

# Facts about Latvia

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 [LIVING AND WORKING IN LATVIA \(booklet; published 2018\)](#) 

## Geography and climate

Latvia is located in North-Eastern Europe, on the shores of the Baltic Sea. It is one of the three Baltic States. Neighbouring countries include Estonia to the North, Lithuania to the South, Russia to the East and Belarus to the South-East. Latvia is divided into four geographic regions – Kurzeme in the West, Vidzeme in the North, Zemgale in the South and Latgale in the East of the country. Latvia covers 65.589 km<sup>2</sup> of territory, and has a shoreline that is 494 km in length. Latvia's landscape is rich and diverse. The country is located in a zone where both Northern and Central European flora and fauna can be found. Some 44% of the territory is covered by forests, and this is seen as one of Latvia's greatest treasures. Latvia is also a land of lakes – approximately 2.300 lakes are found in the country, particularly in the eastern region of Latgale.

Latvia has always been on the crossroads of major trade routes, and since ancient times it has served as something of a bridge between Western Europe and Russia. The ancient chronicles speak of the route “from the Vikings to the Greeks.” It began in Scandinavia, passed along the banks of the Daugava River in what is now a part of Latvia, and continued through Kievan Rus, all the way to the Byzantine Empire.

Latvia has a temperate climate with four distinct seasons. July is the hottest month of the year, with an average air temperature of 20/22°C, and temperatures can rise to 30°C and above. Winters tend to be snowy, with temperatures averaging around -5 to -15°C. Latvia, however, is a place where the weather can do very unexpected and surprising things.



## The Latvian language

Latvian is the state language in Latvia. It is a Baltic language, a member of the Indo-European family of languages. Latvian is considered to be one of the oldest European languages. It is not a Slavic or Germanic language. Only Lithuanian is similar to it. Many people in Latvia speak Russian. Latvia's residents are increasingly learning foreign languages, as well – English, German, French, etc.

Here are a few words and phrases in Latvian:

Hi, hello – Sveiki (svayky)

Good-bye – Uz redzēšanas (uz re´-dzee-sha-nos)

Yes – Jā (yaah)

No – Nē (nee)

Thank you – Paldies (Puhl-dies´, the “ie” pronounced as in “weird”)

Please – Lūdzu (Loo´-dzu)

Sorry – Atvainojiet (Ah´-tvay-no-yiet, the “o” pronounced as in “logo”)



#### Local residents

In the beginning of 2019, there were 1 919 968 residents in Latvia. Of them, 1 196 578 were ethnic Latvians, 478 667 - Russians, 61 429 - Belarusians, 47 071 - Ukrainians, 38 821 - Poles, 22 344 - Lithuanians.

#### State administration

Latvia is an independent democratic parliamentary republic. Legislative power belongs to a unicameral parliament – [Saeima](#), which consists of 100 members. Elections take place every four years. The President of Ministers ([Prime Minister](#)) and [the Cabinet of Ministers](#) have the executive power. The Head of State is the [President of Latvia](#), who is elected by Saeima for 4 years. The President has wide representative functions.

The Independence Day of Latvia is November 18.



## Culture and religion

The Latvian capital city of Riga can be considered to be the Latvian centre for culture, because there is a great concentration of scientific, cultural and entertainment facilities there. People can attend a wide variety of cultural events, visit museums, exhibitions, the theatre and the opera. The cultural and historical importance of Riga is concentrated in [the Old City](#), which UNESCO has included in its list of World Heritage sites.

Theatres, ethnic cultural centres and various other organisations are also found in other parts of Latvia.

Latvia is known as a land of song, and musical events are very popular – concerts, seasonal festivals, etc. One of the most important musical events in Latvia, however, is the Latvian Song and Dance Festival, which brings together the country's best folk dance groups, choirs and musicians. The tradition dates back to 1873. The Song and Dance Festival is held once every five years and is a mighty and exciting event each and every time.

Latvians like their sports – ice-hockey, basketball, bobsledding and other sports are very popular. Latvia's larger towns and cities (Riga, Daugavpils, Liepaja, Ventspils) have ice skating facilities and sports clubs. Many of these activities are also available in the countryside.

A very important tradition in Latvia is the Summer Solstice, known locally as Jāņi. The celebration takes place on the night of June 23, and it is full of colourful traditions from ancient times. Of course, they have been adapted in some cases to modern thinking. People gather together in the countryside, build huge bonfires, and spend the entire night in song and celebration.

The major religious denominations in Latvia are Lutherans, Roman Catholics and the Russian Orthodox Church. Since the Reformation in the 16th century, the Lutheran Church has dominated in Latvia's religious structure.

Useful links:

[Information about living and working conditions in Latvia on EURES portal](#)

[www.latvija.lv/en](http://www.latvija.lv/en); [www.latvia.travel /en](http://www.latvia.travel/en); <http://latviansonline.com>; <http://www.raamitravel.com/en> [www.km.gov.lv/en](http://www.km.gov.lv/en); [www.man tojums.lv](http://www.mantojums.lv); [www.theatre.lv](http://www.theatre.lv) etc.

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<https://www.nva.gov.lv/en/facts-about-latvia>