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OFFICIAL EUROVISION SONG
CONTEST 2003 CITY GUIDE

Spring 2003

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Introducing Riga

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 the looming Eurovision circus in May, of which *Riga In Your Pocket* are proud to announce their status as the official Eurovision 2003 city guide.

Art nouveau and medieval architecture are always visible in Riga. Quality restaurants abound and bars and clubs often 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.

Local time

Riga is in the Eastern European time zone at GMT+2hrs. Daylight saving time falls between the last Sunday of March and the last Sunday of October.

Money

The national currency, the lat (Ls), replaced the transitional Latvian rouble 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, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, EU countries, Hungary, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malta, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland, USA and Vatican City do not require a visa to enter Latvia. Visas are issued for 30 days and extensions will be granted up to a maximum of 90 days in one calendar year. Your visa is valid for Lithuania and Estonia - as long as you do not leave the common Baltic visa space.

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 Lattelekom 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. Those who need to can buy a 10-day visa on arrival at the airport for 12Ls or US\$20. The **currency exchange** office is on the left side after leaving the sliding doors of the customs area. Open 06:00 - 22:00 (Visa cash advance available). There is also a 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 every 20 minutes. 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.

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.

Tourist information

Riga Tourist Information Centres
I-2, Rātslaukums 6, tel. 703 79 00, fax 703 79 10 tourinfo@rcc.lv, www.rigatourism.com. Open 10:00-19:00.
J-3, Bus station, tel. 722 05 55. Open 09:00 - 19:00, Sat, Sun 10:00 - 18:00.



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)
C-4, Lāčplēša 29, tel./fax 721 72 17.

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 'Vecrīga-Vaļņu 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.



Find the Cannon

Mārtiņš Zaprauskis

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 Karambal B-3, Pulkveža Brieža 2, tel. 733 46 72. Rigans may not appreciate most aspects of Americana, but you'd never know it by visiting this hopping diner. Breakfast, grilled cheese, onion rings, and loads of other greasy spoon food appeal to the lively crowd, who should at least admit that Yanks make a mean tuna melt. The ketchup is free: please, remain calm. Open 08:00 - 24:00. (2 - 3Ls)

Aragats B-5, Miera 15, tel. 737 34 45. Travel to Yerevan without leaving Riga. Allow David and Lūbova to treat you to mouth-watering hashlama (mutton & vegetable soup) and delicious shashliks. Your hosts will even chop up your food for you. Don't leave without trying one of their special wines or coffees. Open 13:00 - 23:00. Closed Mon. (6Ls)

Belle Époque I-2, Mazā Jaunavu 8 (entrance from Mazā Monētu), tel. 721 22 80, franton@e-apollo.lv. French Art Nouveau prints set the tone of this casual café behind Hotel Roland. A good place to relax with coffee or wine and the day's paper, Belle Époque offers sandwiches on fresh baguettes, salads and a selection of quiches as well as absinthe for the daring, nostalgic or artistically inclined. If you don't know the difference between Lorraine and Alsace, pictures are provided in the menu. Bon appetit! Open 10:00 - 24:00. (1 - 2Ls)

Da Sergio B-5, Tērbatas 65 (entrance from Matisa), tel. 731 27 77. Although Italian cuisine in Riga has come a long way since the days of spaghetti covered in ketchup, many of the restaurants still lack atmosphere. This establishment not only offers a full menu of authentic Italian dishes and dozens of delicious pizzas, its interior is warm and, what's the word... Mediterranean. Perfect for a family outing or an intimate date. Open 11:00 - 23:00. (2 - 5Ls)

Ei Čarlito C-4, Blaumaņa 38/40 (entrance from Pērses), tel. 777 05 72. Burritos, fajitas, chilli, burgers - they're all here. A little sand and an ocean breeze and you might think you're at a beach bar in Cabo. This colourful Tex-Mex bar and grill that will serve you a mean bloody Mary with tequila, but prohibits the possession of narcotics and atomic weapons. Don't fret. The spicy tortilla chips provided gratis will keep you coming back for more. Open 11:00 - 23:00. (2 - 3Ls)

Fardos I-2, Laipu 6. At first glance the lack of atmosphere and tiny menu doesn't make much of an impression, but don't give up. The shawerma here is the best you'll taste in Latvia and the choice of authentic yoghurt and hot sauces will keep you coming back for more. Open 11:00 - 23:00. (1 - 2Ls)

Habibi J-2, Peldu 24, tel. 722 85 51. This café hopes to become the smoking central of Old Riga. Try the *manti* (extra large dumplings filled with spicy meat) in the front room, or stick the flavoured tobacco in your water pipe and smoke it in back. Live belly dancing Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights from 21:00. Open 12:00 - 24:00. (2 - 4Ls)

Honkonga B-4, Valdemāra 61, tel. 781 22 92. Dishes that are supposed to be spicy actually are—that's reason enough to sing this popular restaurant's praises. Find the expected Chinese meals, red lanterns galore, and wait staff that won't make you feel guilty for spilling hot 'n' sour soup on the crisp tablecloths. Open 10:00 - 23:00. (5Ls)

Kirbis I-1, Doma laukums 1, tel. 949 54 09. Thou shalt not eat flesh right opposite the main doors of Dome Cathedral! Scoop your plate full of salad and excellent vegetarian main courses (all 0.45Ls/100g) and pick up fresh fruit juice to wash it all down at The Pumpkin. Wooden guard rails keep protein-starved carnivores from impaling themselves on the modern chairs. Open 09:00 - 23:00, Sat, Sun 10:00 - 23:00. (2 - 4Ls)

Lotoss (Lotus) I-2, Skārņu 7, tel. 721 26 65. Canadian-Latvian Krissy Pāvelsona seems to know what expats want in a restaurant. Take a seat by the windows and enjoy one of Old Riga's most beautiful vistas and delicious cuisine which includes anything from eggs Benedict to samosas and fillet mignon to classic Rubeen sandwiches. Great for vegetarians. Open 10:00 - 23:00, Fri 10:00 - 24:00, Sat 11:00 - 24:00, Sun 11:00 - 23:00. (2 - 5Ls)

Latvian cuisine

Although your heart may struggle just a bit after a hearty Latvian feast, your stomach will be thankful. *Cūkgaļa* (pork) is standard fare with side dishes like *šķovētie kāposti* (sauerkraut) and *kartupeļi* (potatoes) rounding out a meal.

Alus arsenāls H-1, Pils laukums 4 (entrance from Arsenāla), tel. 732 38 96. Crawl down into the depths of this extensive cellar restaurant for cheap Latvian food and a wide selection of Latvian beer like the excellent Tērvetes pilsner. The unique interior consists of furniture carved out of giant chunks of oak. Open 11:00 - 24:00. (2 - 3Ls)

Alus sēta I-2, 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 grey peas, sour cream and salad. Have an Užavas draught beer or home-brewed Lido ale to wash it all down. Open 09:00 - 01:00. (2 - 3Ls)

Lido atpūtas centrs Krasta 76, tel. 781 21 87. If Paul Bunyon built a log cabin in Latvia it would look like this! Mr. Kirsons of the Lido Empire has outdone himself with the biggest buffet of home cookin' this country has ever seen. Enter the tremendous cellar and discover another restaurant with two bars which serve beer brewed on the premises. Live singing and dancing every night in the cellar from 19:00. Take bus N°107a from Abrenes. Open 10:00 - 23:00. (1 - 3Ls)

Staburags C-5, Čaka 55, tel. 29 97 87. If there were such a thing as a Latvian heaven, this place would come a close second. Feast 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 - 01:00. (2 - 4Ls)

Vērmanītis C-4, Elizabetes 65, tel. 728 62 89. A great place to eat a huge meal for cheap, this restaurant looks like medieval Europe and interwar Latvia collided and produced a unique space decorated with ethnic symbols, stone and stained glass. Bop about to local 'umm-paa-paa' music and help yourself to Baltic cuisine as well as salad and fruit bars on the ground floor and pizza and fast food in the cellar. Great views of the park. Open 08:00 - 23:00. (3 - 4Ls)

Melnie mūki (Black Monks) I-2, Jāņa 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 favourite recipes and where he acquired them. **Open 12:00 - 02:00. (3 - 6Ls)**

Nostālgija I-2, Kaļķu 22, tel. 722 23 38. If you feel that you've been gypped because Riga has shed almost all of its Soviet accoutrements, look no further than this gaudy retro restaurant whose gilded murals glorifying the revolution provide the perfect backdrop for a decent meal of pelmeņi and caviar. Also serves decadent cuisine from the West. **Open 10:00 - 02:00. Disco Thu, Fri, Sat 19:00 - 05:00. (4 - 5Ls)**

Spotikač B-4, Antonijas 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 bacon fat. 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. **Open 11:00 - 23:00. (2 - 4Ls)**

Sue's Indian Raja J-3, Vecpilsētas 3, tel. 721 26 14. All dishes, like the tandoori and curry, are so veritably Indian, it's almost overwhelming. The bill won't be small, but it 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 visitors will have the peaceful interior all to yourself. **Open 12:00 - 23:00. (6Ls)**

Sumo J-2, Kungu 8, tel. 750 32 44. Sample scrumptious sushi, sashimi, tempura and other delicacies from the land of the rising sun accompanied by sake or a Sapporo. Prices are sumo-sized, so avoid financial hara-kiri by sticking with the assorted sushi platter. **Open 13:00 - 23:00. (10 - 12Ls)**

Soraksans I-1, Miesnieku 12, tel. 722 90 68. Authentically decorated with oriental screens and enough paper lanterns to violate several fire safety codes, this restaurant offers more than 40 ethnic dishes at mild prices. On weekdays until 17:00 there is a self-serve buffet with spicy salads. **Open 12:00 - 24:00. (3Ls)**

Slāvu restorāns C-4, Blaumaņa 9, tel. 728 39 74. Although the interior has a modern feel, there's enough timber to satisfy the most nostalgic traktīr (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 sturgeon. **Open 12:00 - 23:00. (2 - 4Ls)**

Cheap & quick

Olē J-2, Audēju 1, tel. 722 95 63. If you're expecting bull-fights 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. **Olē, olē, olē!** **Open 07:30 - 17:00. Closed Sat, Sun. (1 - 3Ls)**

Pelmeņi XL I-2, Kaļķu 7, tel. 722 27 28. The *pelmeņi* (meat dumplings) aren't exactly extra large, but you can fill your bowl and belly with pork, chicken, cheese and vegetable dumplings for under 1Ls. The cheap price, not the taste, draws huge crowds which often queue up outside the restaurant at lunch time. **Open 09:00 - 04:00. Also on (I-3), Audēju 16. Open 08:00 - 21:00, Sat, Sun 10:00 - 21:00. (1Ls)**

Expat watering holes

A. Suns C-4, Elizabetes 83/85 (Berga bazārs), tel. 728 84 18. The Andalusian Dog is proof that an old canine doesn't need to learn new tricks. Loyal expats and locals still cram in day and night, to a tex-mex, burger and beer menu and a boisterous atmosphere that hasn't changed in years. They'll even let you bring your own puppy, who may have to walk you home after all the merriment. There's lunch from 12:00 - 16:00 with more variety, and breakfast, too. **Open 08:00 - 01:00, Thu, Fri 08:00 - 03:00, Sat 11:00 - 03:00, Sun 11:00 - 01:00. (2 - 5Ls)**

Charlestons C-5, Blaumaņa 38/40, tel. 777 05 73. There's something about Latvian-Canadians and food in Riga. They've set up some of the most popular restaurants in town, as is the case with owner Elmārs Tannis. With affordable dishes like real Caesar salad, ribs, and superb pasta, Charleston's 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 08:00 - 24:00. (3 - 6Ls)**

Elkor British Pub J-2, 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 malt vinegar for your fish and chips, English ales for your thirst, and a real dartboard for practicing your game. **Open 11:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 11:00 - 02:00. (2 - 5Ls)**

Lidojošā varde (The Flying Frog) B-3, 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 - 01:00. (3 - 6Ls)**

Vincents B-3, Elizabetes 19, tel. 733 26 34/733 28 30, ritins@vincents.lv, www.vincents.lv. 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. (6 - 12Ls)**

Internet cafés

Dualnet Cafe J-2, Peldu 17, tel. 781 44 40/644 40 10. Drinks of the alcoholic and virgin variety as well as 15 computers for 0.80 - 1Ls/hour depending on the time of day. **Open 24hrs.**

Interneta bistro D-4, Stacijas laukums (in the tunnel under the station), tel. 722 50 43. 12 computers for 0.65Ls/hour. Also offer scanning, printing and video rental. **Open 24hrs.**

Internet kafejnīca (Bilteks) C-4, Elizabetes 75, tel. 728 28 76, info@binet.lv. 0.50Ls for 15min, 2Ls/h. Eight computers, coffee, beer, wine and liquor! **Open 09:30 - 22:00, Sat, Sun 10:00 - 21:00.**

Internet klubs (Vecais kvakers) I-2, Kaļķu 10, tel. 750 35 95, goblin@navigators.lv. No coffee or snacks, but 16 extremely fast computers and games galore. **Open 10:00 - 24:00, Sun 11:00 - 24:00.**

Bars

Editor's Pick

Orange Bar I-2, Jāņa 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 Ibiza 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.**

Best of the rest

Barons Sports Bar

B-5, Barona 108, tel. 729 97 07. Although the only sport Krišjānis Barons experienced 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 TVs 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 inexpensive domestic and foreign beers on draught. **Open 11:00 - 23:00, Fri, Sat 11:00 - 01:00. (2 - 4Ls)**

DECO bārs

C-4, Dzīrmavu 84 (Berga bazārs), tel. 728 92 41, www.zagars.lv. This trendy art deco bar makes for some confusion. Come before 23:00 and you're not quite cool enough. Come after 23:00 and the lines will make you nauseous. Befriend the bouncer and gain access to lively dancing, and a hyper crowd of well-off twenty and thirty-somethings who come because they think it's where they should be seen. **Open 11:00 - 01:00, Fri, Sat 11:00 - 05:00.**

FC Barcelona

B-4, 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. (2 - 4Ls)**

Jautrās māsas I-2, Konventa Sēta, Kalēju 9/11, tel. 722 92 01.

We almost hate to divulge this secret, because its half dozen tables are already full. With its intimacy, art, generous portions and lesser-known Latvian beers, this bar is great for starting an evening with just a few people. Stick to drinks, however, if you're in a hurry as the Jolly Sisters take their sweet time making a meal. **Open 10:00 - 22:00, Sun 10:00 - 18:00.**

Martini's Zemzaru 1, tel. 777 27 79. Although the location on the road to Jūrmala is ridiculously far for the average Rigan, it seems to suit married people who can have a drink with their secret lovers in relative safety. Walk up the Escher-like stairs of the car service to sip cocktails in this trendy bar whose funky walls and furniture have graced the pages of architecture and design magazines throughout the nation. Spend over 50Ls - an easily attainable goal - and they'll pay for your cab home. Great food. **Open 10:00 - 24:00, Sat, Sun 12:00 - 24:00.**

Gay Riga

Homosexuality Info Centre

tel. 727 38 90, gay@gay.lv, www.gay.lv. The knowledgeable authors of this site admit that they haven't as yet been able to translate all of their material, but www.gaybaltics.com covers the three Baltic nations in English.

Rīgas Balzams H-2, Torna 4 (Jēkaba kazarmas), tel. 721 44 94. Watch your head as you descend into the cellar—though you'll probably hit it on the way out. Something about the city's notorious Black Balsam served in dozens of ways lures people in for much too long, and the tasty food doesn't make leaving any easier. Those frightened by the black stuff will find normal cocktails, though they don't have the same medicinal qualities. **Open 12:00 - 24:00.**

Runcis (Tomcat)

I-2, Jāņa 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.**

Sarkans B-4, Stabu 10, tel. 727 22 86,

janis@sarkans.lv, www.sarkans.lv. Red has more to do with the colour of the walls and neon lights surrounding the bar than an unpopular cold war tagline. This ultra modern restaurant and club on three floors serves up a small menu of salads and mains and DJs and dancing on weekends. It's not exactly the place to meet new people, but it's the perfect address for drinks with a group of friends as the whole building is designed as a giant chill out room with plush sofas, relaxing music and of course - cocktails. **Open 10:00 - 24:00, Fri 10:00 - 04:00, Sat 12:00 - 04:00, Sun 12:00 - 24:00.**

Skyline Bar

C-4, 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 16:00 - 02:00.**

Pool & billiards

Ala (The Cave) J-3, Audēju 11, tel. 722 39 57. A labyrinth of pool tables, 2Ls/h. **Open 13:00 - 03:00.**
Bumerangs Mazā Nometņu 30, tel. 762 69 74, www.bumerangs.lv. 3Ls/hr. **Open 24hrs.** Also on C-5, Barona 44, tel. 728 83 39; Dzelzavas 17, tel. 756 02 11.
Klondaika J-2, Grēcinieku 1., tel. 722 68 88, www.klondaika.lv. Pool 0.50 - 0.70Ls/game. **Open 09:00 - 06:00.** Also on C-4, Elizabetes 61 (1st floor), tel. 728 63 80. **Open 09:00 - 07:00.**
Labirints C-4, Tērbatas 2., tel. 709 24 65. 2 tables; 0.60Ls/game. **Open 24hrs.** Also on C-5 Avotu 2, tel. 728 80 73.

Melnais Kaķis (The Black Cat) I-2, Meistaru 10/12, tel. 721 10 21. Pool 2.50Ls/h, snooker 3.50 - 6Ls/h. **Open 09:00 - 07:00.**
NB I-2, Sķūņu 9. Pool 2.50Ls/h, snooker 3.50 - 6Ls/h. **Open 24hrs.** Also on C-5, Čaka 38a (entrance from Ģertrūdes), tel. 728 44 06.

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

Četri balti kreklī (Four White Shirts) J-3, Vecpilsētas 12, tel. 721 38 85, klubs@krekli.lv, www.krekli.lv. Ultra-Latvians raised on folk songs and beer find their way to this 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. Dancing from 21:00. Admission 1 - 5Ls.

Casablanca H-1, Smiļņu 1/3, tel. 721 24 20, www.casablanca.lv. Probably more interesting than the actual city where Bogart drank himself silly, this restaurant/club serves up all of the couscous, falafel and lamb dishes you crave and a funky interior which fills with clubbers and cocktail drinkers in the evening. Open 08:00 - 02:00, Fri, Sat 08:00 - 05:00. Admission: Fri, Sat 1 - 3Ls.

Depo I-2, Valņu 32, tel. 722 01 14, draugs@klubsdepo.lv, www.klubsdepo.lv. Underground music lovers and hip youth, this is the stop where you get off. Well-known groups, DJ's from abroad, garage bands and an alternative crowd all co-exist happily in this club, one of the latest to enter the local rock front. Two large basement rooms play the tunes, and the holding tank on the ground floor doubles as an unexpectedly fine kebab café during the day. Open 21:00 - 03:00, Fri, Sat 21:00 - 05:00. Admission 1 - 3Ls. Café open from 11:00. Closed Sun.

La Rocca B-5, 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 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.

PuPu Lounge J-2, Mārstaļu 14, tel. 722 07 32, www.pupu.lv. Affectionately christened the 'tit bar' by locals, the second endeavour by the owners of Piektdiena, is a place where the same trendy people can not only drink 2Ls beers, but also dance by the bar or upstairs in the small disco hall. The funky interior of half-naked women plastered all over the walls of this club is definitely unique and the scene has greatly improved since the lifting of the 5Ls cover charge. Open 12:00 - 02:00, Fri, Sat 12:00 - 04:00, Sun 17:00 - 02:00.

Casino crackdown

The days of carelessly strolling into a casino a la James Bond are over. A new Latvian law requires all gamblers to show valid identification (passport or driving license) at their casino of choice, without which they will be shown the door, as we were one sad Saturday night.

Editor's Pick

Pulkvedim neviens neraksta (Nobody Writes to the Colonel) J-2, 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 12:00 - 02:00, Fri, Sat 12:00 - 05:00. Admission: Wed, Fri, Sat 1 - 2Ls.

Adult entertainment

Jockey Club C-4, 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.

Klubs 3 J-2, Grēcinieku 22/24, tel. 722 67 50. Full striptease every 15 to 20 minutes. Private dances for 8 - 15Ls and free shuttle service to their other club, Tutti Fruti. A casino is also at your disposal, if you can't bear to look at another naked woman, and you get a 5Ls chip with which to gamble. Open 20:00 - 05:00. Admission: 5-8Ls.

Sezams C-5, Čaka 32, tel. 728 87 81. Just look for the blinking heart sign. The guy at the bar will tell you that they have 'girls non-stop', but they actually only perform every fifteen minutes. The menu includes such interesting titles as 'Lesbi show' for only 40Ls. No-holds-barred entertainment and surprisingly cheap drinks. Open 24hrs. Admission: 10Ls.

Casinos & playhalls

Unlike their Catholic neighbours to the south, Latvians have no qualms about taking peoples' money at any time of the day or night. Although it appears that a casino occupies every corner in the centre of town, many are just depressing slot machine halls that make a Nevada truck stop look charming, perhaps cosy. Those listed below are the best Riga has to offer.

Admirāju klubs J-3, Audēju 12. Also on C-4, Blaumaņa 8. Open 12:00 - 08:00; C-4, Marijas 15. Open 24hrs. Open 11:00 - 02:00.

Aladins C-5, Čaka 32, tel. 728 87 81. Open 24hrs. Bumerangs C-5, Matisa 35, tel. 737 14 48, www.bumerangs.lv. Open 24hrs. Also on C-5, Čaka 38a, tel. 731 19 74; B-4, Dzimavu 45/47, tel. 724 07 33; D-4, Merķeļa 3, tel. 722 32 34; D-4, Train station tunnel, tel. 721 51 25.

Plaza H-2, Valņu 9, tel. 722 25 31. Open 14:00 - 06:00.

Renaissance I-2, Kaļķu 24, tel. 721 23 22/750 30 30. Completely renovated casino on the main drag of Old Riga. Open 18:00 - 06:00.

Tower Casino Club H-2, Smiļņu 7, tel. 722 99 50, 722 99 50, www.tower.lv. Upscale casino with classic games above the Tower restaurant. Open 14:00 - 06:00. **Tower Voodoo Casino C-4, Elizabetes 55 (Reval Hotel Latvija), tel. 777 22 85.** Roulette, Black Jack and everything else you would expect from an authentic casino. Open 24hrs.

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.

Art Nouveau Architecture (Jugendstil) B-3, Alberta street 2, 2a, 4, 6, 8, 13, Elizabetes 10b and Strēlnieku 4a. The biggest gallery of art nouveau architecture by Russian architect Mikhail Eisenstein. A definite must! Some buildings have still not been renovated and it's sometimes possible to venture into the beautiful, yet neglected hallways. Of particular interest is the student hostel from 1953 - 1993. It has undergone a complete facelift and is now home to the Stockholm School of Economics. Nearly 40% of buildings in the centre of Riga are art nouveau.

Dome Cathedral (Doma baznīca) I-1, (Evangelical-Lutheran cathedral), 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 700 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 brīvdabas muzejs) Brīvības gatve 440, tel. 799 45 15/799 41 06. Life as it used to be on 100 hectares. 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 N1 from the corner of Merķeļa and Tērbatas to the Brīvdabas muzejs stop. Open 10:00 - 17:00. Admission: 1Ls.

St. Peter's (Pēterbaznīca) I-2, Skārņu 19, tel. 722 94 26, fax 721 13 75. First mentioned in the 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, has been destroyed several times. It first collapsed in 1666 and was rebuilt a year later. To see how long it would last this time, 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. 1.50Ls for the tower.

The Museum of the Occupation of Latvia (Latvijas okupācijas muzejs) D-3, Strēlnieku laukums 1, tel. 721 27 15, omf@latnet.lv, www.occupationmuseum.lv. Once a museum in honour of 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 their book in Latvian and English for only 6Ls. Open 11:00 - 17:00. Closed Mon. Free admission.

Editor's Pick

Central Market (Centrāltirgus) D-4. 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 H/I-2, Meistaru 19. The Cat House is named for two black felines pivoted on the points of its towers. Not only did the beasts curse 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 piemineklis) H-3, 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 (Melngalvju nams) I-1, 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 Riflemen Monument J-1, Latviešu 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 cinemagoers publicly deride Hollywood films yet secretly attend in droves. For more events, check newspapers and fliers all around town.

Cinemas

Baltic Cinema venues offer discounts (1.60Ls tickets) on film showings weekdays before 17:00.

Daile (Baltic Cinema) C-4, Barona 31, tel. 728 38 54, www.baltcinema.lv. (2.50Ls)

K. Suns (Baltic Cinema) C-4, Elizabetes 83/85, tel. 728 54 11, www.baltcinema.lv. (2.50Ls)

Kino 52 C-5, Lāčplēša 52/54, tel. 728 87 78. (1.80 - 2.20Ls - Thu 1.50Ls)

Kingalerija I-1, Jauniela 24, tel. 722 90 30. (1.50 - 1.80Ls)

Kolizejs C-5, Čaka 67, tel. 727 33 33, www.kolizej.lv. (2.60Ls - Mon 1.60Ls)

Oskars (Baltic Cinema) C-4, Skolas 2, tel. 733 36 43, www.baltcinema.lv. (2.50Ls)

Rīga C-4, Elizabetes 61, tel. 728 11 05. (1.90 - 2.50Ls - Tue 1.20Ls)

Concert halls

Ave Sol C-3, Citadeles 7, tel. 702 75 70.

Dome Cathedral I-1, Doma laukums 1, tel. 721 32 13. Tickets can be purchased in the Wagner Hall, Vāgnera 4 and in the Dome Cathedral.

Great Guild (Lielā ģilde) I-2, Amatu 6, tel. 721 37 98.

Small Guild (Mazā ģilde) I-2, Amatu 3/5, tel. 722 37 72.

Wagner Hall (Vāgnera zāle) I-2, Vāgnera 4, tel. 721 08 17.

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 C-5, Bruninieku 28, tel./fax 737 25 32, lex@zb.lv. Open 10:00 - 20:00. Closed Sun.

DVD Centrs C-4, Tērbatas 28, tel./fax 728 42 02. Open 10:00 - 19:00. Closed Sun.

EMG A-5, Hospitāļu 1/3, tel. 770 22 77. Rent 15 VHS films in English. Open 09:00 - 21:00, Sat, Sun 13:00 - 21:00.

Galleries

Agija Sūna I-2, Kalēju 9, tel. 708 75 43. Open 11:00 - 19:00, Sun 12:00 - 17:00.

Agija Sūna (Stikla dizaina atklātā darbnīca) I-2, Laupe 6, tel. 722 95 29. Open 12:00 - 16:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

Ars Longa I-2, Gleznotāju 5, tel. 728 57 89. Open 11:00 - 18:00. Closed Mon, Sun.

Artists' Union Of Latvia

I-2, 11. Novembra Krastmala 35, tel. 722 89 97. Open 11:00 - 17:00. Closed Sun, Mon.

Bastejs G-2, Basteja bulv. 12, tel. 722 50 50. Open 12:00 - 19:00, Sat 12:00 - 17:00. Closed Sun.

Cīris C-4, Marijas 13/8, tel. 709 22 89. Open 12:00 - 19:00, Sat 11:00 - 18:00. Closed Sun.

Daugava J-2, Alksnāja 10/12, tel. 721 28 96. Open 11:00 - 18:00.

Dekoratīvi Lietišķās Mākslas Muzejs I-2, Skārņu 10/20, tel. 722 22 35/722 78 33. Open 11:00 - 17:00. Closed Mon.

Marta Krasta I-2, Kalēju 21, tel. 722 10 03. Open 11:00 - 17:00. Closed Sun.

Noktirne I-2, Amatu 6, tel. 721 00 73. Open 11:00 - 19:00.

Rīgas Galerija I-3, Aspazijas bulv. 20, tel. 722 58 87. Open 12:00 - 19:00. Closed Sun.

Opera & theatres

Daile Theatre (Dailes teātris) B-4, Brīvības 75, tel. 727 02 78.

New Rīga Theatre (Rīgas jaunais teātris) C-5, Lāčplēša 25, tel. 728 07 65, www.jrt.lv.

Opera I-3, Aspazijas bulv. 3, tel. 722 58 03/722 84 96, fax 722 82 40, boxoffice@opera.lv, www.opera.lv.

Tickets range from 2 - 30Ls. Box office: tel. 707 37 77/45. Open 10:00 - 19:00.

Rīgas kamerteātris B-5, Stabu 18, tel. 960 73 12.

Russian Drama Theatre (Krievu drāmas teātris) I-2, Kaļķu 16, tel. 722 46 60.

Sports

Aerobics & gym

A + S C-5, Lāčplēša 60, tel. 728 95 16. Open 07:00 - 22:00.

Atlantis C-5, Lāčplēša 38, tel. 728 08 70/728 08 42, fax 728 08 67, atlantis@atlantis.lv, www.atlantis.lv. Open 07:00 - 23:00, Sat, Sun, 08:00 - 22:00.

Centrs I-3, Audēju 16, tel. 701 80 00. Open 07:00 - 23:00, Sat, Sun, 09:00 - 21:00.

Radisson SAS Daugava Hotel D-2, Kuģu 24, tel. 706 11 11. 6Ls to use swimming pool, sauna and gym all day. Open 06:30 - 23:00.

Swimming pools

Akvalande E-3, Mūkusalas 45/47, tel. 762 97 00. Adults 3Ls/hr, children under 12 2.25Ls/hr. A 100m long circular pool and waterslides. Open 10:00 - 23:00.

Joker klubs A-3, Katrīnas 12, tel. 709 98 00/709 98 01, fax 732 13 75, jokerklubs@joker.lv, www.jokerklubs.lv. Swimming pools, hot tubs, saunas, squash courts, bowling, billiards and bar.

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 inconvenient 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 I-2, Pils 12, tel. 704 40 00, fax 704 40 01, reservation@grandpalace.lv, www.schlossle-hotels.com. The regal, elegant 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, mini-bar, trouser press, safe and full bathroom are all standard. 56 rooms (50 doubles 98 - 135Ls, 3 junior suites 141 - 195Ls, 3 suites 196 - 272Ls). 18% VAT not included.

Hotel de Rome H-3, Kaļķu 28, tel. 708 76 00, fax 708 76 06, reservation@derome.lv, www.derome.lv. The entrance now has shops, modern conference facilities have been added, and already excellent rooms have been upgraded to keep up with all of the modern amenities discriminating guests expect. If the opera-style bar, business centre, fitness room and sauna don't hold your interest, you can find comfort in the satellite TV, safe, internet access and mini-bar of your room, not to mention great views of Old Riga. 88 rooms (6 singles 91Ls, 63 doubles 100Ls, 18 suites 125Ls, 1 apartment 500Ls).

Radisson-SAS Daugava D-2, Kuģu 24, tel. 706 11 11, fax 706 11 00, reservations.riga@radissonsas.com, www.radissonsas.com. Radisson hotels have a reputation for excellence and Riga's is by no means an exception. Singles and doubles are spacious and include cable TV, mini-bar and full bath. 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. 361 room (97 singles 86Ls, 166 doubles 86Ls, 54 junior suites 132Ls, 31 suites 132Ls, 13 apartments 207Ls). 18% VAT not included.

Upmarket

Ainavas (Landscapes) J-2, Peldu 23, tel. 781 43 16, fax 781 43 17, reservations@ainavas.lv, www.ainavas.lv. 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. 21 rooms (4 singles 60Ls, 9 doubles 77Ls, 5 half-suites 87Ls, 3 suites 96Ls).

Hotel Centra J-2, Audēju 1, tel. 722 64 41, fax 750 32 81, hotel@centra.lv, 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 have varied, subtle décor, 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. 24 rooms (7 singles 48Ls, 7 doubles 56Ls, 5 junior suites 68Ls, 5 suites 76Ls).

Konventa Sēta I-2, Kalēju 9/11, tel. 708 75 01, fax 708 75 15, reservation@konventa.lv, 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. 141 rooms (10 singles 46Ls, 108 doubles 55Ls, 14 junior suites 60Ls, 10 suites 70Ls, 1 apartment 95Ls).

Metropole J-3, Aspazijas bulv. 36/38, tel. 722 54 11, fax 721 61 40, metropole@metropole.lv, www.metropole.lv. 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. 80 rooms (40 singles from 37Ls, 36 doubles from 44Ls, 4 suites from 75Ls).

Reval Hotel Latvija C-4, Elizabetes 55, tel. 777 22 22, fax 777 23 32, latvija.sales@revalhotels.com, www.revalhotels.com. All rooms include phone, mini-bar, 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 (2 singles 69 - 71Ls, 343 doubles 79 - 81Ls, 8 triples 105Ls, 29 suites 95Ls).

Mid-range

Forums J-3, 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 for 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. Not far from the bus and train stations. 31 rooms (24 doubles 33 - 48Ls, 4 triples 57Ls, 3 suites 60Ls).

Laine B-4, Skolas 11, tel. 728 98 23, 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 baths, though the less expensive route is to share showers and toilets. 38 rooms (3 singles 15 - 35Ls, 10 doubles 25 - 45Ls, 21 half suites 40 - 50Ls, 4 apartments 50 - 65Ls).

Radi un draugi J-2, Mārstāju 1/3, tel. 722 03 72, fax 724 22 39, radi.reservations@draugi.lv, www.draugi.lv. Old Riga's most popular hotel has opened a new wing to satisfy the demand for its reasonably priced rooms. The hotel offers bright and cheery rooms with satellite TV, refrigerator, telephone, private bathrooms, the occasional balcony and breathtaking views of the surrounding architecture. Book this minute, as rooms here are usually reserved months ahead of time. 76 rooms (17 singles 33Ls, 51 double 42 - 48Ls, 5 triples 51Ls 3 half - suites 48Ls).

Budget

Saulīte D-4, Merķeļa 12, tel. 722 45 46, fax 722 36 29. The 'Little Sun' doesn't have much reason to hire a shining staff or offer first-rate accommodation. The proximity to the bus and train stations, along with the friendly prices, mean that travellers appreciate the outdated but presentable rooms, and don't complain loudly about the shared showers and toilets. 37 rooms (16 singles 7 - 16Ls, 16 doubles 16 - 22Ls, 2 triples 12Ls, one 9-bed room 18Ls, 2 junior suites 28Ls). Breakfast: 1.50Ls.

Bed & breakfast

ECB B-3, Barona iela 37 (entrance from Gertrūdes), tel. 729 85 35/912 59 57, fax 729 85 25, ecb@ecb.apollo.lv. All rooms are completely renovated with tasteful furniture, cable TV and shower cubicle. An evening meal cooked by a full-time chef is also included in the price as well as laundry service (for long term residents). Internet access and pick-up and delivery anywhere in Riga, even the airport. A great value! Also offer short term apartment rental for US\$60 - 120/day. 6 rooms (singles 27Ls, doubles 32Ls, triples 38Ls, quadruples 42Ls).

Krišjānis & Gertrūde C-5, Barona 39 (entrance from Gertrūdes), tel. 750 66 04, fax 750 66 03, kg@mail.teliatmc.lv, www.musbait.com/hotel. Not unlike a typical British B&B, this hotel only offers five rooms, but each is decorated in a different fashion and provides cable TV, modern bathrooms, coffee/tea set and a cosy atmosphere that one would expect from a home away from home. 5 rooms (5 doubles 15 - 50Ls).

Patricia D-4, Elizabetes 22-6, tel. 728 48 68/724 28 54, fax 728 66 50, tourism@parks.lv, www.rigalatvia.net. This American and Latvian run company rents rooms in the centre for US\$20 per person per night - US\$25 with breakfast. The head office is a short walk from the train station. Rooms in various locations in the centre of Riga. Private apartments from US\$40 - 150 per night. Also reserve airline, train and bus tickets. Car rental also available.

Roach motels

Baltā kaza (White Goat) A-5, Ēveles 2, tel. 737 81 35. A 15 minute tram ride from Barona iela, the White Goat may not have the friendliest staff in Riga, but the spacious doubles including cable TV, writing desk and private bathroom are comfortable, albeit overpriced. A better option, especially for backpackers, is a clean and safe bed for 4Ls in a dorm room (four beds to a room), (6 doubles 25Ls, 43 beds 4Ls/person).

Hostels

Turība Graudu 68, tel. 761 75 43, fax 761 91 52, luta@turiba.lv, www.turiba.lv. Clean, slightly musty rooms with three or four beds, set a fair bit out of the centre. The complex (a business school campus whose name means prosperity) holds a café, sauna and fitness centre. Take trolleybus N'8 from Strēlnieku laukums until the Graudu stop (or take a *taksobuss* from the train station) and walk 100m to the right. 148 beds, triples and quadruples (3.50 - 9Ls per person). Call ahead.

For more information contact: Hostelling Latvia, room@hostellinglatvia.com, www.hostellinglatvia.com.

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Getting around

Buses

Autostars C-5, Gertrūdes 33/35, tel. 731 18 10/308 33 10. Open 09:00 - 17:00. Closed Sat, Sun.
Bus Station (Autoosta) J-3, Prāgas 1, tel. 900 00 09 (Bus information, 0.20Ls/min), www.ikase.lv. The bus station is open from 05:00 - 24:00. For information try the info counter N'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:
Eurolines J-3, Bus station, Prāgas 1, tel. 721 40 80, fax 750 31 34, info@eurolines.lv, www.eurolines.lv. The Eurolines office, on your right when you enter the bus station from the main entrance, sells tickets for buses to Berlin, Bremen, Kiel, Warsaw, Prague, Vilnius, Tallinn, Munster, Munich, Kaliningrad and Cologne.
Nordeka Dzirciema 121, tel. 746 46 20, fax 746 87 02, nordeka@nordeka.lv, www.nordeka.lv.
Norma-A J-3, Bus station, Prāgas 1, tel. 721 45 12, ecolines@ecolines.lv, www.ecolines.lv. Neoplan buses with video and stewardess to Moscow, Brussels, Bremen, Paris and Kyiv. Also on C-5, Čaka 45, tel. 731 51 92.

Car rental

Auto tel. 958 04 480 Open 24hrs. US\$40 - 50/day.
Baltic Car Lease - Sixt Franchisee Airport, tel. 720 71 21, fax 720 71 31, car.rent@carlease.lv, www.sixt.com. Open 09:00 - 17:00. Also on Aspazjas 28, tel. 722 40 22, fax 722 40 36.
Scorpio tel. 751 69 44 Open 24hrs.

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 from 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 excellent website www.ttp.lv.

Taxis

Bona M B-5, Barona 88, 1st floor, tel. 800 50 50.
Riga Taxi Dunties 34, tel. 800 10 10, taxi@parks.lv.
Rigas Taksometru Parks B-4, Valdemāra 51, tel. 800 13 13.
The official tariff is 0.30Ls/km during the day, and 0.40Ls between 22:00 and 06:00. All licensed cabs will have special yellow licence plates. Insist on the meter being turned on. In older taxis the meter is usually turned off and you have to haggle beforehand. For shorter journeys try not to pay more than 1.50Ls. Unfortunately, many drivers will not move for less than 2Ls. Taxis can almost always be found, day or night, in front of the H-3, Hotel de Rome and at the cab stand on J-2, Grēcinieku iela off of Strēlnieku laukums.

Useful information

Medical

ARS C-4, Skolas 5, tel. 720 10 01/720 10 07/720 10 03/720 10 05 (emergency home service). English-speaking doctors.
Centre for Sexual Diseases Briāna 2, tel. 727 21 98.
Dr. Zālītis C-3, Kronvalda bulv. 10-17, tel. 732 26 11/923 16 64. American paediatrician.
DS Medical Centre C-4, Elizabetes 57, tel. 722 99 42/728 03 52, fax 728 94 13, dsmc@navigators.lv. Open 08:00 - 20:00, Sat 09:00 - 15:00. Closed Sun.
Gaiļezera hospital Hipokrāta 2, tel. 753 66 60. Open 24hrs.

Pharmacies

Lauvas aptieka I-2, Kaļķu 20, tel. 722 65 19. Open 08:30 - 19:00, Sat 10:00 - 18:00, Sun 10:00 - 16:00.
Marijas aptieka I-3, Audēju 16 (Centrs shopping centre - ground floor). Open 08:00 - 22:00.
Mēness aptieka C-4, Elizabetes 91/93, tel. 750 22 30. Open 08:00 - 20:00. B-5, Brīvības 121, tel. 737 78 89. Open 24hrs. C-4, Raiņa 17, tel. 722 41 70. Open 08:00 - 22:00.
Rudens aptieka D-5, Gertrūdes 105/1, tel. 724 43 22. It also delivers non-prescription medicine. Open 24hrs.
Vecpilsētas aptieka I-3, Audēju 20, tel. 721 33 40. Open 24hrs.

advertise
here

For more information, contact Brian Soderholm
Tel. (+370-5) 212 39 78
brian1@inyourpocket.com

www.inyourpocket.com

What to buy in Latvia

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

For a quick fix of a multitude of souvenirs in the centre of Old Riga we recommend Aldis Tīlens' amber free shop. He sells postcards, posters, mugs and T-shirts, hand-made wool sweaters, hats and gloves and much more (J-2, Kaļķu 2, tel. 750 35 46). For more traditional souvenirs try Tīne H-2, Valņu 2.

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 Klēts, C-4, Merķeļa 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.

Līvānu stikls—Latvian glassware

Latgale, the eastern region of Latvia, is famous across the seemingly endless length and breadth of this huge nation for its glass and ceramics. Find beautiful examples at Ezerciems I-2, Kaļķu 7/9 and Lasītava H-2, Valņu 2.

Aldaris and Rigas Balzams t-shirts

If you'd prefer something more interesting than a shirt with the word Riga on it pick up some alcoholic beverage tees at Amber free souvenirs (see above).

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.

Latvian paintings

For paint by number views of Latvia a la Bob Ross try Līvu laukums, but if you're looking for some-

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