

instant

**RIGA****inyourpocket****February - March 2011**

## Introducing Riga

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

In Riga, art nouveau and medieval architecture are always visible, 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.

[Arrival & Transport](#)[Basics](#)[Restaurants](#)[Nightlife](#)[Sights](#)[Hotels](#)

and a whole host of other useful information

## By bus

The first thing you'll notice upon arrival at the bus terminal or *autoosta* (J-3, Pāgas 1, [www.autoosta.lv](http://www.autoosta.lv). Open 05:00 - 24:00) are the impressive hangars of the Central Market to your right just above the murky waters of the Riga canal. Inside, Eurolines and Ecolines offices are located to your left as well as an ATM, baggage room (0.40 - 1Ls for the first hour, 0.20Ls each additional hour) and toilets for 0.20Ls (ask for paper). To your right is the waiting room and internet area. A bar/cafeteria, a baby-changing station, a shower and even a small hostel are available upstairs. At the far end of the hall is a bus information centre (open 08:00 - 21:00), currency exchange (open 07:00 - 20:00, Sat, Sun 09:00 - 17:00) and pharmacy (open 07:00 - 20:00) or *aptieka* in Latvian. Outside along the canal is an *e-talons* office (open 09:00 - 19:00, Sat 10:00 - 16:00; closed Sun) as well as a ticket machine where you can buy public transport tickets.

**Getting to town:** trams №7 or 9 stop in front of the bus station; ride it one stop into the centre (buy a 0.70Ls ticket from the driver). To get there on foot, turn left, walk through the underpass and follow the signs 'Vecrīga-Vaiņu iela' into Old Riga. The cabs outside are notoriously dodgy, so either order a taxi by phone (see Getting around) or use public transport. ▶

## By car

As of 21 December 2007, Latvia is part of the Schengen zone of European nations and no longer operates passport checkpoints on its land borders with Estonia and Lithuania. Just drive across the border. The Russian and Belarusian borders still require time and patience. Happy trails! ▶

## By ferry

The ferry terminal (B-2, Eksporta 3a) and yacht harbour lie less than 1km north of Old Riga. A bank machine and café (09:00 - 18:30) are available as well as a Tallink ticket office and a souvenir/alcohol shop.

**Getting to town:** go right across the parking lot in the direction of the ugly grey skyscraper. Old Riga is just beyond it. Taxis are also available. ▶

## By plane

The airport (Iidosta) is some 13km southwest of the Riga city centre. Baggage claim and customs are fairly quick. Rent a car or visit the airport welcome centre in the arrivals hall. A 24-hour baggage room (1Ls/half day) and currency exchange booths (09:00 - 00:30) are also available here, as well as ATMs and a post office (open 08:00 - 17:30, Sat, Sun 09:00 - 16:00).

If you've departed from a non-Schengen country such as Ireland, the UK, the US or Uzbekistan, you will arrive in a different terminal at the north end of the airport building. Car rental and currency exchange are available here, but you might want to leave the terminal, make a right and then enter the Schengen arrival hall because it offers more services.

**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 10Ls. The Airport Express shuttle stops at five different hotels throughout the city for 3Ls every 30 minutes between 05:30 - 00:45. Public bus №22 (get off at 11.novembra krastmala or the Stockmann shopping centre) costs 0.70Ls and departs for the city centre roughly every 20 minutes, but be prepared to pay an extra 0.80Ls for large pieces of luggage. Exit the airport arrivals hall and walk across the parking lot to find the bus stop and schedule. For more information visit [www.riga-airport.com](http://www.riga-airport.com). ▶

## Tourist information

**City of Riga Information Centre I-2, Rātslaukums 6, tel. 67 03 79 00, fax 67 03 79 10, [www.rigatourism.com](http://www.rigatourism.com).** Offers a wide range of information in a variety of languages. ▶ Open 09:00 - 18:00. Closed Sun.

## By train

The train station (Centrālā stacija, D-4, Stacijas laukums) 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 renovated pay toilets (0.15Ls - ask for paper from the surly cashier) and a baggage room (0.50 - 1.50Ls/day), open 04:30 - 24:00. Exchange money at the currency exchanges (valūtas maiņas) in tunnels A and B, at the Parex bank to the right of the Central Hall when coming from the platforms, or at the Swedbank to the left. There are several bank machines in the terminal. **Getting to town:** you are right beside Old Riga. Turn left when leaving the station and head toward the spire of St. Peter's Church, then walk through the underpass and follow the signs '13. janvāra iela' and turn right onto Aspazijas bulvāris. ▶

## Public transport

Riga has nine tram lines, 20 trolleybus routes and 54 bus routes that operate from as early as 05:00 to as late as 01:00, depending on the route. Buy a ticket from the driver for 0.70Ls or purchase a cheaper *e-talons* ticket for 0.50Ls beforehand at designated Riga Transport (Rīgas Satiksme) ticket offices, at public transport ticket machines or at Narvesen and Plus Punkts newsstands, post offices and Rimi supermarkets.

If you're planning on using public transport frequently then it's more economical to buy a ticket for more than one trip or for a period of time. Passengers can choose from a wide variety of different ticket options which include tickets for one (0.50Ls), four (2Ls), five (2.50Ls), 10 (4.75Ls) and 20 (9Ls) rides or tickets good for one (1.90Ls), three (5.70Ls) or five (6 - 9.50Ls) days of travel. The tickets are valid for trams, trolleybuses and city buses. If you buy an *e-talons* ticket you have to press it up against the electronic ticket readers on the bus or tram as soon as you board the vehicle. The green light will flash and the display will show you how many more rides are left on the card (e.g. Atlikums: 7).

You can also take a mikroautobuss or mikriņš, passenger vans that list their destinations and route numbers on their windscreens. They are a scourge to urban transit as they'll basically stop anywhere along their routes to pick up or drop off passengers causing delays and traffic jams. Pay the driver the fare, which varies depending on the route.

Read more about routes and exact departure times in English on the Riga Transport Authority's website [www.rigassatiksme.lv](http://www.rigassatiksme.lv). ▶

## Taxis

**Baltic Taxi Tel. (+371) 20 00 85 00, [www.baltictaxi.lv](http://www.baltictaxi.lv).** This company charges a flat fee of 9Ls from the airport to anywhere in Riga and vice versa. ▶ [CC](#)

**Lady Taxi Tel. (+371) 27 80 09 00, [www.lady-taxi.lv](http://www.lady-taxi.lv).** All cabs are driven exclusively by female drivers. ▶ [CC](#)

**Smile Taxi Tel. (+371) 22 57 76 77, [www.smiletaxi.lv](http://www.smiletaxi.lv).** ▶ [CC](#)

## Alcohol

Latvia has the dubious honour of holding the record for the world's drunkest person. A few years ago an unnamed vagrant was found unconscious by the police and rushed to hospital where his blood test revealed an astounding 7.22 parts per mille of alcohol. Before this man was saved by law enforcement, the medical community had agreed that 4 parts per million was a lethal dose for any human. Although we don't suggest you attempt to break any records, we do hope you enjoy a local drink in moderation while in Riga. *Užavas*, *Bauskas*, *Tērvetes* and the hard to find *Valmiermuižas* are among the nation's best beers and the infamous Riga Black Balsam is a potent liquor that Latvians enjoy inflicting on tourists. Although bars are open at all hours, alcoholic beverages are only sold in shops from 08:00 - 22:00. ▶

## Money

The national currency is the lat (Ls). 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. As we go to press, one euro sells for 0.70Ls and one US dollar for 0.52Ls. There are currency exchange booths everywhere accepting a wide range of foreign bank notes, but always check rates before exchanging money. Major hotels, restaurants and shops accept Visa, Euro- and MasterCard. There are numerous ATMs around town as well. ▶

## Roads

Latvia has some of the world's worst drivers. Passing on blind curves is shockingly common, red lights are ignored by most BMWs and pedestrians on crosswalks tend to become targets for wannabe F1 drivers in tricked out Mercedes jeeps. If, like many locals, you enjoy operating an automobile while intoxicated, you should bear in mind that all perpetrators, including foreigners, face a mandatory ten-day jail sentence and a 500Ls fine. The speed limit is 50km/h in towns, 90km/h on the open road and it is strictly enforced. Speed traps are prevalent and bribes are almost a thing of the past. Parking meters are all over Riga. Traffic police will clamp your car and demand a 5Ls fine on the spot for running out of time, or will fine you 10Ls for being parked illegally. Old Riga is now accessible to nearly all motor vehicles, but the authorities have made it impossible to drive from one end to the other having divided the town into four different sections. Many streets have been changed to one-way streets and certain areas, such as Doma and Līvu squares, have become pedestrian and bicycles zones. The city has lost loads of revenue by opening up the old city, but now charges equally exorbitant parking fees that can only be paid with an SMS text message sent from a Latvian mobile phone number. In other words, most tourists are prohibited from parking their rented or borrowed cars in Old Riga. ▶

## Scams

The growth of the local tourism industry has created countless new jobs, but it has also spawned lots of scams and rip-offs. While most bars and restaurants are happy to welcome tourists, there are some rotten apples that will do anything to take your money. Strip clubs, nightclubs and late night bars seem to be the biggest culprits. Be wary of young attractive girls on Līvu Square asking you to join them for a drink in a nearby bar. You'll be shocked to discover later that the barely palatable bottle of wine you bought them costs 500Ls or more. If you refuse to pay the bouncers will pummel you until you give them your PIN code. Other scams include charging your card for much more than you purchased. Avoid seedy bars and try to always pay in cash at nightclubs. ▶

## Market values

McDonald's Big Mac	1.60Ls	\$3.08	€2.29
Loaf of white bread	0.35Ls	\$0.67	€0.50
Snickers bar	0.28Ls	\$0.54	€0.40
0.7L of vodka	5.00Ls	\$9.62	€7.14
0.5L bottle of local beer	0.55Ls	\$1.06	€0.79
20 Marlboros	1.89Ls	\$3.63	€2.70
Public transport ticket	0.50Ls	\$0.96	€0.71
1l of petrol	0.85Ls	\$1.63	€1.21

Exchange rates (as of 24.01.2011)

US\$1 - 0.52Ls €1 - 0.70Ls £1 - 0.83Ls ¥100 - 0.63Ls

## Smoking

Latvians love to smoke and until recently you could see them lighting up almost anywhere, from barstools to hospital beds. But all that has changed. As of July 1, 2006, smoking is banned in most public places including restaurants. The few places that have built separate smoking sections with proper ventilation systems have been assigned a ☞ symbol. Ironically, the government has largely ignored the root causes of smoking, but a new tax on cigarettes has brought the price of a pack of Marlboros up to just over €2.50. ▶

## Visas

US and EU citizens do not require a Latvian visa. For assistance obtaining residency permits contact the Foreigners' Service Centre of the Citizenship and Migration Board, [www.pmlp.gov.lv](http://www.pmlp.gov.lv). ▶

# inyourpocket

ESSENTIAL CITY GUIDES

## Instant Riga

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## American


**T.G.I.Friday's I-2, Kaļķu 6, tel. (+371) 67 22 90 71, www.rrg.lv.** Local anti-globalisation fanatics may be upset, but expats and tourists can't get enough of this American chain of bar/restaurants. The average Joe or Jānis may gripe about paying almost 6Ls for a burger, but it could also be argued that the abnormally large portions more than justify the price. Enjoy steaks, ribs, nachos and a huge selection of cocktails. ▶ Open 12:00 - 24:00. Also at the airport. (6 - 12Ls). 


## Armenian

**Akhtamar D-4, Merķeļa 9, tel. (+371) 67 21 50 32, www.akhtamar.lv.** This cavernous brick cellar is a maze of rooms and niches decorated with traditional kilims hanging from the walls. Huge servings of grilled lamb, beef, pork and even trout are here in abundance as well as hearty soups and stews and a great selection of wines and brandies from across the Caucasus region. Beer lovers won't be disappointed either with Czech Budweiser and local Lāčplēsis on draught. A large smoking section is available for anyone who needs a cigarette with his or her shashlik. ▶ Open 11:00 - 24:00, Sat, Sun 12:00 - 24:00. (5 - 7Ls).  

**Aragats B-5, Miera 15, tel. (+371) 67 37 34 45.** Yerevan's loss is Riga's gain. Going to this authentic restaurant is like visiting an Armenian family for dinner, only you're presented a bill at the end of the evening. In fact, the family who runs this authentic restaurant fled earthquake-racked Armenia only to open a little piece of their homeland in Riga. Feast on mouth-watering grilled lamb, veal and pork shashliks and a wide variety of other delicious cuisine from the Caucasus Mountains. Don't miss the syrpu sweet coffees or a certain Georgian wine that used to be Stalin's favourite. ▶ Open 13:00 - 22:00. Closed Mon. (6 - 10Ls). 











## Asian

**Gan Bei D-4, Stacijas laukums 2 (Origo), tel. (+371) 67 07 30 12, www.ganbei.lv.** Although the location in a popular shopping centre may lack intimacy, this stylish restaurant is a must see for hungry yuppie shoppers who can choose dishes from two separate menus - one Chinese, the other sushi. The former offers an excellent selection of dishes not offered elsewhere in Riga; the latter original maki and nigiri concoctions that are as pleasing to the eye as they are to the palate. Try the sesame chicken or the rainbow sushi. ▶ Open 10:00 - 23:00. (4 - 8Ls).  

**Soho C-5, Elizabetes 6, tel. (+371) 67 24 02 50.** Judging by the friendly, almost Zen-like service and the beatific smiles on the faces of the wait staff, one would think that enlightenment was on the menu, but sadly sweet and sour, garlic and kung pao dishes with beef, poultry, pork or seafood will have to suffice. The spring rolls are tasty and a bargain at 2Ls for eight pieces and the simple, minimalist interior makes one feel like they're dining in a large lacquer box. ▶ Open 12:00 - 23:00. Closed Sun. (5Ls). 

**Wok Café C-4, Dzīrmavu 60, tel. (+371) 67 28 28 78, www.vairaksauls.lv.** One of the city's best pizzerias has looked east for inspiration and opened this trendy wok café. Pick a combination of meat, noodles and sauces to be cooked to order in its open plan kitchen and Asian favourites like dumplings, spring rolls, spicy salads and a good selection of sushi. The walls are covered in photographs of green florae, so it always feels like spring even if it's snowing outside. ▶ Open 11:00 - 23:00, Fri, Sat 11:00 - 06:00. (5Ls). 

## Symbol key


 Air conditioning	 Credit cards accepted
 Live music	 Take away
 Child friendly	 Fireplace
 Smoking section	 Facilities for the disabled
 Free wireless internet	 Outside seating

## Belgian


**Bon Vivant I-2, Mārstaļu 8, tel. (+371) 67 22 65 85, www.bon-vivant.lv.** Solid wood furniture, a cosy atmosphere and assorted Benelux decorations aren't the only things that make this place an authentic Belgian beer bar. A whole page of the menu is dedicated to steamed mussels, sausages are ordered by the half metre and tasty brews from the Low Countries are served in their proper glasses. The delicious cuisine isn't cheap, but Europeans expect nothing less from Brussels. ▶ Open 11:00 - 24:00, Fri 11:00 - 01:00, Sat 12:00 - 01:00, Sun 12:00 - 23:00. (6 - 12Ls). 

## Cafés



**Caramel Rouge I-3, Valņu 26, tel. (+371) 29 44 60 00.** A long-time favourite of the Art Nouveau district has made the relocation leap to Old Riga and somehow managed to preserve its affordable prices and, by old town standards, its ridiculously pleasant draught beer prices - Užavas and Tērvetes around 1.50Ls. Order international food such as burgers and steaks or local staples like herring, pancakes and omelettes in a red interior on two floors decorated with classic cinema posters including Hitchcock. ▶ Open 10:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 10:00 - 02:00. (3 - 5Ls). 

**Junge C-4, Blaumaņa 17, tel. (+371) 67 24 26 10, www.junge.lv.** A franchise of the popular German chain of bakeries - Stadtbäckerei Junge - this modern café offers coffee-coloured walls, plenty of seating and tasty food and drink to take away or to enjoy on the premises. Order éclairs, cakes, pies, pastries and gourmet sandwiches with medium, large and extra large cups of Java that you can also take with you. ▶ Open 07:30 - 20:00, Sat 09:00:20:00, Sun 09:00 - 18:00. (1 - 2Ls). 

**Meta-Kafe D/E-4, Maskavas 12/1 (Spiķeri), tel. (+371) 67 20 49 93, www.metakafe.lv.** Located in a restored brick building behind the Central Market in the up-and-coming warehouse district, Meta-Kafe is popular with both arty youngsters sporting blonde dreadlocks and mature Bohemians wearing turtle-necks and blazers. A small menu of affordable international cuisine and a cheap brunch are the main attractions of this industrial space with glazed cement floors and matching tabletops, not to mention a large library of books that have probably never been read. ▶ Open 09:00 - 23:00, Sat, Sun 10:00 - 23:00. (3 - 5Ls). 


**Osīrišs C-4, Barona 31, tel. (+371) 67 24 30 02, osiris@ticino.lv.** The first of opera director Andrejs Žagars' many café ventures, and the only one to survive, Osiris found a successful recipe in the mid-1990s and stuck with it. Inexpensive breakfasts, sandwiches, international cuisine and a romantic ambience make this place a favourite of local big shots, politicians and intelligentsia so make a reservation for dinner. The only drawback is the horrible iron tables that were obviously created as torture devices for long legs. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00, Sat, Sun 10:00 - 24:00. (3 - 7Ls). 

## Coffee & Cake



**Café Balans D-4, Elizabetes 24, [www.hotels.tallink.com](http://www.hotels.tallink.com).** If you're looking to 'balanss' out your diet after an evening of feasting on fatty Latvian cuisine you might consider substituting pork knuckle for homemade croissants, pastries, light salads and healthy sandwiches at this small café on the ground floor of the Tallink Hotel Riga. Plenty of coffee, tea and juice are also available as well as a wi-fi connection. ▶ Open 08:00 - 20:00. (1 - 3Ls).  

**Ily (Innocent Café) C-4/5, Blaumaņa 34, tel. (+371) 66 66 23 64.** This red, black and grey café employs some of the city's best baristas so it's a safe bet that you're going to get superb coffee here. What is, however, surprising is that the proffered java is reasonably priced. Take a seat at one of the elevated booths or on a leather sofa and take advantage of free wi-fi and local press with a glass of wine, beer or maybe even a cocktail or browse some of its upmarket coffee products at its shop in the back. Take away drinks are available and you can even add your own syrups at the self-serve station. ▶ Open 10:00 - 21:00, Mon, Tue 10:00 - 19:00, Fri 10:00 - 23:00, Sun 12:00 - 15:00.  



## International


**Bestsellers B-4, Dzirmavu 33 (Albert Hotel), tel. (+371) 67 33 17 17, [www.alberthotel.lv](http://www.alberthotel.lv).** Although this stylish hotel restaurant can accommodate hundreds of diners, its warm autumnal colours create a cosy atmosphere despite all of the space. The small selection of international food is by no means unique, but the menu itself certainly is. In keeping with its literary theme, each patron is given a pen and asked to place a check mark next to the dishes he would like to order. ▶ Open 06:30 - 23:00, Sat, Sun 07:00 - 23:00. (4 - 8Ls). 

**Burga B-4, Dzirmavu 36, tel. (+371) 29 11 81 87.** Part bar and part café, the oddly named Burga is located in a modern glass building and has a dark grey interior punctuated with hot pink couches along the walls and light hardwood floors with matching tables. You can order anything from breakfast food, pasta, local sausages and beer-marinated pork to non-Baltic dishes like grilled sardines. Reasonably priced Valmiermuiza and Tērvetes brews are available on draught or you can take your pick of excellent, affordable cocktails from classic mai tais, zombies and Singapore slings to cosmopolitans. ▶ Open 10:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 10:00 - 02:00, Sun 10:00 - 20:00. (3 - 6Ls).  

**Charlestons C-5, Blaumaņa 38/40, tel. (+371) 67 77 05 72, [www.charlestons.lv](http://www.charlestons.lv).** The interior, the quality of the cuisine and the professional service scream upmarket restaurant, yet the atmosphere is incredibly laid back and the prices are reasonable. What's certain is that you're guaranteed excellent international food from the Jack Daniels pork chop to the teriyaki salmon. A separate bar is also available in front if you just want to have a drink and watch some TV. ▶ Open 12:00 - 23:00, Fri 12:00 - 24:00. (5 - 10Ls).  

**C.U.T. C-4, Elizabetes 73 (Radisson Blu Elizabete Hotel), tel. (+371) 67 78 55 77, [www.restaurantcut.lv](http://www.restaurantcut.lv).** This upmarket restaurant located on the ground floor of the Radisson Blu Elizabete Hotel specialises in grilled cuisine from tuna steaks and salmon to beef tenderloin imported from the South American pampas. You can also enjoy a light lunch of Thai spiced sea scallops or veal carpaccio in its fantastic open courtyard. A wide selection of new and old world wines is also available as well as a daily breakfast buffet. ▶ Open 12:00 - 23:00. Closed Sun. (6 - 12Ls).  



**Esplanāde F-3, Elizabetes 55 (Radisson Blu Hotel Latvija), tel. (+371) 67 77 22 11, [www.restaurantes-planade.lv](http://www.restaurantes-planade.lv).** If you think that Esplanāde is just another hotel restaurant then guess again. The interior is neutral and can accommodate hundreds of tourists, but the cuisine it serves is simply fantastic. Start with the spiced salmon carpaccio with lemon vodka jelly and move on to delicious mains as diverse as red wine braised duck leg and orange-black pepper flavoured roasted lamb saddle. An all-you-can-eat lunch buffet as well as a children's game room are also available. Also offers a daily breakfast buffet from 06:30 - 10:30, Sat, Sun 07:00 - 11:00. ▶ Open 12:00 - 23:00. (8 - 14Ls).  



**Harry Morgan B-4, Dzirmavu 30, tel. (+371) 67 33 10 42, [www.harrymorgan.lv](http://www.harrymorgan.lv).** The story goes that Harry Morgan opened his first New York-style deli in London in 1948 and since then it's become a landmark establishment. History aside, we're just happy that Riga finally has a bona fide breakfast restaurant where you can order American pancakes with maple syrup, eggs Benedict or a genuine full English. You can also try such classics as gefilte fish, roast beef sandwiches and chopped liver in two sleek and modern dining rooms or on the summer terrace. Great desserts like carrot cake and apple strudel are also available as well as beer and wine by the glass or bottle. ▶ Open 09:00 - 23:00, Sat, Sun 10:00 - 23:00. Also at C-4, Dzirmavu 67 (Galleria Riga - 7th floor). Open 09:00 - 01:00, Sun 10:00 - 01:00. (3 - 5Ls). 

**Neiburgs I-1, Jauniela 25/27, tel. (+371) 67 11 55 44, [www.neiburgshotel.com](http://www.neiburgshotel.com).** One of Riga's finest art nouveau buildings has finally been renovated and its ground floor is now home to a stylish restaurant offering both international and Latvian-style food for reasonable prices. Inside you'll find grey walls covered by periodic art exhibitions, light parquet floors and spider-like chandeliers made from black reading lamps. Order salads, pasta, Australian steaks, Scottish salmon, local trout, huge turkey burgers or inexpensive lunch specials in a refined setting on a quiet Old Riga street. ▶ Open 12:00 - 23:00. (4 - 10Ls). 

## Latvian

**Alus arsenāls H-1, Pils laukums 4 (entrance from Arsenāls), tel. (+371) 67 32 26 75, [www.alus-arsenals.lv](http://www.alus-arsenals.lv).** The Beer Arsenal specialises in huge servings of Latvian fare like metre-long sausages, beef tongue salad, pig's ears stuffed with caraway cheese and its signature oven baked pork leg for two served on a wooden platter with a flaming torch. Naturally, a good selection of beer is also on offer including its own light and dark microbrews. Cheap daily specials under 3Ls are a bargain. ▶ Open 12:00 - 23:00, Fri, Sat 12:00 - 24:00, Sun 13:00 - 23:00. (4 - 9Ls).  

**Alus Ordenis H-3, Raiņa 15, tel. (+371) 67 81 41 90.** Although the food is a bit pricey, the menu does offer some hard-to-find local dishes like *cūku pupas* (broad beans in butter sauce), fried herring, boiled pig's feet and 'bull's glands.' All of the standard pork ribs, steaks and other artery clogging delicacies are also served in this charming brick cellar as well as tasty brews in big ceramic mugs. ▶ Open 13:00 - 23:00, Fri, Sat 13:00 - 24:00. (3 - 7Ls).  

**Alus Sēta I-2, Tirgoņu 6, tel. (+371) 67 22 24 31, [www.lido.lv](http://www.lido.lv).** 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. Unfortunately, the annoyingly long queues of hungry tourists have convinced its owners to raise its prices substantially. Have a home-brewed LIDO ale while you wait. ▶ Open 11:00 - 23:00. (4 - 7Ls).  

**LIDO atpūtas centrs (LIDO Recreation Centre)**

**Krasta 76, tel. (+371) 67 50 44 20, www.lido.lv.** 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 as well as local microbrews. Weekends are family days with various activities for the kids including in-line skating and there's live singing and dancing every night from 19:00. Take bus N°12 from the train station directly or tram N°3, 7 or 9 to the 'Atpūtas centrs LIDO' stop and walk about 5 - 10 minutes in the direction of the huge windmill. ▶ Open 11:00 - 24:00. (3 - 5Ls).   

**Medieval**

**Livonija H-2, Meistaru 21, tel. (+371) 67 22 33 51, www.livonijarestaurant.lv.** Located in an ancient vaulted candlelit brick cellar underneath the Small Guild hall on Līvu Square, this medieval-style restaurant offers European and international cuisine as well as some great Latvian dishes like blood sausage with boiled pearl barley, herring with potatoes, honey-glazed pork knuckle and local trout. You can also order one of three interesting 'medieval' beers spiced with ginger, honey or cinnamon and an impressive wine list is also available. ▶ (5 - 9Ls). 

**Pizza**

**Vairāk Saules C-4, Dzirnau 60, tel. (+371) 67 28 28 78/(+371) 80 00 90 80, www.vairaksaules.lv.** The name means 'more sun,' but we prefer the title 'more places like this please.' Although the uniformed staff, colourful menus and interior design give this restaurant a slightly corporate chain feel, the service is genuinely friendly and the food, whether it be pizzas, pastas, seafood, sushi or vegetarian dishes, is fantastic. It also provides a kids' play area for the little ones and a children's menu. ▶ Open 09:00 - 23:00. (3 - 7Ls).   


**Steak houses**



**Zilā govš (The Blue Cow) H-2, Meistaru 21, tel. (+371) 67 22 33 07, www.zila-govs.lv.** Named after a particular breed of Latvian cow, this huge restaurant housed in one of Old Riga's most charming medieval buildings specialises, not surprisingly, in a variety of different steaks that are aged 25 - 40 days in a special meat locker. You can also order swordfish or tuna steaks as well as nouvelle Latvian cuisine like pork fillet marinated in quince juice fried in hemp butter with spinach and pearl-barley risotto. Although impossible to miss, just look for the blue cow perched above the doorway that occasionally moos. ▶ Open 11:00 - 24:00. (8 - 18Ls). 

**Upmarket**

**Bergs Restaurant C-4, Elizabetes 83/85 (Berga bazārs), tel. (+371) 67 77 09 57, www.hotelbergs.lv.** Possibly the best restaurant in Riga, Bergs never disappoints. With a stylish interior that looks like it was ripped out of the pages of *Architectural Digest* and an ever-changing menu of international fusion and nouvelle Latvian cuisine that will satisfy even the most demanding palates, it's guaranteed to make your lunch or dinner a memorable one. Special three- and five-course meals prepared by award-winning chef Kaspars Jansons are also available. Breakfast is served daily 07:30 - 11:00. ▶ Open 12:00 - 23:00. Closed Sun. (9 - 18Ls).  

**What's new?**


**Avion C-5, Stabu 30, tel. (+371) 67 27 67 02.** This so-called aviation bar has received loads of attention in the local press, but to be honest the execution of this novel theme is a little weak. The waitresses could have brought our food on a trolley, the barman could have occasionally interrupted the boring radio music with a drinks special as if he were the captain and patrons could be asked to fasten their seatbelts during moments of turbulence. Instead, you get business class seats, wait staff in uniforms and small portions of cuisine a step above airline food. ▶ Open 10:00 - 23:00, Fri 10:00 - 01:00, Sat 12:00 - 01:00, Sun 12:00 - 22:00. (5Ls). 

**Bonēra (Bonheur) B-4, Blaumaņa 12a, tel. (+371) 67 28 33 43, www.bonera.lv.** This trendy, yet nostalgic French-style café and vintage fashion shop is extremely popular with well-dressed, well-heeled women over the age of 30. Its intentionally shabby walls and their crumbling plaster are adorned with black and white photos of Bonēra's (bonheur: happiness in French) muse - Coco Chanel. Order pricey, yet delicious cakes, biscuits, coffee, tea, wine or spirits while listening to soothing jazz. If you get bored you can always play a game of scrabble, pick up a book from its library or browse through its elegant used clothing that hangs from old wrought iron bed stands. ▶ Open 11:00 - 23:00. Closed Sun.  

**Muffins and More B-4, Gertrūdes 9, tel. (+371) 28 36 76 71, www.muffinsandmore.lv.** This tiny white café offers some soups, some stuffed baguettes and dozens of soft, delicious American-style muffins that melt in your mouth. Try traditional blueberry, cranberry, raspberry and chocolate muffins or taste one of their cream-filled concoctions for either 0.55Ls or 0.95Ls, depending on its size. Although you can sit at one of three small tables, lots of people buy muffins to take away. Naturally, coffee, tea, juice and smoothies are also on offer as well as friendly service. ▶ Open 08:00 - 20:00, Sat 10:00 - 18:00. Closed Sun.  




**Oyster Bar C-4, Dzirnau 67 (Galleria Riga - 7th floor), tel. (+371) 67 75 93 46.** Oyster enthusiasts finally have a place in Riga that they can call home. Two types of oysters from Brittany, France are available on the half shell here - the standard Bretagne oyster and the meatier Tsarskaya for 0.95Ls and 1.85Ls per piece, respectively. A wide variety of top shelf vodkas, wines and champagnes are also available to complement your experience of eating raw sea life on the 7th floor of the city's most salubrious shopping centre. Just look for the fibre optic lamps shaped like jellyfish to find the Oyster Bar. ▶ Open 10:00 - 01:00. (4 - 10Ls). 

**Vegetarian**

**Kamadena B/C-4, Lāčplēša 12, tel. (+371) 67 28 33 74, www.kamadena.lv.** Although most of the cuisine is of Asian origin, including Indian, Thai and Tibetan dishes, some international classics like mozzarella and tomato salads, pasta and crepes are also available. Located in a beautifully restored 19th-century wooden building, its elegant interior of vibrantly coloured cloth lamps, oriental carpets and ornate wood carvings is complimented by new age music. The menu also offers quotes from famous philosophers and statesmen about the virtues of not eating meat. ▶ Open 11:00 - 22:00. Closed Sun. (4 - 7Ls). 


## Bars

**Gauja B-5, Tērbatas 56, tel. (+371) 67 27 56 62.** Step into a Latvian apartment circa 1970. Elvis records crackle on the Hi-Fi while a bohemian bartender grabs liquor bottles from what appears to be someone's grandmother's china cabinet. The furniture is also retro as are the Soviet style beer mugs and the antique magazines and books. Try a milky Brengūļu brew out on the sidewalk or grab a stool and knock back a cheap vodka shot. In keeping with the communal living theme, space is limited. ▶ Open 12:00 - 23:00.

**Krogs Aptieka (Pharmacy Bar) H-1, Mazā Miesnieku 1.** After presiding over a staple of the Washington DC nightlife scene for several years, American-Latvian Kristaps Krēslis has opened yet another Pharmacy Bar, but this time in the Latvian capital. Medieval brick walls, medicinal tinctures and scales, tables embedded with capsules and pills and painted silhouettes of old-fashioned bottles on two floors are a clever combination of old and new and the perfect backdrop for a night of cocktails and beers. The bar also provides a smoking courtyard, summer terrace and a jukebox that offers anything from Johnny Cash to Metallica. ▶ Open 17:00 - 01:00, Thu 17:00 - 03:00, Fri, Sat 17:00 - 05:00.   




**Leningrad I-3, Kalēju 54, tel. (+371) 29 91 50 49, www.leningrad.lv.** After nearly two decades of runaway capitalism and an economy that has imploded, some Latvians are looking back to the past. A bar with a retro Soviet interior of assorted communist relics and even period furniture is as good a place as any to enjoy a drink. The beer might not be as cheap as it was in Gorbachev's time, but for Old Riga the local Brengūlis and Czech Kozel are certainly affordable. ▶ Open 15:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 15:00 - 02:00.

**Lobby Bar F-3, Elizabetes 55 (Radisson Blu Hotel Latvija), tel. (+371) 67 77 22 22, www.radissonblu.com/latvijahotel-riga.** What traveller hasn't spent a little time at a lobby bar out of sheer necessity? Unlike most reception area lounges, the Radisson Blu Hotel Latvija's offers cutting edge design, an impressive variety of cocktails and an excellent menu that offers everything from a *Nicoise* salad or a Mediterranean *tapas* platter to big burgers and the best club sandwich in the city. ▶ Open 09:00 - 24:00, Fri 09:00 - 01:00, Sat 10:00 - 01:00, Sun 10:00 - 24:00. 

**Pieci Vilki (Five Wolves) B-4, Stabu 6, tel. (+371) 67 29 95 55.** Owned by a prominent member of a local motorcycle club, Five Wolves is sometimes frequented by local neighbourhood types sipping beers and at other times by hard-looking, hard-drinking leather-clad men with beards. The menu offers a bit of everything including fried eggs and bacon served on red-hot cast iron pans, chicken wings in extra large sizes and steak served just right. Shot takers shouldn't pass up the vodka bottle served in a block of ice. ▶ Open 10:30 - 24:00, Sat, Sun 13:00 - 24:00. 

## Casinos & Gaming halls

Latvian law compels all gamblers to register at each casino they visit, so bring a passport or valid ID.

**Olympic Voodoo Casino C-4, Brīvības 31 (entrance from Dzirnava), tel. (+371) 67 82 87 77, www.olympic-casino.com.** Located in the new wing of the Radisson Blu Hotel Latvija, it's supposedly the biggest casino in the Baltics. ▶ Open 24hrs.   


**Royal Casino B-5, Tērbatas 73, tel. (+371) 67 50 60 30, www.royalcasino.lv.** Huge spa, hotel, club, restaurant and casino complex. ▶ Open 24hrs.


## Wine bars

**D'vine F-3, Elizabetes 55 (Radisson Blu Hotel Latvija), tel. (+371) 67 77 22 17, www.dvinebar.lv.** Sleek, modern D'vine is located on the second floor of the new glass and cutting-edge metal arrow jutting out of the Radisson Blu Hotel Latvija. Snack on Mediterranean *tapas* and salads while you sip a wide variety of wine and spirits by the glass, half-bottle or bottle. ▶ Open 12:00 - 23:00, Fri 12:00 - 01:00, Sat 12:00 - 24:00. Closed Sun. 

**Tinto C-4, Elizabetes 61, tel. (+371) 67 28 90 85.** Although this stylish wine bar and café with merlot coloured couches offers great views of passers-by on busy Elizabetes iela, it's tucked away off of the street. An early breakfast, delicious *tapas* like *baba ghanoush* and fried sardines, Spanish ham, cheese and olive platters and refined meat and seafood main courses are just a few reasons to dine here. A good selection of wine by the bottle or glass is another. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00, Sat 10:00 - 24:00, Sun 10:00 - 23:00. (3 - 8Ls). 

## Clubs

**Amber Night F-3, Elizabetes 55 (Radisson Blu Hotel Latvija), www.ambernight.lv.** Descend into the depths of the Radisson Blu Hotel Latvija, to find this sleek, stylish nightclub designed with an over 25 crowd in mind. Listen to Top 40 from the past three decades while you sip expertly poured cocktails served at two different bars. Hit the dance floor, relax on gold and black couches in the main hall or occupy one of the tables in the back that have built-in champagne buckets that change colour every few seconds. ▶ Open Thu 21:00 - 02:00, Fri, Sat 22:00 - 05:00. Closed Mon, Tue, Wed, Sun. 

**Club Essential C-4, Skolas 2, tel. (+371) 67 24 22 89, www.essential.lv.** This vibrant hotspot is not another typical boring Riga techno club. In fact, it's quite stylish offering a funky chill out room and several distinct areas on two levels which are all a part of the action surrounding the central dance floor. The music is fast-paced and progressive which is what you'd expect given the talented DJs it imports from around Europe each weekend. ▶ Open Wed, Thu, Sun 22:00 - 05:00, Fri, Sat 22:00 - 09:00. Admission: 3 - 10Ls. 

**Nabaklab H-2, Z.A. Meierovica bulv. 12, www.nabaklab.lv.** Take a hip music club and add art exhibits and a vintage clothing shop and you have a recipe for Riga's best alternative hotspot. You can watch a live band in one hall, dance to DJs in another, relax with a beer in a retro Soviet apartment room or have a smoke and a drink at a picnic table in its huge courtyard. Definitely not the place for techno or pop music fans, this is a bohemian student favourite. ▶ Open 12:00 - 02:00, Thu, Fri, Sat 12:00 - 06:00. Admission: Fri, Sat 2Ls.  

**Piens (Milk) A-5, Aristida Briāna 9, www.klubspiens.lv.** Located in a 19th-century brewery on the edge of the city centre, this self-proclaimed sofa bar is hard to find. Those in the know know that this is one of Riga's hottest cocktail bars and many don't mind queuing up at the weekend to sit on one of many couches that are each completely different in style from your grandpa's sofa to one you'd expect to see in your doctor's waiting room. With two large terraces and a funky, eclectic interior, colourful, hip and laid-back Milk is hard to beat. Sadly, on busy nights they often bar entrance to non-Latvians. ▶ Open 12:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 12:00 - 05:00.

**PUSH G-3, Tērbatas 2 (entrance from Merķeļa), tel. (+371) 20 22 33 22, www.push.lv.** Two Swedes and two locals have put their years of club experience together to open this huge venue only a block away from the Freedom Monument in the Vērmānes Park. Popular house music and international DJs entertain a crowd of Riga's 25+ beautiful people while go-go girls dance above the bottles of the central bar. Nearly 22km of fiber optic cable in the chandelier and elsewhere set the mood with changing lights and drinks are 'tax-free' before midnight, meaning 22% cheaper. ▶ Open Fri, Sat 22:00 - 06:00. Admission: 5Ls. [C]

**The Club I-2, Kungu 8, tel. (+371) 26 77 17 71, www.theclub.lv.** The name may not be too original, but there's plenty to see and do at The Club. A good mix of foreigners, students and beautiful local women congregate here and gyrate and drink to popular club music on two floors. Hit the dance floor to meet and greet and or take a seat on a comfortable couch upstairs and watch the mayhem unfold below. To avoid paying an admission fee, download a flier from its website. ▶ Open Fri, Sat 22:00 - 06:00. Admission: men 3 - 5Ls. [C]

## Cocktails

**Mad House H-2, Kaļķu 11, tel. (+371) 67 22 05 54.** Mad House offers a scatter-brained interior of old movie posters, niches that look like retro living rooms and kitchens and even a portrait of old Lenin. Mixed drinks are delicious but will cost you dearly so you might want to stick with a local draught beer like Tērvetes. A full breakfast, lunch and dinner menu is available as well as a dance floor and a chill out room hidden in the depths of the cellar. ▶ Open 09:00 - 03:00, Fri 09:00 - 06:00, Sat 10:00 - 06:00, Sun 10:00 - 03:00. [C]

**Skyline Bar F-3, Elizabetes 55 (Radisson Blu Hotel Latvija - 26th floor), tel. (+371) 67 77 22 82, www.skylinebar.lv.** You really haven't been to Riga unless you've had a drink here, or so they say. The views are spectacular and the retro interior of shag carpeting, comfortable couches and an abundance of pillows is warm and inviting. Getting one of the coveted seats by the windows is often a chore, but it's worth the effort. The wait staff can be a little lethargic, but perhaps it's due to the altitude. ▶ Open 16:00 - 02:00, Fri, Sat 15:00 - 03:00, Sun 15:00 - 02:00. [C] [F] [S]

## Live music

**Bites Blues Club B-4, Dzirnāvu 34a, tel. (+371) 67 33 31 25, www.bluesclub.lv.** The dark interior is basic without any trendy trappings, the way a real blues club should be. If you're unfortunate enough to miss the live acts on weekend nights, sometimes from as far away as Memphis, classic performances are often broadcast on the big screen during the day. Even if the blues is just another colour to you, it's worth a visit for the delicious international cuisine and the Užavas beer on draught. ▶ Open 11:00 - 24:00, Fri 11:00 - 01:00, Sat 14:00 - 01:00. Closed Sun. Admission: Fri, Sat 5 - 15Ls. [C] [F]

**Bubamara I-2, Audēju 8, tel. (+371) 29 91 50 49, www.bubamara.lv.** For an underground Latvian music joint, its location hidden at the end of a long corridor on the ground floor of a posh 'class A' office building in Old Riga is definitely odd, but perhaps its happy-go-lucky bohemian vibe will rub off on the suits upstairs. Below a central skylight you'll find mismatched chairs and tables, flattened wine bottle lamps and, of course, a stage for local live acts. Brews are affordable and the cocktails are downright cheap. ▶ Open 15:00 - 24:00, Thu, Fri, Sat 15:00 - 03:00. [C] [F]

## What's new?

**Bānūzis D-4, Gogoļa 15, tel. (+371) 28 34 87 16.**

This isn't the place to go with your girlfriend, wife or mistress for that matter. They wouldn't be impressed by the plain grey interior, the shabby furniture, the men who hang out here or its location behind the Soviet Academy of Sciences building. But if you like incredibly cheap British ales, bitters and IPAs on draught and in bottles, tasty local brews like Rēzeknes Brūveris for 0.50Ls and lots of rock music, it might be worth the 5-minute walk from the Central Market. We ate a greasy sausage here with potatoes and sour kraut for only 1Ls! ▶ Open 10:00 - 23:00.

**Jaurā lapsa I-2, Grēcinieku 1, tel. (+371) 29 17 99 09.**

If you're in the mood for some affordable food and drink and a laid back atmosphere in Old Riga then the Funny Fox might just be a good option for you. A huge blackboard which lists all of the available drinks from coffee to cocktails runs the length of the long bar and you can sit at tables to the left or have a seat on one of the leather couches to the right. Order anything from a local Bauskas brew and a Guinness to chicken wings and pork chops or try its lunch specials, which include a soup, main course and a small beer for only 2.75Ls. ▶ Open 12:00 - 24:00. [C]

## Pubs

**Kiwi Bar I-2, Skārņu 7 - 3, tel. (+371) 67 21 19 17, www.kiwiibar.lv.** Over the years Riga has had its share of English and Irish pubs, but this is the first kiwi pub to open its doors in the Latvian capital. Friendly staff from Riga and New Zealand pour a good selection of foreign and domestic beers behind a huge rectangular bar while patrons admire the light wood interior and watch football, hockey and rugby on a bunch of flat screen TVs. You can order a variety of pub food from burgers and breakfasts to sandwiches and ribs or even Indian cuisine from neighbouring Indian Raja. ▶ Open 09:00 - 05:00. (3 - 7Ls). [C]

## Sports bars

**Bombardier Bar C-5, Lāčplēša 35, tel. (+371) 26 36 81 31, www.bombardierbar.lv.** English beer connoisseurs now have a place to call home right in the centre of Riga. Bombardier ale and Young's oatmeal stout can be had for 1.50Ls a pint and a half litre of local microbrew from eastern Latvia is poured for a mere 1Ls. Sports are shown on giant flat screen TVs and a long list of pub food, from fish 'n' chips, chicken wings and steaks to cheap daily lunch specials, is also available. Sadly, a proper English breakfast is conspicuously missing from the menu. ▶ Open 11:00 - 23:00, Fri, Sat 11:00 - 01:00, Sun 14:00 - 22:00.

**Paddy Whelan's Irish Pub & Sports Bar I-2, Grēcinieku 4, tel. (+371) 67 21 01 50, www.pub.lv.** Although it's considered a traditional Irish pub it's also a sports bar dedicated to the finer things in life - namely football and formula one. On the ground floor you can expect a dozen or so flat screen TVs showing different matches, while upstairs you'll find a cosier atmosphere with loads of memorabilia on the walls including a portrait of official extraordinaire Pierluigi Collina. In addition to the usual Irish and international pub food, Paddy's also offers authentic Indian cuisine cooked in a real tandoor. ▶ Open 11:00 - 01:00, Fri, Sat, Sun 11:00 - 04:00. [C] [F] [S] [T]

## Essential Riga

**Art Nouveau architecture B-3, Alberta 2, 2a, 4, 6, 8, 13; Elizabetes 10a & 10b; Strēlnieku 4a.** Visit the biggest gallery of Art Nouveau architecture by Russian architect Mikhail Eisenstein, father of the illustrious filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein who was born in Riga. Most of the buildings have now been renovated and of particular interest is the house at Strēlnieku 4a. Built in 1905 it has since undergone a complete facelift and is now home to the Stockholm School of Economics in Riga. Don't miss the Riga Art Nouveau Museum at the end of Alberta iela, a must see.

**Latvian Ethnographic Museum (Latvijas etnogrāfiskais brīvdabas muzejs) Brīvības gatve 440, tel. (+371) 67 99 45 15, www.brivdabasmuzejs.lv.** 100 hectares of life as it used to be. Farmsteads, windmills, fishing villages, churches and other historic structures have been moved here and preserved for posterity. Watch craftsmen perform various tasks or try some Latvian cuisine and drink in the tavern. Take bus №1 from the corner of Merķeļa and Tērbatas to the Brīvdabas muzejs stop. ▶ Open 10:00 - 17:00. Admission: 2Ls.

**Riga Cathedral (Doma baznīca) H-1, Doma laukums, tel. (+371) 67 21 32 13, www.doms.lv.** The largest place of worship in the Baltics, measuring 187 x 43m, with walls two metres thick, Riga Cathedral also has one of the biggest organs in Europe (6,768 pipes!). It was such a marvel in its day that Franz Liszt composed a piece of music in its honour. The drop from Cathedral Square (Doma laukums) to the church's base shows how the level of the city has risen in the 800 years since its foundations were laid on the site of a Livonian fishing village. Unfortunately, the massive structure is in desperate need of repairs, hence the steel beams and other supports you'll see around columns and just below the ceiling. The price of the ticket also includes access to its Romanesque cloister. ▶ Open 10:00 - 17:00. Admission: 2Ls.

**St. Peter's Church (Pēterbaznīca) I-2, Skārņu 19, tel. (+371) 67 22 94 26, www.peterbaznica.lv.** First mentioned in ancient chronicles in 1209, St. Peter's was a Catholic church until 1523, when it turned Lutheran. Its wooden tower, the highest in Europe at that time, was destroyed several times. It first collapsed in 1666 and was rebuilt a year later. To see how long it would last, the builders hurled a glass from the top: the more pieces the vessel broke into, the greater the tower's longevity. Alas, a pile of straw cushioned the glass' fall and the spire burnt down one year later. Artillery fire destroyed the structure again in 1941. In 1973 it was finally rebuilt and the glass ritual was repeated, this time with smashing results. Take the lift to the observation platform for spectacular views of the city. ▶ Open 10:00 - 18:00. Closed Mon. Admission: tower 3Ls.

**The Museum of the Occupation of Latvia (Latvijas okupācijas muzejs) I-2, Strēlnieku laukums 1, tel. (+371) 67 21 27 15, www.occupationmuseum.lv.** Once a museum honouring the Latvian Red Riflemen, the building now houses a fascinating museum dedicated to the Nazi and Soviet occupations of Latvia. The various exhibits display the atrocities committed against the people of Latvia and the systematic destruction of their nation's sovereignty. Visitors can walk into a reconstructed gulag barracks and catch a glimpse of the intolerable living conditions in Siberian labour camps. Exhibits are available in English, German, Latvian and Russian, but you can also choose to use an audio guide with headphones in English or German or just ask for a live guide. Its book is available in Latvian and English. ▶ Open 11:00 - 17:00. Closed Mon. Admission: donations.

## Cops and robbers

A botched robbery turned bloody in the early morning hours of January 25, 2011 in the usually quiet town of Jēkabpils. Five armed bandits stormed a gaming hall, but its only guard was able to press a panic button and police and security agents were on the scene within minutes. A chase and a gun battle ensued during which two police officers were wounded and another was killed. The thieves were finally apprehended, three of whom had also received injuries in the Hollywood-style chase. Although this kind of criminal activity is fairly rare in Latvia and caused quite a stir, an even bigger bombshell was dropped when it was later revealed that two of the criminals were members of an elite special forces unit of the National Police (Valsts policija) and two more were policemen from the Tukums region. Police officers and schoolteachers were hit hardest by the government's austerity measures. In many cases, their salaries were nearly cut in half, but that's still hardly an excuse for cops to become robbers, and murderers.

## Churches

**St. James Cathedral (Jēkaba katedrāle) H-1, Jēkaba 9, tel. (+371) 67 32 64 19, www.catholic.lv/katedrale.** This church beside the parliament was first mentioned in ancient chronicles in 1225. In 1522, it became the first church in Latvia to hold a Lutheran service, but during a brief Polish occupation 60 years later it was returned to its Catholic flock, who have held it ever since. (Services 08:00, Sun 09:00, 18:00 - Latvian) ▶ Open 07:00 - 19:00.

**St. John's (Jāņa baznīca) I-2, Skārņu 24, tel. (+371) 67 22 40 28.** First mentioned in 1297 when it served as the chapel of a Dominican abbey, the monastery and church were closed during the Reformation in 1523. The building was used for a time as the city's armoury, until it was taken over by a Lutheran congregation in 1582. During the building's construction two monks were bricked into the southern wall and lived out their lives there, fed through the window grate. ▶ Open 11:00 - 20:00, Wed 11:00 - 18:00. Closed Mon.

**St. Saviour's (Anglikāņu baznīca) H-1, Anglikāņu 2a, tel. (+371) 67 22 42 59, www.anglicanriga.lv.** This little church commissioned by British traders living in Riga was built in 1857 on a shipload of English soil specially imported from the UK. Consecrated in 1859, the church was only full when British warships visited Latvia. Transformed into a student disco during Soviet times, it is once again a place of worship which is attended by Riga's English-speaking expat population. Its pastor and his dedicated flock are also renowned for their charitable works. (Services Sun 11:00 - English)

## Museums

**Latvian National Museum of Art (Latvijas Nacionālais mākslas muzejs) F-3, Valdemāra 10a, tel. (+371) 67 32 44 61, www.lnmm.lv.** Enter this time capsule and marvel at the red-carpeted marble stairs and gilt walls and ceiling, which display murals of Latvian landscapes. View classic paintings, drawings, watercolours and sculptures by the Latvian masters Rozentāls, Annuss, Valters, Padegs, Liberts and many more. Works by Baltic-Russians and Germans are also available. Postcards, souvenirs, art books and reproductions of famous Latvian paintings are available for sale in the lobby. ▶ Open 11:00 - 17:00, Fri 11:00 - 20:00. Closed Tue. Admission: 1 - 3Ls. Tours in English: 8Ls.

**Museum of Riga's History and Navigation (Rīgas vēstures un kuģniecības muzejs) H-1-1, Palasta 4, tel. (+371) 67 35 66 76, www.rigamuz.lv.** Enter this unique museum and walk up the stairs to the first floor to discover temporary exhibitions from Latvia and abroad, as well as art and memorabilia from the days of the first Latvian Republic. The second floor displays Bronze Age artefacts and medieval curiosities, such as the sword used by Riga's executioner in the 16th century and the mummified hand of an unlucky criminal. You can also take a peek at Riga Cathedral's courtyard from upstairs. ▶ Open 11:00 - 17:00. Closed Mon, Tue. Admission: 3Ls.

**Riga Art Nouveau Museum (Rīgas Jūgendstila muzejs) B-3, Alberta 12, tel. (+371) 67 18 14 65, www.jugendstils.riga.lv.** This museum is housed in an apartment where one of Latvia's best art nouveau architects once lived - Konstantīns Pēkšēns. The prolific artist and engineer who was responsible for the creation of no less than 250 buildings in Riga also designed this impressive edifice. The historic house was also home to the illustrious painter Janis Rozentāls and the writer Rūdolfs Blaumanis to whom another museum is dedicated on the top floor. View period furniture and artwork from one of the Latvian capital's most creative eras. ▶ Open 10:00 - 18:00. Closed Mon. Admission: 2 - 2.50Ls.

## Places of interest

**Central Market (Centrāltirgus) J-3, Centrāltirgus iela, www.centraltirgus.lv.** When construction was completed in 1930, Riga's Central Market was one of the largest and most modern marketplaces on the European continent. Seventy years later, four of the five pavilions, which were used as zeppelin hangars during WWI, still serve their original function as meat, fish, produce and dairy markets. The bustling atmosphere here hasn't changed much, although most of the hawkers are more reluctant to haggle than in the past. The markets spill out beyond the confines of the hangars and operate throughout the day, some longer than others. ▶ Open 08:00 - 17:00, Mon, Sun 08:00 - 16:00.

**Freedom Monument (Brīvības piemineklis) H-3, Where Brīvības and Raiņa meet.** '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.

**Great & Small Guild Halls (Lielā & Mazā Ģilde) H-2, Amatu 6 and Amatu 5.** During the centuries of German economic domination, the guilds were Riga's power brokers. The former, dating from 1384, was the home of the merchants, while the latter held the city's artisans. These slightly different audiences are reflected in the respective usage of the buildings today: while the Great Guild is home to the Latvian Symphony Orchestra, its smaller cousin hosts conferences and the occasional disco.

**Laima Clock (Laimas pulkstenis) H-2, Where Brīvības and Aspazijas meet.** *Satiekamies pie Laimas pulksteņa* - let's meet at the Laima clock! The yellow-brown clock in front of the Freedom Monument has been a meeting place since it was erected by social democrats in 1924 so people wouldn't be late for work. For decades it has advertised Laima chocolate, and many a sweet romance has started here.

**Old City Walls & Swedish Gate (Vecpilsētas mūris & Zviedru vārti) H-2, At the corner of Torņa and Aldaru.** This is the oldest remaining portion of the Old Town fortifications, the rest having been progressively knocked down because artillery made them obsolete. This fragment was built between the 13th and 16th centuries and restored during Soviet times, hence its rather 'new' appearance. It used to run between the Bishops' Castle and the Castle of the Brothers of the Sword. At the end of Aldaru, is the Swedish Gate (Zviedru vārti), built in 1698 to celebrate the Scandinavians' occupation of the city, and the only such structure left in Old Riga. The apartment above belonged to the city executioner or bende, who would put a red rose on the window ledge on the morning before a head rolled.

**Powder Tower (Pulvertornis) H-2, Smiļšu 20.** Dating back to the beginning of the 14th century, only the rock foundations remained after it was destroyed by invading Swedish troops in 1621. It was rebuilt in 1650 with 2.5m thick walls to protect its valuable contents inside and was obviously successful, as nine Russian cannonballs that hardly made a dent were later embedded in its walls by cheeky masons. At the end of the 19th century a German student fraternity bought the building, but today it's part of the War Museum.

**Riga National Zoo (Rīgas zoologiskais dārzs) Meža prosp. 1, tel. (+371) 67 51 84 09, www.rigazoo.lv.** Take a look at a wide variety of animals from around the globe including tortoises from the Galapagos, Japanese macaques, Bactrian camels, African zebras, lions, tigers, giraffes and hippopotami, Asian red pandas and European bears, wolves and seals. The zoo also has a top-notch tropical house filled with rare birds, snakes and insects. Take tram N°11 from Barona to the Mežaparks stop. ▶ Open 10:00 - 16:00. Admission: adults 4Ls, children 3Ls, free for children under four.

**Three Brothers (Trīs brāļi) H-1, Mazā Pils 17, 19, 21, tel. (+371) 67 22 07 79, www.archmuseum.lv.** The Three Brothers are the oldest stone residential buildings in the city and represent different stages in the architectural development of Riga, from medieval to Baroque. The oldest of the three is N°17 and dates back to the 15th century. The other two were built in the 17th and 18th centuries, respectively. The Riga Museum of Architecture is located in building N°19. ▶ Open 09:00 - 17:00, Mon 09:00 - 18:00, Fri 09:00 - 16:00. Closed Sat, Sun. Admission: free.

## Take a spin

Nothing says that you've made it as a city more than a garish disco coloured Ferris wheel on your main square. Now Riga has its very own bright, shiny neon observation wheel to distract locals and tourists from the boring medieval architecture on Līvu Square. Who needs history and good taste when you can zoom around the square from an elevated height while listening to tacky pop music? We will, however, admit that it's a great way to keep children amused and it affords its patrons with a unique view of the city. The woman at the ticket booth informed us that it will be ferrying passengers from 12:00 - 23:00 until the end of March. Admission: adults 3Ls, children 2Ls.



Riga really has it all when it comes to hotels. You can stay in an ultra modern design hotel in the old town or a beautiful suite with private terrace and Jacuzzi if you don't mind spending your hard-earned cash. Those travelling on a budget can choose from plenty of B&Bs, hostels and even a few recently opened low-cost hotels. Naturally, you'll pay more for accommodation in the summer, than you will in the winter, but many hotels have had a rough time of it during the ongoing financial crisis so bargains are available if you're willing to shop around for the best deal. Unless otherwise noted, breakfast and VAT are included in the prices listed here.

## Cream of the crop

**Hotel Bergs C-4, Elizabetes 83/85 (Berga Bazārs), tel. (+371) 67 77 09 00, fax (+371) 67 77 09 40, www.hotelbergs.lv.** Spacious, tasteful and luxurious. Pamper yourself in this sleek, centrally located yet quiet hotel in the trendy Berga Bazārs shopping plaza. Offering an array of amenities, Hotel Bergs' spacious interiors are a contrast of light and dark, wood and linen. Discuss matters of grave importance in the top-floor glass conference hall which seats up to 120 people or unwind in its stylish restaurant - one of Riga's best. Hotel Bergs is a member of the alliance of Small Luxury Hotels of the World. ▶ Breakfast: 14Ls. 38 rooms (21 studio suites from 126Ls, 7 apartment suites from 178Ls, 6 loft suites from 178Ls, 4 penthouse suites from 265Ls).

**Hotel de Rome H-2, Kalķu 28, tel. (+371) 67 08 76 00, fax (+371) 67 08 76 06, reservation@derome.lv, www.derome.lv.** A landmark hotel located in Old Riga only a stone's throw from the Freedom Monument. Hotel de Rome offers tastefully decorated rooms with cable TV, wireless internet, phone, mini-bar and local artwork on the walls. Business class accommodation has the added benefit of a trouser press and heat lamps in the bathrooms, while suites provide extra space and incredible views. An elegant top-floor restaurant called Otto Schwarz is also available as well as a lobby bar. ▶ 88 rooms (6 singles from 75Ls, 35 doubles from 85Ls, 28 business class from 91Ls, 18 suites from 113Ls, 1 presidential apartment 600Ls).

**Hotel Neiburgs I-1, Jauniela 25/27, tel. (+371) 67 11 55 22, fax (+371) 67 55 95 62, www.neiburgs.com.** This stylish design hotel is housed in one of Old Riga's most beautiful art nouveau buildings. All 55 of its apartments include a combination of modern minimalist décor and original elements like restored parquet floors that date back to 1903. Kitchens, spacious rooms, huge plasma TVs, free wireless internet access, bathrooms with bathtubs, slippers and robes and excellent views all come standard. Two-storey suites, accommodation with balconies and an excellent restaurant are also available. ▶ 55 rooms (36 studio apartments 68 - 82Ls, 4 studio deluxe 108Ls, 8 senior suites 116Ls, 7 two-storey suites 152Ls).

**Radisson Blu Ridzene Hotel G-3, Reimersa 1, tel. (+371) 67 09 33 33, fax (+371) 67 32 26 00, www.radissonblu.com/ridzenehotel-riga.** A 1980s edifice houses one of Riga's most deluxe hotels. Expect comfy rooms with cherry wood decorations and an excellent top-floor sauna and fitness complex with 180° views. The friendly staff has an eye for detail - our favourite improvement to the former Soviet elite hotel is the happy rubber duck in each bathroom. ▶ 95 rooms (77 standard class from €95, 13 business class from €155, 3 suites from €437, 1 presidential suite from €937, 1 wheelchair accessible from €95).

## Upmarket


**Albert Hotel B-4, Dzirnau 33, tel. (+371) 67 33 17 17, fax (+371) 67 33 17 18, www.alberthotel.lv.** Nearly everything in this huge 11-storey hotel revolves around a common theme - Albert Einstein and his theories. Each of the 246 rooms includes a quote from the father of modern science, the conference facilities are named space, time and light, the 'do not disturb' signs simply say 'I'm thinking' and even the carpets include a pattern of working atoms. All rooms are tastefully decorated with relaxing autumnal colours and have the standard amenities you would expect from a great hotel. A restaurant and 11th-floor cocktail lounge are also at your disposal. ▶ 241 rooms (7 singles 40Ls, 159 doubles 45Ls). Breakfast: 6Ls.

**Hotel Gutenbergs H-1, Doma laukums 1, tel. (+371) 67 81 40 90, www.gutenbergs.eu.** The only way that this luxury hotel could have a better location would be if it were located *inside* Latvia's largest cathedral instead of right next to it. All rooms offer the usual amenities including satellite TV, writing desk, wireless internet and spacious bathrooms, but we recommend the cosy, rustically furnished rooms in the section that was once a 17th-century warehouse. A small bronze book is attached to each room key. ▶ 38 rooms (38 doubles 35 - 44Ls, 6 triples 50Ls, 7 suites 59 - 69Ls).

**Konventa Sēta I-2, Kalēju 9/11, tel. (+371) 67 08 75 07, fax (+371) 67 08 75 15, www.konventa.lv.** With foundations that were once part of the medieval city wall, the sprawling Konventa Sēta (Convent Yard) stands its ground against Riga's many hotels. A maze of hallways joins nine historic buildings, and leads to a variety of rooms, some with original oak beams. Standard amenities are available as well as disabled and non-smoking rooms, not to mention plenty of shopping and eating options in its extensive courtyard. Apartments with kitchenettes are also available. ▶ 141 rooms (10 singles from 36Ls, 65 doubles from 38Ls, 14 junior suites from 43Ls, 12 suites from 52Ls, 38 apartments from 38Ls, 2 luxury apartments from 70Ls).

**Metropole I-3, Apaszijas bulv. 36, tel. (+371) 67 22 54 11, fax (+371) 67 21 61 40, metropole@metropole.lv, www.metropole.lv.** The oldest continuously running hotel in Riga, the Metropole has been catering to the city's visitors from its excellent location by the Latvian National Opera since 1871. A Scandinavian influence is evident in every aspect of the hotel, whether it is the design of the cosy rooms or the cuisine offered in the restaurant. All rooms, smoking and non-smoking, are tastefully decorated in pleasant pastel colours and include satellite TV, wireless internet access, minibar, safe, trouser press, and bathrooms with showers. A restaurant and bar are also available. ▶ 41 rooms (17 singles 35Ls, 24 doubles 42Ls).

**Monika Centrum Hotel B-3, Elizabetes 21, tel. (+371) 67 03 19 00, fax (+371) 67 03 19 01, www.centrum-hotels.com.** This four-star hotel housed in a completely renovated neo-Gothic building built in 1883, offers spacious rooms with satellite TV, climate control, mini-bar, phone, internet access and private bathrooms with bathtub and bidet as well as a bar, restaurant, modern conference facilities and a fitness centre. Many of the rooms also include balconies with excellent views of the park and surrounding 19th-century architecture. Named after the owner's daughter, Monika also offers incredible suites with original decorative artwork and four-poster beds. ▶ 80 rooms (12 singles 53Ls, 50 doubles 60Ls, 3 suites 91Ls, 1 apartment 105Ls, 14 junior suites 67Ls).

**Radisson Blu Elizabete Hotel C-4, Elizabetes 73, tel. (+371) 67 78 55 55, [www.radissonblu.com/elizabete-hotel-riga](http://www.radissonblu.com/elizabete-hotel-riga).** Its interior was created by a trendy London design firm and each of its modern, spacious rooms includes flat screen TVs, free wireless internet, large bathrooms and many other four-star amenities as well as views of either the courtyard or the park. A fitness centre, a hip cocktail bar and a grill restaurant called C.U.T. are also at your disposal and an ice machine is located on each floor which is unheard of in Latvia. ▶ 228 rooms (204 standard class from €99, 18 business class from €119, 3 junior suites from €299, 1 suite from €359, 2 wheelchair accessible from €99). 

**Radisson Blu Hotel Latvija C-4, Elizabetes 55, tel. (+371) 67 77 22 22, [www.radissonblu.com/latvijahotel-riga](http://www.radissonblu.com/latvijahotel-riga).** All rooms include phone, minibar, hairdryer, climate control and satellite TV. Executive class suites are more spacious and include a few extra amenities. Allergy and smoke-free accommodation is also at your disposal, as well as three bars, a restaurant, conference facilities and room service, not to mention a new wing with dozens of shops and a seafood restaurant. Don't miss the view from the 26th-floor Skyline Bar. ▶ 571 rooms (478 standard class from €89, 47 superior class from €109, 38 business class from €159, 3 suites from €368, 1 presidential suite from €518). 

**Tallink Hotel Riga D-4, Elizabetes 24, tel. (+371) 67 09 97 60, [www.hotels.tallink.com](http://www.hotels.tallink.com).** You can expect modern décor in all of its 256 rooms, which include brown, white and silver colours, flat screen TVs, free wireless internet access, safe, phone and other 4-star amenities as well as bathrooms with heated tile floors and huge showerheads. A restaurant, lobby bar, café, cigar room and beauty salon are also available and kids are given colouring books and crayons while their parents check in. A morning sauna is also included in the price and underground parking is available. ▶ 256 rooms (21 singles 68Ls, 227 doubles 72Ls, 3 suites 142Ls, 5 junior suites 103Ls). 

## Mid-range


**Hotel Edvarda F-3, Dzirmavu 45/47, tel. (+371) 67 43 99 60, [www.hoteledvarda.lv](http://www.hoteledvarda.lv).** This quiet family-run hotel is a great option for people who'd like to avoid the noise and party atmosphere of Old Riga or travellers who simply want a good night's sleep. All rooms are similarly decorated with bright walls and peach-coloured doors and carpeting and include flat screen TVs, free wireless internet access, minibar, phone and bathrooms with heated tile floors. Superior rooms are more spacious and include bathtubs and terraces. A children's room and a Viennese-style cafe are also at your disposal. Although the hotel is non-smoking, each floor has a communal balcony. ▶ 20 rooms (7 singles 38Ls, 11 doubles 43Ls, 2 superior 59Ls). 

**Kolonna Hotel Riga H-2, Tirgoņu 9, tel. (+371) 67 35 82 54, fax (+371) 67 35 82 55, [reservations@kolonna.com](mailto:reservations@kolonna.com), [www.hotelkolonna.com](http://www.hotelkolonna.com).** Located on one of Old Riga's most charming streets just off Cathedral Square (Doma laukums), this stylish hotel certainly has plenty to offer and at very affordable prices. Each room is slightly different in size but all offer satellite TV, writing desk, phone, private bathrooms with shower and minimalist décor. The top floor rooms also have air conditioning and luxury two-storey penthouse suites are also available. Many of the city's best eating and drinking establishments are also close by. ▶ 41 rooms (2 singles 30Ls, 18 doubles 32Ls, 11 studios 42Ls, 2 penthouses 45Ls, 8 family 45Ls). 

**Radi un Draugi I-2, Mārstaļu 1, tel. (+371) 67 82 02 00, [www.draugi.lv](http://www.draugi.lv).** All rooms are spacious and include cable TV, wireless internet access, phone, refrigerator, coffee or teakettle and modern bathrooms with hairdryer and shower or tub. Accommodation in the original section has a bit of old world charm, while newer rooms offer warm interiors with Latvian wooden furniture. A Viennese-style café is available as well as a bar and lounge that looks like an English gentlemen's club. Reserve well in advance. ▶ 76 rooms (16 singles 36Ls, 50 doubles 44Ls, 1 triple 52Ls, 3 junior suites 52Ls, 2 family rooms 52Ls). 

## Bed & Breakfast

**B&B Krisjanis & Gertrude C-5, Barona 39-1 (entrance from Gertrūdes), tel. (+371) 67 50 66 04, [www.kg.lv](http://www.kg.lv).** Not unlike a typical British B&B, this hotel only offers six rooms, but each is decorated in a different fashion and provides cable TV, free wireless internet access, modern bathrooms, coffee/tea set and a cosy atmosphere that one would expect from a home away from home. A common room is also available with a kitchenette and a computer with internet access. ▶ 8 rooms (6 singles 21Ls, 6 doubles 28Ls, 2 triples 32Ls). 

**Hotel Multilux C-5, Barona 37 (entrance from Gertrūdes), tel. (+371) 67 31 16 02, [www.multilux.lv](http://www.multilux.lv).** All of the rooms in this historic Art Nouveau building in the centre of Riga are completely renovated with tasteful furniture, cable TV and en suite bathrooms. Multilux is family-owned so you're guaranteed good service as well as internet access, housekeeping, 24-hour reception and a breakfast buffet. A great value! ▶ 15 rooms (3 singles 12 - 20Ls, 3 doubles 18 - 29Ls, 2 triples 21 - 29Ls, 5 twin 15 - 25Ls, 1 six-bed room 39 - 59Ls, 1 studio apartment 50Ls). 

**Jakob Lenz B-3, Lenču 2, tel. (+371) 67 33 33 43, [www.guesthouse-lenz.lv](http://www.guesthouse-lenz.lv).** This B&B located in a quiet residential neighbourhood is only a stone's throw from the city's most impressive Art Nouveau buildings and offers bright and spacious rooms, many with private bathrooms, within renovated apartments on three floors. A full kitchen is also available as well as a communal computer with internet access or free wireless in rooms. ▶ 19 rooms (3 singles 16 - 20Ls, 8 doubles 20 - 30Ls, 4 triples 25 - 35Ls, 4 apartments 35 - 45Ls). 

## Hostels

**Riga Hostel I-2, Mārstaļu 12, tel. (+371) 22 33 78 84, [www.rigahostel.com.lv](http://www.rigahostel.com.lv).** Each dorm room has its own bathroom and shower and a kitchen is available if you'd like to do your own cooking. A relaxation room is also at your disposal where you can watch TV or a DVD, surf the net for free or smoke a hookah. No curfew. ▶ 8 rooms (2 doubles 16 - 20Ls, 1 triple 21 - 27Ls, 1 quad 28 - 40Ls, 2 eight-bed dorms 4.90 - 7.90Ls/person, 1 twelve-bed dorm 4.50 - 5Ls/person, 1 fifteen-bed dorm 3.80 - 4.50Ls/person). 

**Riga House Hostel C-5, Barona 44 - 9, tel. (+371) 29 38 94 50, [www.rigaouthere.com](http://www.rigaouthere.com).** This centrally located hostel is run by an expat tour operator, so not only will you have a comfortable bed, but you'll also be able to book activities. Dorm rooms offer bunk beds and also include hardwood floors and original Latvian tile fireplaces. A communal kitchen with a washing machine, a smoking balcony, free internet access, shared toilets, showers and even a bathtub are all at your disposal. ▶ Breakfast: 5Ls. 3 rooms (2 doubles 30Ls, 1 four-bed dorm 10Ls/person). 