Relocation guide

to Latvia

LIAA
Latvijas Investīciju un attīstības aģentūra
Investment and Development Agency of Latvia

MAGNETIC LATVIA

Greetings and warm welcome!

It is my honour to congratulate you on your move to Latvia, which is no doubt a major step in your journey. If you are either visiting or moving permanently, I am glad you have chosen Latvia with its vibrant economy, innovative start-up community and rich cultural life.

Latvia is an internationally engaged and open country. We are a member state of the European Union and NATO, as well as a candidate to the non-permanent seat of the UN Security Council for the term 2026-2027. In our country you will never be far from sandy Baltic sea beach or pine covered forests, as Latvians are proud to live close to nature in our traditions and in daily life.

To help you get accustomed and reach your professional or personal goals, we have put together this digital booklet. It is a collection of all the big and little things you need to know when relocating to Latvia — from the legalities to practical and cultural aspects of life, and everything in between.

We hope this material will answer all your questions about relocating to Latvia but in case you have any specific inquiries, please see the back of this guide for a list of resources and organizations that are here to help you. Always remember that there are people standing by to support you in your relocation journey.

I wish you all the best and see you soon in Latvia!

Egils Levits
President of Latvia

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01

Why Latvia?

Jaunā Teika, Riga
© Jaunā Teika

The basics at a glance

© Uldis Laganovskis, Shutterstock

Most common greeting:

Čau!
(pronounced "ciao", like the Italians)

Currency:
Euro

Official language:
Latvian

Population:
1.9 million

Capital city:
Riga

Government:
Parliamentary Republic
Part of NATO and the EU since 2004

Ethnic makeup:
Latvians **62.5%**
Russians **24.7%**
Belarusians **3.1%**
Ukrainians **2.3%**
Poles **2%**
Lithuanians **1.1%**
Others **4.1%**

Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2020

Emergency number:
112

Electricity:
C/F sockets, 220V

Weather

Latvia experiences the four seasons at their fullest. The warmest month is July with average maximum temperature of +21.5°C, while the coldest months are January and February with average minimums of -7.5°C and -7.9°C.

Latvia practically doesn't experience natural disasters. The worst you'll get is some snow, which locals will be thrilled about as they pull out their cross-country skis.

Latvians

They may seem a bit distant at first. But when you get to know them, you can be certain that you've come across true friendship. You always know where you stand.

Latvia is a country where everyone has space to live their lives as they've imagined, with plenty of room for your own self expression. We're a small, but mighty country when we come together, and boy do we love to come together when we're facing a collective challenge. Be that in sports, in sadness, or pride of our achievements.

Meet Latvia

a quick tour of your new home

Gauja National park
© Rinalds Stradiņš, Shutterstock

Latvians love going foraging for mushrooms and berries. Every Latvian knows "a spot" - an untouched corner deep within a forest rich with wild blueberry bushes or chanterelle spawns. A true mark of friendship with a Latvian is when they're willing to share their secret location.

Proximity to nature

- **54%** of territory covered by forest
- **496km** white sandy beach coastline
- **2,000** lakes
- **12,000** rivers

Latvians cherish nature, and make full use of it being so accessible.

It's completely feasible to take a sunrise walk in a bog and manage to be at the office by 9am, or decide to have your lunch at the beach and get there in 20min.

Riga itself has forests in the city, making it possible not only to enjoy the forest that's at arms' reach, but also to indulge in autumn foraging – essentially a national pastime.

The luxury of easy access to nature is a lifestyle that can't be beat.

All-natural by default

- **Largest indoor** market in Europe
- **No markup** for farmer's market produce
- **Emphasis** on seasonal eating

In Latvia, eating clean is the default. With farmer's markets in every major neighbourhood (without costly markups, no less), finding clean, affordable, and fresh produce is the status quo.

Moreover, seasonal eating is the norm. You'll find local produce in all major grocery stores or you can buy freshly harvested fruit and vegetables directly from farmers in markets, stores, and roadside stalls.

You don't have to strive to eat healthy here, it comes with the territory. Getting to know neighbours will also likely result in veggie swaps when there's a seasonal overflow.

Prepare for being offered zucchinis and pumpkins in the fall!

Dome square Christmas Market
© Investment and Development Agency of Latvia

Land of opportunity

- **#1** most startup-friendly country in the world *(Sifted, 2021)*
- **#19** in global Ease of Doing Business ranking *(World Bank, 2020)*
- **3 degrees** of separation

A natural playground to execute ideas, start businesses, develop skills, and test the waters.

Our policies are entrepreneur-friendly, our people are skilled, our location puts you at the crossroads between the East and the West – everything you need to thrive is readily available.

Within Latvia's small community of less than 2 million, anyone can usually be reached by 2 to 3 calls (or tweets), even the ministers.

Conversation festival LAMPA 2019, Cēsis
©Investment and Development Agency of Latvia

Aranet4 - an innovative indoor air quality sensor
Made in Latvia by SAF Tehnika JSC

Technological early-adopters

- **99%** of territory covered by 4G
- **5G** pioneers
- **#3** in the world in mobile data usage
- **#4** in the European Union in Digital public services

This country likes to move fast when it comes to trying out new things and adopting the latest tech. With one of the most connected societies and some of the fastest internet in the world, we like to try new things, build digital tools, and enjoy a connected lifestyle.

Singing nation

- **Countless** renowned classical musicians
- **2.2%** of the population participates in the **UNESCO-protected** Song and Dance Festival

Latvia calls itself the singing nation – and for good reason!

Song permeates everyday life – many people sing in choirs, music can be often heard on the streets, and musical events are frequent and usually at a very affordable price.

Latvia is home to world-class musicians such as opera singers Elina Garanca, Inese Galante, Kristine Opolais, conductor Andris Nelsons, violinist Gidons Kremers, and so many more.

Latvian Song and Dance festival
© Archive of Latvian National Centre for Culture

Zuzeum Art Centre, Riga

Cultural hot-spot

- **No. 1** spender on culture in the EU
- **Centuries-old** traditions maintained
- **30,000+** participants in Song and Dance festivals

Latvians love and respect culture – in all forms. Traditional culture is respected and maintained, with songs, dances, ancient crafts and rituals abounding.

Theatre, opera, and ballet performances are world-class, and available at a price that anyone can attend – and they do!

It's no wonder Latvia was the springboard for ballet dancer and choreographer Mihail Barishnikov, and internationally acclaimed theatre director Alvis Hermanis, to name a few.

Latvian sports fans = the best sports fans

- **Gold** in bobsleigh, Olympics 2014
- **6x world cup champions** in skeleton (in a row!)
- **1st** olympic BMX gold medal

Latvians love to get behind their teams.
Usually it's a David and Goliath type situation,
and the Latvians take down the giant.

We do particularly well in winter sports – ice hockey, where we're the smallest country in the International Ice Hockey Federation, bobsleigh, where we've taken many international medals, and skeleton, where our duo of Dukurs brothers are bound to take the pedestal.

We also have many players in the NBA and NHL, making being international sports fans a national pastime.

Easy access to global destinations

- **100+** destinations by air
- **Nearly** the geographical center of Europe

Latvians enjoy being at the center of North and South, East and West. With the most connected airport in the Baltics, it means no destination is out of reach.
An opportunity for short travel trips is always available, to the most diverse of destinations.

Of the last 3 Olympic events, 10 Olympic Winter Games medal winners come from Sigulda, making it the **#1 municipality in the world** in terms of medals per capita.

Bobsleigh and luge track, Sigulda
© Sigulda Thrills

02

Moving to Latvia

Riga International airport (RIX)

If a longer stay in Latvia is what you're after, we'd love to have you!

You'll need a residence permit and a place to live.

There's no sugar-coating it, this involves the typical hassle that comes with moving to a foreign country. You need to determine which permit you qualify for, you need to find a place to live, and you need to sort out the moving itself.

But worry not, we're here to help.

In this section, you can find the practical info and resources needed for setting up your longer stay.

Kemeri National park
© Viesturs_Jugs, Shutterstock

Visas & residence permits

Art nouveau district, Riga

For EU citizens

EU, EEA, and Swiss citizens won't need a visa to work and live in Latvia. That being said, if staying for longer than 3 months, you'll need to:

01
Register with the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (OCMA), demonstrating that you're either:

- employed or self-employed in Latvia
- a service provider or an employee of an EU-registered company
- a student studying locally

02
Declare your address in Latvia by presenting a document (for example, rental/lease agreement) confirming your place of residence in Latvia. See section "Declaration of residence" for a detailed process description!

EU citizen relocation checklist

- ☑ Find an employer
- ☑ Find a place to live
- ☑ Travel to Latvia
- ☑ Open a bank account
- ☑ Start working
- ☑ Apply for an ID-card at the OCMA
- ☑ Declare your address
- ☑ Get settled in and enjoy!

You can register a partner, spouse and children as well!

For non-EU citizens

For non-EU citizens looking to relocate to Latvia, you'll need to meet two requirements:

01
Obtaining a visa to enter the country (unless you're from one of the 60+ countries with a visa-free regime)

02
If you want to work or study – **obtain a residence permit**
or
Obtain a long-term D-Visa for work, which lets you enter the country and work for up to 1 year, and only takes 2-3 weeks to obtain.

Learn more about each of the options available to non-EU citizens to work, build a business, or study in Latvia in the next pages. →

Just want to dip your toes in the water and come over for a shorter amount of time? Come over with a Schengen business or tourism visa to stay for 90 days. Learn more **here**.

Residence permit with the right to work

The basic work permit – this applies to most job seekers

Length of term: Up to 5 years with the possibility of extension
Application time: 6-8 weeks

Criteria:

- You must have an agreement in place with an employer in Latvia offering you employment and an invitation submitted to the OCMA by the employer
- At least 3 years of related work experience or education

EU Blue Card

Job seekers that are considered highly qualified*

Length of term: Up to 5 years with the possibility of extensions
Application time: Up to 2 months

Criteria:

- You must have an agreement in place with an employer in Latvia offering you employment and an invitation submitted to the OCMA by the employer
- 5 years of professional experience in the industry

OR

- Academic experience of at least 3 years in a program related to the intended employment industry

> *If you resign or the job contract is terminated, you are **eligible to apply for an unemployed status in Latvia** with this permit and request extra 3 months of stay to look for a new Employer.*

*either with 3 years of specialty education, or 5 years of specialty experience

General application process to receive a residence permit

01
Find an employer & vacancy that suits your experience and receive an invitation from your employer to come to Latvia.

02
Submit your documents at the Latvian consulate in your country of residence or by mail (if you're already in Latvia) and wait for the decision from the OCMA.

03
After OCMA's approval, travel to Latvia to finish the process – submit your biometrics at an OCMA's office, undergo a fluorography procedure and obtain health insurance.

04
Receive your **visa or a residence permit card**!

Startup visa

For those looking to establish a scalable business that's registered in Latvia*

Length of term: Up to 3 years
Application time: 3 to 5 months

Criteria:
Draft of the start-up idea (no more than a one-pager!) outlining the team, technological aspect of the idea, competitive advantage and development plan for three years. Submit it to LIAA by visiting the **info page**!

> **Up to five founders under the same startup business idea can receive the residence permit.*

Student residence permit

For those looking to study full-time

Length of term: The length of the study program
Application time: 6 to 8 weeks

Criteria:
Enrollment in full-time studies at a registered institution of higher education in Latvia

All of the residence permits will give you access to:

- Free movement within the Schengen area
- Access to a certified eSignature
- Perspective of permanent residence

Additional benefits:

- Option to relocate your spouse and children
- Opening local bank account free of charge
- Registering with National Compulsory Health Insurance Scheme

Non-EU citizen relocation checklist

- ☑ Find a job in Latvia
- ☑ Your employer submits a Sponsorship Request at the OCMA
- ☑ Apply for a temporary residence permit for work
- ☑ Find a place to live
- ☑ Apply for an entry visa (if required)
- ☑ Travel to Latvia
- ☑ Apply for an ID-card at the OCMA
- ☑ Declare your address
- ☑ Open a bank account
- ☑ Start working
- ☑ Get settled in and enjoy!

Long-term D visa for work

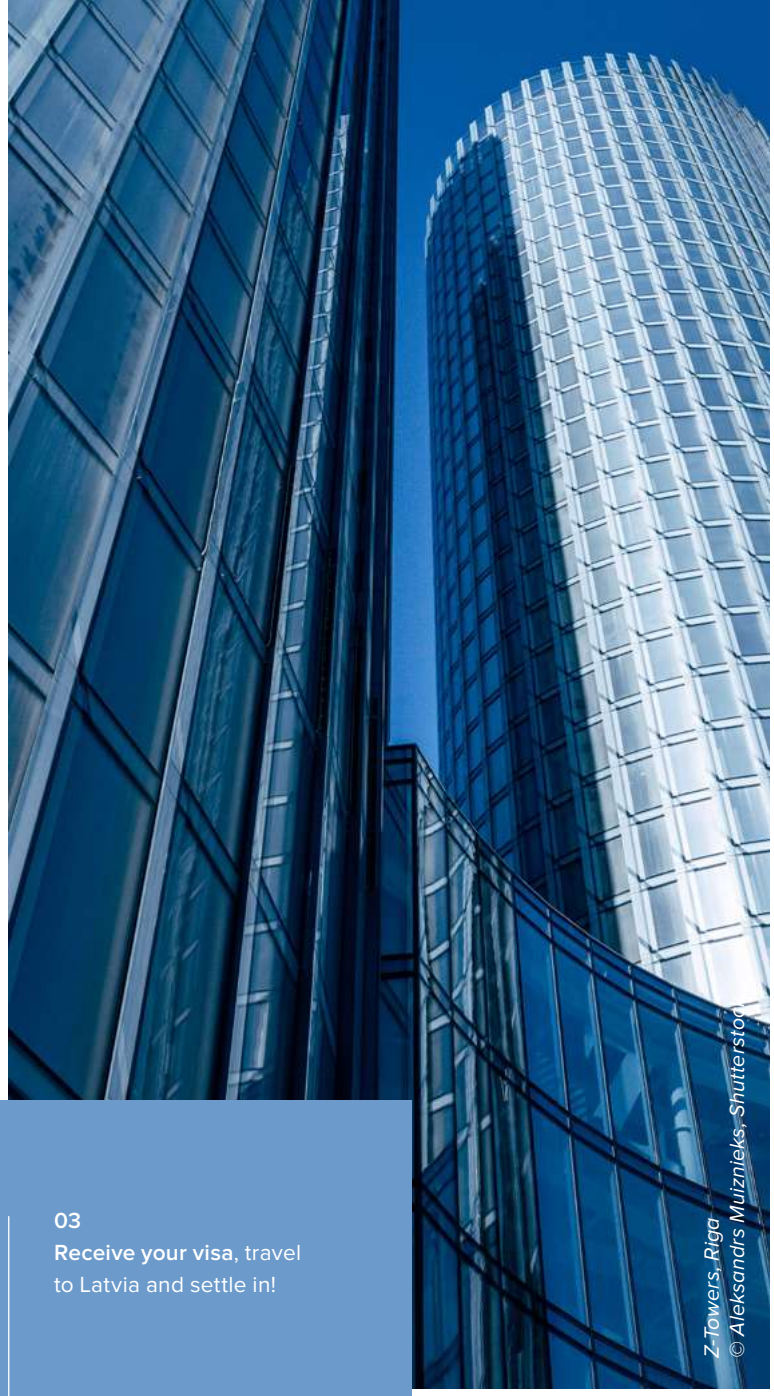
This is the fastest way to start working in Latvia. You can come on the D-visa, and apply for a residence permit later on.

Length of term: Up to 1 year
Application time: 2-3 weeks

Criteria:

- You must have an agreement in place with an employer in Latvia offering you employment and an invitation submitted to the OCMA by the employer
- At least 3 years of official work experience in the profession in which the employer intends to employ you in Latvia

In contrast to residence permits, this visa will not give you access to the Latvian ID card and the benefits it incurs.



Z-Towers, Riga
© Aleksandrs Muiznieks, Shutterstock

Application process

01
Find an employer & vacancy that suits your experience. Undergo the application process, and receive an invitation from the employer to come to Latvia!

02
Submit your documents at the Latvian consulate in your country of residence and receive the D-visa for work from OCMA.

03
Receive your visa, travel to Latvia and settle in!

Declaring your residence

ID card and residence permit recipients are asked to delcare their residence at the OCMA.

It's recommended to have written consent from your landloard.

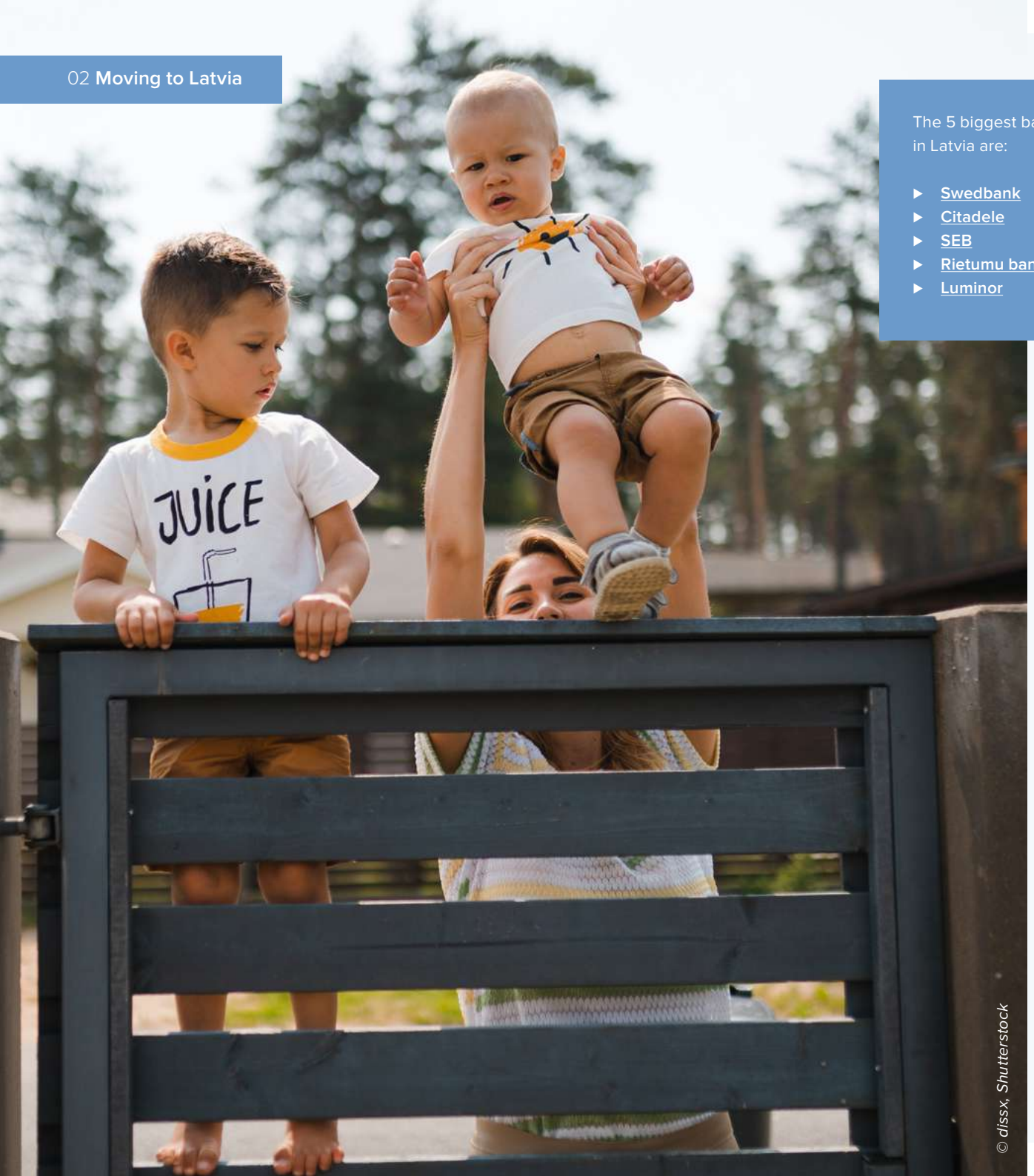
A declared residence is a requirement for:

- entering into relationships with various private and public institutions, such as banks and schools
- being able to receive any official communications from governmental institutions

Additionally, depending on the municipality you declare in, you can **gain from local benefits, discounts, and bonuses**:

- Riga residents can obtain a Riga Resident's Card, which gives certain discounts, can be used as an e-ticket and e-wallet.
- Sigulda residents can obtain a Sigulda Card, which also gives discounts in various shops and allows them to use the city's bus network free of charge, among other benefits.

*If at any point you move to a new address, you can easily change your declared residence online at **latvija.lv**. To access the page, you'll either need an eSignature or online banking credentials that come with opening a bank account.*



© dissx, Shutterstock

The 5 biggest banks in Latvia are:

- Swedbank
- Citadele
- SEB
- Rietumu banka
- Luminor

Helpful things to know

Opening a bank account

Most banks in Latvia offer user-friendly, convenient banking services online. However, non-citizens will have to book an appointment to **visit a branch in person to open a bank account**.

To start the process, you will need:

- passport or ID card
- for non-residents, one of the following:
  - an EU citizen certificate
  - a Latvian residence document (such as a D-visa or residence permit)
  - a document proving a tie to Latvia (such as an employment contract or a study agreement)

Family benefits

Families are treasured in Latvia, with every new addition celebrated. What more would you expect from a small country?

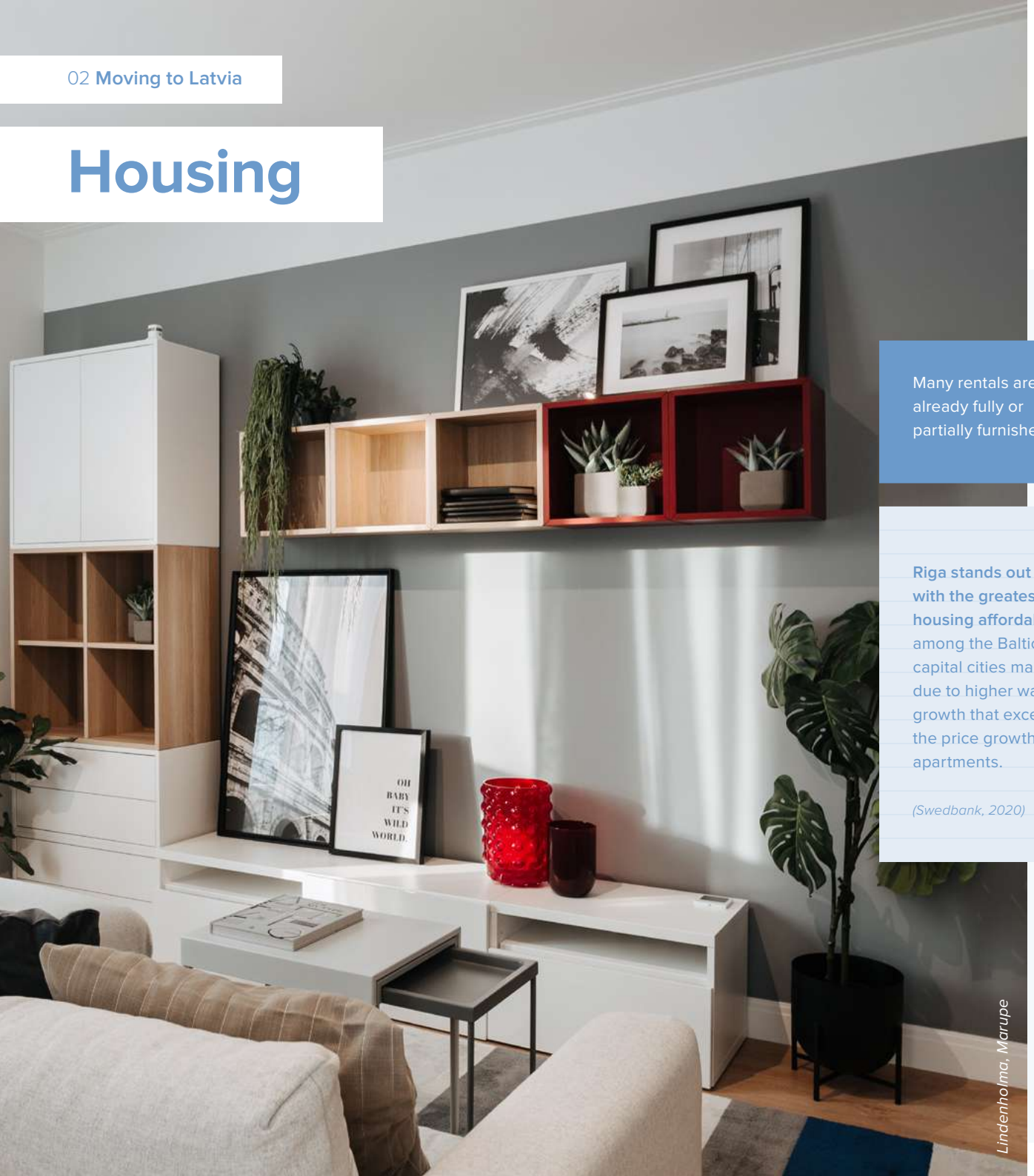
As a result, there are several programs in place to support families, particularly those with newborns:

- Latvia has one of the most progressive parental leave programs in the world. Parents can take up to 1.5 years off of paid leave, which can be taken by either the mother or father (or divided up by both!)

- Maternity benefits and family support relief payments are available, based on contributed taxes.

Eligibility is a bit complicated, and each situation is unique. We recommend consulting the **State Social Insurance Agency** to see if you're eligible. EU/EEA/Swiss nationals that pay taxes in Latvia could be eligible, but unfortunately, other country nationals are not.

Housing



Lindenholma, Marupe

A wide selection of housing is available both in Riga and outside of it, suited for whichever lifestyle you're looking to build. From central apartments in the middle of the bustle, to leisurely countryside homes to be closer to nature.

Many rentals are already fully or partially furnished.

Riga stands out with the greatest housing affordability among the Baltic capital cities mainly due to higher wage growth that exceeds the price growth of apartments.

(Swedbank, 2020)

Where to search

There are several websites that are commonly used to find homes both for rent and for sale, the most popular ones being:

- www.ss.com
- www.inch.lv
- www.city24.lv
- www.arcoreal.lv
- www.rentinriga.lv
- www.kivi.lv
- www.latio.lv

In addition to the established real-estate sites, there are also a handful of Facebook groups where listings are shared. You can find some hidden treasures there. Join the groups and check them regularly – the best deals are snatched up very quickly!

- *Dzīvokļu īres piedāvājumi draugiem/paziņām*
- *Dzīvokļi Rīgā - Pārdod - Izīrē*
- *Dzīvokļus īrē, izīrē, pērk, pārdod - RĪGĀ*

Renting

The rental market is hot, with the best deals going fast. We recommend identifying the area you want to live in (for example, closer to the city center to be near the hustle and bustle, or closer to your workplace for a quicker commute, etc.), and keeping an eye out for rental opportunities that pop up.

The process is simple – you see a listing you like, then get in touch with the listed contact person. You can request to arrange a viewing. If you like what you see, you can let them know you'll take it. Keep in mind – this usually happens on a "first come, first served" basis, so timing is important.

Trebū HOME, Riga

What to ask the landlord when considering renting?

- A sample of utility bills (for both summer and winter months) to have an understanding of potential costs. It's not unusual for winter bills to be twice as high due to heating costs.
- The amount of security deposit to be paid upon renting the apartment. Typically, the security deposit comes out to 1-2 months rent.
- A rundown of the items in the utility bill, to make sure you know what's included and what you're expected to pay for separately (electricity or gas, for example).
- You may be able to negotiate on the rent, but if demand is high, don't get your hopes up.
- Ask if it's ok to register the apartment as your declared residence address. Although it's within your rights, it's better to confirm this to avoid any issues in the future.

Helpful things to know:

Though agreements can vary, typically the renter is expected to cover rent + utilities. The published rent amount is usually only the rent part, unless otherwise stated.

Landlords commonly request the first and last month of rent upfront (you don't lose that last month, it's simply already paid for).

The amount of rooms listed pertains to total rooms in the apartment, not just bedrooms.

Average rent for a 2-room apartment excluding utilities (1 bedroom)

Latio (2020)

Buying

Property prices in Latvia are comparatively low, however, they're trending upwards at a steady pace. As a result, buying property in Latvia is both accessible, as well as a great potential investment for the future.

How buying works

It's as simple as browsing properties, and when you find something you like, contacting the seller to schedule a property tour. Or you can always turn to real-estate agencies and agents that can do the legwork for you, as well as help you navigate the market.

Mortgages are available from banks. Get in touch with them first to receive an offer, as well as a sum that you'd be pre-approved for. When you identify the property you'd like to buy, the bank will perform an assessment of value, and then decide on issuing the mortgage.

Statistics about the residential market in Riga

Ober Haus, 2020

Annual apartment price change
+2.3%

New apartments built
1.975

New apartment prices in residential districts
(€/SQM - with final fit-out)
€1.550 - €2.100

New apartment prices in city centre & old town
(€/SQM - with final fit-out)
€1.800 - €4.000

Prices for exclusive apartments in city centre & old town
(€/SQM)
€5.000 - €7.000

Residential investment yield (City centre)
4.1%

The average annual interest rate for home mortgages is around 2-3%
Bank of Latvia, 2020

Divi Krasti, Riga

Regional specifics to know:

Homes and the land they're on can be sold separately. When looking at buying a house, make sure that you check if the land is included.

Apartments can be sold in two formats – per unit, or in shares, which is called "*domājamās daļas*". While it doesn't change the fact that you own the property, the format does have implications on buying procedures, property tax, and other matters, such as communal space renovations.

When purchasing apartments in the "*domājāmās daļas*" format, you are subject to a process that lets other owners claim the apartment in your stead within three months of you singing the purchasing contract, due to a process called "*pirmpirkuma tiesības*". While rarely enacted, it can be an unpleasant surprise if not prepared. Speak to your real-estate agent to maneuver these situations.

Property tax is paid quarterly. The amount is subject to the value of the area you live in and the size of your property. This amount can change as areas gain or lose value over time.

Real estate agents

Agents can be helpful in scouting properties for you and managing the documents. They take their commission from the seller, so you don't have to worry about paying one.

A few reputable real estate firms include:

- Ober-Haus
- Latio
- Sotheby's International Realty
- Arco Real Estate
- Baltic Expert

State support for buying

There are several programs in place to support new property buyers. These programs are available to any citizen or residence permit holder that meets the criteria.

The support available is:

- a short-term loan towards your down payment
- taking the place of your guarantor (guarantors are required when taking a mortgage)

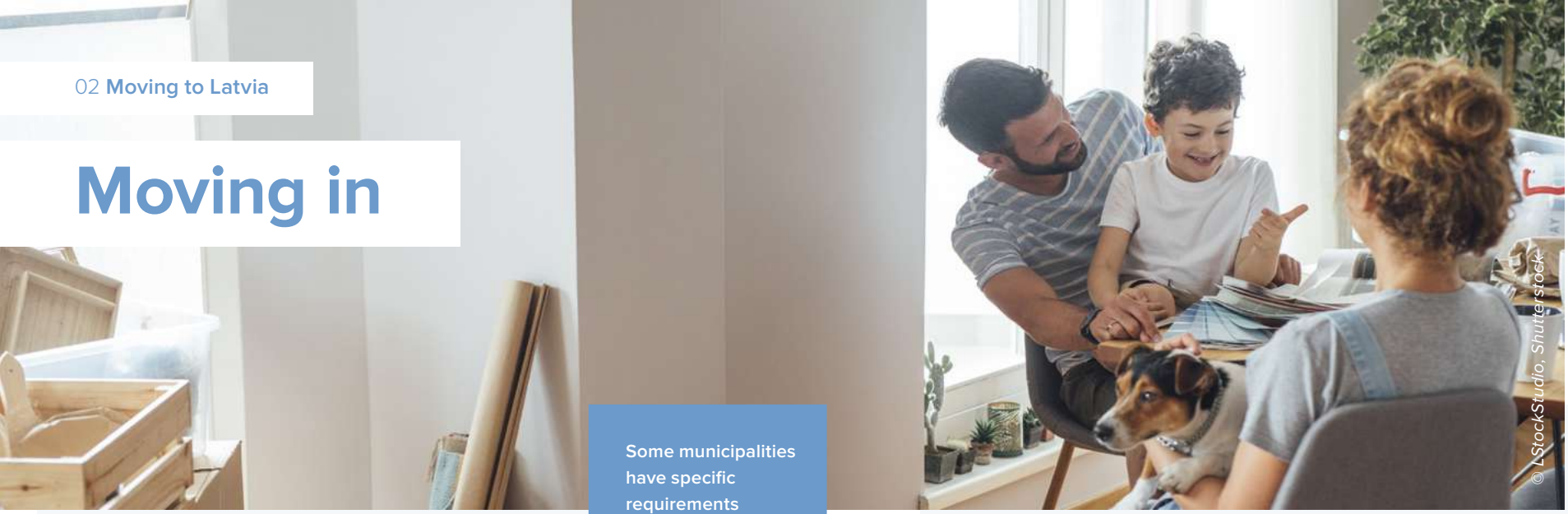
The two qualifying categories are:

- **New parents** – have a child or are expecting, and have a regular monthly income.
- **Young professionals** – have a regular monthly income, have acquired a vocational secondary or higher education, are up to 35 years old.

You can learn more about these support programs at **Altum**:

Magdelēnas kvartāls, Rīga

Moving in


© LStockStudio, Shutterstock

Moving your pets

Your furry friends are more than welcome to come along. They'll be subject to just a few requirements before getting the all-clear.

Your dog, cat or ferret will need to be:

- micro-chipped or have a legible tattoo (if applied before 3 July 2011)
- vaccinated against rabies
- treated against the tapeworm *Echinococcus multilocularis*, where necessary
- in possession of a valid European pet passport (if travelling within the EU) or an EU animal health certificate (if travelling from a non-EU country)

Specific restrictions may apply to some countries, so please check the **Food and Veterinary Service** page before traveling.

After relocation, dog owners should register their pet at the **Agricultural Data Centre**.

Some municipalities have specific requirements for pet owners. Please consult your municipality for more information after arriving.

The most common pets in Latvia are cats and about 38% of households have one, which is the second highest number in Europe.

Moving your belongings

International shipping companies will be of the greatest help to bring your belongings to Latvia. Shipping times vary depending on the country of origin and traffic restrictions imposed as a result of Covid-19 in Europe (if any).

When moving within the EU, no tax restrictions are in place.

However if moving from outside the EU, import and other taxes may apply:

- Personal property (such as household items) can be applied for tax exemption, clothes and other necessities aren't taxed.
- Items you've had for less than six months will be subject to import duties and taxes.

See all terms and conditions **here**:

03

Employment & Entrepreneurship

Hanzas perons, Rīga

Latvia is hungry for talented individuals with unique international experience.

Both employers and the country itself reflect this hunger in vacancies as well as state programs to attract international talent.

The highest demand for talent is expected in the fields of IT, sciences, and engineering in the nearest future. Economists predict that the Latvian labor market will be in strong need of professionals with education in STEM subjects as well as those with vocational education.

Let's go over the basics of finding employment, starting a business, and any programs that might help you in that process.

Origo One, Riga

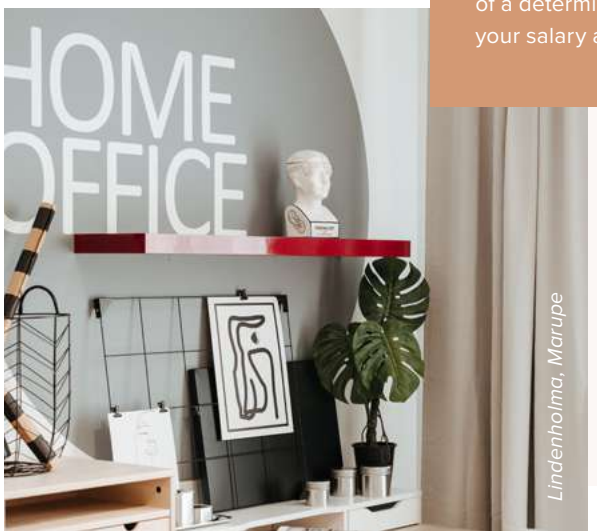
Finding a job

Business Garden Riga

In the pre-Covid era, Rigans earned on average 12% more vs. the average of the country. However, with the option to work remotely from the seaside of Kurzeme or woods of Latgale, the region you live in is not that important of a determinent of your salary anymore.

Latvia is a small country – there are only so many people. But our people are smart and our ambition is boundless. We're always building, creating, innovating and an extra pair of hands is never turned down. In a survey by the Latvian Chamber of Commerce, over 63% of employers have encountered issues with hiring low-skilled workers, and 74% have had trouble hiring highly skilled workers. There are opportunities for everyone!

Some particularly in-demand fields are IT, sales, and engineering. The roles can be found in a range of companies, from multinational corporations down to the local startups that are growing at a head spinning pace.



Lindenholma, Marupe

What to know about salaries

The average salary in Latvia is €1174 gross
The average salary tends to grow each year by 4-6%. Of course, averages are different across industries and regions. Sectors with the highest level of remuneration include IT/ Telecom, Pharmacy, Financial Services, Construction, Wholesale (representative offices).

The average salary across various positions in Latvian startups was €2775 gross
MeetFrank, 2020

Salaries are usually paid monthly. They are often stated in either Gross (aka Bruto) or Net (aka Neto).

Gross = The full salary before taxes
Net = The salary after taxes, which you receive in your bank account

Often "net" salary is described in Latvian as "*uz rokas*", which means "on hand". In other words – the amount of money you have to spend.

Taxes are based on a variety of factors, such as salary, how many dependants you're responsible for, and other factors. To get an idea of your salary after taxes, enter your details in a **salary calculator**.

In Latvia, **taxes are deducted from your salary before it is paid out to you** – that way, as a salaried employee, you don't have to worry about taxes.

Where to look for a job

Cv.lv
The biggest local job board in Latvia covering all industries

YourMove.lv
A platform connecting foreign professionals to companies in Latvia that are seeking global talent

LinkedIn
Use it to establish a network of local professionals and follow the vacancies announced on company profiles

MeetFrank
Career app specializing in IT, software engineering, data and marketing vacancies

ABSL Latvia
A list of career pages of Business Service centres located in Latvia

Contact EURES network consultants in Latvia that specialize in supporting international job seekers

Check the State Employment Agency's vacancy website

Teodors, Jauna Telka, Riga

What to know about taxes

If you're employed by a company registered in Latvia, it will be your employer's responsibility to register you with the State Revenue Service as a taxpayer. Income and social taxes will automatically be deducted from your paycheck, so you won't have to do any yearly taxes.

If you have income from sources that are not a local employer (ex. if you're self-employed), it will be your responsibility to register. In that case, we recommend contacting the **State Revenue Service for assistance**.

The taxes deducted from your salary include:

Progressive income tax: 20-23%, based on salaries up to €62 800 per year

Social insurance tax: 10.5% (and your employer contributes an additional 23,59% on your behalf)

Do hold on to any medical or educational receipts or any donations – you'll be able to submit them once per year for tax rebates. There's even an app for that! Here's a **full list of what qualifies**.

A variety of tax rebates are available. You'll need to have your tax booklet submitted to the SRS, which can be done electronically **here**.

For entrepreneurs

LIAA Business Incubator, Liepaja

As the #1 startup-friendly country, and ranking #19 in the Ease of Doing Business Index, combined with a well-educated and tech-savvy workforce, the opportunities for growing a business in Latvia are truly endless.

Here, we'll dive into the details of what doing business in Latvia looks like, so that you can start off on the right foot. Your success is our success – we're rooting for you!

The country's current business focus is on developing smart city, green tech, IT, biomedicine, **smart materials & photonics, and life sciences industries.** If you're in that sphere, be sure to contact LIAA – there are entire departments dedicated to helping you!

In case you plan to relocate an existing company to Latvia, please visit the Register of Enterprise's website for a **detailed 2-stage process description**.

Do you intend to be self-employed? Learn more about registering a company and taxation **here**.

Starting a business

The basic process of establishing an LLC spans 8 steps. For a detailed description of all the activities, visit the Register of Enterprise's **homepage**.

01 Open a temporary bank account

Take into consideration that the bank will take a few days to go through your records before deciding on opening the account.

02 Decide on a unique name

*You can see if a name has already been registered by searching for it **here**.*

03 Draw up founding documents

You'll need to fill out and submit a Memorandum and Articles of Association, a folio of shareholders, provide info on the owners, signiature certification documents, etc.

04 Deposit the equity in your account

There is a certain type of LLCs that allow for equity of €0.01.

05 Ensure a legal address for the company

If the property doesn't belong to you, you'll need to submit consent from the property owner.

06 Pay the registration fees

*Registration is completed only after the Enterprise Register is able to verify that the state fee is transferred into **The Treasury account**. See the list of fees **here**:*

07 Submit the documents in one of these ways:

- *In-person at the Enterprise Register*
- *Online at Latvija.lv*
- *By email with electronically signed documents*
- *By mail*

All submitted documentation must be in Latvian or with a notary certified translation. We recommend working with professional consultants and lawyers to help with document preparation.

08 Register in the State Revenue Service register of VAT taxpayers

Corporate tax in Latvia

Corporate income tax: 20%

Corporate income tax in Latvia is 20%, which is below the EU average of 21.47%. It's paid from any profit, which is paid out as dividends or for business-unrelated expenses.

There is no corporate income tax applied on reinvested profit.

Mandatory social insurance contributions (MSIC): 23.59%

On behalf of their employees, employers deduct 23.59% from employee Bruto salaries and pay them towards the mandatory social insurance contributions.

Value-added tax: 21%

VAT is charged on all transactions made over the course of doing business, with special rates for specific categories, like education, transportation, and others.

For more information on tax rates, as well as industry-specific programs that might apply to you, visit State Revenue Service homepage:

Origo One, Riga

There are a ton of everyday items we bet you didn't know are Latvian inventions. Here are just a few:

- **Rivets on jeans** *(Jacob Davis / Jākobs Jufess)*
- **Pringles** *(Aleksandrs Liepa)*
- **High-altitude fighter jets** *(Jānis Akermanis / John D. Akerman)*
- **MikroTik routers** *(found in every country of the world)*

Workforce

Latvia is home to a pool of highly qualified individuals – as one of the top 10 most literate countries in the world and one of the most educated, thanks to accessible pricing, with citizen proficiency in multiple languages as the default. With comparatively lower average wages than in Western countries, Latvia's an ideal place to build a team to scale your business.

Language:

- **95%** of inhabitants speak **at least 2 languages** – 2nd place in Europe
- **65%** of inhabitants speak **at least 3 languages**
- **42%** of 15-34 year olds are **fully fluent in English** – the highest rate in the Baltics

Education:

- Latvia has one of the highest rates of female graduates in the world – **65% of graduates are women**
- **42% of 25-34 year olds have a higher education**, above the OECD average of 37%

What makes Latvians excel at what they do*:

- Individualism, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation
- Strong work ethic
- Latvians value competence, discipline and punctuality
- Being good listeners. Unlikely to interrupt, will listen closely and give feedback only at the end
- Quality of life is the sign of success and standing out from the crowd is not admirable

**According to Hofstede Insights and Richard D. Lewis' "When Cultures Collide: Leading across cultures"*

Looking to hire?
List your vacancies on one or more of the most common job sites. Take a look at our "Employment" section of this guide for a list of top sites.

Support for entrepreneurs

If you're looking to do business in Latvia, there are many resources dedicated to making it easier for you!

Have a look and see what might apply to you.

There are many programs that are launched throughout the year to support entrepreneurs. Check the **LIAA events calendar** regularly to find out and apply for them!

The Investment and Development Agency of Latvia (LIAA)

Offers entrepreneurs and investors guidance on business opportunities in Latvia.

The services (which, by the way, are free of charge) include:

- Information on the economic and market situation
- Facilitating business opportunities (location and fact-finding missions, company visits, bring investors to potential facilities sites and arrange meetings with stakeholders)
- Investment incentives
- Facilitated networking
- Identification of best property options
- Cooperation with municipalities and academia
- Access to relevant government officials
- Assistance with start-up procedures and investment project aftercare

Reach out to the LIAA team for case-specific questions!

Business Incubators

With 13 state-sponsored incubators around the country, early-stage entrepreneurs are invited to take advantage of the rapid growth environment and networking.

What to expect:

- 6-month pre-incubation program & up to 2-year incubation program
- Business training
- Mentor support
- Access to grants and co-financing support
- Networking events
- Coworking spaces
- And more

The pre-incubation program is now available in English!

Read more on the Magnetic Latvia website:

Business Accelerators

Latvia is home to several accelerators that can fast-track your startup's success.

They are:

- Buildit – focuses on hardware and the internet of things startups
- Commercialization Reactor – focuses on deep-tech startups
- Overkill Ventures – focuses on B2B software startups
- Startup Wise Guys – focuses on B2B Fintech startups

Read more on StartupLatvia – Acceleration funds:

Science Commercialization

LIAA provides support to public research organizations for commercialization of research results.

Supported activities include:

- Carrying out a feasibility study
- Preparing a commercialization strategy
- Industrial research & experimental development
- Participation in international exhibitions
- And more

Read more on StartupLatvia – Science Commercialization:

Innovation Vouchers

The Innovation voucher program is support for R&D aimed at businesses of every size that develop new products or technologies.

The program supports such R&D activities as:

- The development of a new product or technology
- The strengthening of industrial property rights
- The certification and testing of new products or technologies

Innovation vouchers are up to 85% co-financed for up to €25 000 in expenses.

Read more on StartupLatvia – Innovation Vouchers

Special economic zones (SEZ)

The 5 SEZs in Latvia offer favourable business incentives, including:

- Rebates on real estate tax
- Rebates on corporate income tax
- Tax relief for dividends, management fees, intellectual property payments
- And more

Visit each SEZ's website for more information:

- Liepaja SEZ
- Rezekne SEZ
- Riga Free port
- Ventspils Free port
- Latgale SEZ

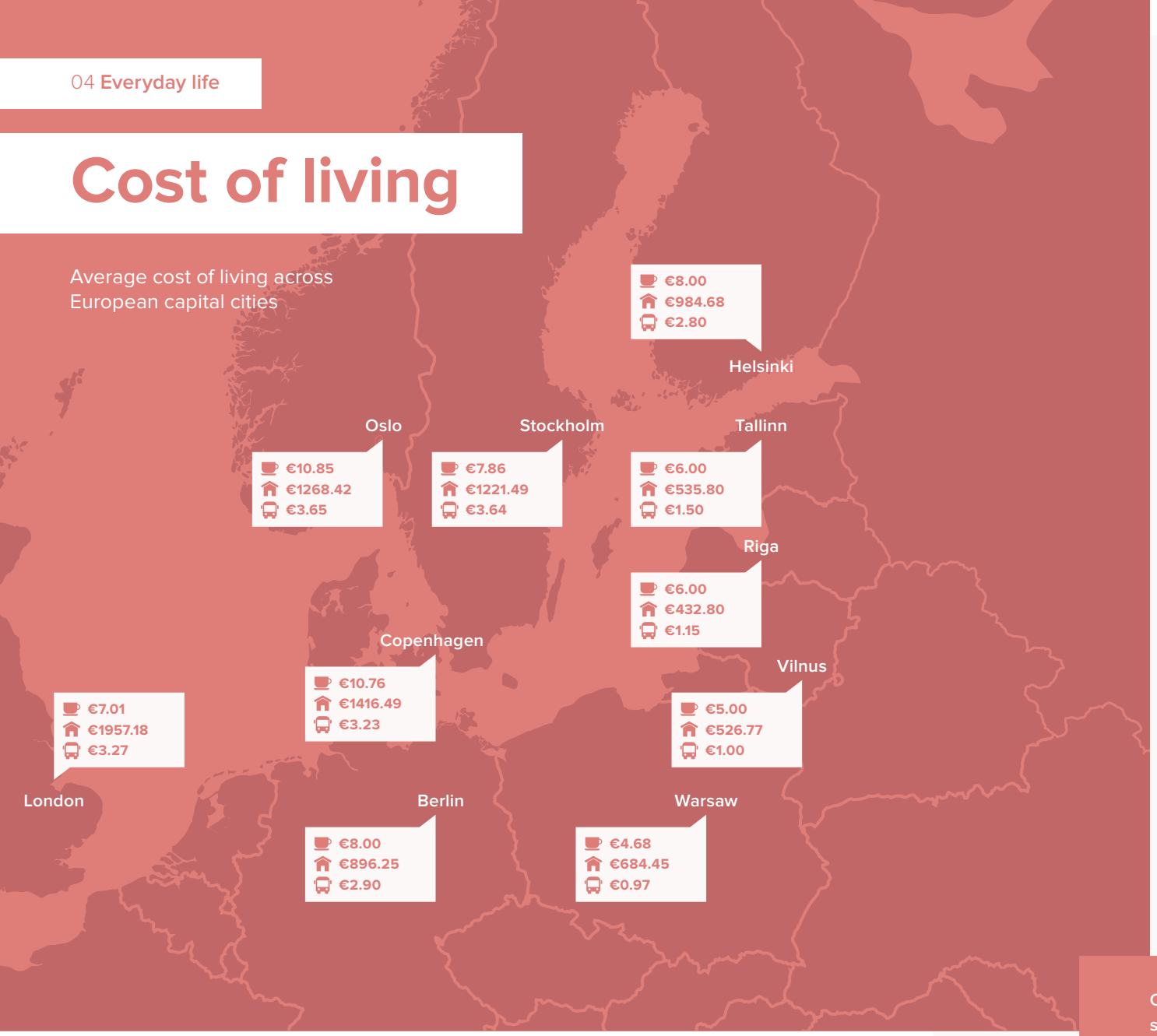
04

Everyday life

© alfaori, Shutterstock

Cost of living

Average cost of living across European capital cities



Numbeo.com (2021)

The cost of living in Latvia is relatively low when compared to other European cities. The balance of cost, opportunity, and lifestyle is what ultimately draws many expats to Latvia.

- Lunch
- Monthly rent of a 1-bedroom apartment
- 1 public transit ride

Other average costs

Monthly utilities

Utilities: **€168.52**

Connectivity

High-speed home internet: **€17.50**
Unlimited mobile phone plan: **€14**

Eating out

Cappuccino: **€2.65**
3-course meal at a nice restaurant: **€40**
A beer: **€3**

Health & well-being

A doctor's visit in a privately owned health institution: **€30-40**
Monthly gym subscription: **€20**
New haircut: **€20-30**

Outside of Riga, the cost of living can vary substantially. In most cases, housing, eating out, public transit, and local produce will be cheaper. That being said, utilities may be higher, depending on the heating and water infrastructure.

Language

© Aleksandrs Muižnieks, Shutterstock

Language is a major factor to feeling settled in Latvia. We're a small country, and very proud of our language – Latvian, which is spoken nowhere else in the world. Locals will love it if you try to speak to them in their own language, even if you're not that good yet. It's the thought that counts!

That being said, Latvia is a very multicultural place, with different cultures and languages living side by side.

About Latvian

Latvian is part of the Indo-European family tree, which has its roots in Ancient Sanskrit!

With 33 letters in the alphabet, 7 grammatical cases, and 6 declensions, Latvian is considered a difficult language to learn. However, with the support of native speakers, local immersion and additional Latvian lessons, the language will come naturally to you.

Latvian is a phonetic language, meaning what the word looks like is how it's pronounced. That means that **all you have to do is get the letter pronunciation down**, and you'll be off to a good start!

What linguists want you to know

Sveiki – Hi

Labdien – Good day

Paldies – Thank you

Kā tev iet? – How are you?

Visu labu – All the best

Jā – Yes

Nē – No

What Latvians want you to know

Daba – nature, part of the Latvian soul

Dziesma – song, the great equalizer and unifier

Klusums – silence, and a good friend of Latvian introverts

What you really need to know

Čau – Hey! Used among friends

Normāli – Fine, the most common response to "how are you"

Learning Latvian

Any Latvian would be thrilled to have another Latvian-speaker in the world. So be sure to know that when you decide to learn the language, you'll have an additional 2 million cheerleaders supporting you!

Some language centers specialize in teaching Latvian to foreigners. Find a list here.

Learn for free

People relocating to Latvia are offered free Latvian language lessons. Classes fill up quickly, so make sure to apply early!

- For people declared in Riga
- For people with a residence permit

Online resources

There are several online resources that can help you with your journey.

- Events and courses in Integration.lv – the events section keeps an updated record of language-based activities for foreigners, like free classes and even improv events!
- e-Laipa – developing vocabulary for A1, A2, and B1 levels
- Loescen – learn basic phrases
- Self-assessment – a tool to understand what your level of knowledge is
- Latvian Language agency – a collection of resources for those who already have basic knowledge of the language
- Mondly – a convenient tool to train your language skills on the go

Mobile & Internet connection

Latvia ranks 4th in terms of broadband connectivity among EU countries, according to the DESI Index

European Commission, 2020

The average mobile internet speed is **48.41Mbps**

There are thousands of public wireless internet points available in Latvia. In Riga alone, users have access to nearly **2,200 free WiFi points**!

99% of the country is covered in a speedy and stable 4G connection. When it comes to internet speed, Latvia is ranked 16th in the world! For you, that means a fast and affordable connection anywhere and everywhere, be it streaming your favorite movie from the comfort of your couch, working from the beach on a sizzling summer day, or listening to your favorite podcast while foraging for mushrooms in a remote corner of an untouched forest.

Phone plans

In Latvia, most homes don't have a stationary phone – almost everyone relies on mobile phones for communicating.

The most common plans are:

- Monthly plans – €14/month on average for unlimited plans, must have a contract signed. Go to one of the mobile operators' salons to set up your connection.
- Pay-as-you-go – You can get a SIM card at corner stores like Narvessen and grocery stores like Rimi, ask for "*Zelta Zivtiņa*", "*LMT Karte*", or another brand's SIM card.

Internet plans

Home internet is relatively cheap at €17.50 per month on average. With most homes in Riga qualified for optical cable connections, it makes for super fast internet surfing.

Top mobile operators:

- LMT
- Tele2
- Bite

Top internet providers:

- Tet
- Baltcom
- LMT

Getting around

Riga International Biennial of Contemporary Art (RIBOCA1), 2018
© Dace Kundrate, Shutterstock

Latvia's a relatively small place, which makes it easy to get around! Riga is home to a far-reaching public transit system, that's supplemented with the rise of various micro-mobility services. Getting to the countryside and other cities is easily accessible via frequent and affordable trains, as well as buses that can bring you to the edge of Latvia and beyond.

The easiest way to look up public transport both in Riga and in other cities in Latvia is through the 1188.lv website. It will also show you what the most convenient route for your trip is, taking into consideration all of the possible modes of transit.

When travelling by train, pay attention to the picturesque train stations! **Ķemeri, Stende, Sigulda, Dubulti, Gulbene** to name a few are worth a visit due to their history and architecture.

Keep your ticket at hand – it will have to be presented either to the bus driver when you get on, or to the inspector in the train after you've boarded.

Public transport in Latvia

The most efficient ways of getting around Latvia using public transit is via train or bus. There are 7 train lines that start in Riga and extend to the outskirts of the country, while there are countless bus routes that will take you to and from wherever you have to go, even abroad!

It's said that bus rides give you the best insight into Latvian rural life – never-ending woods and meadows outside the window, countryside hits blasting from the driver's radio, and the elderly traveling home with baskets full of treasures purchased in the central market – an interesting journey is guaranteed!

Getting tickets

Rail

Local

- using the **Trains in Latvia** or **Mobilly apps**
- at station ticket offices
- onboard the train from the ticket inspector

Traveling abroad

Currently, one can reach Valga in Estonia, Moscow and St. Petersburg in Russia, Vilnius in Lithuania and Kiev, Minsk in Belarus by **train**.

Buses

Local

- using the **Bezrindas** or **Mobilly apps**
- at bus station ticket desks or ticket machines
- last-minute from the bus driver

Traveling abroad

Safe and comfortable journeys with coach companies such as **Ecolines**, **LuxExpress**, **Eurolines**, **Flixbus** will take you nearby to Klaipeda, Siauliai, Tartu and Tallinn in the neighbouring countries and as far as Berlin, Prague, Warsaw and other **European destinations**.

Public transport in Riga

In Riga, public transport services are provided by buses, trams, trolley-buses, and minibuses, all of which run approximately between 5am and midnight.

The cost of a ride on any of them is **€1.15** if purchased in advance, but tickets from the driver will cost **€2**. Discounts are available for students and seniors.

Where to get tickets:

- **Narvesen** and other corner stores
- From **ticket machines** in some bus stops and in some trams
- From **Rīgas Satiksme offices**

Helpful apps:

- You can plan your route easily on the **Rīgas Satiksme** website
- **Trafi** can help you find your closest bus/tram stop and the quickest route to your destination

Night buses may drive some routes during the night-time hours on weekends.

© Svietlieisha Olena/Shutterstock

Public transport in other cities

Each major town in Latvia has its own local public transport system. Tickets can be purchased from the driver (bring cash!), but for bigger cities, a network of ticket outlets will be available.

Check the city's website for more information!

Urban mobility

If public transport is not your cup of tea, there are various other ways you can get around town, including taxis, micro-mobility services like electric scooters, ride-hailing, and car-sharing apps.

Car sharing

- CarGuru
- CityBee
- Fiqsy

Scooters

- Bolt
- Fiqsy
- CityBee
- Atom

Taxis

- Baltic Taxi
- Red Cab
- TaksiLV

Ride-hailing

- Bolt

All licenced cabs have special yellow number plates. If you're using a traditional, non-app service provider, insist on the meter being turned on.

For shorter journeys around the centre of town, **the cost shouldn't exceed €6**.

Driving

Driving in Latvia is done on the right side of the road. The default speed limits are 50 km/h in urban areas and 90 km/h on highways. Speeding is monitored both by stationary speed cameras and by the police.

Other important rules:

- The minimum age for driving a car is 18
- Everyone in the car has to fasten their seatbelt (including the passengers in the back seat)
- The permissible alcohol level in the blood is up to 0.5 ‰, and up to 0,2‰ for people having a driving licence for less than 2 years. The police often monitor drivers for alcohol use
- Winter tires are compulsory between December 1 and March 1

The Southern Bridge (Dienvidu tilts), Riga © fotokaleinar, Shutterstock

Driver's license

EU, EEA and Swiss citizens

Your driver's license will be valid in Latvia without taking any additional tests.

Non-EU citizens

If you are staying in Latvia for more than a year, you'll need to exchange your driver's license to a local one by passing a medical examination and a driving test. Until then, you can drive the vehicle categories that are indicated in your licence (or its accompanying document). Without a category indication, you can only drive B category vehicles.

If your license isn't in the Latin alphabet, you'll need to have its notarised translation to Latvian.

Read more about obtaining and exchanging your driver's license license **here**:

NB! UK citizens can exchange their driving license without taking additional exams.

Parking

Most parking in the center of Riga is paid and costs around €1.00-2.50 an hour. Paid parking is indicated by white lines marking the parking space and a parking meter road sign at the respective intersection.

The easiest way to find a parking area and pay the fee is using the **Mobilly app**. Alternatively, you can use non-cash parking meters on the street.

Registering a vehicle

If you come to Latvia with your car, you will have to register it **within 3 months**. You can do the registration in any of the **26 CSDD customer service centers** in Latvia.

When a vehicle is registered, it will get a national registration number and a vehicle registration certificate. See the complete list of documents needed for registration & fees applicable for the process **here**.

Vehicle insurance

OCTA or Motor Vehicle Owners' Compulsory 3rd Party Liability insurance (MTPL)
Mandatory for all vehicles

The MTPL policy (OCTA in Latvian) compensates losses that you, the driver, has inflicted on others – vehicles, cyclists, pedestrians, passengers and their property.

CASCO
Not mandatory, but can be very useful

Additional insurance covering accidental damage to your vehicle. That could be theft, scratches, broken windshields, etc.

Contact an insurance provider for a quote (our health insurance section has a list).

© Ģirts Ragelis, Shutterstock

Healthcare

Pauls Stradiņš Clinical University Hospital, Riga
© Pauls Stradiņš Clinical University Hospital

Latvia's healthcare system is a mix of private and publicly funded services. Permanent residence permit holders will have access to publicly funded services, though you may encounter a waiting line. Most paid services, however, are available to everyone, with little-to-no waiting time and at an affordable price.

Useful contacts

113 or **112**

Call for emergency care and an ambulance

+371 66016001

Consult the public GP phone line **if you happen to have a simple health problem and wish to get medical advice outside the working hours of your own GP.**

Available from 17:00-8:00 on workdays, and 24h on weekends.

How healthcare works in Latvia

Most Latvians are registered with a general practitioner (or what Latvians call "*ģimenes ārsts*" – a family doctor). This is the first point of contact for everything health-related, and the GPs will then direct their patient to specialists as necessary. These visits are state-subsidized, with patients paying just over €1 per visit. A list of healthcare organizations is available **here**.

Anyone can visit specialist doctors by signing up and paying the full price. The cost is usually between €20-60.

- **Permanent residence holders:** have the opportunity to apply to a GP and use their services. **Find one near you** and call them about joining their practice.
- **Temporary residence holders:** visit doctors when needed by paying full price, and offset the costs with your mandatory health insurance.

Acute and emergency healthcare

Acute and emergency healthcare services are provided in specialized trauma points, as well as in most large hospitals and some private clinics.

Make sure to bring identification and your health insurance with you!

Where to go for emergency help

- **Paula Stradiņa klīniskā universitātes slimnīca**
- **Rīgas Austrumu klīniskā universitātes slimnīca ("Gaiļezers")**
- **Rīgas 2.slimnīca**
- **Traumatoloģijas un ortopēdijas slimnīca**
- [Children's] **Bērnu klīniskā universitātes slimnīca**
- [Pregnancy] **Rīgas Dzemdību nams**
- [Psychiatric] **Rīgas psihiatrijas un narkoloģijas centrs**

Major regional hospitals will offer 24/7 emergency services. **Find a list here**:

Health insurance

Private health insurance
Health insurance is a mandatory document in order to obtain a temporary residence permit. As a minimum, this will give you access to emergency medical care, treatment for critical conditions, and transportation either to a different health institution or back to your country of origin in the event of severe illness or death.

Most major insurance companies will offer this basic package, but you can definitely upgrade to increase your healthcare coverage. Take a look at their websites to see what they offer!

Top Insurance companies:

- BTA
- BALTA
- Balcia
- ERGO
- IF

European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)
EU citizens and foreigners with permanent residence permits can apply for the EHIC to get access to state-funded healthcare while temporarily in the EU, EEA countries, and Switzerland, at the same costs of locals.

Where can I use EHIC in Latvia?

- Trauma points
- Hospital admissions departments
- In an emergency case – State Emergency Medical Service (call 113).

Get more info here:

EHIC is not an alternative to travel insurance. It does not cover private healthcare or costs such as a return flight to your home country or lost/stolen property.

"Medics to the World" by Aigars Bikse
© AJSTUDIO PHOTOGRAPHY, Shutterstock

Culture

Latvian Song and Dance Festival, the Mezaparks Great Bandstand, Riga
© Archive of Latvian National Centre for Culture

One thing you'll find in common with most Latvians is a deep appreciation for culture.

Latvia has the highest spending on culture in the EU*, and you can definitely feel it in terms of both volume of events and financial accessibility.

The country is a hotspot for cultural activities, ranging from classical and ethnographic to contemporary and avant garde. You won't have trouble finding something you'll love. On the contrary, the biggest problem you'll run into is the agony of choice.

**% of total government expenditure (Eurostat, 2018)*

Latvian love for culture in numbers

- **92% of inhabitants in Latvia** claim they attend cultural events and venues, either concerts, museums, galleries, cinema, festivals or other cultural occurrences.
- The greatest culture consumption is observed among youngsters – **15 to 30-year-olds**.
- Latvia has **a network of 120 music schools** located not just in the cities but also in the countryside, and **1 in 12 children** attend those.
- The latest Latvian Song and Dance festival (2018) gathered a record number of participants **totalling up to 43,219 including choir singers, dancers, folk musicians, orchestra members**. The participant age ranges from **3-year-olds to 91-year-old**.

"Man 30 gadu" at the Latvian National Theatre
©The Latvian National theatre, photo by Kristaps Kalns

The Mikhail Chekhov Riga Russian Theatre is the oldest Russian-language drama theatre outside Russia.

A snapshot of what's on offer

Classical & choral music

- **3** professional choirs
- **4** professional symphonic orchestras

Latvia is internationally famous for its deep-rooted choral music traditions and many excellent classical musicians, such as:

- **Andris Nelsons**, classical conductor, 3-time Grammy winner
- **Pēteris Vasks**, classical composer, Grammy award nominee
- **Iveta Apkalna**, one of the world's leading organists

The amateur choir movement in Latvia is highly developed – **around 5% of the country's population are amateur choir participants**.

Thus, many Latvian amateur choirs regularly compete in international competitions where they're always among the top candidates for main prizes.

Theatre

- **8** state co-funded theatres
- **32%** of the population attend the theatre at least once a year

Theatre is one of the most popular forms of performance art in Latvia, and Latvians are keen theatre lovers. Going to a play is a ritual that involves dress-up, visiting the theatre's café before the play, and bringing flowers to beloved actors who often have a status of local influencers. The Latvian theatre scene is the Latvian *Hollywood*.

While most plays are held in Latvian, the Riga Russian Theater, founded in 1883, offers content to a Russian-speaking audience, and a few theatres provide English subtitles for some plays as well.

Ballet

Closely knit to the traditions of the Russian school of classical ballet, Latvian ballet has given the world such stars as **Mikhail Baryshnikov**, **Maris Liepa**, and **Alexander Godunov**.

The Latvian National Ballet, born in 1922, today builds its repertoire on the gems of classical ballet and contemporary productions. The Ballet has collaborated with world-renowned choreographers such as Boris Eifman, Krzyzstof Pastor, and more.

Soviet Latvian ballet dancer **Mikhail Baryshnikov** is considered one of the greatest dancers of our time. He commenced a spectacular dancer career with such prominent theatres as American Ballet Theatre and New York City Ballet. During the past few years Rigans have had the unique opportunity to experience two theatre production premiers starring Baryshnikov – The White Helicopter (2019) & Brodsky / Baryshnikov (2015).

Opera

For a population of less than 2M, Latvia can be proud of many great opera voices that often steal the global spotlight.

Elina Garanca, **Aleksandrs Antonenko**, **Marina Rebeka**, **Inese Galante**, and **Kristine Opolais** are just a few examples of the brilliance that shines on stages of New York's Metropolitan Opera, Opera National de Paris, London's Royal Opera House, the Vienna State Opera, and more world-class opera houses.

Opera performances have both Latvian and English surtitles for a more enjoyable experience.

The world-renowned composer **Richard Wagner** lived and worked in Riga from 1837 to 1839. It can rightfully be said that Wagner's conducting style, as well as opera Rienzi, genuinely belong to Riga.

"Hamlet. Tell Me (No) Tales" at the Latvian National Opera and Ballet
© The Latvian National Opera and Ballet, photo by Agnese Zeltiņa

Visual arts

The Latvian visual art scene is Nordic and poetic, often executed in refined techniques, paying a lot of attention to an artwork's formal and esthetic aspects.

Well-known artists include **Vilhelms Purvitis**, **Janis Rozentals**, **Vija Celmins**, and more.

Visiting an art museum in Latvia is relatively cheap. The local art scene has a lot to offer: Latvian National Museum of Art, Art Museum Riga BOURSE, Mark Rothko Art Center, and many independent galleries.

The Latvian National Museum of Art collection comprises more than 52,000 works by Baltic and Russian visual artists.

One of the most significant artists of his generation, **Mark Rothko**, associated with the American Abstract Expressionist movement of art, was born in Latvia, where he spent the first 10 years of his life.

Contemporary music

Latvia has a lively local contemporary music scene – performances in local pubs and clubs, open-air concerts in forests, by the rivers, or even on lakes.

International musicians often include Riga in their world tours. Venues such as Arena Riga, Mežaparks Great Bandstand, and Palladium Riga often welcome world-class bands and performers.

The annual **Positivus Festival** is the largest music and arts festival in the Baltics, taking place since 2007. For the last few years, it has gathered around 30,000 people each year, and in 2012 it won the "Best European Festival" award from the British Festival Guide.

Daugavpils Mark Rothko Art Center, Daugavpils © Investment and Development Agency of Latvia

© Vidzeme concert hall "Cēsis", Cesis
Vidzeme concert hall "Cēsis", photo by Indriķis Stūrmanis

Regional hubs

Concert halls "Latvija", "Cēsis" and "Lielais dzintars", Latgale embassy "Gors" and Dzintari concert hall – every concert hall of the regional network is an artwork and buzzing hub itself combining excellent architecture, dazzling concerts and plays, as well as comfortable cinemas and exhibition spaces.

Find tickets:

- www.bilesuparadize.lv
- www.bilesuserviss.lv
- www.kurpes.lv

Most events have corresponding Facebook events, and many Latvians find out about the hottest events on Facebook. Make sure to check out the events page to see what's on!

Latvians know that a summer must-do is visiting at least one ***zaļumballe*** outside the capital city – a big outdoor dance party, usually accompanied by a local village band that keeps playing until the last dancers go home in the early morning light.

Unique to Latvia

Latvia has a rich culture, with many ancient traditions still kept alive by enthusiastic locals. These traditions stand out among other cultural events, as they're unique to Latvia.

Midsummer festival
© Investment and Development Agency of Latvia

These **mind-blowing performances are made up of amateur choirs, folk dancing groups, folklorists, and more**. Anyone can participate, including you – all you need to do is join a community in your municipality.

May 22 is the day to celebrate all of the names that don't have a dedicated name day.

Latvian Song and Dance Celebration

Every 5 years, over 40,000 performers come together in Riga to participate in this celebration of Latvian culture. Singers, dancers, and musicians from around the country perform in massive-scale concerts that can be attended in-person. This UNESCO-recognized event takes over the city for the week that it runs, and is certainly a sight to behold.

Jāņi (summer solstice)

Jāņi is the most anticipated celebration of the year, happening from 23rd til 24th of June. On this day, the Latvians honour their pagan roots. It originated as an ancient fertility festival celebrated after sowing the crops and before gathering harvest. Locals make flower and oak leaf crowns, light bonfires, and sing and dance throughout the night. It is so ingrained in local culture that both the 23rd and 24th are national holidays!

Name days

Each Latvian name is marked on a day in the calendar along with a few others, and that day is their name day! It's celebrated almost to the same extent that a birthday is – with flowers, cake, and congratulations. Latvian's won't say no to another reason to celebrate.

Cemetery festivals

A community-wide event where extended families gather to tend their family graves and show respect to their ancestors. What might initially seem peculiar, it's a light-hearted and eagerly-awaited yearly event. These usually happen on summer weekends, with families dressing up, and adorning family gravesites with flowers and candles. A priest gives a sermon, and local musicians perform afterward. These festivals differ from region to region but Latgale is most known for their celebratory festivals.

Sports

© Agris Krusts, Shutterstock

Our teams might not always win but for us they are always the champions! For a country of just around 2 million people we definitely punch above our weight on the world's stage.

Latvians have managed to pioneer a few important moments in sport history: **Latvia's national basketball team** won the first ever FIBA championship in 1935, while **BMX racer Māris Štrombergs** became the first ever Olympic champion in this sport.

Latvians, possibly, are the best sports fans in the world. Well-organised, dressed and painted in the colours of the Latvian flag, they are visible and audible wherever they go, always ready to lift the mood of everyone around them.

Ice hockey

Hockey is the main and national sport in Latvia. Talented players appear every year, and a fair few of them have made it to the world's most prominent hockey leagues, including the hockey mecca that is the NHL.

Basketball

Basketball has always been a big part of sports culture in Latvia. Each town has its own open-air street basketball field filled with youngsters playing the game on warm summer evenings. Also, the abbreviation K.P.* doesn't require additional explanation in most cases.

**Kristaps Porziņģis, a well-known Latvian NBA player*

Football

Despite Latvia's northern climate and history, football has long since been a part of the country's sporting culture. While it isn't the most widely watched sport in Latvia, it does attract many spectators when the national team competes in international tournaments.

Winter sports

Skeleton, bobsleigh and luge are a matter of great pride in Latvia. Martins Dukurs (skeleton) has been at the top of the game for quite a few years, with only a few others who can compete with him worldwide.

The same goes with bobsleigh and Oskars Melnbārdis' team and many other young talents arising each year.

Get to know about Latvian achievements in other sports here:

Nature

Pape nature park
© Investment and Development Agency of Latvia, photo by Valdis Skudre

Latvians like to put **nature everywhere** – forests are Latvian organic food shops where they pick berries and mushrooms and gather teas and herbs. When they're angry they say "*Ej dillēs!*" or "*Ej bekot*" which literally means "Go to dill!" or "Go pick mushrooms!".

To say that Latvia boasts pristine nature is no exaggeration! With 54% of the country covered by forests, nearly 500km of white sandy beach coastline, and untouched nature just a 20 min drive from Riga's center, nature is at your fingertips and open to be explored.

You can take it upon yourself to explore nature with forest hikes and seaside walks. Or you can team up with enthusiasts for more specific interests, like bird-watching, fishing, or hunting. Get to know the jewels from each region, and start planning your nature getaways in Latvia by scanning through a more detailed list of options **here**.

Guided hiking, SUP board and paddling tours with fun additions are organized by some organizations such as **Movement spontaneous**, **Purvu bridēji**, **Hiking in Latvia**, **Lūzumpunkts**, **Piedzīvojuma gars** and others.

Hands-on ways to experience Latvia's nature

There are many unique ways to experience nature in Latvia, here are just a few.

SUP in the bogs
Take a Stand up Paddling tour in one of our many bogs for a unique experience. Especially at dawn!

Lake concerts
Attend a nighttime **concert on a lake** – simply rent a boat on the designated lake and enjoy the atmosphere.

Barefoot trail
Enjoy one of the **barefoot forest trails** for a different kind of forest experience – fun for the whole family!

Education

University of Latvia, Riga
© University of Latvia, photo by Toms Grinbergs

Both public and private education options are available at every level. School traditionally starts on September 1st, when parents are given the day off to take their kids to school, and kids usually go in with flowers for their teacher.

Pre-school

- Age: 1.5-7
- Kindergartens or pre-primary classes at general education institutions, e.g. schools
- Compulsory at age of 5 and 6

Basic education

- Age: 7-16
- Schools
- Compulsory from age of 7

Secondary education

- Age: 16 and up, depending on the programme
- Schools or vocational education institutions
- Not compulsory

Higher education

- Age: 19 and up, depending on the programme
- Higher education institutions

Kindergartens

There are both public and private pre-schools available for kids starting from 1.5 years old. Public kindergartens have low costs, and thus have long waiting lines. But don't worry if you haven't managed to apply in time! There are a bunch of private kindergartens that the municipality has a contract with – the city council will cover a share of monthly costs incurred by the participation fee so that your kid can attend the private kindergarten.

Price of kindergarten in Latvia

Public
Parents only cover the cost of meals (€1,5 to 2)

Private
€300 to 400 monthly, covering both attendance and meals

Application

- Riga: Online **www.eriga.lv**
- Other municipalities: **www.epakalpojumi.lv** or visit the homepage of the municipality and get in touch directly with the Education department

Basic education

Public schools implement the government-mandated education system where classroom sizes are up to 30 pupils. There are also quite a few private international schools in Riga, some of which also offer the International Baccalaureate programme. Additionally, there are state-funded ethnic minority schools in Latvia where part of the language of instruction is in Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, Polish, etc.

While your children are welcome at public schools, if there is too much of a language barrier, they may benefit more from attending a private, international school.

© Liepaja State Technical School

Documents needed

Public schools

- Riga
- Other regions: visit your municipality's Education department's website

- ☑ Application (a form will be provided in the school)
- ☑ Description of previous study experience and grades
- ☑ Child's medical history

International schools

- International School of Latvia (IB program)
- International School of Riga (IB program)
- École Française Jules Verne de Riga
- Private German International School – DEUTSCHE SCHULE RIGA
- Exupery International School
- King's College Latvia
- Municipality-subsidized ethnic minority schools

Requirments are school-specific, check out the homepage for more information.

Vocational education

Vocational education is an option for secondary school, where pupils are given practical and theoretical preparation for work in a particular profession. Many programs offer students a practical basis for the highly sought-after STEM-related higher education programs in Latvia.

Top 3 vocational schools according to evaluation of employers in Latvia:

- Riga Technical college
- Riga Technical school of Tourism and Creative industries
- Riga Trade vocational secondary school

Programs in vocational schools are usually conducted in Latvian.

Higher education

There are 6 universities and 21 academies offering wide-ranging higher education in Latvia. While humanitarian studies, arts and music studies are internationally recognized and very affordable, the future estimates show that most highly sought-after specialists will be the graduates of STEM programs.

Top rated universities in Latvia

01 University of Latvia

02 Riga Technical University

03 Riga Stradins University

04 Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies

Pricing

The cost for post-secondary education can vary, depending on the program, the university, and exam results. In public universities (such as LU and RTU), there are state-subsidized spots for the students with the best grades. Meanwhile in private universities, such as RSU and SSE, full tuition is applied.

Student-friendly housing is provided in most of the universities ranging from €65 to €290 per month, depending on the facilities, number of students in the room, and extras.

For more info, check out the **Study in Latvia page**:

Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies, Jelgava
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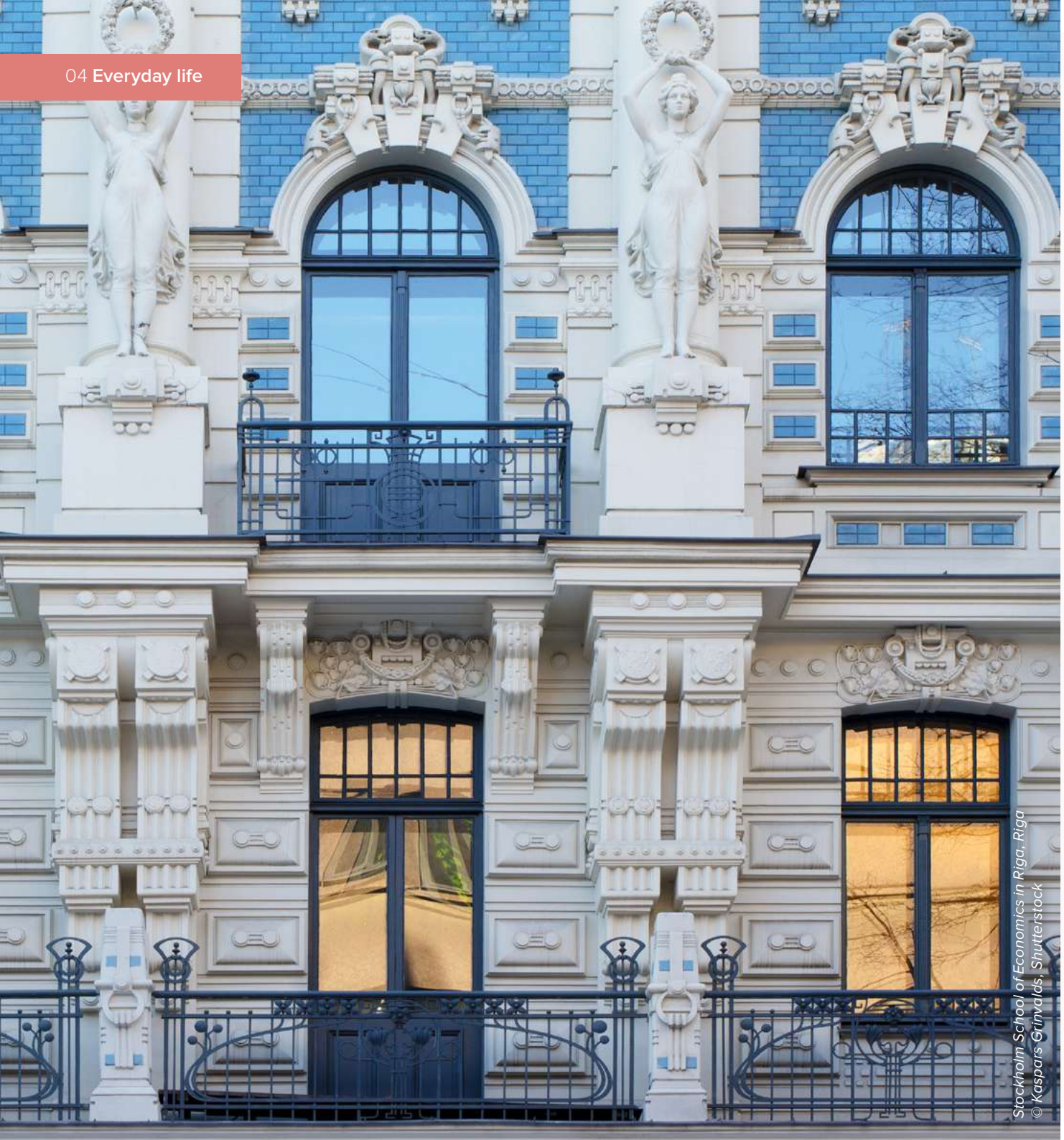

Stockholm School of Economics in Riga, Riga
© Kaspars Grinvalds, Shutterstock

Post-graduate

A variety of master's and doctorate programs are available through any of the universities.

Several MBA programs offer world-class education for executive level professionals in English:

- Stockholm School of Economics in Riga (the #1 provider of Executive education in the Nordics & Baltics according to the latest worldwide ranking)
- Riga Business School

Life-long learning

The country is filled with learning opportunities, both formal and informal. Here are a few state-funded initiatives worth keeping an eye on.

- Adult learning program
  500 different courses are co-financed by the State Education Development agency and the European Social Fund. Be it programming, entrepreneurship, construction or project management, everyone will be able to find something useful.

- Specialist and manager-level programs
  LIAA offers various programs at different times of the year for specialist- and manager-level professionals, such as the mini-MBA program in Innovations in collaboration with Riga Business School, executive education at a program organized by Stanford university etc.

Staying in Latvia

Jūrkalne Steep Coast
© Investment and Development Agency of Latvia

So you want to stay in Latvia longer? We don't blame you!

There are a few options for you, ranging from long-term residence to becoming a full-fledged citizen.

Long-term residence

After at least 5 years of residence in Latvia & the EU, third-country nationals gain the right to apply for a long-term resident status.

Your benefits:

- Visa-free travel within the Schengen zone
- The ability to work anywhere else in the EU after one year of work in any EU country, along with the right to apply for a residence permit there.

The criteria:

- The last 5 years have been spent continuously and lawfully residing in the country's territory.

For more information on the application process & criteria, see here:

Latvian Citizenship

What can be better than realizing that you're home, and that you're here to stay? Well, it might be realizing that you can become part of the exclusive club of 2 million citizens.

Your benefits:

- Travelling visa-free within 150 countries including the Schengen area
- Access to world class EU healthcare system
- Latvian and EU citizenship for your children
- Access to world class educational system of EU and EFTA.
- Right to work in EU and EFTA countries

Those who have Latvian ancestral roots can apply for **dual citizenship**.

The criteria:

- At least 15 years old
- Permanent place of residence has been in Latvia for no less than the last 5 years, with some exceptions
- Fluency in Latvian, knowledge in the basic principles of the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia, the text of the National Anthem, and the basics of history and culture
- Having a legal source of income
- Submission of notice regarding the renunciation of your former citizenship and an expatriation permit from that country.

See the process, conditions and documents needed for the process in detail here:

Helpful resources

National Library of Latvia, Riga
© Gariis Polskis, Shutterstock

Try searching for Facebook groups that connect expats or your nationals, like “Expats in Latvia”, “Indian association in Latvia”, “Expats in Riga” etc.

Settling in

There are a few organizations that are here for you when you arrive in Latvia. Their goal? To help you settle in and feel at home. Take a look at what’s on offer, and what will support you best.

Information Centre for Newcomers (ICN)

A one-stop-shop service to support newcomers in settling in, offering free services such as:

- Translations
- Legal, employment, educational, wellness consultations
- Psychologist support
- Latest info on language courses
- And more!

Visit their website:

Remigration coordinators

Dedicated consultants to support Latvian diaspora in remigrating back to Latvia.

They’ll help you find:

- Housing options
- Employment opportunities
- And any answers you might have

There’s one coordinator for each region, get in touch with yours:

EURES consultants

Consultants that specialize in supporting the free movement of workers within the EU, Switzerland, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

They can help with:

- Finding employment
- Info on living conditions
- And any other related questions

Contact a consultant:

Make Room Latvia

A non-profit organization that supports immigrant integration, particularly foreign students, asylum seekers and people with refugee and alternative statuses.

They offer:

- Social mentoring
- Language learning
- Generating employment, volunteering, and entrepreneurship opportunities
- Bureaucratic support

For more info go to:

Dzintari Forest park
© Investment and Development Agency of Latvia

Latvia ranks 4th in EU e-government benchmark
(2020)

Useful e-services

Latvija.lv

A platform to quickly access Latvian State services.

Here you'll find info and resources on:

- Social services
- Finances and taxes
- Consular services
- Environment
- Rights
- And more

Take a browse to learn more about available services:

Electronic Declaration System (EDS)

The State Revenue Service's platform for communicating with taxpayers and performing all of the related tasks.

Here you'll be able to:

- Submit tax declarations
- Pay taxes online
- Communicate with the SRS
- And more

To access the EDS, you'll either need a Latvian bank account or an eID card issued by the OCMA.

Go to the website here:

Staying safe

Above all, safety is the most important. Latvia's a great place to live, but as with any place, especially large cities, being vigilant is always recommended.

Here are a few recommendations from locals:

- In crowded places such as the Central Market or Bus Station, keep an eye on your belongings and don't leave bags or pockets open.
- When going into nature, beware of forest ticks – they can be abundant from May to September. Use tick-repellant spray and tuck your pants into your socks. If you do get bitten by one, get in touch with a doctor to remove it properly as soon as you get back to the city.

Emergency numbers:

- **Fire and rescue service:** 112
- **Emergency medical assistance:** 113 or 112
- **Police:** 110 or 112
- **Gas emergency service:** 114

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Investment and Development Agency of Latvia

MAGNETIC LATVIA

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