



TOP TRAVEL ITINERARIES IN LATVIA



TOP TRAVEL ITINERARIES IN LATVIA

1. Latvia's treasure - history and culture	1
2. What is hidden in Latvia's hills	4
3. Latvia's nature - best enjoyed slowly	7
4. In close with Latvia's primeval nature	10
5. How Latvia enthuses children	13
6. Families at play in Latvia	16
7. Latvia - full of excitement	19
8. Latvia - unforgettable	22
9. Treat yourself to Latvian delicacies	25
10. Latvia tastes of the countryside	28

SYMBOLS

- » suggested duration
- 📏 approximate distance
- 🕒 when to visit
- 📍 main type of attractions
- 👤 tourist destination

 European Destinations of Excellence
(ec.europa.eu/eden)

 Gauja National Park (www.gnp.lv)

 Kemeru National Park
(www.daba.gov.lv)

🟡 top 10 tourism destination

 Slitere National Park
(www.daba.gov.lv)

 Razna National Park
(www.daba.gov.lv)

 "Blue Flag" beach
(www.blueflag.org)

○ not included in the itinerary



1. LATVIA'S TREASURE - HISTORY AND CULTURE

Get a feel for Latvia in capital city Riga and its 800 years of development, then travel eastwards along once vital waterway, the Daugava river. Soak up Latgale's catholic and orthodox churches and its agricultural, industrial and military heritage.

- » 2-3 days
- 📏 480 km
- 🕒 January - December
- 📍 History and culture





Latvian National Opera

Start your journey by absorbing 800 years of history as you wander through the narrow, cobbled streets of **Vecrīga**, Riga's medieval Old Town, with churches, museums and galleries catering to all tastes secreted among its diverse facades. Count the warehouses to grasp Riga's history as a great Hanseatic port.

By the canal, once part of Riga's medieval fortifications, take a guided tour of the **Latvian National Opera's** classic 19th century building. Imagine yourself singing an aria, discover back-stage secrets and be awed by the splendour of the restored auditorium and halls.

Stroll across green parkland to reach Riga's 'quiet centre', home to magnificent Jugendstil (Art Nouveau) buildings dating back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Gain an insight into their history and a feel for that era at the **Riga Jugendstil Museum**, admiring the correspondingly ornate interiors on display. Now you understand why this area has a UNESCO heritage listing.

Time to leave the city and head upstream along its once-great waterway, the river Daugava. Just beyond Salaspils, drive across the Riga hydro-station dam to reach **Dole island** and the **Daugava museum** to dip into the river's many-faceted history as a trade route and place to live as far back as the 9th century. Contrast life in the museum's 1898 mansion home with that of a 19th century fisherman in the open-air recreated historic settlement.

Take a break at **Ogre** for the Lazdukalns Dendrology Park and climb the 100 steps to its delightful hilltop pond of water



Koknese Castle

lilies and viewing platform. The park has several walking trails, including the special Swamp trail.

Evocative **Koknese Castle** was built by Crusader Bishop Albert in 1209 and stood on the banks of the Daugava up to the 18th century Northern War. Once on high ground, construction of the Riga hydro-dam saw the castle's foundations disappear under the Daugava and Pērse rivers.

Just past Siļpils, take to the Daugava with **Mežmalas Viking** to view Oliņkalns, the Sēlpils castle mound and the river's many rocky coves from the Lāčplēsis (Bearslayer), a river boat awash with epic heroic legends like that of its namesake.

The 13th century **Krustpils Castle** was the only stone castle in what is now Latgale owned by the Archbishop of Riga. Rebuilt as an opulent palace in the 19th century, today it is home to the Jēkabpils History Museum which displays a timeline of and artefacts from the edifice's history and restoration, as well as significant regional objects.

Riverside Līvāni features the Baltic's only **Glass Museum** where, in one place, you can view the complete history of the Līvāni glass factory, first mentioned in parish records in 1887, and samples of its products. Despite its remote location, the factory operated for more than 100 years.

Leave the river and head east to Preiļi for its ornate miniature castle and surprisingly lively **Dolls' Museum**.

You won't miss the stunning **Aglona Basilica**, as its shining white spires stand out for miles, a great help to the many believers who make the annual pilgrimage to the centre of



Aglona Basilica

Latvia's Catholicism. Wonder through the huge churchyard and step inside to view its subtle pastel colouring and lavish gilded altar.

For your less spiritual needs and everything you ever wanted to know about bread and bread-making, Aglona also has a **Bread Museum** - tasty and educational.

Still in Aglona, feel the suffering of more recent history at the **World War II Museum**, explaining some of the miseries that little Latvia and its people endured at the hands of warring super powers.

Near the Aglona Basilica, on the shores of Aglona lake, stand the sculpture garden and ornamental plantings of **Karaļa kalns** (The King's Hill) with sacred wooden sculptures carved in gratitude to God and Jesus.

Head south back to the river and Latvia's second largest city **Daugavpils** whose History and Art Museum is located in one of its most beautiful Art Nouveau buildings adjacent to pretty Dubrovina Park. A visit to its gallery named in honour of world-renowned artist and native of Daugavpils Mark Rothko is obligatory.

Daugavpils Fortress is an impressive fortified edifice covering a total area of more than 150 hectares and is the only untouched, early 19th century fortress remaining in east Europe. The fortress's jagged contour consists of a bulwark with eight towers, ravelins and contrgades with other defensive structures - lunettes, redoubts and a moat. A scone on the left bank of the Daugava protects the bridge. Inside the walls,



Ludza Craft Centre

building facades are in Empire style, although the Nikolai Gate and Water Tower are Gothic.

Travel further upriver to Naujene parish where the unique settlement and museum complex, **Slutišķi Old Believers' Village**, is well worth a visit to see how deeply this version of the Russian Orthodox religion has influenced the lives and work of local residents.

Our furthest point upriver, **Krāslava** is already close to the Belarusian border. The attractive buildings of Krāslava's historical centre and St Ludwig's Catholic Church date back to the 18th and 19th centuries and are enhanced by the town's location, nestled among three lakes and three small rivers.

Leaving the river again, head north to the **Andrupene Farm Ethnographic Museum**, an authentic, early 20th century farm spread over six buildings: the home, barn, pig-sty, threshing barn, sauna and forge. Tools, household items and furniture of that era create a bygone rural atmosphere.

Further north is Rēzekne, Latgale's cultural heart and home of the **Latgale Cultural Museum**. Extended and modernised in 2011, it features a rich collection of Latgale ceramics, paintings and ethnographic items.

This journey ends at the **Ludza Craft Centre**, at the foot of an ancient castle mound, welcoming anyone wishing to learn ancient crafts in pottery, weaving and other workshops. The centre also stocks works by local artisans: folk costumes, linen and wool garments. The Exhibition hall hosts displays by regional master artisans and monthly Latgalian Green markets.



2. WHAT IS HIDDEN IN LATVIA'S HILLS

A leisurely sweep north through Vidzeme proffers a microcosm of Latvia's history and culture, taking in everything from Latgalian and Livonian Stone-age dwellings, through crusaders' strongholds and baronial mansions, to striking contemporary art.

- ▶▶ 2-3 days
- 📏 200 km
- 🕒 April - October
- 🎓 History and culture



WHAT IS HIDDEN IN LATVIA'S HILLS



Turaida Museum Park

Easily reached from Riga, Sigulda sits at the south of the Gauja National park on the tall banks of the ancient Gauja valley. Surrounded by historic sites, the town itself features the **Sigulda Medieval Castle ruins**, originally built by the Sword Master of the Venn Order in 1207. The later, Livonian Order convent with its Gothic apertures and the main gate tower survive and provide a wonderful backdrop for summer's open-air concerts.

Our next stops are across the deep Gauja valley and there is only one way to cross - by the 43m-high **cable car**. Opened in 1969, it is the only one in the Baltic States and provides spectacular views. Not the nervous type - try bungee jumping from the cable car.

Disembark at **Krimulda Manor** for stunning views back to Sigulda. The castle ruins are medieval, but the first mansion was built in the 15th century. The existing example of Classicism was built in 1848 for Prince Lieven.

At the base of a sandstone cliff sits **Gūtmaņala**, the longest erosion cave in the Baltics, formed 10 000 years ago by Ice Age waters. Associated with many legends, it is an ancient cult site. Carved signatures attest to its popularity with 19th century tourists.

Back up the top of the valley, the **Turaida Museum Park** hosts a valuable collection of historical artifacts. Explore the cultural heritage of the Gauja Livonians, climb the medieval stone castle tower, see the drawbridge, battlements, gates and guard towers, chapel and secret passage. Turaida Church is beautiful and elegant in its simplicity.



Līgatne paper mill village

Head northeast to the bank of the Līgatne river and **Vienkoči Park**. The park is a tribute to wood and woodcraft, with model buildings, animals, folk tales and historic events all exquisitely carved and placed in a pristine natural environment.

Code-named 'Holiday Hotel', the **Līgatne Bunker** was a top-secret Soviet-era facility built to house the communist elite of the 1980s in case of nuclear war. Only opened to the public in 2003, the 9m below-ground bunker still contains technical equipment, now augmented with displays of Soviet-era memorabilia, not least the canteen with a typical Soviet menu.

Līgatne's history is closely linked with the **Līgatne paper mill village**. A paper mill first operated here in the early 19th century, but it is the village which has gained recognition and national significance for its unusual architecture and the social model under which workers lived in the 100-year-old wooden buildings.

Right by the roadside, the **Ieriķi Nature Trails** provide an ideal stop. Clamber the scenic steep banks and seven waterfalls of the Meldrupe river, view the ever-changing display of native flora and admire the impressive waterwheel and ruins of the 300-year-old mill of Ieriķu manor.

Long ago the site of a 9-11th century fortified Latgalian settlement, the **Āraiši museum park** stretches out alongside the pretty Āraiši lake. The authentic reconstruction of the lake fort is based on Stone and Bronze Age archaeological evidence garnered from drained lakes. The adjacent medieval castle ruins date back to the Livonian Order.

WHAT IS HIDDEN IN LATVIA'S HILLS



Cēsis Castle and Manor Complex

On the other shore of lake Āraiši, **Geidānmuīža** or Geidanmois is being created as a centre of medieval Livonian skills and historical re-enactments. Book time in Livonia, take up your sword or enjoy more peaceful activities.

If you stop while meandering through the cobbled streets of **Cēsis Old Town**, you may only see buildings as old as the cobbles themselves. Imposing St. John's Church was a Livonian Order cathedral and stands by the restored Rožu laukums, once the market square. The Rauna gate is the symbolic junction between the old and new towns.

The Livonian Order fortress ruins in the **Cēsis Castle and Manor Complex** date back to 1220, but its circular towers were built at the turn of the 15th century. The Baroque Jaunā Palace was built for Count von Zeever in 1777 and now houses the Cēsis Local History and Art Museum.

Head north to **Valmiera** and its old town with Livonian Order castle ruins and Saint Simon's Church, both dating to the 13th century. Engineering works in 2005 uncovered a section of the city's northern defensive wall with a loop hole and cobbled road.

Still in the Old Town, the Dispensary, Valmiera's oldest wood building, retains its medieval appeal and is part of the **Valmiera Historical Museum**. Its collection ranges from Iron Age archaeological relics through medieval and pre-industrial artifacts to contemporary art and design by well-known regional artists.



Munchausen museum

Discover the unhurried taste of **Valmiermuīža beer**. Its origins go back to Swedish times when the manor inn was built not far from the castle. Maintaining its renowned traditions of hospitality, the new boutique brewery welcomes visitors for brewery tours, tastings and picnics.

Turn west to get to the **Limbaži medieval castle ruins and viewing tower**. The castle is one of the oldest fortifications in Latvia and its gate tower retains fragments of its retractable lattice gates. The main gate also still has several Gothic period details and the south wall features Gothic windows with pointed arches. From the tower, look out over Limbaži's old town and glacial lake.

Just by the Limbaži castle ruins, in the early 19th century, the then Riga Council built a new manor in the Classicism-style. Now home to the Limbaži Museum, it combines regional history displays with regular exhibitions by local contemporary artists.

Take in the coastal view as you reach Dunte and the **Munchausen museum** and its nature trails. Dedicated to inveterate fibber Munchausen, the manor house is where he followed baronial pursuits like hunting. His tale-telling capability is shown by the ten ducks killed with a single shot. One of the most popular museums in Latvia, its upper floor features wax figures of many current-day Latvian celebrities.

Slip down the coast to **Saulkrasti** and its unique Bicycle Museum. Started in 1977, the collection features legendary bicycles and many cycling-related displays.



3. LATVIA'S NATURE - BEST ENJOYED SLOWLY

Latvia is one of the most forested countries in the world as this journey will reveal, but our countryside also boasts a great variety of natural settings. Wide waterfalls, peat heaths, white sand dunes and sandstone caves all feature along the way.

- ▶▶ 3-4 days
- 📏 590 km
- 🕒 April - October
- 🌳 Nature





Tervete Nature Park

We start in **Tervete Nature Park**, site of an ancient Zemgalian fort, and famous for its tall 300-year-old pines, used to create the park's sculptures - fairy-tale characters of Anna Brigadere. Ramble the lush nature trails, row or fish in beautiful Swan Lake with its many birds, ride on the train.

Pēteris Upītis was Latvia's pre-eminent horticulturist and the Museum and Garden named after him reflect his contribution. Spring is the ideal time to visit **Dobele** for the blossoming orchards or particularly lilac time to admire one of the largest collections in the world.

Located in the vicinity of Tukums, exotic **Jaunmoku Palace**, where Neo-Gothic intertwines with Jugendstil, was built in 1901 as the hunting lodge of the Mayor of Riga. Home to a colourful exposition about forestry and hunting, legend has it that the ghost of the White lady is always at hand.

Uphill from Sabile, the 100ha of the **Pedvāle Open-Air Art Museum** are covered with grassy meadows, gentle slopes and deep ravines, a winding river and woods. Here creative artists are free to express themselves, encouraged to draw their inspiration from nature and local materials, creating a place where stones, wood, landscapes and other natural elements take on a cosmic dimension.

The pearl of Kurzeme, **Kuldīga** is acknowledged to be one of Europe's foremost tourist destinations with its enchanting narrow streets and courtyards. The Alekšupīte river flows along the walls of Old Town houses. The redbrick Venta bridge exudes a special charm. The Pilsētas dārzs gardens are embellished with sculptures. With its rapid flow and extraordinary width of



Seaside Park in Ventspils

249m, natural monument Ventas rumba is the widest waterfall in Europe and is part of the Venta Valley Nature Reserve - abundantly forested and home to many rare and protected plant species.

A little to the north, the **Riežupe sandstone caves** are man-made. Carved out over centuries, the sand was first used for domestic scouring and later for glass-making. It is the longest cave system in Latvia, rumoured to be even longer, with labyrinthine underground passages lost to collapses. In winter, look out for hibernating bats.

Head west to the Baltic coast and the beautifully rugged, steep dunes of **Jūrkalnaes stāvkrasti**. The appeal of this blend of 20m-high sand walls, rocks, clean water and stately pine trees dates back to the early 19th century when it was popular with the local landed gentry.

Just up the coast, the **Užava lighthouse** stands 30m above the sea on tall dunes. Originally built in 1879, the existing edifice maintains its initial appearance. Standing 16m high, it is also known as Bakofen as its three dunes are reminiscent of a baking oven.

One of many attractions in the port of **Ventspils**, the Seaside Park nestles in copious greenery. Chug along one of two routes on the antique narrow gauge railway. Walk the Jungle trail and greet its resident animals, exquisitely carved from wood. Try out different surfaces: dolomite slabs, wood blocks and chips, bark or cones. Energetic visitors can climb and swing through the trees on the challenging obstacle course.



Beach at Kaltene

Just up the coast, the **Oviši lighthouse** is the oldest in Latvia having been built in 1844, but reconstructed in its original form in 1905. The white tower is 38m tall and is unusual in that it has a second tower inside.

Once a Soviet installation to detect missiles, the **Irbene Radio Astronomy Centre** now serves more peaceful purposes. One of its two parabolic radio telescopes has a diameter of 32m, the largest in north Europe and the 8th largest in the world.

Kolkas rags is the northern tip of Latvia's west coast, the meeting place of Baltic and Gulf of Riga currents, sunrise and sunset, and all four winds. Its sandy, pristine beaches are wonderful for relaxing by the water. It is the main attraction of Slītere National Park which has become popular with nature lovers, not only for its bounteous flora and fauna, but as a great place to see migrating birds.

Turning south-east along the Gulf coast, traverse deep forests to reach the wild, boulder-strewn beach at **Kaltene** where shellfish fossils date back to the Littorine era. Pathways lead back into the pines where you will find kalvas, huge piles of boulders left by the receding Baltic glacial lake. The nature trail includes two viewing platforms and a bird-watching tower.

Strike inland to Valdemārpils and the **Laumu Nature Park**, jam-packed with the Bee, Bird, Plant and Forest educational trails for experiencing the wonders of nature. Active leisure seekers will enjoy the Sports trail with its obstacles testing agility and balance. Try out other recreational activities - mini golf, trampolining, fishing, cycling, even candle-making. In winter, cross-country skiing is the way to go.



Great Ķemeri Heath

The **Lake Engure Nature Park** is a unique European wetland and one of the most important reserves in Latvia, home to 15 listed species and 23 habitats. The short distance between freshwater lake and the coastal dunes, replete with forests and marshes, offer a great variety of sights. Now equipped with trails and an information centre.

The **Great Ķemeri Heath** or raised bog has been formed over 8 000 years by the action of Sphagnum or peat moss, creating layers of peat as much as 8m thick, but still living. All the rain and snow falling on the heath is collected in the bog which can hold up to 20-25 times its weight of water. Take to the boardwalk, supported only by the quagmire, to see how the soil, poor in nutrients, acidic and water-saturated, lets only a few shrubs and stunted trees survive, hence the eerie landscape.

Having passed through Jūrmala's many townships, Lielupe leads you to the **Ragakāpas (Horn Dune) Nature Park**. Follow the path to see 300-year old pines and one of the highest dunes in Latvia. Explore the open-air museum of a 19th century fisherman's life. The Nature, Insect, Pine and Plant trails reveal 5 rare plants and 4 endangered birds. Viewing platforms, benches, stairways and information signs help you enjoy your visit.



4. IN CLOSE WITH LATVIA'S PRIMEVAL NATURE

Latvia has many areas totally untouched by man. On this journey you will get close to these pristine sites by walking along white dunes and rocky seashores, climbing sandstone outcrops and following nature trails and rivers through deep forests.

- ▶▶ 2-3 days
- 📏 200 km
- 🕒 April - October
- 🌿 Nature



IN CLOSE WITH LATVIA'S PRIMEVAL NATURE



Sunset Trail in Saulkrasti

Just north-east of Riga, Vidzeme coast resort **Saulkrasti** is much more relaxed than Jūrmala. Perfect for just lying on the white sand beach or taking the 4km-long Sunset Trail from Baltā kāpa (white dune) through tall pines to the town itself. Climb the dune for stunning views up and down the coastline and of the Inčupe Pēterupe estuary.

A little up the coast, the **Munchausen Museum** at Dunte Manor has revived the legend of the inveterate fibber Baron. The Forest Trail is the longest aspen walkway in Europe, its 5.3 km length passing through wetland forest to the sea. Admire the wood-carved animal characters of folk tales lurking along the way.

The **Vidzeme Stony Seashore** is the only place in the Baltic Sea where sandstone strata are exposed on the beach. Formed 350-380 million years ago, the highest are to the south of Veczemji and between Kāpnieki and Siliņi. The boulders scattered along the shore act as a natural barrier to the eroding impact of strong winds and storms. The area hosts both typical and rare and protected seashore species and biotypes.

Head inland to get to the **Limbaži medieval castle ruins and viewing tower**. The castle is one of the oldest fortifications in Latvia and its gate tower retains fragments of its retractable lattice gates. The main gate and the south wall also still have several Gothic period details. From the tower, look out over Limbaži's old town and glacial lake.

Latvia is one of the most forested countries in the world, but with relatively few species. This shortage is addressed at the **Ledurga Dendrological Park** with its incredible array of



Ungurmuiža manor

more than 1000 varieties of trees and shrubs, one of the most extensive in Latvia. So many and some unique, for example, gorgeous white, fragrant magnolias - happily surviving Latvia's frequently freezing winters.

Near Sārumezers, the **Vējiņu caves** contain the only known underground lakes in the Baltic States. Formed by rock falls blocking underground streams, they are replenished by spring floods from the Brasla river. Because of the perilous state of the sandstone roofs and walls, you will need a guide to accompany you.

Atop the lake from which it takes its name, Baroque **Ungurmuiža manor** is the only 18th century wooden building of its type preserved in Latvia. Built by Baron von Campenhausen in 1732, it is being restored to its former splendour. Absorb the special atmosphere by taking a walk in the park beneath the huge oak-trees. Perfect surroundings for the regular chamber music concerts.

Cross the fast-flowing Gauja and walk the **Cīrulišu Nature Trails** for an insight into the river's eons of history. Well-signposted routes take you to the glacial-era valley. Spot the work of the forest's native builders - beaver dams and above-ground ants nests - and compare them to man's efforts, the old bobsleigh track and ski resorts.

The Livonian Order fortress ruins in the **Cēsis Castle and Manor Complex** date back to 1220, but its circular towers were built at the turn of the 15th century. The Baroque Jaunā Palace was built in 1777 and now houses the Cēsis Local History and Art Museum. The wonderful Castle Park is deservedly considered

IN CLOSE WITH LATVIA'S PRIMEVAL NATURE



Līgatne Nature Trails

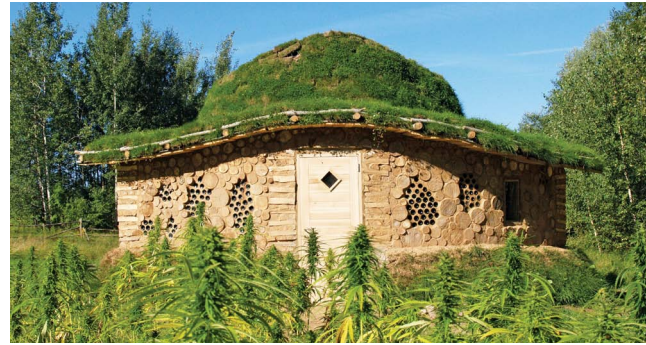
one of the most outstanding and most original 19th century landscape parks in Latvia.

Long ago the site of a 9-11th century fortified Latgalian settlement, the **Āraiši museum park** stretches out alongside the pretty Āraiši lake. The authentic reconstruction of the lake fort is based on Stone and Bronze Age archaeological evidence garnered from drained lakes. Nearby, medieval castle ruins hide on a treed hillock.

Zvārtes iezis (rock) is the most imposing of the many sandstone and dolomite outcrops that can be seen along the Amata River trail, a pleasing mix of forest and meadow. Near the Visitors' Centre, ancient witch Zinta and her beneficial plants remind us that the iezis was once a meeting place for witches.

Līgatne and its surrounding villages feature many sandstone outcrops, the highest concentration in Latvia. Over the centuries, local residents have taken advantage of these by carving out cave systems and cellars for both personal and work needs. The unstable condition of the 350-370 million-year-old rocks mean you will need a guide.

The Gauja National Park is Latvia's largest and the wooded glens of its 5km-long **Līgatne Nature Trails** are the perfect place to view Latvia's wild animals and birds in their natural environment. The animals, brought here from all over Latvia, have either been injured or were domesticated orphans unable to survive on their own.



Vienkoči Park

Līgatne's history is closely linked with the **Līgatne paper mill village**. A paper mill first operated here in the early 19th century, but it is the village which has gained recognition and national significance for its unusual architecture and the social model under which workers lived in the 100-year-old wooden buildings.

Stop off at the Līgatne river and **Vienkoči Park**. The park is a tribute to wood and woodcraft, with model buildings, animals, folk tales and historic events all exquisitely carved and placed in a pristine natural environment. Cap your visit with a trip in a log boat.

At the base of a sandstone cliff not far from the Gauja river opposite Sigulda sits **Gūtmaņala**, the longest erosion cave in the Baltics, formed 10 000 years ago by Ice Age waters. Associated with many legends, it is an ancient cult site. The lush green meadows around it are a perfect picnic spot.

The **Turaída Museum Park** hosts a valuable collection of historical and artistic artefacts. One of its iconic symbols is Indulis Ranka's sculpture garden Dainu kalns dedicated to Latvian folklore. Explore the cultural heritage of the Gauja Livonians and the medieval stone castle tower with its amazing view over the ancient Gauja valley. Turaída Church - the oldest wooden church in Latvia - is beautiful and elegant in its simplicity. The nature trails all over the park reveal rare plants, old water channels and sightings of the castle from unusual vantage points.



Family holidays are different because you have to keep both children and parents occupied. Latvia can do that with its combination of junior attractions set in fascinating natural and historic environments. A good sampling of Riga attractions, too.

- ▶ 2-3 days
- 📏 140 km
- 🕒 January - December
- 👤 Family entertainment



HOW LATVIA ENTHUSES CHILDREN



Dobuļi Minizoo

We start in **Bauska**, where the medieval castle shows this was a Livonian Order stronghold. The castle is beautifully and strategically sited on the narrow strip between the Mūsa and Mēmele rivers, just up from their merging to form Lielupe. The newer 16th century part is the last remaining residence of the Kettlers, Dukes of Kurzeme (Courland) and Zemgale.

Down in the old town, the **Bauska Historical and Art Museum** is easily the region's largest. As well as the usual displays, it features special exhibitions like 'Bauska over the Years and its People in the 20th century' and regularly updated specialist expositions.

Who doesn't have a soft spot for rabbits? Head north on Via Baltica for Pilsmuižkungu near Code and **Trušu pilsētiņa or Rabbit Town**, a new, open-air attraction celebrating the cuddly long-eared creatures. With 65 rabbit breeds, this is one of the most extensive displays in Europe.

A little further north, turn off at Zorģi for the **Labrinti Amusement park**, a dazzling collection of mazes and other outdoor attractions covering 3.5ha. Pedal go-karts, boating, a chairlift, ball games - you name it, Labrinti has it. And if time runs out you can camp overnight.

North again to Dzintmisa, where the **Dobuļi Minizoo** features an ever-growing collection of wildlife, domestic animals and birds from around the world. The waterfowl pond offers a particularly enjoyable stroll or picnic spot.

We are in Riga now where the **Lido Amusement Park** offers a wide array of energy-consuming and exhilarating activities,



Rāmkalni

not to mention great meals in the massive log building, where the playroom will occupy younger visitors while their parents dine stylishly.

Step straight into the 21st century with the high-tech entertainment on offer at **Go Planet**. With the most advanced kart track in the Baltics, new-generation Formula1 simulators, the only 4D cinema in eastern Europe, laser games in a multilevel maze and lots more, everyone will find something to do.

The **Riga Motor Museum** is the largest antique vehicle museum in the Baltics and has a great reputation with enthusiasts for its special, often unique vehicles such as the Kremlin collection, Latvian-made cars, mopeds and bicycles and pre-war and Soviet models.

Easily reached by tram, **Riga Zoo** celebrated its centenary in 2012 and continues the modernisation of recent years. Perhaps the best example of that is the Giraffe house, the most visited in the whole zoo. The zoo's many animals, among typical lakeside pine forest and alongside Ķīšezers lake, guarantee hours of pleasure.

Step into the past at the **Ethnographic Open-Air Museum of Latvia**, established in 1924 to preserve buildings and artefacts relating to our disappearing agricultural heritage. Ideally sited on the shore of Lake Jugla, museum staff and volunteers present a never-ending show of traditions and festivities.

Take the tree-lined Vidzeme highway to reach **Rāmkalni** and its rodel track, the longest in the Baltics at 400m with seven

HOW LATVIA ENTHUSES CHILDREN



Sigulda Adventure Park

unyielding curves into the Gauja valley. There are many other activities, more or less strenuous (anyone for Zorbing or bungee-jumping?), but in winter downhill skiing takes over.

If you like climbing trees, the **Mežakaķis Adventure park** is for you. 'Walk', clamber, slide or glide on and through the trees on this obstacle course which takes full advantage of the steep side of the Gauja valley. Hardly surprisingly, it's a ski resort in the winter.

Still not had enough action? Then you will find something at the **Sigulda Adventure Park** to use up your excess energy. Choose from a rollercoaster of a toboggan ride, tree-top obstacle course, catapult, climbing wall, chair lift and more. With many other options for children and, naturally, skiing in winter.

Sigulda has been popular with walkers for more than 200 years and in earlier times a walking stick was obligatory. Later, canes came into vogue and the district developed its own colourful design. When Sigulda marked its 800th anniversary in 2007, the town devoted the whole of what is now Cane Park to a celebration of this unique souvenir.

The **Sigulda medieval castle** was originally built by the Sword Master of the Venn Order in 1207. The later, Livonian Order convent building with its Gothic apertures and the main gate tower survive and provide a wonderful backdrop for the open-air staging of concerts and festivals in the summer.

Take a seat, relax and enjoy awesome views of the deep, ancient Gauja valley as you ride **Sigulda's Ferris wheel** and



Cable car in Sigulda

rise above the tree tops. Gaze at romantic Turaida castle and Krimulda palace/manor across the wide valley. Particularly beautiful when the golden autumn tints the valley.

Our next stops are across the deep Gauja valley and there is only one way to cross - by the 43m-high **cable car**. Opened in 1969, it is the only one in the Baltic States and provides spectacular views. Those of a harder constitution may care to take up the offer of bungee jumping from the cable car.

At the base of a sandstone cliff sits **Gūtmaņala**, the longest internal erosion cave in the Baltics, formed 10 000 years ago by thawing Ice Age waters. Associated with many legends, it is a protected geological object. Its popularity with 19th century tourists is attested to by the signatures carved in the soft stone.

At the top of the valley, the **Turaida Museum Park** hosts a vast collection of historical artefacts and buildings. One of its iconic symbols is the Dainu kalns sculpture garden dedicated to Latvian folklore. Explore the medieval stone castle, climb its tall tower. The nature trails all over the park reveal rare plants, old water channels and unusual views of the castle.

Finish off your journey with another breath-taking journey through the tree tops at the **Meža Reinis obstacle course**. If you want to stay grounded, play a round of golf or join in a game of football or volley ball, hire bikes or canoes. Winter time is skiing time.



6. FAMILIES AT PLAY IN LATVIA

Fun for all the family is guaranteed as you wend your way from waterslides in Jūrmala to the numerous attractions offered by beach-side Ventspils. And there is plenty of variety along the way, from fairytale nature trails to crossbow shooting.

- ▶▶ 3-4 days
- 📏 320 km
- 🕒 April - October
- 👨‍👩‍👧‍👦 Family entertainment



FAMILIES AT PLAY IN LATVIA



Jūrmala beach

Water, steep slopes, pipes and curves are always accompanied by the shouts of children (and their parents?) enjoying themselves. And the **Līvu Aquapark**, just over Lielupe in Jūrmala is no exception. Venture down one of the 13 different slides with speeds up to 60km/h or watch it all from the wave pool or a relaxing massage pool.

Not far from the beach, deep into the dunes and tall pines is pretty **Dzintari Forest Park** replete with playgrounds, walking and rollerblading tracks, skate park and cafes. Climb the 33.5m high viewing tower and see the whole coastline from one of its 12 balconies.

Many places claim to have white sand, but when you see the 32.8km long stretch of **Jūrmala beach** you are seeing the genuine, white-quartz article. But the character changes as you pass each suburb - the Blue-flag beaches are the most popular but other spots are perfect for quietly watching languid sunsets.

In one of Jūrmala's many beautiful summer residences, in Majori, you will find the **Inner Light Art residence**. Inspired by his work in the restoration of Riga's Nativity Cathedral's murals, artist Vitaly Yermolayev has invented a new, unique painting technique. Will his paintings help you find your inner self?

The **Great Ķemeri Heath** or raised bog has been formed over 8 000 years by the action of Sphagnum or peat moss, creating layers of peat as much as 8m thick, but still living. All the rain and snow falling on the heath is collected in the bog which can hold up to 20-25 times its weight of water. Only a few shrubs and stunted trees can survive, hence the eerie landscape.



Dobele Local History Museum

Follow Lielupe upstream to **Jelgava** where, on Pils sala (Palace island), one of the last remaining floodplain natural grasslands is a protected reserve. A valuable and important habitat for birds recognised by many international organisations, the island is also home to two herds of wild horses.

Jelgava's Holy Trinity Church Tower has had an eventful history. A rare survivor of the city's destruction in world War II, the tower was used by the Soviet military. Now wonderfully renovated and hosting historical expositions, you can enjoy the panorama from the 9th floor or eat in its stylish restaurant.

Tērvete Nature Park is the site of an ancient Zemgalian fort, and famous for its tall 300-year-old pines, used to create the park's sculptures - fairy-tale characters of Anna Brigadere. Ramble the lush nature trails, row or fish in beautiful Swan Lake with its many birds, ride on the train.

One of the mission's of the **Dobele Local History Museum** is to establish the true character of the region's residents. A number of creative workshops contribute to this: painting with sand, discovering herbal teas in the Duchess's garden, court ladies' games and board games featuring Dobele.

Just by **Jaunpils castle**, in a walled yard built by Swedish prisoners of war in 1605, Niedru Iija (Marsh-harrier) offers truly medieval activities: crossbow shooting, archery, axe and spear throwing, coin-making, blacksmithing, armour, weapons and even medieval feasts.

In the Latvian language, **Saldus** implies sweetness and there is no shortage of it in the town by that name. Vote for your

FAMILIES AT PLAY IN LATVIA



Water Amusement Park in Ventspils

favourite ice-cream flavour at Druvas saldējums (how about chicory?); discover the delights of Latvia's milkier version of fudge, the gotiņa, at Saldus pārtikas kombināts; watch tasty bread, cakes and pastry being made at Saldus maiznieks.

Kuldīga is packed with enchanting narrow streets and courtyards. The Alekšupīte river flows along the walls of Old Town houses. The redbrick Venta bridge exudes a special charm. The Pilsētas dārzs gardens are embellished with sculptures. With its rapid flow and extraordinary width of 249m, Ventas rumba is the widest waterfall in Europe.

A little to the north, the **Riežupe sandstone caves** are man-made. Carved out over centuries, the sand was first used for domestic scouring and later for glass-making. It is the longest cave system in Latvia, rumoured to be even longer, with underground passages lost to collapses. In winter, look out for hibernating bats.

Our journey ends at **Ventspils**, which has a lot to offer, not least its Blue-flag beach. Its 1.2km of fine white sand, 80m wide with dunes reaching heights of 9m are a wonderful place to enjoy the sea. Swim, join in volleyball and football games or just lie in the sand - there are also special paths for pram and wheelchair access.

Just off the beach itself is the **Beach Waterpark**, an open-air water amusement park with three different pools and slides for all ages. Younger visitors will appreciate the octopus, boat, frog and mushroom pools. On colder days, warm up in the saunas or bubble baths.



Lemberg's Panama

The recently renovated **Water Amusement Park** offers large and small swimming pools, a gym, aerobics classes and a new Complex with lively water attractions like the wave pool and a variety of spa treatments, with the stress-relieving salt room being a favourite.

The **Ventspils Creativity House** is home to Latvia's largest digital planetarium, the most modern in the Baltic region, with an observatory equipped with an up-to-the-minute telescope. The planetarium uses special software to show full 360° moving views and unique star shows which can be watched by up to 40 people.

The **Centre Sports Hall** is extensive at over 2 000m² and features several innovations: a modern 8-lane shooting range, the highest external climbing wall in the Baltics, weightlifting hall and gym. It is a public facility but is so up-to-date, it is also utilised by the armed forces.

Downhill skiing on Latvia's flat west coast? And why not if there is an imposing artificial slope as there is at **Lemberg's Panama**. And the slope is getting higher each year. Its use is not limited to the winter as the Adventure Park uses the slopes for attractions such as downhill boarding and the crazy Rotocycle. The park's latest attraction is the wakeboard-towing lake.

Ventspils					
119	Liepāja				
50	69	Jūrkalne			
184	215	195	Rīga		
58	91	41	155	Kuldīga	
166	201	183	23	137	Jūrmala
Distance between cities (km)					



In among our natural gifts, Latvia offers plenty of extreme action. Whether it's speeding down superfast water slides or rodel tracks, windsurfing on a world-championship course or putting in the miles on a beach or in the waves, this trip has it.

- ▶ 2-3 days
- 📏 280 km
- 🕒 January - December
- 🏊 Active recreation





Līvū Aquapark

Water, steep slopes, pipes and curves are always accompanied by the shouts of children (and their parents?) enjoying themselves. And the **Līvū Aquapark**, just over Lielupe in Jūrmala is no exception. Venture down one of the 13 different slides with speeds up to 60km/h, frolic in the wave pool and relax in a massage pool or sauna to recover.

Not far from the beach, deep into the dunes and tall pines is pretty **Dzintari Forest Park**. Race through the greenery along one of the rollerblading tracks or practice your jumps in the skate park. Children will love the playgrounds. Watch them from one of the cafes or from the 12 balconies of the 33.5m high viewing tower with stunning views of the whole coastline.

Many places claim to have white sand, but when you see the 32.8km long stretch of **Jūrmala beach** you are seeing the genuine, white-quartz article. And all with refreshing seawater to help you recover from the action available along the way, particularly at the Blue-flag beaches - volleyball, football, pedalos, canoes, windsurfing - it's all here.

Head toward Smārde, near Tukums for more action at **Milzkalns** or Giant's Hill. A hectic ski resort in the winter, Milzkalns offers paintball, streetball, football and volleyball action for summer visitors, but its pride and joy is the lake with wakeboard towing cable - home of the Latvian championship.

At **Jaunmoku Palace**, Neo-Gothic forms intertwine with Jugendstil (Art Nouveau) elements. Built in 1901 as the hunting lodge of the then Mayor of Riga George Armitstead, it is home to an extensive exhibition of Latvian forestry and hunting.



Zviedru cepure

Legend has it that the palace is haunted by the ghost of the White lady.

Follow the steep-sided Abava River valley as it sweeps south to **Kandava**, first mentioned in 1230, but thought to be much older. The striking appearance of the Old Town, particularly evident in the houses around the main square, is a result of the whole town being rebuilt after a disastrous fire in 1881. Many buildings are linked by decorative arches.

Head to Sable and the legend of **Zviedru cepure**, the Swedish hat, constructed as the grave of a commander by the helmets of his soldiers in the 17th century. The steep slope of this busy ski resort is perfect for summer's rodel track. Take the 950m nature trail to the summit and its viewing tower, or better still, ride a horse, just like the Swedish soldiers.

The pearl of Kurzeme, **Kuldīga** is packed with enchanting, romantic narrow streets and courtyards. The Alekšupīte river flows along the walls of Old Town houses. The vaulted red-brick bridge across the Venta river exudes a special charm. Upriver, Ventas rumba is the widest waterfall in Europe and is part of the Venta Valley Nature Reserve, abundantly forested and home to many rare and protected plant species.

Head west to the Baltic coast and the beautifully rugged, steep dunes of **Jūrkalnes stāvkrausti**. The appeal of this blend of 20m-high sand walls, rocks, clean water and stately pine trees dates back to the early 19th century when it was popular with the local landed gentry. These days it caters to a more active lifestyle with paragliding, windsurfing, kiteboarding and surfing.



Karosta Prison

Pāvilosta's history dates to Jēkabs, the Duke of Kurzeme (1642-1682) who had a port built at the mouth of the Saka River. The Duke was a renowned innovator, but one wonders what he would say to the equipment you can hire at the Pāvilosta Surf Club which caters to windsurfers, surfers and skimboarders.

The port of Pāvilosta has had a chequered history, having variously been blocked and destroyed during different wars. In recent years a fishing port, even that was fading out. That is why it is great to see the rejuvenation the town is undergoing following the construction of the **Pāvilosta Marina** and the visitors, both local and international, it has attracted.

Construction of Liepāja's magnificent **Karosta** (Naval port) was commenced in Tsarist times, the late 19th century. Used exclusively by the Soviet Navy, ordinary people were not permitted to enter for 50 years. Today, it provides an evocative backdrop for participants in the game Escape From The USSR. This is no video game, this is the real thing - look out, they're after you!

One of the original buildings of the old naval port, **Karosta Prison** functioned as a military jail until 1997. Sinister from the outside, even more unwelcoming inside. And just the place to act out the role of a Soviet-era prisoner. Different harrowing experiences are offered, but only the bravest visitors dare spend the night.

The fact that the 2012 World Championship was held in Liepāja is clear proof that this is a serious windsurfing centre. **Host club Rietumkrasts** (West coast) caters for the serious windsurfer, but also has an eye for the future as it offers training and



Liepāja Beach and cycling routes

equipment hire for numerous sailing and boating disciplines. The largest and most modern swimming facility in Kurzeme, the **Liepāja Olympic Centre's Pool and Spa** offers a relaxation zone, water massage, bubble baths, saunas, a water attraction zone for children and two swimming pools. Special spas include salt, aromatic and herbal, with a cold water bucket for instantaneous cooling down.

By commissioning specially designed cycle racks and developing several **cycling routes**, the city of Liepāja has shown it is serious about cycling. And why not, as there is plenty to see, all within easy cycling distance and with no long climbs. Hire a bike and head for Karosta, the historical naval port area, Liepāja's harbour or old town, and of course the sea and dunes.

Liepāja Beach, as well as having a Blue Flag, has some serious swimming history behind it. Its fabulous swimming has been noted since the 1860s when the Russian Tsar and his court first came here. The beach is 50 to 80m wide and has fine, surprisingly white sand. If you around after a storm, look out for pieces of amber washed ashore.

Valmiera				
63	Sigulda			
106	51	Rīga		
36	26	73	Straupe	
31	39	87	24	Cēsis
Distance between cities (km)				



8. LATVIA - UNFORGETTABLE

Latvia's tall trees have served many purposes from ships' masts to stockade walls. Now they are being put to use for tree-top adventure with awesome obstacle courses challenging the bravest. Try these and other active pursuits, ancient and modern.

►► 2-3 days

📏 180 km

🕒 January - December

🎯 Active recreation



LATVIA - UNFORGETTABLE



Aerodium

This route has a flying start at the **Aerodium** just outside Sigulda. That is meant literally because Aerodium, a Latvian invention, is a vertical wind tunnel which allows people to take to the air. See how quickly you can start performing the acrobatic stunts and moves perfected by Aerodium's team who have 'flown' all over the world, including at an Olympic opening ceremony.

Reaching Sigulda itself, first stop is the **Mežakaķis Adventure Park** where you can again take to the air, this time with the help of trees. 'Walk', clamber, slide or glide on ropes, nets and cables as you make your way through the trees on this obstacle course which takes full advantage of the steep side of the Gauja valley. Hardly surprisingly, it's a ski resort in the winter.

The imposing white tower at the top is your guide for finding Sigulda's very own **Bobsleigh and Toboggan Track**. Impressive isn't it - not unexpected that it is used for World Cup races. And in the summer you can try it out yourself by speeding around the 17 steep banked curves on a Vučko or a wheeled bobsleigh with an experienced pilot. 80km/h anyone?

Still not had enough action? Then you will find something at the **Sigulda Adventure Park** to use up your excess energy. Choose from a rollercoaster of a toboggan ride, Tarzan-inspired tree-top obstacle courses, catapult, climbing wall, chair lift and more. With many other options for children and, naturally, skiing in winter

We now have to cross the deep Gauja valley and easily the best way is by the 43m-high **cable car**. Opened in 1969, it



Meža Reinis

is the only one in the Baltic States and provides spectacular views up and down the valley and the Turaida castle. But why is it stopping in the middle. It's so someone can bungee jump into the valley! Want to give it a try?

Over the valley, the **Turaida Museum Park** hosts a vast collection of historical artefacts and buildings. One of its iconic symbols is the Dainu kalns sculpture garden dedicated to Latvian folklore. Explore the medieval stone castle, climb its tall tower, learn about the different occupants over the centuries and the sad tale of the Turaida Rose.

Just around the next hill, take another breathtaking journey through the tree tops at the **Meža Reinis** obstacle course. If you want to stay grounded, play a round of golf on one of Latvia's few courses or join in a game of football or volleyball, hire bikes or canoes. Winter time is skiing time, but in summer you can take to the slope on grass skis and wheeled boards.

The **Cēsis Medieval Castle** was built in the 13th century, but the remaining tower dates from the 16th century. Go medieval by climbing the tower's winding stairs by lantern light. View the area's history in the museum in the more recent palace, or visit a working jewellery workshop. Keep a look out for announcements regarding the medieval festivals held in the green castle grounds.

They say the Gauja is Latvia's true river, as it arises in Vidzeme and doesn't leave it until it enters the Baltic Sea. It is beautiful, tree- and cliff-lined and **Žagarkalns** offers a number of ways to enjoy it at close quarters. Decide your route, choose from canoes, inflatables and rafts and the Žagarkalns team will



Ozolkalns

transport you to the start and bring you back to base. Like its neighbour, **Ozolkalns** is a popular winter ski resort. Summer sees a transformation from the top to the bottom of the steep Gauja valley side. Up top you can take to the treetops on the Squirrel obstacle course featuring Latvia's longest cable runs, see how accurate your archery technique is or race downhill on a mountain bike. When you get there, choose from canoes, boats and rafts.

We now move upriver to Valmiera, where active leisure centre **Baili** runs a now familiar riverside winter-summer operation. It's skiing in winter, but taking to the river in the summer. In this case it's two rivers as you can choose between the Gauja and the narrower, but equally pretty Salaca. Once again you can choose from canoes, inflatables and sturdy rafts holding up to 15 people.

Away from the river, the **Avoti** leisure complex offers some dry land options. Take in typical Latvian birch copses on the 9-hole golf course, downsize to mini-golf, stretch out on the breathtaking catapult or grasshopper attractions. Visit the BMX museum and find out how local rider Māris Štrombergs won two Olympic gold medals.

Whatever the season, whatever your preference, the people at the **Eži Active Tourism Centre** will have the gear to suit you: skis, skates, bikes or boats. The Eži (hedgehogs) team will also provide transport for river trips, advice on cycle routes, even coaching. Look out for the new Tower - a feat of engineering erected as a genuine test of courage and agility.



Vējiņu caves

Head south toward Riga and take the Kocēni turnoff for the **Zirgaudzētava Kocēni stud-farm** and its 80 horses. Whether you are a beginner or a serious rider, you can hire a horse suited to your riding skills. Whether taking a straightforward gallop or wanting to leap show-jumping fences, coaching is available. An indoor riding hall enable year-round operation and you can even buy a horse.

Near Sārumezers, the **Vējiņu caves** contain the only known underground lakes in the Baltic States. Formed by rock falls blocking underground streams, they are replenished by spring floods from the Brasla river. Because of the perilous state of the sandstone roofs and walls, you will need a guide to accompany you.

Further south towards Riga, cross the Gauja to **Rāmkalni** and its rodel track and tow, the longest in the Baltics at 400m with seven unyielding curves into the Gauja valley. There are many other activities, more or less strenuous (anyone for Zorbing or bungee-jumping?) on land or on the Gauja, but in winter downhill skiing takes over.



9. TREAT YOURSELF TO LATVIAN DELICACIES

Despite not being a large country, Latvia can offer many different delicacies and flavours. Whether it be coastal seafood, tea and honey fresh from green meadows, sweet fudge or scrumptious rye bread, you will find something to satisfy your palate.

- ▶ 2-3 days
- 📏 580 km
- 🕒 April - October
- 🍷 Culinary delights



TREAT YOURSELF TO LATVIAN DELICACIES



Lāči Bakery

Latvia is known for its tasty and healthy rye breads, both dark and sour dough, and the **Lāči Bakery** near Piņķi is a wonderful place to discover them. Lāči (bears) stick to traditional methods like leavening in abras, time-honoured wood troughs, and wood-fired ovens. The huge range includes eco-breads made from organically grown ingredients.

Head to Krimūna near Dobeles and wonderful aromas will lead you to **Rūķīšu tējas** (Hobgoblin tea). The range of health-giving herbal teas, grown and hand-picked right here, have been developed on the premise that the healthiest foods are sourced from what grows where you live. You will be astonished by the range, available singly or in blends.

Just by **Jaunpils castle**, in a walled yard built by Swedish prisoners of war in 1605, Niedru Iija (Marsh-harrier) offers truly medieval activities including crossbow shooting, archery, axe and spear throwing, coin-making and blacksmithing. Build up an appetite and return to the castle for an authentic medieval feast with an explanation of the dishes.

Who is not attracted by the natural sweetness of honey and there is no better place to try some than at Blidene, at the **Kāres apiary**. Take a guided tour to learn about honey and bees, taste honeys produced from specific blossoms and flowers, ambrosia and pollens. Brave a tour of the hives or participate in beeswax candle making.

In the Latvian language, **Saldus** implies sweetness and there is no shortage of it in the town by that name. Vote for your favourite ice-cream flavour at Druvas saldējums; discover the delights of Latvia's milkier version of fudge, the gotiņa, at



Latvian Dairy Museum

Saldus pārtikas kombināts; watch tasty bread, cakes and pastry being made at Saldus maiznieks.

Towards Liepāja, at Skrunda you will discover that milk does not come in cartons. The **Latvian Dairy Museum** relates the history of Latvia's dairying traditions with artefacts and interactive displays. Let the museum staff know in advance and you can even make your own butter or cheese in a working dairy.

Liepāja, on the west coast, is better known as a commercial and naval port, but you cannot be by the sea without enjoying seafood. Hence the revival of signature dish, **Liepājas mencīņš (little cod)**, based on a traditional Kurzeme recipe. The key ingredient is sun-dried cod and you can try it in local restaurants, served in special ceramic bowls.

Liepāja is known as Latvia's musical, particularly rock-music capital. Trace the musical notes of the Kā pa notīm trail to see pearls of Latvia's cultural heritage: Jugendstil (Art Nouveau) buildings, Holy Trinity Church and its great organ, superb restaurants and hotels on the Promenade.

Follow the Baltic coast northwards to the beautifully rugged, steep dunes of **Jūrkalnes stāvkrausti**. The appeal of this blend of 20m-high sand walls, rocks, clean water and stately pine trees dates back to the early 19th century. As it has regained its allure, cafes and restaurants have opened to cater to the increasing numbers of visitors.

Before you reach Ventspils, be sure to stop at the **Užava Brewery**. Consistently ranked among Latvia's best beers, Užava

TREAT YOURSELF TO LATVIAN DELICACIES



Žograis or sklandrausis

prides itself on maintaining traditional brewing traditions and the use of carefully selected malt, hops and yeasts, even water. Take a brewery tour and taste live, unpasteurised beer the way it should be.

One of many attractions in the port of Ventspils, the **Seaside Park** nestles in copious greenery. Chug along one of two routes on the antique narrow gauge railway. Walk the Jungle trail and greet its resident animals, exquisitely carved from wood. Try out different surfaces: dolomite slabs, wood blocks and chips, bark or cones.

Ships have been entering the Ventspils port for 700 years, guarded by the Livonian Order castle. Now you can watch ships from the tree-lined terrace of the **Castle pub, Melnais sivēns (Black piglet)** as you try their fascinating fusion of international and local medieval cuisine. How about black pudding with rhubarb wine?

The Kolkas rags headland, where the Baltic Sea meets the Gulf of Riga, was once home to the Livonians. At the Ūši guesthouse and restaurant you can taste some of their culinary specialties. The **žograis or sklandrausis** is a carrot tart and the bukstiņbiezputra, a porridge of groats, carrots and potatoes, is guaranteed to keep the cold out.

Along the east coast, enjoy a Banquet with Fishermen at the hotel in **Roja**. This is a full experience of a fisherman's life as you ride out into the sea in fishing boats and then enjoy a typical meal - fish soup cooked on the campfire, rye bread and smoked fish. Learn local folk songs, dances and games.



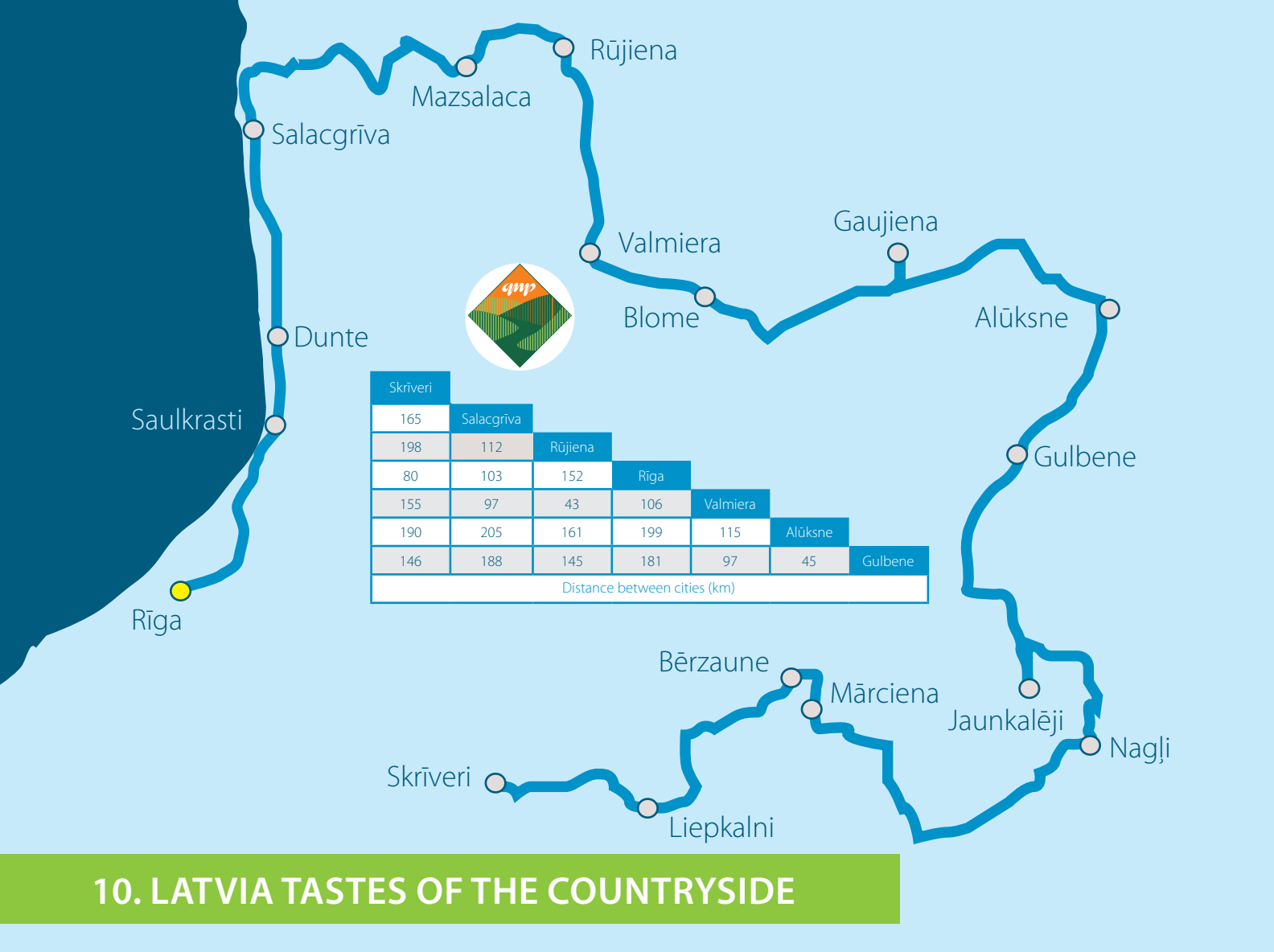
Ragaciems Fish Market

Strike inland to Valdemārpils and the **Laumu Nature Park**, jam-packed with the Bee, Bird, Plant and Forest educational trails for experiencing the wonders of nature. Try out other recreational activities - mini golf, trampolining, fishing, cycling, even candle-making. In winter, cross-country skiing is the way to go. Relax with a tasty fresh pancake.

To the south at Lauciene, step into the largest **Daylily Garden** in eastern Europe, with more than 2 000 different examples of these striking blooms, many hybrids the handiwork of the owners. Take home bulbs and a bottle of locally made wine. The list of wine varieties is a botanist's delight, from dandelion to quince and strawberry.

Continuing southwards on the main Riga road you arrive at the **Rideļi Mill** and its millpond. It has a long history and was first restored in the 1920s. No longer a commercial mill, it presents milling demonstrations and you can taste the results in the fresh pancakes at the on-site café.

Stay on the main road for the **Ragaciems Fish Market**. Just inland from Ragaciema rags, Latvia's own Cape Horn, this is the place for freshly smoked fish, all caught and smoked by local fishermen. There is a great range, mostly recognisable, but for a truly Ragaciems experience, try a lucītis (a Viviparous blenny, no less) - 'unzip' it like a banana!



10. LATVIA TASTES OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

Savour the flavours of Latvia’s long agricultural tradition and pristine environment, starting with the unrivalled selection in Riga’s Central Market. Taste delicious lampreys, berries, goat’s cheese and aromatic fresh rye bread along the way.

- ▶▶ 2-3 days
- 📏 690 km
- 🕒 April - October
- 🍷 Culinary delights



LATVIA TASTES OF THE COUNTRYSIDE



Riga's Central Market

Riga’s Central Market presents an imposing sight from the river as the curves of its three massive pavilions resonate with the arches of the railway bridge. An obligatory stop for tourists, it is no less imposing up close with its fascinating architecture, huge selection of fresh foods and typical market fare. Check out the Spīķeri area across the tram tracks for gourmet meals in trendy eateries.

Make for the Vidzeme coast and **Saulkrasti**, where the Sunset trail runs along the beach from Baltā kāpa (white dune) to the town. The dune provides stunning views of the Vidzeme coastline and the Inčupe Pēterupe estuary. As you would expect from a popular resort, restaurants and cafes serve local dishes.

The museum at **Dunte Manor** reveals all about legendary liar Baron Hieronymus von Munchausen. The ground floor hosts displays of the best lies but there are wax figures and a collection of beer mugs upstairs. A nature trail stretches to the beach. Eat in baronial style at the on-site restaurant.

The **Salacgrīva Lamprey Tači (weirs)** are home to a fascinating traditional fishing method. The weirs are reconstructed each year from specially aged fir poles with access planks laid on top. In keeping with tradition, no nails or screws are used. The lampreys are caught in large and small nets, depending on conditions, from August to February. The next time you savour a lamprey, think of the poor fishermen protecting their fragile weir from the ravages of nature.

Follow the gorgeous Salaca upstream to Mazsalaca where the **Skaņākalna Nature Park** stretches along 3km of the river



Rūjiena ice cream

bank. Colourful sandstone outcrops and caves are enhanced by the Kurbads trail. 50 wooden sculptures relate the legend of this mythical hero.

Further inland, charming **Rūjiena** is home to the stately, red-brick Dairy, built in 1912 and at one time Latvia’s largest exporter of butter. Today it is the country’s ice-cream capital, producing many different products from pure, natural ingredients. For a taste of Latvia, try an ice-cream cake or the unique layered rye-bread dessert.

Head to Valmiera and the excellent beer produced at the **Valmiermuiža Brewery**. The origins of Valmiermuiža’s alus go back to the Swedish era when the castle inn was built not far from the Livonian Order castle. This rich history has influenced the unique beer made from three types of malt and two different hop varieties, brewed for a minimum of 30 days. Take a tour to discover how to taste beer in the style of the lord of the manor and which foods best accompany ale.

Approaching Smiltene, turn off for Blome and the **Donas country guest house**. The stables have been converted into a traditional bakery where you can make your own loaf or Christmas gingerbreads.

Latvia’s peat bogs and heaths provide a fertile environment for wild cranberries. At **Kalnapurvs** near Gaujiena, the peat has been planted with larger cultivated hybrids. Following the success of this venture, owners Veryberry have branched out into other berries and also produce a delicious range of juices and syrups.

LATVIA TASTES OF THE COUNTRYSIDE



Jaunkalēji Farmstead

Gulbene and Alūksne are connected by the Baltic States' only working **narrow gauge railway**, the bānītis. More than just a train, you can get married on it, or view a re-enactment of a train robbery.

The **Jaunkalēji Farmstead** is near Ošupe, close to the Latgale border and specialises in traditional bread baking. No white breads here, only slow-leavening dark rye and lighter sour dough loaves are hand formed, laid out on maple leaves and baked in a wood-fired oven. Choose a 1-hour guided tour or get the full experience, a 4-hour hands-on baking class with your own loaf to take home. Too tired to go on? Relax in the sauna and spend a night in the country, with fresh bread for breakfast.

We cross into Latgale for the **Teirumnieki heath** near Nagļi, an example of a raised bog created over centuries by sphagnum or peat moss. The 800m plank walkway takes you across the stunted landscape. Circle back by the lakeside track.

On the opposite side of huge lake Lubāna, the inland fishing village of Īdeņa is located on an island between the lake and the surrounding wetlands. It is a fabulous place for bird watching and several towers have been built for this purpose. Stay at the **Zvejnieki (Fishermen's) Homestead**, relax in the sauna and enjoy a delicious traditional meal with fresh fish from the lake, local game and organic vegetables from the Zvejnieki garden.

The **Mārciena Manor** has been beautifully renovated and turned into a first-class hotel and spa. The restaurant is in keeping with the baronial surroundings and serves local fish,



Skrīveru saldumi

game and organic vegetables. Catch your own fish in the manor lake and have the chef cook it with mushrooms you have picked in the forest.

Bērzaune is home to the largest commercial rabbit farm in the Baltic States. Hygiene rules mean you can only view the animals through glass windows, but the **Sveķi Rabbit Garden** has displays explaining the farming process. Tastings can be arranged and rabbits are available for sale.

The Bērzaune rabbits have goats as neighbours, around 250 of them. At the **Livi goat farm**, Latvia's largest, you can find out about the whole process, from grass to milk to tasty goat's cheese. Watch cheese being made, taste it - you'll buy some!

Head south to the banks of the Daugava river where the aroma of fresh bread is certain to arouse your appetite. Stop at the **Liepkalni bakery** to taste and buy breads baked to 90-year old family recipes, also see a wood-fired portable bread oven.

Not far downriver, give your journey a sweet ending by stopping at **Skrīveru saldumi**, home of classic gotiņas and other scrumptious morsels. Here, classic milk fudge candy has been taken to new heights with flavoursome flourishes like nuts, fruit and, of course, chocolate. Christmas brings yummy gingerbread gotiņas. Other products include chocolate-coated fruit, aerated toffee and marzipan, and muesli bars. Take one of the tours to learn the secrets of the perfect gotiņa and make your own marzipan figurine.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Averoja

☎ +371 67282911 ✉ incoming@averoja.lv
🌐 www.averoja.com

Baltic Country Holidays (Lauku celotajs)

☎ +371 67617600 ✉ lauku@celotajs.lv
🌐 www.countryholidays.lv

Express Baltic

☎ +371 67365236 ✉ incoming@expresstravel.lv
🌐 www.expressbaltic.lv

Laimtūre

☎ +371 67439893 ✉ incoming@laimture.eu
🌐 www.laimture.eu

Milagro Travel

☎ +371 67710401 ✉ info@milagrotravel.lv
🌐 www.milagrotravel.lv

MEETING TOUR Travel & SPA Consultants

☎ +371 67039735 ✉ leisure@meetingtour.lv
🌐 www.meeting.lv

Riga Travel Agency

☎ +371 67509676 ✉ info@rta.lv 🌐 www.rta.lv

RIX Travel

☎ +371 67281434, +371 67282233 ✉ rixtravel@rixtravel.com
🌐 www.rixtravel.com

Via Hansa Tours

☎ +371 67338638 ✉ hq@viahansa.com 🌐 www.viahansa.com

TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRES

Riga ☎ +371 67037900 🌐 www.liveriga.com

Jūrmala ☎ +371 67147900 🌐 www.tourism.jurmala.lv

Aglona ☎ +371 65322100 🌐 www.aglona.travel

Bauska ☎ +371 63923797 🌐 www.tourism.bauska.lv

Cēsis ☎ +371 64121815 🌐 www.tourism.cesis.lv

Daugavpils ☎ +371 65422818 🌐 www.visitdaugavpils.lv

Dobele ☎ +371 63723074 🌐 www.dobele.lv

Jēkabpils ☎ +371 65233822 🌐 www.jekabpils.lv

Jelgava ☎ +371 63005447 🌐 www.visit.jelgava.lv

Koknese ☎ +371 65161296 🌐 www.kokneseturisms.info

Krāslava ☎ +371 65622201 🌐 www.visitkraslava.com

Kuldīga ☎ +371 63322259 🌐 www.visit.kuldiga.lv

Liepāja ☎ +371 63480808 🌐 www.liepajaturisms.lv

Līgatne ☎ +371 64153169 🌐 www.visitligatne.lv

Limbaži ☎ +371 64070608 🌐 www.visitlimbazi.lv

Līvāni ☎ +371 65381856 🌐 www.livani.lv

Ludza ☎ +371 65707203 🌐 www.ludza.lv

Madona ☎ +371 64860573 🌐 www.madona.lv

Pļaviņas ☎ +371 22000981 🌐 www.plavinunovads.lv

Preiļi ☎ +371 65322041 🌐 www.preili.lv

Rēzekne ☎ +371 64605005 🌐 www.rezekne.lv

Saldus ☎ +371 63807443 🌐 www.saldus.lv

Saulkrasti ☎ +371 67952641 🌐 www.saulkrasti.lv

Sigulda ☎ +371 67971335 🌐 www.tourism.sigulda.lv

Talsi ☎ +371 63224165 🌐 www.talsitourism.lv

Tērvete ☎ +371 63726212 🌐 www.zemgaletourism.lv

Tukums ☎ +371 63124451 🌐 www.visittukums.lv

Valmiera ☎ +371 64207177 🌐 visit.valmiera.lv

Ventspils ☎ +371 63622263 🌐 www.visitventspils.com

LATVIA

0 11.5 km

Scale 1:1 150 000

THE STRAIT OF IRBE

THE GULF OF RIGA



ABOUT LATVIA

Location: North East Europe, east coast of the Baltic Sea

Area: 64 589 sq. km

Border countries: Estonia, Russia, Belarus, Lithuania

Population: 2 191 580

Independence declared:

November 18, 1918

Government: Parliamentary republic

EU Member State: Since May 1, 2004

Official language: Latvian

Ethnic groups: 60% Latvians, 27.3% Russians, 3.7% Belorussians, 2.4% Poles, 6.3% others

Capital: Riga

Largest cities: Riga, Daugavpils, Ventspils, Jūrmala, Jelgava, Liepāja, Rēzekne

Time zone: GMT+2, from April to November: GMT+3

National currency: Latvian Lats, exchange rate to Euro:

1 EUR = ~ LVL 0.7

Electricity standard: 220V

Internet TLD: .lv

Calling code: +371



