarū 10/12, tel. 721.10.21.** Pool 2.50Ls/h, snooker 3.50 - 6Ls/h. **Open 09:00 - 07:00.**

**NB Šķūņu 9.** Pool 2.50Ls/h, snooker 3.50 - 6Ls/h. Also on C-5, Čakā 38a (entrance from Gertrudes), tel. 728.44.06. **Open 24hrs.**

## Clubs

From standard bars to more mature music clubs and raging discos, Riga has no problem providing nightlife. The town is small enough to cover on foot, though as the night gets longer, so does the distance between places.

## Favourites

**Bites Blūzs Klubs** Dzirnava 34a, tel. 733 31 25. The dark interior is basic without any trendy trappings, though a real blues club should be. If you're unfortunate enough to miss the live acts, sometimes from as far away as New Orleans, classic performances are often broadcast on the big screen during the day. Even if the blues is just another colour to you, it's worth a visit for the American menu which includes barbecued ribs and pecan pie. Open 12:00 - 01:00, Fri, Sat 12:00 - 02:00. Closed Sun. Admission: Fri, Sat 10 - 15Ls. [G][F]

**Četri Balti Krekli Vecpilsētas 12**, tel. 721 38 85, www.krekli.lv. Ultra-Latvians raised on folk songs and beer find their way to this restaurant/club when they want to hear nothing but familiar rock and quality live performances. Bring a well-versed native to point out famous writers and artists, who often find inspiration under the brick ceiling. White shirts aren't required, but no matter how much you smile at the bouncer, you won't get in wearing trainers. Open 12:00 - 05:00, Sat 17:00 - 05:00, Sun 17:00 - 03:00. Admission: 1 - 5Ls. [G][F]

**La Rocca Brīvības 96**, tel. 750 60 30, peter@partymix.lv, www.larocca.lv. No doubt the largest and liveliest nightclub in the Baltics, this converted theatre provides entertainment for the eyes and ears in the form of techno, spandex garments that barely cover the waitresses' backsides, bartenders who wear paint in place of bras and hundreds of people trying hard to look their best. Surprisingly cheap drinks. Open 22:00 - 09:00, Sun 22:00 - 06:00. Closed Mon, Tue, Wed. Admission: 2 - 5Ls. [G]

## Nautilus

**Kungu 8**, tel. 781 44 77, www.nautilus.lv. Enter the hold of this large submarine to discover a pulsating hotspot. Hit the dance floor, climb the stairs to watch the action or relax on red couches in the chill out room. Waitresses are dressed in sailor suits and there's enough uniformed security to make one wonder if they're actually naval officers. Open 22:00 - 07:00. Closed Mon, Tue, Sun. Admission: 3 - 8Ls. [G]

**PuPu Lounge Mārstaļa 14**, tel. 722 07 32, www.pupu.lv. This funny little place on two levels offers expensive drinks, various nooks to sit, chat and look cool in, and well-endowed waitresses. Actually, the upper female anatomy is thematic of the joint, with the double entendre in the name and menus that open by unhooking a bra clasp. *PuPi* is slang for breasts in Latvian. Open 12:00 - 02:00, Thu, Fri 12:00 - 06:00, Sat 17:00 - 06:00. Admission: Fri, Sat 3Ls. [G]

## Gay Riga

**XXL A. Kalniņa 4**, tel. 728 22 76, xxl@xxl.lv, www.xxl.lv. The name can be a touchy thing for some people — they snicker and don't quite know what to make of it. All one needs to know is that, yes, it is a hip gay club/restaurant, but it also draws a diverse crowd looking only to dance. The art on the walls is appropriately racy, the food is surprisingly satisfying, and it's a great place to take the girls for a night out. Open 18:00 - 07:00. Admission: 1 - 10Ls. [G]

## Editor's pick

**Pulkvedim neviens neraksta (Nobody Writes to the Colonel)** Peldu 26/28, tel. 721 38 86. The only club to play alternative rock and punk classics as well as modern house and drum and bass, the Colonel is the place to go for Riga's hip and arty clubbers. The smoky, dimly lit ground floor is dominated by a circular bar surrounded by thirsty patrons and a small dance floor that ebbs and flows with the music. The surprisingly bright cellar club decked out in pink and yellow is a place that Austin Powers could and does call home. See if you can spot him. Open 16:00 - 02:00, Fri, Sat 16:00 - 05:00. Admission: Wed, Fri, Sat 2 - 3Ls.

**Roxy Kalku 24**, tel. 722 40 41. Although the switch from techno to pop music was a welcome surprise, Pepsi Forum's replacement club hasn't changed much, save its more casual atmosphere and dress code. Hit the dance floor, have a seat on the couches upstairs and on stage, chill out in the bar downstairs or, like most people, scratch your head and wonder why there are so many middle-aged men dancing with very young girls. Open 21:00 - 06:00. Admission: 3 - 5Ls. [G]

**Spalvas Pa Gaisu (Feathers in the Air)** Grēcinieku 8, tel. 722 03 93, www.spalvaspagaisu.lv. Since it opened on the most happening street in Old Riga, the aptly named 'Sinners' Street, Feathers in the Air has been a hit. Featuring cosy shopfront booths (good luck finding a free one) and regular live music, this is where hip sidesters go to see and be seen. Sadly, the wait staff of ten confuse themselves with patrons and expect special treatment. Skip the attitude and go directly to the bar to order. Open 11:00 - 24:00, Wed, Thu 11:00 - 02:00, Fri, Sat 11:00 - 05:00. [G][F]

**Voodoo Elizabetes 55 (Reval Hotel Latvija)**, tel. 777 23 55, www.voodoo.lv. One of Riga's poshest nightclubs is a club, disco, casino and lounge all in one. The small club is packed with wealthy locals and expats, the disco, decked out in African artefacts, is full of stylish 20- and 30-something dancers, the classy casino is equally as lively and the foyer lounge attracts the undecided. Two rules apply: techno music is prohibited and you must be 21 to enter. Open 20:00 - 05:30. Disco open 20:00 - 05:30. Closed Sun, Mon, Tue, Wed. Admission: 3 - 5Ls. [G][F]

## Adult entertainment

**Jockey Club Elizabetes 49**, tel. 722 88 44. The Scandinavian-owned Jockey Club promises adult entertainment for a reasonable price. Naked ladies practice their trade every 20 to 30 minutes, but fully clothed women dance around a pole for your amusement between shows. Private dances range from 10 - 120Ls. An expat favourite. Open 20:00 - 06:00. Admission: 7Ls. [G]

## Casinos & Gaming halls

**Olympic Casino Kuģu 24 (Radisson SAS)**, tel. 706 11 75. Open 24hrs. [G]  
**Tobago Casino Club Aspazijas 22 (entrance from Valju)**, tel. 722 32 22. Ahoy gamblers! Staff dressed in pirate garb man the tables. Open 24hrs. [G]  
**Tower Casino Club Smiļņu 7**, tel. 722 99 50, www.tower.lv. This popular casino is now open again after reconstruction and offers blackjack, American roulette, six-card poker, 'Let It Ride' and 'Poker Club'. Open 24hrs. [G]  
**Tower Voodoo Casino Elizabetes 55 (Reval Hotel Latvija)**, tel. 777 22 85. Roulette, blackjack and everything else you would expect from an authentic casino. Open 24hrs. [G]

## Essential sights

You haven't been to Riga unless you have seen these. It sounds harsh, but that's just so you'll actually go, as these are worth visiting above everything else.

## Essential Riga

**Art Nouveau Architecture (Jugendstil)** Alberta street 2, 2a, 4, 6, 8, 13; Elizabetes 10b; Strēlnieku 4a. Visit the biggest gallery of Art Nouveau architecture by Russian architect Mikhail Eisenstein. A definite must. Some buildings have still not been renovated which makes for a somewhat chaotic clash of modern investment and communist neglect. Of particular interest is the house at Strēlnieku 4a. Built in 1905 it was home to a student hostel from 1953 - 1993. It has since undergone a complete facelift and is now home to the Stockholm School of Economics. Nearly 40% of buildings in the centre of Riga were built in this flamboyant style.

**Dome Cathedral (Doma baznīca)** Doma laukums, tel. 721 34 98. The largest place of worship in the Baltics, measuring 187 x 43m, with walls two metres thick, its organ is one of the biggest (6,768 pipes) in Europe. The drop from Dome Square to the cathedral's base shows how the level of the city has risen in the 800 years since its foundations were laid on the site of a Livonian fishing village. Open 13:00 - 17:00, Sat 10:00 - 14:00. Closed Mon, Sun. Admission: 0.50Ls.

**Open Air Ethnographic Museum (Latvijas etnogrāfiskais brīvības muzejs)** Brīvības gatve 440, tel. 799 45 15/799 41 06. 100 hectares of life as it used to be. Farmsteads, windmills, fishing villages, churches and other historic structures have been moved here and preserved for posterity. Watch craftsmen perform various tasks or try some Latvian cuisine and drink in the tavern. Take bus N°1 from the corner of Meķeļa and Terbatas to the Brīvības muzejs stop. Open 10:00 - 17:00. Admission: 1Ls.

**St. Peter's (Pēterbaznīca)** Skārņu 19, tel. 722 94 26, fax 721 13 75. First mentioned in ancient chronicles in 1209, St. Peter's was a Catholic church until 1523, when it turned Lutheran. Its wooden tower, the highest in Europe at that time, was destroyed several times. It first collapsed in 1666 and was rebuilt a year later. To see how long it would last, the builders hurled a glass from the top: the more pieces the vessel broke into, the greater the tower's longevity. Alas, a pile of straw cushioned the glass' fall and the spire burnt down one year later. Artillery fire destroyed the structure again in 1941. In 1973 it was finally rebuilt and the glass ritual was repeated, this time with smashing results. Open 10:00 - 17:15. Closed Mon. Admission: 1.50Ls for the tower.

**The Museum of the Occupation of Latvia (Latvijas okupācijas muzejs)** Strēlnieku laukums 1, tel. 721 27 15, omf@latnet.lv, www.occupationmuseum.lv. Once a museum honouring the Latvian Red Riflemen, the building now houses a fascinating museum dedicated to the Nazi and Soviet occupations of Latvia. The various exhibits display the atrocities committed against the people of Latvia and the systematic destruction of their nation's sovereignty. Visitors can walk into a reconstructed gulag barracks and catch a glimpse of the intolerable living conditions in Siberian labour camps. One room is dedicated to the struggle for independence ending with September 1991. Exhibits in English, German, Latvian and Russian. You can buy its book in Latvian and English for only 6Ls. Open 11:00 - 17:00. Closed Mon. Free admission.

## Editor's pick

### Central Market (Centrāltirgus)

When construction was completed in 1930, Riga's Central Market was one of the largest and most modern marketplaces on the European continent. The five huge structures, which were used as zeppelin hangars during WWI, were brought to Riga at the behest of the government and Kārlis Ulmanis. Seventy years later, four of the pavilions still serve their original function as meat, fish, produce and dairy markets. The markets spill out beyond the confines of the hangars and operate throughout the day, some longer than others. Open 08:00 - 18:00.



## Places of interest

**Cat House Meistaru 19**. The Cat House is named for two black felines pivoted on the points of its towers. Not only did the beasts cure their first sculptor, he fatally fell while putting them up, but their purpose was to cause trouble. Roughly 100 years ago, the Latvian owner of the building was excluded from the powerful Big Guild across the road by its ethnocentric German occupants. He ordered the cats to be turned around, backside up, as an insult to his enemies. They were turned around and he was admitted to the Guild.

**Freedom Monument (Brīvības pieminekļis)** Brīvības, City Centre, 'Milda', as she is affectionately known, was unveiled in 1935 and is a national shrine for Latvians. Designed by Kārlis Zāle, the friezes around the base of the sculpture depict Latvians singing, working and fighting for their freedom, while the three stars in the maiden's hands represent the three historical regions of the country: Kurzeme, Vidzeme and Latgale. Locals are always placing flowers at the base of the monument, an act for which people were deported to Siberia in Soviet times. The honour guard changes every hour on the hour from 09:00 - 18:00.

### House of Blackheads (Meingalvju nams)

**Rātslaukums 7**, tel. 704 43 00. One of the architectural treasures of Riga, it was just recently rebuilt in honour of the city's 800th anniversary in 2001. Dating from 1344, it was destroyed in 1941. A striking Gothic building with a Dutch Renaissance facade, it was used to house travelling, single members of the merchants' guild. Many of its fantastic riches accompanied Baltic Germans who repatriated to Germany in the late 1930s. The building is now open to the public. Open 10:00 - 17:00. Closed Mon. Admission: 1Ls.

## Soviet Riga



**Latvian Rifleman Monument** Latviesu strēlnieku laukums. This controversial statue in honour of the Latvian Red Riflemen is viewed by some as a symbol of the old communist system. Others believe it is a necessary tribute to Latvians who fought in the early years of WWI. Politics aside, it's quite an impressive statue.

## Culture

Perhaps the best aspect of Riga's cultural life is that world-class performances are very affordable. Latvians hold the opera and theatre in the highest esteem, and make it a point to go often. Local cinema-goers publicly deride Hollywood films yet secretly attend in droves. For more events, check newspapers and fliers all around town.



## Cinemas

**Daile (Baltic Cinema)** Barona 31, tel. 728 38 54, www.baltcinema.lv. Now that Baltic Cinema has opened its mega-movie complex, older Hollywood blockbusters and films that never lose their popularity are shown here in two top-notch halls for dirt cheap prices. (1.40Ls)  
**Coca-Cola Plaza Forum Cinemas (Baltic Cinema)** 13. janvāra 8, www.baltcinema.lv. Forum Cinemas is the second largest cinema complex in Northern Europe. 14 viewing halls with 3200 seats are available to film-goers not to mention the largest movie screen in the Baltic-Scandinavian region (260m<sup>2</sup>). A bar and cafe are also at your disposal. (2.70Ls) [☞](#)  
**K. Suns**

**Elizabetes 83/85, tel. 728 54 11.** Recently renovated with plush seating, K. Suns is now mostly dedicated to films of an arty or European variety. (1.50 - 2.60Ls)  
**Kinogalerija Jauniela 24, tel. 722 90 30.** Small cinema showing arty films and classics. Bring your own refreshments. (1.50 - 1.80Ls)  
**Rīga C-4, Elizabetes 61, tel. 728 11 05.** Riga's first cinema, originally called Splendid Palace, has been completely renovated and its sound system upgraded. Its ornate old world interior makes for an interesting movie venue and its smaller 'new hall' is also state of the art. It's also one of the few cinemas to show films from around the globe as well as box office hits. (2.50Ls; Tue 1.50Ls)

## Concert halls

**Ave Sol**  
**Citadeles 7, tel. 702 75 70.** This small church is good for choir concerts. Note its mosaic symbols.  
**Dome Cathedral**  
**Doma laukums 1, tel. 721 32 13.** The destination for world-class organ concerts. Tickets can be purchased here or in the Wagner Hall, Vāgnera 4.  
**Great Guild Amatū 6, tel. 721 37 98.** Home of the Latvian Philharmonic Orchestra.  
**Small Guild Amatū 3/5, tel. 722 37 72.** Popular venue for small concerts and events.  
**Wagner Hall**  
**Vāgnera 4, tel. 721 08 17.** Named after the composer who once conducted in its halls, it's the place to go for small classical concerts.

## Film rental

A small selection of English-language films on VHS can be bought at most Narvesen stores for about 6Ls. If it says *ieskaņota latviski* you don't want it. If everything is written in Cyrillic you don't want it either. If it says *ar latviešu subtitriem* than buy it before somebody else does. DVD owners can choose from a huge selection of movies for sale and for rent at the shops listed below.  
**DVD Baltija** Bruņinieku 28, tel./fax 731 60 96, SK@riga.mailbox.lv, www.vianets.lv/dvdbaltija. English-speaking staff and a good selection of films. Open 10:00 - 21:00.  
**DVD Centrs** Stabu 53, tel. 731 55 46.  
**DVD Centrs**  
**Skolas 14 (entrance from Lāčplēša), tel. 728 81 78.** Not the best place for new films, it does have a good selection of films older than a year or two. Open 10:00 - 22:00.  
**Videoplanēta** Stacijas laukums 2 (Origo). DVDs and video for sale and for rent. Open 10:00 - 22:00.

## Opera & Other venues

**Opera** Aspazijas bulv. 3, tel. 722 58 03/722 84 96, fax 722 82 40, boxoffice@opera.lv, www.opera.lv. Venue for opera, ballet and international performing artists. Box office: tel. 707 37 77/45. Open 10:00 - 19:00.  
**Bītes Blūzs Klubs** Dzīnavu 34a, tel. 733 31 25. The best place to go for blues concerts with a wide variety of performers from as far away as Memphis and New Orleans.  
**Cetri Balti Krekli** Vēpilsētas 12, tel. 721 38 85, www.krekli.lv. This club is home to 100% Latvian acts like Ainars Mielavs, Pērkons and Autobuss debests.  
**Kalkū Vārti** Kalkū 11a, tel./fax 721 25 75. Upmarket club with concerts by local favourites like Ainars Mielavs and even international super-duper singing sensation of Eurovision fame, Marie N.

## Sports

**Aerobics & Gym**  
**Atlantis Lāčplēša 38, tel. 728 08 70, fax 728 08 67, www.atlantis.lv.** Open 07:00 - 23:00, Sat, Sun 08:00 - 22:00. [☞](#)  
**Centrs Audēju 16, tel. 701 80 00.** Open 07:00 - 22:00, Sat, Sun 09:00 - 22:00. [☞](#)  
**Reaktors Rūpniecības 27, tel. 732 53 48, fax 709 32 99.** Open 07:00 - 23:00, Sat, Sun 09:00 - 20:00.

**Swimming pools**  
**Akvalande Mūkusalas 45/47, tel. 762 97 00.** A 100m long circular pool and waterslides as well as a bar. Adults 3Ls/hour, children under 12 only 2.25Ls/hour.  
**Radisson SAS Daugava Hotel Kuģu 24, tel. 706 11 11.** 6Ls to use swimming pool and sauna fall day.

**Ice-skating**  
**Lido ice rink Krasta 76, tel. 750 44 20.** The Lido Relaxation Centre not only offers a skating rink, but also great Latvian food and beer as well as attractions for the kids. Open 10:00 - 23:00, (adults 0.50 - 1Ls/hour; children 0.30 - 0.50Ls/hour; skate rental 0.50Ls/day)  
**Līvu laukums ice rink Līvu laukums.** Even the laziest Old Riga wanderer can't pass up some ice time in the centre of the city. Open 11:00 - 23:00. (0.70 - 1.50Ls/hour; free of charge before 14:00)

## Useful information

### Dentists

**A+S Health Centre** Lāčplēša 60, tel. 728 95 16.  
**DS Medical Centre** Elizabetes 57, tel. 722 99 42/728 03 52, fax 728 94 13.

### Medical

**ARS** Skolas 5, tel. 720 10 01/720 10 03. English-speaking doctors.  
**Dr. Zālītis Kronvalda bulv. 10-17, tel. 732 26 11/923 16 64.** American paediatrician.  
**DS Medical Centre** Elizabetes 57, tel. 722 99 42/728 03 52, fax 728 94 13, dsmc@navigators.lv.

### Pharmacies

**Lauvas aptiekā** Kalkū 20, tel. 722 65 19. Open 08:30 - 21:30, Sat 10:00 - 18:00, Sun 10:00 - 16:00.  
**Marijas aptiekā** Audēju 16 (Centrs shopping centre-ground floor). Open 08:00 - 22:00.  
**Rudens aptiekā**  
**Gertrīdes 105/1, tel. 724 43 22.** It also delivers non-prescription medicine. Open 24hrs.  
**Tallinas aptiekā**  
**Tallinas 57b, tel. 731 42 11.** Open 24hrs.  
**Vēpilsētas aptiekā**  
**Audēju 20, tel. 721 33 40.** Open 24hrs.

# advertise here

For more information, contact Girts Upenieks  
Tel. (+371) 722 05 80,  
girts@inyourpocket.lv

## 24-hour exchange

**Marika Basteja bulv. 14.** Currency exchange booths (valūtas maiņa) offer normal rates. Torn notes or those with any scribbles are often refused by most banks and exchanges. Also on Brīvības bulv. 30, tel. 728 77 74.

## Key cut & Locksmiths

**Anko C-5, Barona 78, tel. 731 56 27.** Open 09:00 - 20:00, Sat 10:00 - 16:00. Closed Sun. Also on I-3, Audēju 16 (Centrs-ground floor), tel. 701 80 37. Open 09:30 - 21:30.  
**AutoLockMaster Centrs**  
**A-6, Barona 136A, tel. 925 87 77, fax 727 35 10, autoLMC@apollo.lv.** Locked out? They can open apartment, car and safe locks and install new ones. 15Ls per visit. Open 24hrs.

## What to buy in Latvia

If someone back home demands that you 'buy something Latvian' for them look at our list.

### Riga Black Balzams

Originally intended as a cure-all elixir, Balzams has been made and consumed in Riga since the late 18th century and is still used today to alleviate hangovers and stomach-aches and as the main ingredient in many local cocktails. Consisting of over 24 herbal ingredients it is dark brown in colour and sold in charming ceramic jugs. Try it in coffee, with currant juice, local sparkling wine or the more daring can imbibe it neat.

### Latvian folk costumes

Although you can buy generic versions of folk costumes in some souvenir shops, Senā Klets, C-4, Meŗķēja 13, is the only place that offers and can design authentic costumes from any region in Latvia.

### Soviet memorabilia

Many collectors have cashed in on the demise of the Soviet Union by buying up cheap nick-knacks, medals and busts of Lenin. Buy all the red remnants you crave in most antique shops around town.

### Amber

The petrified sap isn't as plentiful as it is in Lithuania or Kaliningrad, but it still washes up on the beach now and again. There are some 20 amber stalls behind St. Peter's church, on Valņu behind Hotel Riga, on Līvu laukums and even more private sellers who will hassle any tourist with inferior quality junk on the streets.

### Latvian national hockey team jerseys

Hockey is without a doubt the most popular sport in Latvia. Local boys have placed in the top eight teams in the World Championship for the past three years and have topped such greats as Russia and the US. For authentic jerseys at about 22Ls a piece go to Hokeja pasaule I-2, Barona 75, tel. 727 14 42. Open 10:00 - 19:00. Closed Sun.

### Art Nouveau in Riga

A new book written by Silvija Grosa that lists the most popular Art Nouveau buildings in and around the city. The book can be compared to a walking guide that takes you through the streets and neighbourhoods that house the most important architectural jewels of this time period. *Art Nouveau in Riga* is available at all Jāņa Rozes bookstores, or at any of the other larger bookshops around Riga for 6.90Ls.

### Laima chocolates

Sweets are always in vogue and the Laima factory has been producing delicious chocolate for decades. The Soviet era saw a slump in quality, but now they're up to snuff again. Laima chocolates are available almost everywhere including the airport.