

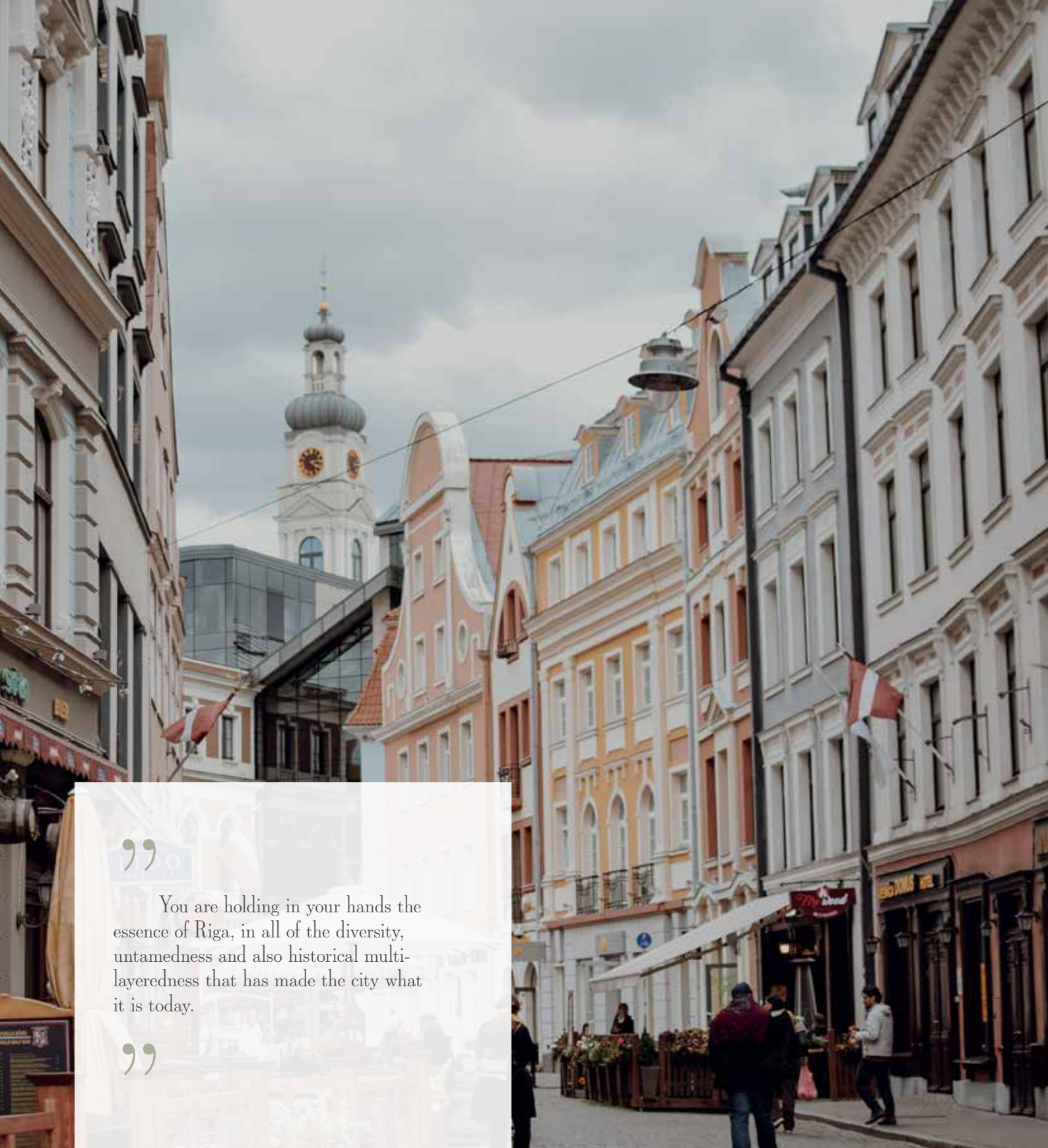
An aerial photograph of Riga, Latvia, showing a dense urban landscape with numerous buildings featuring red-tiled roofs. The Riga Cathedral, with its tall, dark spire, is a prominent landmark on the left. In the background, the Daugava River flows through the city, and the modern, white, sail-shaped Freedom Tower stands out against the sky. The overall scene is bright and sunny, with scattered white clouds.

*100*ⁱⁿ **RIGA**

LIVE
RIGA

INDEX

Introduction to Riga	4
Symbols of Riga	6
Architecture	16
Interesting Neighbourhoods	30
Nature	41
Art and Culture Institutions	52
Restaurants, Bars and Cafes	64
Fashion and Design	78
Active Lifestyle	87
Untraditional Viewpoints	94
Legendary Rigans	102



INTRODUCTION TO RIGA

Do you know what's the one question about Riga visitors to the city most often ask? No, it's not about the current economic situation or what time of year is best to visit Riga. In fact, it's more of an observation than a question: "It feels like Riga is bubbling over with life and has become something like the creative epicentre of the Baltics. There's so much going on, especially in culture. **Why exactly Riga, and why right now?"**

This publication, which includes 100 things, places, facts and emotions that define present-day Riga and its unique vibe, is an answer to this question. You are holding in your hands the essence of Riga, in all of the diversity, untamedness and also historical multi-layeredness that has made the city what it is today. From symbols of the city, architectural masterpieces and cultural and artistic spaces to various different neighbourhoods of the city, fashion, design, gastronomy, sports activities and unusual scenic viewpoints.

Historically, Riga has always been a crossroads, a melting pot of various nations and cultures. But the unique patina in this city of more than 600,000 inhabitants has in large part also been formed by the proximity of water – the Daugava River and the Gulf of Riga.

The city has always lived in close cooperation with nature, which is still an important part of its residents' daily lives – the many public parks, forests, squares, lakes and city canal. Riga has hills and islands, as well as beaches. Nesting birds and even beavers call the city home. In addition, considering the relatively compactness of the city, many of its sites are within walking distance: special urban pulse points and green relaxation zones, a dynamic city atmosphere and the romance of rural idylls. In the springtime, the air in Riga is full of the heady aroma of lilacs; in the autumn, it exudes the melancholy of falling yellow and red leaves; in the winter, it sparkles with a feeling of wonder after a fresh, white layer of snow.

Today, Riga is a cradle for innovative start-ups, and it prides itself in an excellent music and contemporary art scene, the Song Festival (which culminates in an open-air concert with 18,000 choir singers) and a dynamic gastronomy milieu, in which local chefs compete in their search for "the flavour of Latvia" and thus bring an appreciative smile to the face of many a gourmet traveller.

Riga has a glamorous city centre as well as a hipster republic. It's possible to arrive in Riga via all three classic means of transportation – air, land and water – and the city can be observed both from above and from a SUP board on the water. Even though geographically Riga can be considered a Nordic city, its multinational character makes it both adventurous and passionate. And yet, also ambitious. Like any city full of creative energy, it vibrates, pulsates and astonishes at any time of year.

”

You are holding in your hands the essence of Riga, in all of the diversity, untamedness and also historical multi-layeredness that has made the city what it is today.

”

SYMBOLS OF RIGA



1

SILHOUETTE OF RIGA

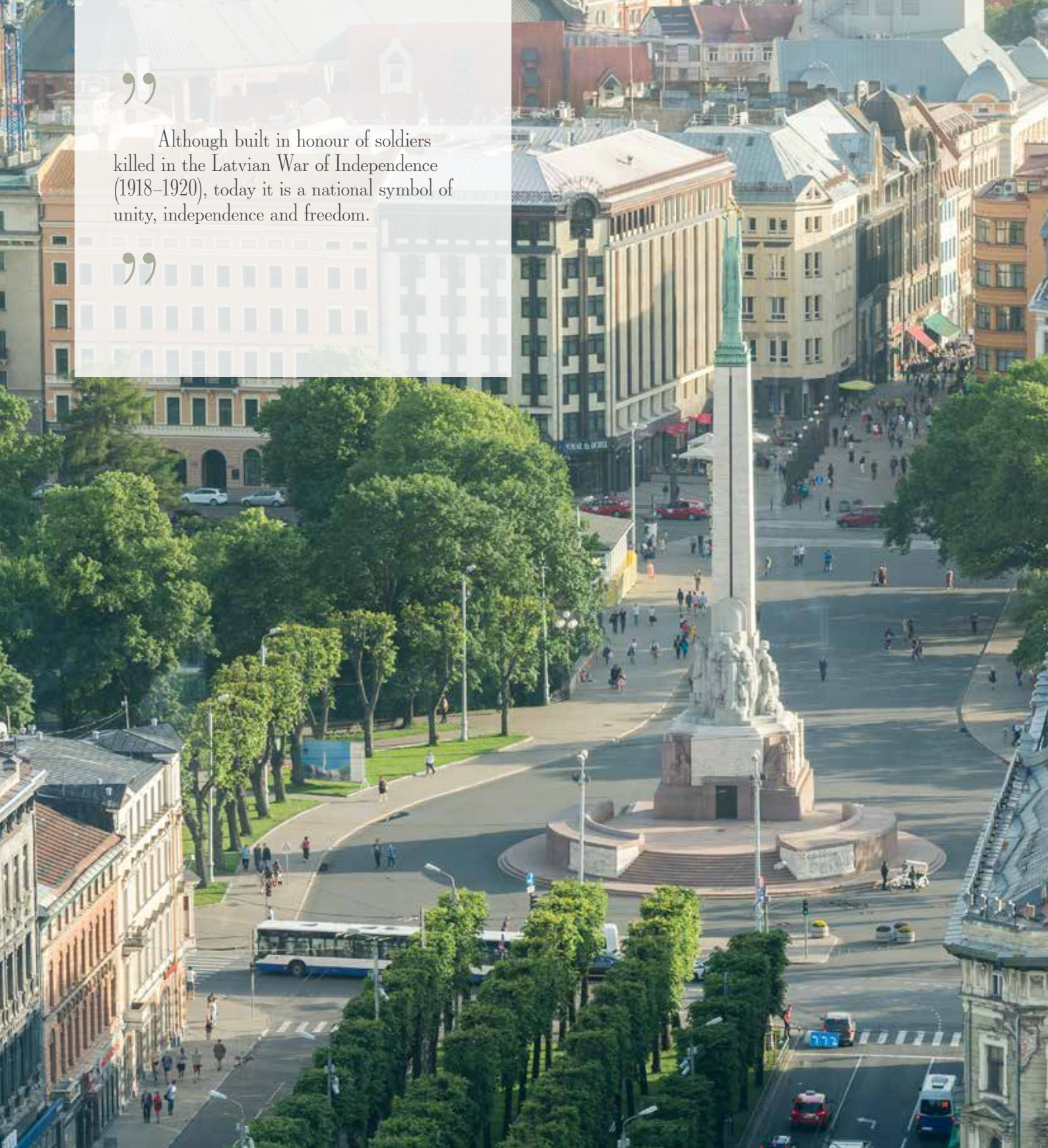
The historical centre of Riga, which has been granted UNESCO World Heritage status, is best seen from the left bank of the Daugava River. Its main features are the church towers concentrated in Old Riga – St. Peter's Church, Riga Cathedral, St. Jacob's Cathedral, St. Mary Magdalene Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church – as well as Riga Castle, the Baroque tower of City Hall (Rātsnams) and the high-rise Academy of Sciences building (108 metres). In addition to these classics, you'll also see the Ministry of Agriculture building and the former Latvija (now Radisson Blu) hotel, both built during the Soviet

era. More recent architecture is found on the other side of the river: the Z-Towers (123 and 117.5 meters) built in the last decade, the Swedbank headquarters building (121 meters) and also the National Library of Latvia (66 metres), the form of which reflects the Old Riga silhouette, thereby creating a dialogue between the two sides of the river. Other accents in the city's silhouette include industrial smokestacks and the water towers built at the turn of the 20th century.

”

Although built in honour of soldiers killed in the Latvian War of Independence (1918–1920), today it is a national symbol of unity, independence and freedom.

”



2

FREEDOM MONUMENT

The Freedom Monument is a symbol that evokes awe in even the most sceptical of Latvians. Although built in honour of soldiers who were killed in the Latvian War of Independence (1918–1920), today it is a national symbol of unity, independence and freedom. The project was initiated in 1920, and the winning design, titled “Shine Like a Star”, was created by Kārlis Zāle. The monument was financed with donations from the people of Latvia and unveiled in 1935. It is 42 metres tall and made of grey and red granite, travertine, reinforced concrete and copper. The composition consists of thirteen groups of sculptures and bas-reliefs depicting the history and culture of Latvia. Above these sculptures rises a 19-metre-tall obelisk with the symbol of Freedom at the top – a young woman who is affectionately called Milda by the people. She holds three gold-plated stars high in the air, which represent the three historical regions of the country: Vidzeme, Latgale and Kurzeme. The inscription at the foot of the monument reads “For Homeland and Freedom”.

The demolition of the monument was discussed during the Soviet era, but the famous Russian sculptor (and student of Zāle) Vera Mukhina, who believed the monument to be of high artistic value, is credited with saving it. Although the placing of flowers and gathering in larger groups at the foot of the monument was prohibited during the Soviet occupation, it nevertheless retained its symbolic meaning. When the National Awakening movement began in the late 1980s, the Freedom Monument was the site of demonstrations marking important dates in Latvian history. The first such demonstration took place on June 14, 1987, when members of the Helsinki-86 human rights defence group commemorated the victims of mass deportations by the Soviet regime. The ceremonial guard at the monument was reinstated after the restoration of Latvian independence.

NOVEMBER 11 EMBANKMENT

The November 11 Embankment (11. novembra krastmala), a street that stretches right along the banks of the Daugava River in central Riga, is one of the city's main thoroughfares and has been of strategic importance throughout its history. It has experienced times of flourishing as well as many tragic episodes. For example, along this street is a monument to the people who perished during a demonstration on January 13, 1905 – it was here that they were wounded and killed by gunfire, or chased onto the river ice and drowned.

Today, the November 11 Embankment is the site of many city-wide festivities, including the annual celebration of Latvia's independence day on November 18, the Riga Festival, New Year's Eve and Midsummer, when the

city celebrates the shortest night of the year.

One of the most special events associated with the November 11 Embankment is the annual observance of Lāčplēsis Day on November 11. Lāčplēsis is the Latvian Superman – a mythological figure whose source of incredible strength lies in his bearish ears. Even very young children are familiar with his story, because almost every household has a copy of the Lāčplēsis epic written in the late 19th century by the poet Andrejs Pumpurs, who based his work on popular folk tales. Lāčplēsis' purpose in life is to battle the nation's enemies, although in Pumpurs' version of the story he drowns in the Daugava River together with the Black Knight. The work ends, however, with a

remark that there will eventually come a time when only the enemy will be pushed down.

November 11, 1919, is symbolically considered just such a time. On that day, the army of the newly independent Latvia was victorious in its battle against Pavel Bermond-Avalov and his forces. In commemoration of this event, on Lāčplēsis Day the country pays tribute to all the soldiers who fought in the Latvian War of Independence, and since 1988 people have been gathering on the banks of the Daugava on the evening of November 11 to light thousands and thousands of candles. Some even make small boats to send their candles out onto the waters of the Daugava.

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF LATVIA

The new national library of Latvia, also referred to by locals as the Gaismas pils (Castle of Light), was for decades one of the most-discussed construction projects in Riga. The need for a new home for the country's national archive of books arose already in the early 1990s, as soon as Latvia regained its independence. That's when famous Latvian-born architect Gunārs Birkerts (1925– 2017) drew a sketch for just such a building, which took more than 20 years to come to fruition and sparked heated debates in society.

But, since it opened to the public in the spring of 2014, the National Library of Latvia has become a significant part of Riga's cityscape and is considered one of the city's most vivid cultural landmarks of the 21st century. The Castle of Light is always full of life and energy; it hosts a variety of book exhibitions, and it has also become a sought-after venue for exhibitions of contemporary art. The building has a certain magic – those in the know say

that at five o'clock in the morning on May 4 (the anniversary of the restoration of the independence of the Republic of Latvia), a ray of light shoots straight up into the sky from the very top of the library. As the sun rises on that morning, it supposedly reflects off the building and shines perfectly vertically into the heavens.

The library contains the original cabinet used by Krišjānis Barons, the best-known collector of

dainas, or Latvian folk verses. Barons designed the cabinet himself, and it was made in 1880 in Moscow. He had up until then kept his collected folklore materials in cigar boxes, but he transferred them to the new cabinet when the number of verses reached about 150,000. In all, the cabinet holds 217,996 four-line folk verses. It was added to the UNESCO Memory of the World register in 2001.



LATVIAN NATIONAL THEATRE

The Latvian National Theatre is where the Republic of Latvia was proclaimed on November 18, 1918. The Eclectic-style building, designed by Latvian architect Augusts Reinbergs, has been deemed a national architectural and artistic monument. Construction began in 1899 and spawned a number of legends. While digging the foundation pit, workers discovered quicksand and also well-preserved, 300-year-old piles from a Swedish-built system of defensive

ravelins. In order to fortify the theatre building, 1493 piles were driven into the foundation.

Over the many years of its existence, one of the mainstays of the Latvian National Theatre has been the popularising of Latvian theatrical works. It traditionally begins each season with a new production of a work by a Latvian author.



THE BLACK THRESHOLD AND THE MEMORIAL TO VICTIMS OF REPRESSION AT THE TORŅAKALNS STATION

It's difficult to imagine that the building on the corner of Brīvības and Stabu streets, the Eclectic style of which is so typical of Riga, is actually a silent witness to Latvia's years of Soviet occupation and has literally been soaked in blood. Here the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia set up the Black Threshold, a memorial to victims of communist terror. The building itself is known locally as the Corner House, and during the Soviet era it served as the headquarters for the Cheka, or KGB. Created by Latvian sculptor Gleb Panteleyev, the memorial

depicts a steel door that stands ajar, symbolically separating freedom from oppression, humiliation and death. It is a powerful reminder of the wrongs committed against thousands of innocent people who were forced to cross the dark threshold of this building into the KGB's cellars, where they were tortured to death.

The Torņakalns railway station is another witness to very tragic events in Latvia's history. This is the place from where thousands of Rigans and residents of nearby

areas were loaded onto cattle cars and deported to Siberia on June 14, 1941, and March 23, 1949. Whole families were deported, including women, children, infants and the elderly – in all more than 50,000 people. Most of them died either during the journey or in Siberia from hunger, illness and the cold. Today, one of the original cattle cars and a commemorative stone stand next to the station building as a bitter, existential reminder of this tragedy.

LATVIAN SONG AND DANCE FESTIVAL

The Latvian Song and Dance Festival is a cultural phenomenon and the largest cultural event in the country. The first such festival took place in 1873, when present-day Latvia was still a part of the Russian Empire. Twenty-five song festivals have been organised since then, and they have become some of the most important events

bringing the nation together. Currently, the festivals average 30,000 participants from across the country. The majority are members of choirs and dance groups, but many brass bands, folklore groups, ethnographic ensembles, country bands, kokle ensembles, amateur theatre troupes and foreign guests also take part.

CEMETERY CULTURE

Latvians have a special relationship with the deceased, which is most apparent at the so-called cemetery celebrations held throughout the country on Sundays between June and the end of August.

A cemetery celebration is a social event, a local ritual. The cemetery is spruced up several days before the celebration: the sand is raked, often creating symmetrical designs; the headstones and

monuments are washed and decorated with fresh bouquets of summer flowers. On the Sunday of the celebration, relatives from near and far, from city and country, meet at their family graves. After honouring their deceased, they often go to have lunch together or otherwise mark the reunion of family members.

During the darker months of autumn (in Riga, it's the last Sunday before Advent begins),

Latvians organise "candle evenings", or, to use the church's terminology, they commemorate All Souls' Day. On this evening, they visit their family graves and place small evergreen wreaths and candles next to the graves of their loved ones. On this evening, all of Riga's cemeteries are alight with thousands of small candles, and to passers-by the scene looks at once strange and surreal, but also very touching.

RIGA BLACK BALSAM

Riga Black Balsam (Rīgas Melnais balzams) is the most popular of Latvian drinks. Having survived through many different eras without losing any of its authenticity, the unique liqueur is made from an infusion of 24 different roots, leaves, flowers and buds. The recipe

was developed in the mid-18th century by Rigan pharmacist and blacksmith Abraham Kunze. It has always been kept in oak barrels and later filled into ceramic bottles. According to legend, Russian Empress Catherine the Great was cured with Riga Black Balsam after falling ill on a visit to

Riga. To this day, Rigans take the drink as a dose of "medicine" on dark autumn evenings or at the first sign of a cold. Over the years, a number of flavour variations have been introduced to the market, but the liqueur's original recipe is still the most popular.

STREET ART

Even though street art in Riga is still in its infancy, it's already becoming an exciting new canvas. Both firewalls and roofs are being painted, and the most noticeable example to date is the 800-square-metre work titled Saule, Pērkons, Daugava (Sun, Thunder, Daugava) on the wall at 46 Tallinas Street. Created during a street art festival in 2014, the artists – Kiwie and Rudens Stencil,

both from Latvia – used 1500 cans of spray paint to complete the work of art.

Saule, Pērkons, Daugava is the largest piece of street art in the Baltic States and features the red-and-white Lielvārde sash, a symbol of Latvian identity. The title refers to a song for choir by the same name.

Kiwie often depicts a special animal-like character in his artwork, and this is one of the most recognisable images in Riga's street art. The best example can be seen on the building at 13 Alauksta Street. Rudens Stencil's best-known work in Riga is the 8x8-metre portrait of a woman at 6 Priežu Street in the Sarkandaugava district.





ARCHITECTURE

1

MEDIEVAL RIGA

Riga is full of many vivid reminders of its medieval past. One of these is the defensive wall that once surrounded the city. It was 1.30 metres thick and 9 metres high and originally had a fortified tower every 70–120 metres. Some of these towers (28 in total) were round, others semicircular, and still others were rectangular. One of the earliest sections of the fortified wall still stands today, in Jāņa Sēta (John's Courtyard). The stone wall was extended in the 13th century, as the town expanded, and a fragment of this slightly newer section is still visible on Trokšņu Street.

One of the city's main pillars of defence was the Powder Tower, originally called the Sand Tower. Today it is all that remains of a complex that once guarded the entrance to the city from the east. Back then, however, the Powder Tower, which dates to the year 1330, looked completely different; it was neither round nor enclosed, as it is today. It originally had a rectangular form, and later it was horseshoe-shaped. The tower only took on its current form in the 16th century, when it was rebuilt in

order to accommodate firearms. The pointy roof was added only in the 19th century.

Riga Castle, on the right bank of the Daugava River, is the most predominant structure in Riga's Old Town and one of the largest medieval castles in Latvia. It was built in the late 1340s, destroyed in 1484 and rebuilt anew in 1515. The castle has a long and interesting history – for many centuries it served as the centre of power, controlling a sometimes larger, sometimes smaller territory. And it continues this purpose today, as the seat of the President of Latvia. The castle has been reconstructed numerous times, and over the centuries it has lost – but also gained – many elements of artistic and architectural significance. In its current form, Riga Castle has six towers. The Tower of the Holy Spirit, the Lead Tower, the Pipera Tower and the North Tower mark the structure's corners; the other two towers are named the Bay (Erker) Tower and the Tower of the Three Stars.



12

ART NOUVEAU

Art Nouveau – that most noticeable of all architecture styles in Riga – marks an extraordinary period of economic growth that the city experienced at the turn of the 20th century. Approximately 800 of the city's buildings feature Art Nouveau façades, which include characteristic motifs such as stylised plants, floral and marine life, screaming and laughing masks, and sculptures depicting the female form, an eternal symbol of beauty. The style is located everywhere, from the wooden architecture of the Mežaparks suburb to the many impressive masonry buildings in Riga's Quiet Centre (Alberta iela and Strēlnieku iela), and even on the lone representative of this

style at 23 Tallinas Street. Art Nouveau is the basis on which Riga's historical centre was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The Kamintius House apartment building at 23 Tallinnas Street showcases the start of a collaboration of two Art Nouveau virtuosos, Konstantīns Pēkšēns (1859–1928) and Eižens Laube (1880–1967). This partnership soon flourished, resulting in hundreds of construction projects in Riga. Pēkšēns was the most multi-faceted architect in the history of Latvian architecture, and, as an employee in Pēkšēns' office, Laube demonstrated his innovative talents in designing a national architecture inspired by the Art Nouveau style. Thus, both

architects developed the National Romantic style, which is rooted in an understanding of local architectural forms. It is encoded with a Northern constancy and stability, manifested in robust forms and relatively rough textures. While architect Mikhail Eisenstein created fireworks with his virtuosic play of decorative forms, Laube's designs were reserved and noble yet articulated with effect in their façade finishes, integrating ethnographic motifs in various shades of neutral grey. The most striking examples of this style can be found at 15/17 Tērbatas Street (originally the Atis Ķeniņš School) and the outstanding National Romantic-style apartment building at 47 Brīvības Street.

”

Art Nouveau is the basis on which Riga's historical centre was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

”

PORTALS AND ORNAMENTAL RELIEFS

Over the centuries, Riga's architecture has amassed a rich variety of building façades saturated with many symbolic motifs.

The Late Gothic reliefs of the Madonna and Child and Master of the Livonian Order Wolter von Plettenberg on the main courtyard portal of the Riga Castle are particularly unique and valuable. The sculptures depict two symbols – a spiritual leader and a secular leader – of the Christianisation of Prussia and Livonia. When present-day Latvia and Estonia were Christianised in the Middle Ages, they were named Terra Mariana (Mary's Land) in honour of the Virgin

Mary. Plettenberg, as the ruler of that land, ushered in a new era both economically and spiritually with the help of the Reformation. Several 17th-century Baroque buildings in Riga's Old Town feature ornate stone portals, for example, the Rheuttern (Reiterna) House and the Swedish-Baroque Dannenstern House, both on Mārstaļu Street.

In the 18th century, when Classicism entered architecture, landlords paid particular attention to the portal of a building, designing it to form a unified composition together with the central window and balcony above it. Christoph Haberland was one of the most

prominent architects of the day, and his work can still be seen at 9 Pils Street, 5 Smilšu Street and 17 Šķūņu Street.

The many examples of Art Nouveau architecture in Riga let visitors appreciate a variety of ornamentation styles. For example, the buildings designed by Konstantīns Pēkšēns at 3 and 13 Rūpniecības Street and 13 Elizabetes Street in the so-called Quiet Centre neighbourhood feature ethnographic and ornamental reliefs, while the decoration on the building at 14 Vīlandes Street has a bee motif, a symbol of industriousness and resourcefulness.

”

The Late Gothic reliefs of the Madonna and Child and Master of the Livonian Order Wolter von Plettenberg on the main courtyard portal of the Riga Castle are particularly unique and valuable. The sculptures depict two symbols – a spiritual leader and a secular leader – of the Christianisation of Prussia and Livonia.

”

RIGA CATHEDRAL

Riga Cathedral has no match in terms of its longevity, size and magnificence. It is the only cathedral-style church and cathedral chapter monastery complex in the Baltic States. Construction lasted throughout the whole of the 13th century, and the grand building was rebuilt and expanded a number of times over the next few centuries.

In 1547, the Riga Cathedral church spire was destroyed by fire, and the effects of the tragedy can still be seen today – during the fire the tower acted like a huge chimney, and therefore some of the walls appear to be covered with a layer of glass. The tower was rebuilt at the end of the 16th century, and it was constructed from the ground up with a lattice of dense wood to provide support for the 140-metre pyramid-shaped church spire to withstand the force of the wind. At the time it was one of the tallest structures of its kind in the world. In the mid-18th century the church spire was torn down and a new, lower structure was built; this is the tower with

Baroque ornamentation that can still be seen today.

The cathedral tower has a very unique feature – a wooden double-spiral staircase. There are only two such staircases in the world, and both were made according to drawings by Leonardo da Vinci.

Although the church was built on a hillock, its foundation currently lies a few metres below street level. Due to flooding of the Daugava River, every year the road level around the church had to be raised. Still, water often flooded into the church. In the spring of 1709, for example, it was possible to go fishing inside the church, and later a memorial plaque was affixed to the interior wall showing the water level at that time.

One of the most impressive features of the church today is the moment when the interior lighting is switched on at dusk and the extraordinary stained glass windows reveal themselves when viewed from Cathedral Square.





15 ST. PETER'S CHURCH

At a height of 123 metres, the church spire of St. Peter's Church in Riga towers over all the other church spires in Riga and is a dominant and integral part of the city skyline. The tower has been restored to its original 17th century form, having been destroyed by fire after a lightning strike in 1721 (lightning has struck the St. Peter's Church tower a total of six times).

The church is dedicated to St. Peter, the patron of the city, who is depicted on the church's weather vanes holding the key to the city in his hand. This church, built in the 13th century, is the most notable

Gothic monument in Riga and one of the most beautiful of its kind in the Baltics. The church contains the exposed brick walls, large lancet arch windows and rosettes that are characteristic of Northern Gothic architecture. The church was substantially rebuilt and extended in the 15th century. The 136-metre-tall bell tower was constructed at that time, and at the top of the steeple was a sphere that served as a document depository as well as the symbolic Riga rooster. The rooster atop the tower today is the seventh such rooster and an exact replica of the previous one.

”

The church is dedicated to St. Peter, the patron of the city, who is depicted on the church's weather vanes holding the key to the city in his hand. This church, built in the 13th century, is the most notable Gothic monument in Riga and one of the most beautiful of its kind in the Baltics.

”



Wikimedia Commons/ CC BY SA 4.0

WATER TOWERS

A particular feature of the city of Riga is its impressive industrial heritage, including factory chimneys and the unique water towers built around the turn of the 20th century. In fact, it would be difficult to find similar towers in any other European city. Today, however, they no longer serve their original purpose and have instead become distinctive historical monuments. It would even be worth planning a unique water-tower tour of the city.

Such a tour could begin with the oldest of the city's four water towers, the "twin" giants built in 1896 and 1897 and located at the end of Matīsa Street. Then continue on to Riga's largest water tower, which was built in 1912 in the Čiekurkalns neighbourhood and reflects the Art Nouveau architectural style, albeit with a Baroque-style roof. End your tour at the Āgenskalns water tower on Alīses Street. This beauty, designed in 1910 by Riga's most famous architect, Wilhelm Bockslaff, underwent a complex reconstruction in 1937, when the top of the tower was lifted with jacks and the tower's "leg" was heightened by 7.5 metres. The tower is now 40 metres high. The top of the main portal is decorated with a large Riga coat of arms in the Art Deco style – a real piece of 20th-century avantgarde that can surprise passers-by still today. The interior of the tower is just as impressive as the exterior, with the monstrous constructions and metal rivets bringing to mind Captain Nemo's submarine.

WOODEN ARCHITECTURE

Riga can be regarded as a city made of wood, and this is a rarity among European cities. There is more wooden architecture here than anywhere else – in total around 4000 wooden buildings. The most notable collections of wooden buildings can be found in the Grīziņkalns district of the city and across the river in Pārdaugava, especially Ķīpsala Island and Kalnciema Street. In Pārdaugava, the construction of wooden buildings began in the 17th century and continued until the start of the Second World War. The oldest wooden buildings still standing today were built in the 18th century. The styles represented include Baroque, Classicism, Historicism, Swiss

chalet and Art Nouveau, as well as simple wooden structures and wooden sheds. Nowadays much of the wooden architecture so characteristic of Riga is undergoing painstaking restoration. One of the most notable stories regarding the restoration of wooden structures can be seen in Pārdaugava, along Kalnciema Street on either side of the intersection with Melnsila Street. By scrutinising archival documents, blueprints and project sketches, the renovators managed to reconstruct the unique aura of this corner of the city, enjoyed today by Rigans who regularly attend markets and cultural events organised in this quarter.

As the result of the work of the Koka Rīga (Wooden Riga) wooden architecture restoration centre, the intersection at Lienes and Krāsotāju streets in Grīziņkalns, on the right bank of the Daugava River, has also experienced a rebirth. Superb examples of wooden architecture can be found on Krāsotāju, Vārnu and Jāņa Asara streets as well as in the area near the intersection of Čaka and Matīsa streets. An example is the wooden structure at 2a Jāņa Asara Street, which is built in the style of a Swiss chalet, a style that is mostly seen in the classy suburb of Mežaparks.



SOVIET SLEEPING DISTRICTS

The buildings in Riga's sleeping districts – often referred to as "boxes" due to the grey concrete panels and dull-toned white calcium silicate bricks from which they're made – are much criticised for their lack of aesthetic appeal. However, these mass-produced residential buildings built in the Soviet era are an integral part of Riga. The multi-level residential apartments on the outskirts of the city were primarily built between 1950 and 1990 and are a striking legacy of that era.

Identical, or only slightly modified, construction projects

were built simultaneously throughout the whole Soviet Union, from Leningrad to Belgorod, Siberia and Tashkent. Yet, it is possible to feel a certain sense of individual character in the seemingly hopeless uniformity of the buildings, and the world that unfolds in the cross-section of a single building can be quite intriguing.

There's a striking building on Ozolciema Street in the Ziepniekkalns suburb of Riga – the Series 119 construction is known locally as the "Wall of China". It is not only the longest building

in Riga, but also in the whole of Latvia. The building stretches for over half a kilometre; it has 11 stairwells and 404 apartments. A similar "Wall of China" consisting of multi-modular nine-storey buildings can be found in Purvciems, Riga's largest suburb. The grey concrete hulk stretches for a whole block on Dzelzavas Street and is speckled with a colourful mosaic of balconies, each outfitted and decorated according to the different tastes of its residents.



UNIVERSITY OF LATVIA



The largest structure on the Riga Boulevard Circle is the main building of the University of Latvia on Raiņa Boulevard. This monumental yellow brick building is, incidentally, also the oldest university building in Latvia; its construction was begun in 1866. It was designed by Gustav Hilbig and in accordance with the traditions related to the construction of teaching institutions at that time. The impressive ensemble of buildings occupying the entire block encircled by four streets – Raiņa Boulevard, Merķeļa, Inženieru and Arhitektu streets – was constructed in three stages, a process that took approximately forty years.

Neo-Romantic, Renaissance and Byzantine architectural styles can be found in the oldest part of

the ensemble. The central part of the building features ornamental cast-iron mouldings depicting the coats of arms of the former Baltic provinces: Vidzeme, Kurzeme and Estonia. Above these are reliefs symbolising the nine fields of technical science that were offered for study at the Riga Polytechnic (the former name of the University of Latvia) at that time: physics, chemistry, mechanics, commerce, engineering, architecture, agriculture, land surveying and navigation.

The university's astronomical observatory provides an interesting vertical emphasis to the central projection of the building. The tower offers a 360-degree view, with Vērmānes Park on one side and the gardens by the canal on the other. From this vantage point the structure

of the network of footpaths provides glimpses of the old bastion.

The interior of the university, with its large halls and antique wooden stairways that still have the scent of wood, is just as elegant as the façade of the building.

An intriguing anomaly in the building is the legendary punishment cell, which instilled fear in students for not returning books on time or other transgressions. The punishment was solitary confinement in the narrow space for a few days. This is why the greyish white walls were soon covered right up to the ceiling with not only signatures but also drawings and longer memoirs – from thoughts on university lecturers to memories of past girlfriends

RIGA CHURCH OF JESUS

Several unique wooden churches in Latvia remain almost completely unaltered since their time of construction, thereby embodying an almost magical aura of history. Some of these churches can be found in Riga and are linked with the architect Christian Friedrich Breitkreutz.

One of Breitkreutz's wooden gems is the Riga Church of Jesus (18 Elijas iela), built in 1822. It is the largest Late Classicism-style wooden construction in Latvia and is also considered one of the largest wooden churches in Europe. It is an eight-cornered building with simplified, symmetrical, Empire-style architectural shapes and exhibiting a characteristically strict and solemn monumentality. The interior of the building is covered by a large cupola, 20 metres in diameter, which is perched on 16 wooden columns grouped in pairs. The grandeur of the main façade is emphasised by a portico with four Ionic columns, while the 27-metre-tall bell tower dominates the surrounding skyline and stresses the importance of the building. All constructions in the church are secured with wooden pegs, which ensure the 19th-century structure's stability even today.



”

It is an eight-cornered building with simplified, symmetrical, Empire-style architectural shapes and exhibiting a characteristically strict and solemn monumentality.

”



INTERESTING NEIGHBOURHOODS

21

BERGA BAZĀRS

Berga Bazārs is like a small, self-sufficient city within a city. It is very centrally located and also within the borders of Riga's UNESCO-protected historical city centre. The network of small pedestrian streets hidden from the larger thoroughfares around it harbours a kind of secret, inner life of shops, cafés and arcades. One of the city's most unique architectural projects, Berga Bazārs was built in the late 19th century by local businessman and urban developer Kristaps Bergs in collaboration with a young architect named Konstantīns Pēkšēns.

Berga Bazārs was built over a period of 13 years (1887–1900) and is the largest and only shopping passage of its kind in Riga. It has a patina all its own, the result of a colourful and varied history. In the late 19th century this part of Riga – between Marijas, Elizabetes and Dzirnavu streets – was still considered the outskirts of the city and a relatively undeveloped quarter with allotment gardens and even a cabbage field nearby. But when the “bazaar” opened in 1900, it quickly became a centre of activity, attracting both urban and rural dwellers and people of

many different ethnicities. Berga Bazārs later suffered considerable damage during the two world wars and the Soviet era. But today, thanks to Bergs' descendants, it has been restored to its former form and is one of the most exciting examples of Riga's 21st-century pride. In addition to stores and cafés, Berga Bazārs is also home to the Hotel Bergs, beside which stands a fountain created by the well-known Latvian artist Ilmārs Blumbergs.

”

In the late 19th century this part of Riga – between Marijas, Elizabetes and Dzirnavu streets – was still considered the outskirts of the city and a relatively undeveloped quarter with allotment gardens and even a cabbage field nearby.

”

”

Berga Bazārs is also home to the Hotel Bergs, beside which stands a fountain created by the well-known Latvian artist Ilmārs Blumbergs.

”

KALNCIEMA QUARTER

The many wooden buildings along Kalnciema Street in the Pārdaugava district of Riga – but especially those around the intersection with Melnsila Street – are part of one of the best-known and most creative areas of the city. These buildings have been carefully restored, and their owners have invested much

energy in creating an environment like none other. The buildings are home to an exclusive design salon, architecture offices, cafés and other creative businesses. The neighbourhood also enjoys an active cultural life, with regular concerts, art exhibitions and poetry readings. The weekly farmer's market that takes place

at the intersection of Kalnciema and Melnsila streets has become very popular in recent years. Every Saturday, local farmers and artisans arrive here to sell their produce and wares – the atmosphere is colourful, the emotions are genuine, and air is full of enticing aromas, freshness and energy.



MEŽAPARKS

At the height of the industrial revolution, when European cities began to encounter some of the first problems associated with the urban phenomenon – such as poor air quality and lack of sunshine – more and more thought was put into creating a healthy urban environment. One of the first garden cities in Europe was developed in Riga in 1901. It was an avantgarde project in a pine forest on the banks of Ķīšezers Lake quite near the city centre. Until then, this area (which is now called Mežaparks, but was formerly known as Ķeizarmežs) was a pristine lakeside pine forest with only a few country estates. The only one of these summer

residences to survive to the present day is Grāves Estate in Saules Dārzs.

By the time the First World War began, 108 villas had already been built in Mežaparks. In the 1920s and 1930s another 250 single-family homes were added to the colony. Most of the houses in Mežaparks were built in the rational Art Nouveau style, although various "neo" styles from previous eras can also be found in the architecture. The first people to afford private homes in Mežaparks were the German intelligentsia, which is reflected in the German names of many streets: Štrālzundes,

Vismāras, Dancigas... Later, the Latvian intelligentsia also began to buy up plots, and some of these families have managed to retain ownership of their properties to the present day.

As befits a "town in a forest", Mežaparks is special for its unhurried pace of life. In winter, when ice and slush cover the streets of central Riga, Mežaparks enjoys fluffy, white snowbanks and silence. In the summer, it offers a breath of refreshing, aromatic air. On Sundays you'll find the park being enjoyed by families with children heading to the local zoo.

”

Most of the houses in Mežaparks were built in the rational Art Nouveau style, although various "neo" styles from previous eras can also be found in the architecture.

”

SKANSTE – RIGA'S MODERN CENTRE

According to an old legend, there's a spirit that lives in the Daugava River, and every once in a while it emerges from the water and asks the same question: "Is Riga completed?" If it ever receives a positive answer, it is said that the city will sink into the river. But there's no need to worry. Riga continues to evolve all the time. Although still in its infancy, it is assumed that the Skanste district will become the new centre of the city; the goal

of its developers is to make this area a showcase of 21st-century Riga. Skanste is set to be the home of Riga's conference and concert centre, which will join the already existing Elektrum Olympic Sports Centre and Arena Riga as well as the Sporta 2 art and technology quarter housing the kim? contemporary art centre and TechHub, a space for new technology startups. Several modern apartment and office complexes, as well as three public

parks, have also already been built or are planned for Skanste, which make this the most rapidly growing area of Riga. Skanste is located on the right bank of the Daugava River. The main thoroughfare is Skanstes Street, and the district is bordered by Pulkveža Brieža, Hanzas and Vesetas streets as well as Ganību Dambis and the railway.

MIERA STREET REPUBLIC

Even though "Peace Street" (Miera iela in Latvian) was named after the road established here in the mid-19th century that led to the new city cemetery, today it has made an existential U-turn and bubbles with life and the energy of various creative initiatives. Miera Street is the epicentre of Riga's hipster culture and has even been recognised by Skyscanner as the hippest neighbourhood in the world.

But the area's original peaceful feeling has not been lost, either.

In the mornings, Miera Street wakes up slowly. But once it's awake, the atmosphere is enthusiastic. This is a place for all sorts of people who "work with their hands" – baking cakes, sewing, cooking healthy food, growing, fixing, recycling, etc. In other words, this is a street of cafés, small shops run by passionate owners, workshops and other creative initiatives. Among the best-known residents on this street are the M50 design, clothing and accessory store, the Walters un Grapa bar, the Rocket

Bean Roastery oasis for coffee lovers, the Mierā bakery famous for its harmony and homemade cakes, the Mr. Page bookstore, and the Astronauts store featuring 20th-century furniture, lamps and home accessories.

The tram that rolls along Miera Street gives the neighbourhood a special charm, and a special aroma is provided by the Laima confectionery's chocolate museum.



”

Miera Street is the epicentre of Riga's hipster culture and has even been recognised by Skyscanner as the hippest neighbourhood in the world.

”

MOSCOW DISTRICT

The historically Russian and Jewish district of Riga – called Maskavas forštate in Latvian, or Maskačka in the local slang – begins right behind the Central Market. But you'll need to venture further to experience it in full. There you'll encounter wonderful wooden architecture from the 19th century and the turn of the 20th century, mysterious and time-worn courtyards, graffiti, dicey characters, homeless communes and stray (but friendly)

packs of dogs. The Moscow District is also the part of Riga where you'll find houses of worship of five different religions and denominations. Among them is the Grebenshchikov Church, the world's largest Old Believer house of worship.

In 1941, a part of the Moscow District was sectioned off and turned into a Jewish ghetto. Today, the Riga Ghetto and Latvian Holocaust Museum gives

visitors a look back into that time, with actual witnesses in the form of old buildings, original cobblestones and other elements of the ghetto's infrastructure.

But change is also coming to the Moscow District. Some buildings and streets have been renovated in recent years, and examples of modern architecture have also popped up here and there.

BOLDERĀJA

Formerly a separate, independent village and later a proletariat district of Riga, Bolderāja still feels like a republic unto itself. There is a completely different feeling of physical reality here, and therefore even Rigans see heading to Bolderāja as a kind of journey. Bolderāja is bordered by the Buļļupe River, Hapaka Ditch and the Loču Canal as well as the Daugava River, which flows into the Baltic Sea only a couple of kilometres away. The district's

close link with water is reflected in the local streets named after, for example, cod, captains, sailors, fog and the colour blue. Bolderāja is also known for its white sand beach, pines, meadows and eclectic mix of architecture. 19th-century wooden houses and once-stately masonry buildings are interspersed with examples of Brutalist-style multi-storey apartment buildings from the Soviet period.

Even though Bolderāja became a part of Riga only in the 1920s, it has long played a role in the city's history. The most vivid testimony of its importance is the Daugavgrīva Fortress, built in the 17th century by the Swedes. The fortress was once a significant part of Riga's defence system.

PĀRDAUGAVA

Riga's left bank, known as Pārdaugava (literally, "across the Daugava"), has always cardinally differed from the historical centre of the city. Due to the Daugava River, which forms the border between these two halves, Pārdaugava developed at a different pace than the other side of the river, and in many places it still retains the charm of a small town. Perhaps slightly time-worn, but nevertheless fascinating. Here you can still discover small streets forgotten by time and where automobiles don't even really venture, peek into the

courtyards between old wooden buildings, or lose yourself in the meditative romance of the public parks.

Practically every street in Pārdaugava has its own unique character and story. For example, a stroll along Mazā Nometņu Street becomes a lesson in the history of architecture, where eclecticism lives next to the rationalism of the 1920s-1930s and Art Nouveau stands next to classicism, the style it rejected. Nearby, Meža Street prides itself in the building that takes up

the entire block between Meža, Tīrgus and Puķu streets. Built in the Gothic Eclectic style, it was designed by Latvian architect Konstantīns Pēkšēns.

Pārdaugava is ideal for wanderers and those who wish to see "a different Riga" in concentrated form, right on the other side of the Daugava River. It's a district that for centuries watched as Riga developed, until it became a part of Riga itself.

”

Practically every street in Pārdaugava has its own unique character and story. For example, a stroll along Mazā Nometņu Street becomes a lesson in the history of architecture, where eclecticism lives next to the rationalism of the 1920s -1930s and Art Nouveau stands next to classicism, the style it rejected.

”



29

ĶĪPSALA

As you leave the glamour of the boulevards in central Riga and cross Vanšu Bridge, you enter a completely different world. The idyllic aura of Ķīpsala Island is best expressed by the narrow cobbled street that runs right along the banks of the Daugava River. Apart from a few prominent newcomers, the street is lined with old wooden buildings, and the sea birds and fresh smell of water are all around. Ķīpsala is about 300 years old and was

originally inhabited by fishermen and bargemen. These trades proved profitable, and in the late 19th century the most prosperous of the island's residents built two-storey wooden houses. Several of them have now been restored and form a part of Riga's unique heritage of wooden architecture, which has even been officially recognised by UNESCO. Many of the buildings were restored to their original form, while some have contemporary

additions; others have even been moved here from central Riga in order to protect them from demolition.

Ķīpsala is also home to the Ķīpsala International Exhibition Centre international exhibition complex (the largest of its kind in the Baltics), the Press Building (a relic from the Soviet era) and the Swedbank headquarters, also referred to as the Sun Rock.

”

The idyllic aura of Ķīpsala Island is best expressed by the narrow cobbled street that runs right along the banks of the Daugava River. Apart from a few prominent newcomers, the street is lined with old wooden buildings, and the sea birds and fresh smell of water are all around.

”

LUCAVSALA

Despite its location in the middle of Riga, Lucavsala is a wild island – a jungle in the heart of the city – that stretches for two kilometres in length and a whole kilometre in width. In addition, this is a place where two completely different worlds live side by side. One face is well-kept and the site of the recently established Lucavsala Recreation Park at the foot of

Salu Bridge. A true summer oasis for rest and relaxation, the park offers the city's largest children's playground, a beach, a café and all sorts of sports and activities. Lucavsala is also a place for outdoor concerts and festivals. The other face of the island is the as-yet-undeveloped southern end, where a certain untamed harshness still prevails: overgrown paths, small allotment gardens,

ramshackle houses protected from outsiders by signs reading "beware of the dog"...

It's easy to get to Lucavsala (which has only one street, Lucavsalas Street). Just get on trolleybus #19 in the city centre, and climb off at the Lucavsala stop. The park at the northern end of the island begins just a few metres from the stop.

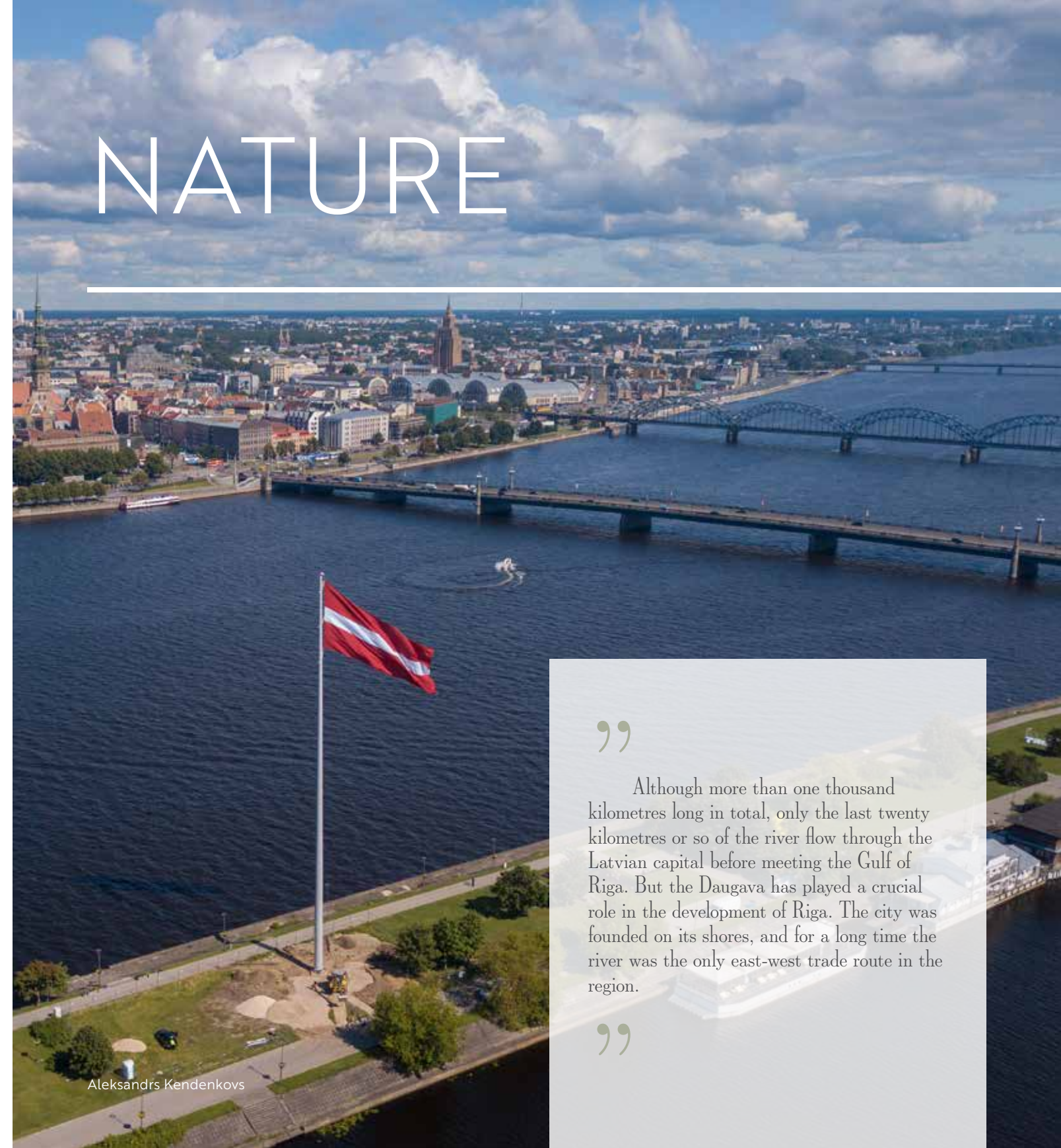
”

A true summer oasis for rest and relaxation, the park offers the city's largest children's playground, a beach, a café and all sorts of sports and activities. Lucavsala is also a place for outdoor concerts and festivals.

”

30

NATURE



”

Although more than one thousand kilometres long in total, only the last twenty kilometres or so of the river flow through the Latvian capital before meeting the Gulf of Riga. But the Daugava has played a crucial role in the development of Riga. The city was founded on its shores, and for a long time the river was the only east-west trade route in the region.

”

Aleksandrs Kendenkovs

DAUGAVA

31

Rigans have a very special relationship with the Daugava River. It is not only Latvia's largest river and a national symbol for the country; it is also a force of nature with whose sometimes unpredictable character the people living along its shores have needed to come to terms with. Although more than one thousand kilometres long in total, only the last twenty kilometres or so of the river flow through the Latvian capital before meeting the Gulf of Riga. But the Daugava

has played a crucial role in the development of Riga. The city was founded on its shores, and for a long time the river was the only east-west trade route in the region.

On the one hand a mother-nurturer (thanks to its abundance of fish), on the other hand the river could also provide unpleasant surprises. The channel of the Daugava has changed several times over the years, and extensive springtime floods have

wreaked damage on the city. In 1358 the flood waters in the Riga Cathedral are said to have reached the height of an adult human being. And on April 23, 1929, Riga was transformed into Venice for a day – in some areas of the city movement was only possible by boat. Information on the Daugava's water level is still included in local springtime news reports.

32

Even though technically Riga is located on the Gulf of Riga, locals refer to this body of water as simply "the sea", thereby underscoring the self-sufficient spirit of the city.

Latvian culture – and Latvians themselves – have a very

significant relationship with the sea. It is depicted in art, literature, cinema and folklore, where it is personified as both a protector and source of nourishment as well as the decider of fates. When autumn storms bring strong winds to the area, many people rush to the seashore to feel the

power and might of the wind and witness its cleansing effect on the beaches near the city. Walking out on the Mangaļsala jetty is also popular at times like this – it is the first part of the city that ships see as they enter the mouth of the Daugava River.



RIGA CANAL

3.2 kilometres long, about two metres deep and crossed by 16 bridges of various size, the Riga Canal is an artificial body of water that was created after the medieval defensive walls and ditch surrounding the city were demolished. Both ends of the canal are connected to the Daugava River, and its banks were carefully landscaped in the late 19th century.

The Riga Canal is also a wonderful way to see Riga from a different perspective. Take a "Riga Loop" tour on a SUP board or kayak – under the 16 bridges, right in the middle yet apart from the hustle and bustle of the city, past centuries-old buildings, along the zigzags of Riga's former system of defensive walls. Here you can paddle at your own speed and feel like you're in a completely different world than that taking place up on dry land.

The Riga Canal is also home to beavers. They become a news item as soon as they wake up in the spring. One of the several lodges they've made stands right across from the opera house. But each season they also manage to take down a tree or destroy a few flower beds along the canal. Despite this mischief, which the city tries to deter with more and more protective fencing, the beavers and the residents of Riga peacefully co-exist in the city.



ĶĪŠEZERS

Ķīšezers Lake is in the northeastern part of Riga and is the tenth largest lake in Latvia.

The average depth of Ķīšezers Lake is 2.4 metres, with a maximum depth of 4.2 metres. The lake has several islands, and there's almost always a wind blowing. Therefore, in addition to

the ever-present fishermen (both on shore and in boats), this is also a favourite destination for local windsurfers. Here you'll also find the veikot.lv wakeboard club.

One of Riga's most exciting outdoor cafés is located on the banks of Ķīšezers Lake – Cabo Cafe. Even though the café

remains open during the cold months and offers hot teas to warm up with, the action really picks up in the summer, when Cabo Cafe provides the perfect spot to take a break during a long day in the sun and water. One of the most popular swimming spots on Ķīšezers Lake is right next to the café.

PARKS

At the beginning of the 20th century, Riga's parks were instead referred to as spas or health resorts – places for people to relax and recuperate. Riga has almost twenty parks and gardens of various size, each with its own personality. The oldest is Viestura Garden (Viestura dārzs), established in 1711 by order of Peter the Great himself. Here you'll find the Alexander Gate, Riga's only "arch of triumph".

The best known of Riga's parks is Vērmānes Garden, which was funded by public donations and named in honour of the largest donor, Anna Wöhrmann (Vērmāne), the widow of the merchant Christian Heinrich Wöhrmann. In 1817, she donated a piece of land to the city for the establishment of a public park containing exotic tree species, a rose garden and a restaurant. Her only condition was that the park would never be subdivided

or sold to a private person and would always remain accessible to the people of Riga. A bandshell (or "cockleshell", as it was called in those days) was later built in the park, with the current open-air stage dating to the 1950s. A mineral-water pavilion also stood in the park, but it was eventually turned into a movie theatre, then a cultural centre for the city's transportation employees, and today it houses the Bibliotēka N°1 restaurant.

Due to its location in the very centre of Riga, however, Vērmanes Garden is a hurried place, with many people moving through it quickly as they head from point A to B.

Arkādijas Park, near Māras Pond on the other side of the Daugava

River, is the most idyllic park in the city. Its several levels provide diverse and beautiful views of the surrounding landscape. Ziedoņdārzs Park is the only park in Riga set amidst apartment buildings – like a green oasis dropped in between the inner-city buildings all around. In the

winter, however, Uzvaras Park becomes a favourite place for Rigans – as soon as a layer of snow forms on the ground, the cross-country ski trail and skating rink are opened for all to use.



36

RIGA'S ISLANDS

As all prominent rivers, the Daugava is capricious and has a strong personality. Its islands provide vivid testimony of this character. Although poorly documented in historical sources, it is estimated that there were once several dozen islands in the Daugava River. Over the years, they have changed shape, merged, become attached to the mainland or even been lost altogether due to flooding, the river's channels changing course and also the military and industrial actions of humans living along the river's shores.

The current islands in the river, each of which is a world of its own, are also undergoing constant change. For example, Zaķusala

Island, which was formed by the merging of several islands, is only about 300 years old. Furthermore, it seems to still be growing today. There used to be a fishing village on the island, but life changed in 1976, when the Salu Bridge was built, and later, in the 1980s, when the Riga Radio and Television Tower was built on the island.

Kundziņsala was also formed when several smaller islands merged together in the second half of the 18th century. For a long time, the island was a nesting ground for seagulls and other aquatic birds. In fact, one of the islands that merged to form Kundziņsala was named Duck Island. Even though the romance of earlier times is gone,

Kundziņsala is still a place to go for some peace and quiet – a place to enjoy the aroma of lilacs in the spring and the bitter aroma of fallen leaves in the autumn. There is still a small settlement of houses from the early 20th century in the central part of the island, but the site is increasingly being degraded by industrialisation.

Today, the name of a street remains as the only evidence of the existence of Mūkusala Island; the area was only a true island from the 13th to the 18th century. Lucavsala and Ķīpsala islands, however, are still full-fledged islands.

RIGA'S BEACHES

In recent years, Riga has put more and more thought into summer, and it's gradually becoming one of the most summer-friendly cities in Europe. This means that beaches have become an integral part of the city as well. Whether along the Daugava River or the banks of Ķīšezers Lake, each beach has a character of its own.

The best beach for industrial romantics is the white-sand beach on Ķīpsala Island. It's located at the foot of the Vanšu Bridge, next to one of the city's busiest transportation hubs. Directly across the river is the Riga Passenger Terminal, so you can watch the ships come in and leave as you catch some rays. From here you can also see

Riga Castle, where the president of Latvia resides. With the traffic speeding past up on the bridge, this beach combines an urban dynamic with the idyllic tranquillity and sweet summer smells of Ķīpsala.

The beach on Lucavsala Island, for its part, feels like a trip out into the green countryside, even though the island is right in the middle of the city. Lucavsala was once full of small allotment gardens, but now eleven hectares have been turned into a large recreation zone popular with locals from all walks of life. Thanks to its interactive children's playgrounds, the beach on Lucavsala is a great place for families with young children. This

is also where the wakeboarders gather. And where open-air film screenings take place. And where you can sit on the café terrace and gaze at the sunset reflecting off the river's waters.

For those who prefer a lakeside beach, head to the slightly smaller beach at Ķīšezers Lake, whose sand is sprinkled with pine needles and cones. That's because of its location between the pine forest and the boat dock. The Mežaparks central promenade – appropriately called Atpūtas Street (Street of Rest) – is also nearby. Here you'll find a cafés as well as plenty of space for a picnic.

”

The best beach for industrial romantics is the white-sand beach on Ķīpsala Island. It's located at the foot of the Vanšu Bridge, next to one of the city's busiest transportation hubs. Directly across the river is the Riga Passenger Terminal, so you can watch the ships come in and leave as you catch some rays.

”

RIGA'S HILLS

The topography of Riga was originally wind-blown sand dunes. Small settlements were eventually established between the dunes, and still today there are quite a few place names in Riga that refer in one way or another to hills, although in reality they are all relatively quite small.

The highest point in Riga is Dzegužkalns (Cuckoo Hill, 28 metres above sea level), a naturally formed dune in the Pārdaugava district of the city that's a kilometre long and about 300 metres wide. The area was turned into a public park in the 1930s, and its highest point opens up to a beautiful view of the low, wooden architecture of the surrounding neighbourhood – it's an authentic slice of 19th-century Riga.

A 24-metre-high dune can be found in the former working-class neighbourhood of Grīziņkalns. A public park was established here as well in the early 20th century, and its best-known feature is a series of terraces.

The highest point (actually, the only area of higher elevation) in the city centre is Bastejkalns. The hill was made from the city's medieval defensive ramparts after they were demolished in the 19th century. The retaining walls were added in 1951 and contain many decorative details from the historical buildings destroyed during the Second World War. Even though today Bastejkalns is a favourite place for a romantic stroll, it is also the site of a tragic event in Latvia's recent history. In January 1991, several people were

killed or mortally wounded here during a shootout by the special police units of the Soviet Ministry of the Interior. Commemorative stones on both sides of the city canal now mark the sites where they fell.

But the most paradoxical of Riga's hills lies at the end of Deglava Street, amongst the clusters of multi-storey apartment complexes. For almost 50 years this – a district that is now home to more than 100,000 people – was the site of a residential and industrial waste dump. Although no longer actively used as a dump, over the decades the accumulated waste grew into a hill that's now 35.5 metres high.

TREES

Trees are like green jewels – and also natural doctors – for a city, and they’ve always been a dominant feature of Riga. But trees also carry significant symbolic meaning in Latvian culture. For example, due to its beauty and gentle touch, Latvians have always associated the birch with the concepts of home and homeland. Like Latvians themselves, the birch has a distinct will to live. The birch will survive even if other trees

around it have died. Latvians highly value the sap of birches, which they tap as soon as the ground begins to thaw in spring – it’s full of valuable minerals, and Latvians call it the drink of health. During birch sap season, you can buy bottles of it (slightly fermented and flavoured with raisins and some lemon peel) at all the farmers’ markets in Riga, and the drink stays fresh until the beginning of summer. The most common tree in Riga, however, is

the linden, or lime. It’s considered a tree of love and family as well as a symbol of femininity. Therefore, Latvian families have always planted a linden when a girl is born...and an oak if a boy is born. According to the local mythology, a linden can also ward off lightning and absorb a person’s illnesses.



LILACS

The lilacs bloom for only a short time – three weeks – but it is during this time that the city truly blossoms, falling into a swoon of sweet sin. Nothing blooms as vividly and with such a heady and life-affirming aroma as lilacs, and it’s no wonder they’re considered a symbol of youth and family. Latvians believe that if you find and eat (!) a five-petalled lilac flower in the springtime – then all your wishes will come true. Every local child knows this, so don’t be surprised if you see people oddly searching for something in the lilac bushes, as if they’ve gotten lost.

Lilacs have also been memorialised in artwork and design. The motif was once a favourite decorative element on the porcelain and faience dishes made by the legendary Kuznetsov Porcelain Factory (established in 1841), which today are highly valued collector’s items.



ART AND CULTURE INSTITUTIONS



LATVIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ART

In May 2016, after several years of major renovation, the main building of the Latvian National Museum of Art (LNMM; Inmm. lv), located at 1 Jaņa Rozentāla Square, was opened again to visitors. The exterior of the building, originally built in 1905, remains untouched. But an organic synergy of two different eras is revealed behind the Historicism-style façade. Inside, the historical core of the museum has been preserved, with many once-forgotten elements given new life; at the same time, contemporary architectural features have also become an integral part of the overall form. A gleaming, golden staircase connects the old part of the building with the new museum spaces, where minimalist concrete dominates. When heading to the main exhibition hall, which hosts changing

expositions, visitors get a glimpse of the glass-covered museum warehouse, which holds a part of the museum's collection. The collection covers art from the early 19th century to the late 20th century.

The museum's permanent exhibition, displayed in the old part of the building, traces the development of Latvian fine art. One of the highlights is the museum's collection of work by well-known constructivist Gustav Klutis (Gustavs Klucis). But the museum is also notable for being the only place in Riga to see a permanent exhibition presenting local art processes of the late 20th century.

The Arsenāls Exhibition Hall of the LNMM is located at 1 Torņa Street, very near Riga Castle and the Saeima (Parliament) building.

This is one of the most prestigious art spaces in Riga and an important stop for understanding contemporary art processes.

Another structural unit of the LNMM, the Riga Bourse Art Museum, is also located in Old Riga, at 6 Cathedral Square. Architecturally, the building unambiguously calls to mind the Venetian palazzo style. Inside, it holds Latvia's largest collection of foreign art, beginning with the 5th century BC all the way to the early 20th century.

Still another part of the LNMM is found at 10/20 Skārņu Street, right next to St. Peter's Church. The Museum of Decorative Arts and Design contains seven individual collections: textiles, ceramics, metal art, leather art, decorative wood art, glass art and design.



ART INSTITUTIONS

Contemporary art is one of the elements that gives modern urban cultural life a provocative, experimental flavour, urging people to look at what's happening in our world from a completely different perspective.

The kim? Contemporary Art Centre has established a home for itself in a former candy factory at 2 Sporta Street (kim. lv) in Riga. In Latvian the name is an abbreviation for the rhetorical question "kas ir māksla?", or "what is art?". Since it began in 2009, kim? has focussed not only on organising exhibitions of Latvian and foreign artists but also on defining and interpreting the essence of art through discussions, lectures and educational programmes for children and youth.

One of the oldest non-governmental cultural and art institutions in Latvia is Noass, or Noah in English (www.noass.lv), which is located on a débarcadère, or landing stage, moored to the AB Dambis jetty in the Daugava River. Noass' focus is on the moving image, and its extensive archive of video art is particularly valuable. Noass' video art festival, titled Ūdensgabali, is popular among art circles and is the only such event in the Baltics.

Riga Art Space (Rīgas mākslas telpa; makslastelpa.lv), a multifunctional centre for art and culture located under Town Hall Square in Old Riga, collaborates with other art institutions to regularly hold a wide range of contemporary art events.

Based on the private collection of Dina and Jānis Zuzāns, who are well-known patrons of the arts in Latvia, the Mūkusala Art Salon (www.mmsalons.lv) is the only private exhibition space in Riga. The couple strives to create a portrait of Latvian art, so, logically, their space hosts regular art exhibitions focussing on vivid, compelling phenomena in Latvian art.

During the summer season, the corner of Kalnciema and Melnsila streets (36/38 Kalnciema Street) becomes one of the city's epicentres of visual art. Here, at its so-called "summer home", the Art Needs Space foundation (makslaivajagtelpu.lv) organises a series of small-format, conceptual exhibitions.

”

One of the oldest non-governmental cultural and art institutions in Latvia is Noass, or Noah in English (www.noass.lv), which is located on a débarcadère, or landing stage, moored to the AB Dambis jetty in the Daugava River. Noass' focus is on the moving image, and its extensive archive of video art is particularly valuable. Noass' video art festival, titled Ūdensgabali, is popular among art circles and is the only such event in the Baltics.

”

ETHNOGRAPHIC OPEN-AIR MUSEUM

A visit to the Latvian Ethnographic Open-Air Museum is like a trip back to a world long before the invention of the automobile, when only food and drink from one's own land was put on the table and each farmstead wove its own sheets and blankets. The museum was founded in 1924 and covers 87 hectares. Here visitors can wander the seemingly endless network of paths, stroll along the banks of Jugla Lake, or easily find a quiet corner to have a picnic under the pines without being bothered by other people.

The museum contains 118 old buildings from all regions of Latvia (Kurzeme, Zemgale, Vidzeme, Latgale) that have

been recognised as superb examples of the country's cultural and historical heritage. They have been disassembled, transported to the museum and then painstakingly reassembled to form a number of authentic farmsteads. Here you'll find typical peasant houses and barns, craftsmen's workshops, windmills, smithies, potters' kilns and tar kilns. In some of the buildings it is also possible to observe craftsmen creating wonderful objects according to old, traditional techniques.

The most festive moment of the year at the Ethnographic Open-Air Museum is the first weekend of June, when for almost

fifty years now craftsmen and artists from all over Latvia have been gathering at the museum to participate in its annual fair. Huge crowds flock to the museum, all abuzz with excitement, because everyone is looking to buy that special woven rug or textile, piece of jewellery, ceramic dish or other ware. Because Latvian craftsmen are known for their craftsmanship and high quality of work, the museum has also established a new tradition – every year, on the second Saturday and Sunday of August, it hosts the Contemporary Crafts Festival.

”

The museum contains 118 old buildings from all regions of Latvia (Kurzeme, Zemgale, Vidzeme, Latgale) that have been recognised as superb examples of the country's cultural and historical heritage. They have been disassembled, transported to the museum and then painstakingly reassembled to form a number of authentic farmsteads.

”



RAILWAY MUSEUM

The Latvian Railway History Museum (railwaymuseum.lv) located at 2/4 Uzvaras Boulevard holds the largest trove of records related to the railway industry in Latvia. The museum also owns the largest collection of broad-gauge railway vehicles (locomotives, railroad cars, wagons, etc.) in the Baltics. The museum encompasses the history of the Latvian railway, with expositions covering topics from station architecture to the

life of its employees. Its extensive collection of photographs reflects both existing and former railway stations, bridges, lines, locomotives and wagons that were once used in Latvia. In addition, the museum has a wide range of industry-related printed materials: train lists, tickets, various books and brochures, periodicals, honorary certificates, invitations and other printed matter that contains information no longer available anywhere else.

The museum features a 19th-century railway repair shop complete with an improvised platform, from which museum visitors arrive in the waiting room of the station and the offices of the stationmaster, cashier and agent on duty. Visitors can also climb into the driver's compartment and engine room of a diesel locomotive, inspect electric and steam locomotives at close range, and gaze into a passenger car from the 1930s.

PAULS STRADIŅŠ MUSEUM OF THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE

Few people know that the building at 1 Antonijas Street in Riga holds one of the three largest medical history museums in the world. It was founded in 1957 by one of the most legendary medical doctors in Latvia,

Professor Pauls Stradiņš. The museum's collection contains over 200,000 artifacts and covers all medical fields; the permanent exposition takes visitors on a journey that leads to various ages and places. It illustrates the

intuitive medical practices of the Stone Age, testifies to the oldest surgical operation (trepanation) and tells about the harsh reality of magical medicine and medieval therapies.

The museum introduces visitors to medical discoveries and the rapid progress of medicine from the 18th to the 20th century, and also emphasises the history and achievements of medical developments in Latvia.

One of the most interesting places in the museum is the hall dedicated to outer-space biology and medicine. It features an historical astronaut's suit, take-off and landing chairs, and a capsule used to send dogs into space. A

mount of the dog Chernushka is also on display here; she ventured into space in 1961, a full month before Yuri Gagarin.

RAINIS AND ASPAZIJA HOUSE

Rainis and Aspazija were the most legendary of Latvian literary unions. Rainis (1865–1929) was an intellectual Social Democrat, a champion of Latvian national identity, a translator, playwright and poet. His wife, Aspazija (1865–1943), was a feminist and one of the most vivid women in Latvian society around the turn of the 20th century; she was also a poet with a volcanic personality. It is quite difficult to talk about one without mentioning the other.

The 19th-century wooden house at 30 Baznīcas Street, where Rainis

and Aspazija settled in 1926, became their last joint residence in Riga. Rainis lived here until his death in 1929; Aspazija lived at this address until 1933.

To preserve their legacy, both poets had expressed a desire that their house eventually be transformed into a memorial museum. The exposition is created as a lifelike living space, where the presence of Rainis and Aspazija feels quite real. The poets' shadows slide from room to room, a piano plays in the background, dishes clink in the

kitchen at mealtimes, and from time to time the telephone in Rainis' room rings. Lines of the couple's poetry are used as an interior design element and let visitors immerse themselves in the creative heritage left by these giants of the literary world.

One of the main features in the Rainis and Aspazija memorial house is the library, which contains 6067 books in 14 languages as well as 2900 issues of various periodicals.

RIGA MOTOR MUSEUM

The Riga Motor Museum, located at 6 Sergeja Eizenšteina Street, is the largest antique car museum in the Baltics. It contains over 146 exhibits in a space covering 4,000 square meters. The exhibits are grouped together in 11 different categories and form a multi-layered narrative that allows visitors to follow the history of cars not only in Latvia but worldwide and discover how the automobile became an integral part of everyday life. The museum's greatest treasure is a car that has survived for more than a century – it was manufactured in the United States in 1903 by Latvian-born

carmaker August Krastin (Augusts Krastiņš).

Another of the museum's highlights is its own so-called "Kremlin collection", which includes, among other things, former Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev's Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow and the ZIS-115S that Joseph Stalin used to ride in. The museum also has a Auto Union V16. This car, used in hill-climb racing in the 1930s, provided one of the main impulses for founding the Riga Motor Museum.

The museum's multimedia expositions invite visitors to take

active part and make a visit to the museum particularly exciting. For example, when boarding a PAZ bus, they travel back to 1975 and experience a trip to a joyous wedding on a kolkhoz. Visitors can also drive in a virtual parade and be photographed in a Kremlin car. A special programme lets children learn about the history of the automobile in a 60-minute guided tour. They can also obtain a bicycle licence at the museum. The child-friendly museum has lounge areas with various games as well as a play corner for children.



SPLENDID PALACE

Located at 61 Elizabetes Street, Splendid Palace is the oldest and most ornate cinema theatre in Riga. Moreover, it was the first building in the city created specifically for the cinematograph. It features sophisticated architectural details, allegorical wall and ceiling paintings, and sculptural palm branches framing the screen in the Great Hall. In fact,

almost nothing has changed here since 1923, when Splendid Palace was unveiled to the public. The theatre could accommodate 824 cinema-goers and was the most modern cinema in the Baltics.

In October 1929, The Singing Fool (USA, 1928, directed by Lloyd Bacon) was shown at Splendid Palace and was the first motion picture with sound to be shown

in the region. Since its inception, the theatre has stood out from the crowd with its fine selection of movies, and this tradition continues to the present day. The schedule consists of high-quality auteur cinema as well as art-house films from Europe and elsewhere that have drawn accolades at film festivals around the world.

ART GALLERIES

Art galleries are significant "way points" to current art processes in Riga, and the solo and group exhibitions they host allow visitors to become acquainted with significant personalities, trends and current events on the local cultural scene.

The two oldest art galleries in Riga are the Daugava Gallery (at 1 Ausekļa Street in the Quiet Centre, in a building designed by Jānis Frīdrihs Baumanis, the first Latvian educated as an architect; www.galerijadaugava.lv) and the Bastejs Gallery (at 7 Alksnāja Street in Old Riga; www.bastejs.lv). The Daugava Gallery focuses on a very broad range of Latvian

art; it regularly holds exhibitions of contemporary art as well as expositions dedicated to the grand old names of Latvian art history. The Bastejs Gallery, for its part, includes in its programme exhibitions of artists from abroad, especially reviews of artists from the Baltic region.

The Māksla XO Gallery (14 Elizabetes Street; www.makslaxogalerija.lv) and Alma Gallery (www.galerija-alma.lv) are institutions that actively seek to represent art not only domestically but also on the international stage, by regularly participating in international art fairs.

The 427 Gallery (fourtoseven.info), located at 70 Stabu Street and founded by the artists Kaspars Groševs and Ieva Kraule, is definitely one of the most provocative art spaces in Riga at the moment. Although there's no guarantee that it will always be open during normal business hours, it's worth checking out in order to feel the vibe of the city's new art scene. The Low Gallery (www.facebook.com/lowgallery), initiated by artist Maija Kurševa and located at 115 Ģertrūdes Street, opened in the spring of 2017. Kurševa calls Low Gallery the ideal place for spontaneous ideas, new talents and the manifestation of the artistic process.



”

..this place, where during the Second World War the dockworker Žanis Lipke hid 55 Jews in a three-metre-deep pit under his woodshed and thus saved their lives.

Just a few metres from where Lipke's woodshed was located, the author of this museum project, Latvian architect Zaiga Gaile, has created an emotional and visually impressive memorial.

”

ŽANIS LIPKE MEMORIAL

The Žanis Lipke Memorial, located at 8 Mazais Balasta Dambis on the island of Ķīpsala, is one of the most hidden museums in Riga. The small street is sometimes even forgotten to be included on maps. But incognito status suits this place, where during the Second World War the dockworker Žanis Lipke hid 55 Jews in a three-metre-deep pit under his woodshed and thus saved their lives.

Just a few metres from where Lipke's woodshed was located, the author of this museum

project, Latvian architect Zaiga Gaile, has created an emotional and visually impressive memorial. Unveiled in 2012, it's a space with a strong aura at the end of a dimly lit tunnel – a place for reflection, meditation and contemplation. The faint scent of wood tar can be felt in the air, which calls to mind images of the old fishermen's huts on Ķīpsala. The visitors' path leads through a dusky labyrinth reminiscent of the woodshed to the central memorial hall in the building's attic – this is the heart of the three-storey building. Through

a hatch in the floor visitors peer into the basement bunker, where nine plank bunks are mounted on the walls. The sound installation by composer Jēkabs Nīmanis heightens the emotions. This is a place where time suddenly becomes an abstract concept, and it's possible to look into the past as if through the eyes of God. Only upon exiting the building does one fully appreciate its size – it resembles Noah's ark, which delivered the fortunate survivors to dry land after the flood.

RESTAURANTS, BARS AND CAFES



”

What are the national foods that every guest of Riga should try to find in the city's stores, markets and restaurant menus? The answer can be confusing, because Latvian cuisine reflects influences from the cuisines of many other cultures. However, it seems that the locals knew how to take the best of these foods and culinary influences and adapt them to their own tastes.

”

WHAT TO TASTE IN RIGA

Grey peas – a food that has long been forgotten elsewhere – are especially popular in Latvia around Christmas. They are served with a bacon and onion sauce, and the dried peas can be bought at practically every grocery store in the city.

At the summer solstice, however, Latvians always eat **Midsummer**

cheese with caraway seeds. It's one of the oldest cheese recipes in Europe, and it goes particularly well with beer. Documentary evidence of beer brewing in Latvia dates back to the 13th–16th centuries.

Considering that forests cover a large proportion of the country, it should come as no surprise that

game is a special part of Latvian traditional cuisine: roe deer, red deer, elk, wild boar, capercaillie, black grouse. Regarding fish, although it might come as a surprise to visitors to Latvia, an absolutely classic Latvian food is the wonderful **trinity of sour cream (mixed with curd), boiled potatoes and herring.**

”

Rye bread is a truly traditional Latvian food and occupies a place of honour on the table. The hardy rye grain overwinters in Latvia's fields; it then flowers for two weeks, ripens for two weeks and dries for two weeks. After that, it is harvested and used to bake that dark, hearty, nutritious, sourdough bread.

”



GOURMET RESTAURANTS

Riga's gastronomy scene has managed to surprise more than a few gourmand travellers. On the one hand, menus at the city's best restaurants echo the current trend for Nordic cuisine and seasonal eating; on the other hand, the city's multicultural soul is also definitely present. It's the combination of these two aspects that makes for the sometimes surprising bouquet of flavours that can be found in Riga. The prestigious White Guide Nordic restaurant guide named the Riga restaurant Vincents as a top-rank establishment in the Baltics.

Locals, however, have long known Vincents to be a legendary fine-dining classic.

Vincents was the first gourmet restaurant in Riga, and over the 20+ years of its existence it has hosted many prominent guests, from Elton John to the Emperor of Japan and Prince Charles. For many years, its head chef, Slow Food advocate Mārtiņš Rītiņš, was the brightest star on Latvia's gastronomy scene. Vincents continues the traditions Rītiņš established there, although now under the leadership of Raimonds

Tomsons, its long-standing sommelier and the winner of the 2017 European Sommelier Championship.

Bibliotēka No1 is a member of Riga's younger generation of gourmet restaurants. Its team masterfully combines tradition with contemporary gastronomy, and the menu is as nuanced in flavours, colours and seasonality as the magnificent view outside its windows – Vērmanes Garden, Riga's most beautiful public park.



Bibliotēka No1



Vincents

THE FLAVOUR OF CONTEMPORARY LATVIA

What kind of flavour bouquet best describes contemporary Latvia? How do old traditions mingle with contemporary culinary innovations? Searching for the flavour of contemporary Latvia has become one of the most exciting activities and topics of study on Riga's gastronomy scene.

Menus at the members of the "Contemporary Latvian Cuisine"

club – that is, the restaurants led by the country's most outstanding culinary masters, such as Entresol (Elizabetes iela 22; entresol.lv), Kolonāde: Mūsu stāsti (Brīvības bulvāris 26; kolonade.lv), Ferma (Valkas iela 7; fermarestorans.lv) and Muusu (Skārņu iela 6; muusu.lv) – prove that local Latvian products and produce can be used in very original and unusual ways. The flavour of contemporary Latvia

can be found in foods that include products like rowan berries, acorns, ramps, sorrel, hemp butter, Baltic herring, dumplings and much more. Meals created according to the principles of this cuisine not only taste good, are of high quality and take health and good nutrition into consideration; developing and enjoying such foods also supports local farmers and producers.



Ferma



Muusu

THE FLAVOURS OF NATURE



”

How does one “lock” the true flavours of nature into a dish? This is currently one of the biggest challenges Riga’s chefs have taken on. In addition to following the current trend of creating menus that contain only seasonal produce grown in Latvia, a host of chefs has chosen to take it one step further, by turning to products that grow wild in nature, without human intervention. If you know what it’s like to snack on a handful of cloudberries fresh from the marsh or are familiar with the taste of wood sorrel picked from a forest glade, now you can also experience these flavours at a number of restaurants in Riga.

”

For instance the chefs at Restorāns 3 (3 Kalēju Street; restaurant3.lv), have demonstrated the amazing diversity of dishes that can be created from birch juice syrup, cloudberries, forest mushrooms or even beaver tail. The chef at Valmiermuižas Alus virtuve (9a Aristīda Briāna Street; valmiermuiza.lv), for his part, closely follows the seasons and the natural produce they bring

forth. He challenges himself to only make use of products that naturally grow in this climate, and so he searches for everything in the country’s forests and meadows that was once deemed edible by our ancestors.

The menu created by chef of Valtera restorāns (8 Miesnieku Street; valterarestorans.lv) is as changeable as the seasons. Although it includes a certain

amount of creative improvisation, the natural flavours of chanterelles or summer squash, eel or pike perch, guinea fowl or game is always present. Enjoy the riches of the Baltic Sea and local freshwater waterways at the Le Dome (4 Miesnieku Street; zivjuresstorans.lv) fish restaurant. Whether preparing Latvian sturgeon caviar or turbot, the chef is a virtuoso working in his niche.



Restorāns 3



Valmiermuižas alus



Le Dome



Valtera restorāns

WATERSIDE RESTAURANTS

Riga is blessed with lots of waterfront access – the Daugava River runs through the middle of the city, and there are lakes around the edges of the city. Visiting each body of water is like a journey within a journey, because each has a different character and a vastly different feel.

One of the most built-up waterfront areas in Riga is Andrejosta, a bit to the north of

the city centre. Here you'll find a cluster of restaurants, cafés and clubs. The oldest of these institutions is Koya (Andrejostas iela 4; koyarestaurant.com). Other well-known names are the restaurant, bar and lounge Aqua Luna (Andrejostas iela 4; aqualuna.lv) and Muusu Terasē (Eksporta iela 1A; muusu.lv/muusu-terase), which serves contemporary Latvian cuisine. Modern design and seagulls in the

air, yachts passing by and a time-worn industrial ambience, graffiti and innovative gastronomy – Andrejosta is an urban romantic experience full of contrasts.

A completely different, almost meditative waterside scene is found at the golf club restaurant Ozo (Mīlgrāvja iela 16; ozogolf.lv) on the banks of tranquil, beautiful Ķīšezers Lake.



Garage



Easy Wine bar



Aqua Luna

WINE BARS

For several years already, the popular bar/restaurant Vīna Studija (vinastudija.lv), which boasts a collection of several hundred wines from various regions around the world, has helped to guide wine culture in Riga. It has several locations throughout the city, but all of them are united by a stylish yet democratic interior design. Well-known architect and wine aficionado Mārtiņš Pīlēns participated in the creation of Vīna Studija, but he has since moved on to a new project, Modernists (K. Barona 31;

modernists.lv). The modernist Bauhaus-style boutique bar and store focuses on so-called grower champagnes, or champagne made by small producers.

The drinks menu in Garage wine bar (Elizabetes iela 83/85; garage.lv) features wines from Argentina, Germany, Italy and France, which can be enjoyed together with some wonderful food as well – all in an environment inspired by the garage. Meanwhile, the passion at another wine space in Riga, Tinto (Elizabetes iela 61; tinto.lv), is cinema. The bar and restaurant is

located next to Splendid Palace, Riga's oldest and most ornate movie theatre, and features a wine collection representing 20 countries around the world as well as Spanish-inspired snacks.

The Easy Wine bar (Audēju iela 4; easywine.lv) offers a different concept – service according to the no pre-payment wine-card principle. Just place the card in the wine dispenser, and your glass will be filled with one of 60 different wines on offer.

57 BEST BEER SPOTS

Riga is an intriguing destination for beer lovers. In addition to the traditional pubs, it's worth paying attention to the places that brew their own beer, most often in a special space at the back of the bar or pub. One such place is the Labietis brewery (9a-2 A. Briāna Street; labietis.lv), which offers a number of beer varieties divided into "families", depending on the strength of beer. Each of these has a quirky name, such as "Soho Švitiņš" (Soho Dandy, a traditional

British bitter) or "Kapracis" (Gravedigger, a beer that calls to mind the smell and taste of the smouldering remains of a fire).

For over a decade now, Valmiermuižas alus (9 A. Briāna Street; valmiermuiza.lv) has been considered one of the best breweries in Latvia. You'll find almost its entire range of beers available at the brewery's so-called "embassy in Riga", which also features a restaurant

presenting Valmiermuiža's own vision of the perfect beer and food combinations. Meanwhile, the beer bar Taka (10 Miera Street; facebook.com/takabars), where music, culture and board games live together harmoniously, is notable for its very unique range of beers, focussing mainly on the truly small breweries of Latvia and their individual flavours.



Taka



Labietis



Valmiermuižas alus

BARS AND NIGHTLIFE

Years ago, Riga was the most lively of all the Baltic capitals in terms of its nightclub scene and many professional DJs. Today, the city's bars and nightclubs have each focussed on creating their own unique image and atmosphere that best suits their intended audience, so local club-goers know more or less what they can expect from each club.

Many a tourist has spent an unforgettable night in one of Old Riga's establishments. The

more refined revellers prefer the long-standing B-Bārs (2 Dome Square; bbars.lv), while those who favour a more relaxed and warm atmosphere won't want to miss a night out at Omas Briljants (7 Audēju Street; omasbriljans.lv).

These days, however, the lively bar and nightclub scene has shifted past the boulevard circle, and for the past few years the most prestigious player on the scene has been Bārs XII (1a Strēlnieku Street; bar13.lv).

lv), located in the very heart of Riga's Art Nouveau district. Slightly further out – in the creative quarter known as the Miera Street Republic – many an intellectual, following a stiff and serious meeting or conference, will not hesitate to step into the alternative beer bar Walters & Grapa (19 Miera Street), only to later head on for some dancing at the city's most fiery rock bar, Nemiers (9a Aristīda Briāna Street; nemiers.lv).

RIGA'S HIP HANGOUTS

On the map of European hipster sub-culture, Riga has a number of times been awarded the title of hipster capital. Although there are signs of hipster culture throughout the city, its epicentre is Miera Street. This is the home of many hip spots: design and fashion stores, cool hairdressing salons, tea houses and vegetarian

cafés. An alternative outlook on life permeates the air, and there are acoustic concerts, poetry readings and lectures in the evenings.

Another unique hipster meeting place is MiiT (10 Lāčplēša Street; miit.lv), which was one of Riga's first "velo cafés" and still continues

this tradition. There's also a centre for motor scooter enthusiasts and those who adhere to the cult of the iconic Italian brand Vespa – Vespa Garazh at 4 Valkas Street (vespas.lv) provides scooter maintenance, a scooter rental service and a Vespa-style bar.

Sooner or later all of Riga's hipster roads lead to the Vest bar (1 Stabu Street; facebook.com/VestRiga), where all the notable celebrities of this particular style gather. Here you can check out

the latest "barber style" haircuts and the newest trends in tattoos. At the same time, enjoy a hearty meal and good brew as well as a fleeting glance at the TV, which regularly screens live sports

broadcasts. Hipsters who are also cultural gourmands often drop by the café of the Kaņepes Culture Centre (15 Skolas Street; www.kanepes.lv).



MARKETS

Rigans have always enjoyed – and succeeded – at trade, both selling and buying. To this day, despite the wide range of supermarkets in Riga, locals still include shopping at the variety of markets that the city offers as part of their daily routine.

Of course, the main market in Riga is the Central Market (7 Nēģu Street; rct.lv). It's one of the largest European city marketplaces and is also unique because of its extraordinary architecture. The cluster of market booths and stands in this area is located right next to five impressive central buildings that were once used as hangars for German Zeppelin airships during the First World War. Riga Central Market is full

of life and very eclectic. Here you can renew your zest for life, yet you may also be slightly disenchanted – whatever the case, it's possible to find some real gems among the junk. When you learn to look with a critical eye and recognise the good stuff, shopping at the Central Market can turn into a real gastronomic adventure. At the same time, you can also have a bit of a feast and savour the local flavours for free. How? Simply by showing an interest and asking for a taste.

A different type of market shopping experience is offered at the farmers' and artisans' market in Kalnciema Quarter (35 Kalnciema Street; kalnciema.lv), which takes place every Saturday

all year round. Although set in the shade of apple trees and against a backdrop of restored wooden buildings, the market's strongest drawcard is the quality offered by the merchants. Here you'll find lots of local, organically grown produce, including some more "exotic" goods, such as melons and watermelons grown in Latvia, and lesser-known treats, for example, a Latvian version of Hong Kong bubble waffles and carrot gelato. Other one-of-a-kind objects can also be found at the Kalnciema Quarter market, from traditional crafts created by local artisans to things with a distinctly contemporary design.





FASHION AND DESIGN

ImageHouse

1

STYLISH SOUVENIRS

Finding a meaningful souvenir is a challenge in any metropolis, especially in this time of oversaturated consumer culture. An even bigger challenge is creating souvenirs that are popular not only among tourists but also among local residents. And yet Riga has managed to do just this!

The "Rīga" t-shirts designed by Miesai have become something of an urban style icon. The logo contains a reference to the large-scale "Rīga" signs on the side of three major roads leading

into Riga, designed in 1980 by artist Valdis Celms. You'll see more than just a couple of locals wearing the popular shirt!

The LNMM Brand Foundation, for its part, is devoted to popularising the Latvian National Museum of Art collection. It regularly creates lines of souvenirs based on reproductions of artwork found in the museum's permanent collection or exhibited in temporary exhibitions. Each souvenir is like a work of art in itself, with its own story and purpose. For example, the clock

whose face is decorated with details from various works of art, or the t-shirts paraphrasing the timeless paintings of Kārlis Padegs, a legendary dandy and outsider of the Latvian art world. The foundation has also created a unique shoe collection inspired by the Latvian modernist Niklāvs Strunke.

If you are looking for more traditional city souvenirs that are stylish and useful at the same time, visit the Riga Tourist Information Center (Ratslaukums 6).

2

ACTIVE LIFESTYLE ACCESSORIES

In Latvia, a rebirth of classical values and a rethinking of design to meet the needs of today's users have come to characterise the manufacture of inventory and accessories for an active lifestyle.

A 20th-century icon is making a comeback in the Latvian capital – the classic Ripo skateboards made by the Sarkanā Zvaigzne moped manufacturer in the 1980s

and 1990s can now be seen on the streets in a more modern and sought-after longboard version. The most notable addition to skateboard culture today, however, is Lokal Boards, a manufacturer of handcrafted skateboards defined by their laconic, contemporary and stylish design that calls to mind the aesthetics of old-school hippie surf culture.

And for the children, Brum Brum has developed a fresh, new design for small balance bikes. A single screw makes assembly and disassembly unbelievably simple and easy, and the unique U-shaped birch frame is made to protect young riders' backs from potholes. The wheels are safe for little fingers as well.

CONTEMPORARY JEWELLERY

Jewellery is a language all its own, and Latvian contemporary jewellery artists have an excellent, refined command of this language. Each of them stands out with a vividly individual style, their sources of inspiration ranging from cultural history and ethnographic elements from around the world to the clean lines and asceticism of the Bauhaus style. Their creations include attractive post-modernist

compositions, historicism and also free interpretations of forms found in nature. No matter whether using precious gems, semi-precious stones, precious metals, ebony, coral, lava rock or amber, Latvian artists display an elegant feeling for material. Although at first glance much of the jewellery resembles miniature sculptures, the design is also always distinctly functional.

The Putti art gallery in Old Riga is a mainstay of the Latvian contemporary jewellery tradition. Established in 2000, it organises powerful, compelling exhibitions and is thus also recognised on the international stage. At Putti you'll find the essence of jewellery created by Latvia's best contemporary jewellery designers.



ETMO

DESIGN AND LIFESTYLE STORES

Just like Latvian design itself, the places where this design is represented are also vibrant and exciting. Riga's galleries, stores and design spaces masterfully combine Latvian identity, which involves a system of cultural codes developed over hundreds of years, with a contemporary feeling for the world.

The design and lifestyle store RIJJA (Tērbatas iela 6/8, riija.lv) is the largest platform for contemporary Latvian design. Here you'll find work by internationally recognised Latvian designers as well as the best from local craftsmen, who continue

the old traditions yet also incorporate modern solutions into their work. The store sells everything from bed linens, towels and free-flowing garments made of refined, washed linen to original furniture, dishes and lighting objects.

The ETMO gallery (Arsenāla iela 7, etmo.lv) also maintains a close relationship with traditional Latvian crafts, emphasising the use of ethnographic motifs in contemporary design. Textiles made in Latvian weavers' studios form a significant part of the wares for sale at ETMO.

Kolekcionārs (Blaumaņa iela 7, kolekcionars.com), for its part, takes a different approach to Latvian design by combining an art café, a store and a parade of Latvian design all in one. The design objects fulfil their true calling here – they are not only displayed for viewing but are actually tangible and usable. This means that lamps made by Latvian designers hang from the ceiling and hold real lightbulbs, spoons clink on the plates, and hot coffee steams in the cups. In addition, the collection is always being added to and changes along with new trends in Latvian design.

LATVIAN CONTEMPORARY FURNITURE DESIGN

Latvian contemporary furniture design is marked by a northern minimalism and functionality, which includes designs that can be configured, modified and combined in various ways to alter their form.

The Mint line of furniture has entered both the Latvian and international markets with a bang. It has been inspired by some of the world's best examples of design as well as by modernist and brutalist architecture. Mint proves that functionality is still able to speak

the language of design and that furniture is not just something chosen to match a room. Its pieces are expressive and self-sufficient in their own right.

Rihards Funts (one of Latvia's most progressive contemporary designers) and the Latvian design studio Rijada also adhere to the idea that only by using existing components and putting them together in different combinations does the new and unusual arise. Rijada's designs are often rooted in the

Latvian aesthetic and old crafts traditions.

One interesting aspect of the best contemporary furniture designed in Latvia is that it looks just as good whether in a living room or a kitchen. In addition, many pieces of children's furniture are designed in order to grow along with the child. A fine example of this is the SO:LO transformable children's object created by Aija Priede-Sietiņa and Daneks Sietiņš of Kukuu and lauded by design enthusiasts.



Mr. Page

CONCEPT BOOKSTORES

Each with its own character and smell, Riga's bookstores are like small, self-sufficient worlds in which the selection on the shelves is curated with the passion of a collector. And, despite the oversaturation of the digital age, their popularity just keeps on growing, thereby confirming that this is truly a time of exciting niche publications.

The concept bookstore Mr. Page (4 Miera Street; facebook.com/mrpagebookstore) adheres to the motto "a bookstore is like

a love letter to all of the great books in the world". The books here have been carefully selected and come from many different publishing houses (both large and small), shops and exhibitions from around the world. Mr. Page's bookshelves carry books about art, popular science, pop culture and lifestyle as well as recent publications dedicated to Instagram and Snapshot, innovative photo albums and new literature from Latvia and abroad.

The owners of NicePlace TELPA

(21a K. Barona Street; niceplace.lv) – book illustrator Zane Ernštreite and linguist Valts Ernštreits – are both very familiar with books and have created a true space for inspiration in their store. Authors and poets show up here regularly as well, perhaps generating ideas for new work right amongst the bookshelves. NicePlace TELPA sells good literature by local authors as well as literature in translation. It also has a variety of wonderfully inspiring stationery and souvenirs made by Latvian designers.

NATURAL COSMETICS BRANDS

At a time when 'healthy lifestyle' has become a mantra, there's also more and more demand for natural cosmetics. And you're sure to find the Latvian brand Madara Cosmetics among the most popular cosmetics concept stores. Madara began as a small, alternative manufacturer

but has since grown into an international company. It uses some of the most powerful natural antioxidants found in forests and woodlands to make its products. Whether it's a rich but gentle foam with yarrow extract or an intense moisturising cream infused with northern

peony and flaxseed antioxidants and hyaluronic acid, Madara harnesses the special healing qualities found in plants that have been growing in this cool, harsh, northern climate for thousands of years.

LATVIAN FASHION BRANDS

Latvian fashion brands are becoming more and more popular in the local market, and they're becoming noticed elsewhere in the world as well.

Mareunrol's was listed as one of the top 100 best new contemporary designers by the prestigious Phaidon publishing house in its 2013 almanac Pattern. In addition to fashion, Mareunrol's has also made a vivid entrance in the fields of scenography, video art and photography. It won the main prize at the International Fashion and Photography Festival in Hyères and was among the ten finalists for the legendary Woolmark Prize in 2016. The

brand has participated in the Paris Men's Fashion Week since 2012.

The Elīna Dobeļe footwear brand designed by architect Elīna Dobeļe is a favourite not only in Latvia and the Baltics but also further afield in Europe and Asia. All of its shoes are handmade, each pair of shoes has a special name, and their design is often inspired by architecture. Perhaps it's no surprise that Dobeļe approaches footwear as if she were creating miniature houses for feet.

Latvian children's fashion has also become quite popular. For

example, child actress Kylie Rogers wore a dress designed by Lazy Francis at the premiere of David Frankel's film Collateral Beauty in New York. And the brand's Silent Circus collection was created with the approval Charlie Chaplin's family.

The luxury brand Aristocrat Kids, whose signature collection consists of fairytale-worthy dresses for girls, can be found in exclusive shopping destinations, including Isetan Shinjuku in Tokyo and Harrods in London, for which it has even created a special collection.

CONCEPT STORES

There is a strong tradition of fashion design in Latvia, and wearing clothing by local designers is a matter of both style and pride for Rigans. Latvian fashion concept stores, each with its own character and style, have also played their part in

popularising local fashion. The largest platform for Latvian fashion design is the Paviljons concept store (Shopping centre Domina, paviljons.com). With its eclectic approach, it's an inspiring address for those who enjoy rapidly changing street fashion as

well as those who prefer classic cuts and designs. In recent years it has also been operating a pop-up store in Berlin, where it acts as an ambassador for Latvian fashion.

Imagehouse (Brīvības iela 40) is the first and largest combined design concept in Riga offering interior design, high & contemporary fashion and a cafe. This concept store breaks the borders between the different design scenes to offer guests a creative shopping experience. Here you can find a unique selection of internationally known Interior fashion brands. You are also very welcome to

enjoy a cup of coffee or glass of wine with our gourmet style starters & desserts.

M50 (Miera iela 17; m50.lv) offers a considerably more democratic approach to Latvian fashion design. Many of the things for sale here are handmade and one-of-a-kind. In addition, many artists have chosen M50 to be the sole representative of their work, so their creations cannot be found

anywhere else in Riga. The newest and most ambitious of Riga's fashion stores is BOLD (www.boldconceptstore.lv), whose goal is to become the biggest platform for exclusive Baltic design. Here you'll find the most exciting names in local design as well as clothing from intriguing designers from the two neighbouring Baltic countries.



Image House

LATVIAN DESIGN IN THE WORLD

Glass, linen and wax – these are three materials that, masterfully interpreted, have allowed Latvian designers to gain international recognition.

Artis Nīmanis, the designer at an&angel, uses a special technique he has developed to give glass a seemingly metal-like appearance. Having taken on the qualities of stainless steel, the glass reflects the surrounding environment, while the inside of the vessels brings to mind copper, silver and even gold. An&angel has won the prestigious Red Dot and German Design awards. Its vessels are also in the collection of the Latvian National Museum of Art.

Textile artist Laima Kaugure and her brand Studio Natural –

which combines tradition, handicraft and unusual, explicitly contemporary design – has caught the eye of Italian fashion master Giorgio Armani. Studio Natural's products have repeatedly been exhibited in the Maison & Objet trade fair for interior design in Paris as well as at design fairs in Japan. The brand specialises in linen home textiles featuring a variety of textures, linen scarves in finely nuanced tones and clothing with the "noble, wrinkled" look so characteristic of linen.

Munio Home started out by designing a line of fine, handmade, soy-wax candles. Their special packaging, made of recycled cardboard, was even recognised by the World Packaging Organisation as the

best packaging in the world. The brand now creates exclusive items for the home that have been designed by Zane Tetere-Šulce, a locally and internationally renowned architect. Its products feature clean lines, and they continue to be hand-made of natural materials by skilled craftsmen: weavers, blacksmiths and potters. Munio Home franchise stores can be found worldwide, and the brand also takes part in the prestigious Maison & Objet and Abitare 100% Project design fairs in Paris and Verona, respectively.

”

Glass, linen and wax – these are three materials that, masterfully interpreted, have allowed Latvian designers to gain international recognition.

”



WAKEBOARDING IN RIGA

The range of water activities available in Riga has grown in the past decade to also include wakeboarding, with wake parks and wakeboarding spots opening up one after the other in the Latvian capital. The Wakeyou cable wake park is located very near the Riga Airport, literally under low-flying aircraft. With several special

structures (a slide, pipe, funbox, half ramp, kickers) for various wakeboarding tricks, specialists in the sport have deemed it one of the best parks in the Baltics. Closest to the city centre are the Riga Wake Lucavsala and Wake 24 cable wake parks. The former is located in the Lucavsala Recreation Park near the Salu Bridge and has equipment for

beginners as well as professionals. In addition, the park offers many other outdoor activities to choose from. But the true adrenaline and active leisure fans will enjoy the multi-functional complex 333. It's located in about 20 min drive away from the city center and is perfect for a day of adrenaline on water.

SAILING

Sailing as a recreational and professional sport has been taking place in Latvian waters for over a century. July is usually the most active month for sailing competitions, when many Latvian sailors take part in international regattas. Competitions, championships and regattas are also held annually on the Daugava River and Ķīšezers Lake in Riga. When larger international regattas are held in the Latvian capital, it is not uncommon to see more than 100 yachts of all

shapes and sizes on the Daugava River in central Riga.

A wide range of sailing and motorised watercraft can be seen in the waters of Riga on a daily basis during the sailing season. It is precisely water transportation that opens the door to experiences that are otherwise hidden to everyday life on dry land: see different views of the buildings along the waterfront, watch construction work in the port, or get close to the large

ships dry-docked in Mīlgravis.

The yacht clubs and boat moorings are also prominent points of city life in Riga. The Andrejosta Yacht Club is located next to the ferry terminal on the right bank of the Daugava River in the city centre, and on summer evenings it even has a touch of the Mediterranean. On the opposite bank is the new City Yacht Club with its ascetic floating houses.



CROSS – COUNTRY SKIS

It is said that there are places where all children are born with downhill skis on their feet. In Riga it is said they're born with cross-country skis. With its ample, flat expanses, Riga seems made for cross-country skiing during the snowy months of the year. Weather permitting, cross-country skiing can be done almost anywhere in Riga. During the winter season, there are also several well-maintained cross-country skiing trails in places like Pārdaugava, Biķernieki Forest and Mežaparks. Many of these trails are free of charge and operate around the clock.

Mežaparks has the longest history of public-access cross-country skiing for Riga city dwellers. Every winter a 2.5-kilometre classic-style ski trail and a 1-kilometre free-style cross-country ski loop is opened near the open-air stage in Mežaparks' recreational park. Riga's longest cross-country ski trail, however, is found in Biķernieki. Although typically used for motor sports and racing, in winter the 4.7-kilometre Biķernieki Track is prepared for both classic and skate skiing and is wide enough to accommodate experienced skiers as well as families with children.

On the left bank of the Daugava River, at the foot of the 79-metre-high Victory Monument, is the 1.25-kilometre Uzvaras Park cross-country track. It remains lighted throughout the night and lets you enjoy skiing while at the same time keeping pace with the pulse of the city. A completely different mood can be experienced on the 3-kilometre ski trail on the grounds of the Viesturi golf club. As you glide through the forest, you might even catch an up-close glimpse of wild animals roaming freely.

GOLF CLUBS

Among European capitals, Riga is unique in that the peaceful, green, wide-open areas suitable for the game of golf are found quite close to the city centre. In the northern part of the city known as Vecmīlgrāvis lies the Ozo Golf Club, which is also included on the list of the world's best golf courses. This very special golf course, with 16 artificial ponds and 50 sand

bunkers, sits on the shores of Ķīšezers Lake, which poses a special challenge to golfers, especially during windy weather.

The smaller, nine-hole Viesturi golf course on the southern side of the city holds the distinction of being the first golf course in Latvia. Here, too, the proximity of water makes for a more exciting game by compelling every player

to hit the ball across a pond. The Viesturi golf course is surrounded by dense forest, so, in addition to a few golfing challenges, players might even see some wild animals up close. Sometimes roe deer and even wild boar can be seen wandering down the forest paths in the early morning or evening hours.

FISHING

Riga has its own very enthusiastic fishing community. Already a local legend, the “eternal fishermen” working right next to the shipping lanes in the Daugava River can be seen in all weather conditions. During the harshest of winters, when the Daugava freezes over, something unique can be observed in the very centre of Riga – the river is peppered with fishermen seated on the ice, immensely patient and armed with an admirable

immunity to the cold. People often joke about how the ice fishermen show up on the river even before the ice has formed. And the toughest of them stubbornly await their catches until the final thaw of spring has set in, when the ice has become dangerously thin and has even begun to recede from the riverbanks.

The real fishing-hole experts, however, are found in the vicinity

of Ķīšezers Lake. They know where to find the best fishing spots – where the pike and perch hide in the reeds and shallows, where the zander’s favourite holes and strong currents are located, and where to find schools of fish that have been pushed by winds from the Baltic Sea into the river and lakes.

ICE-SKATING

In a city where winter – whether harsh or gentle – lasts for four months, ice-skating as a recreational activity is quite popular. During the cold season, there is no lack of places in Riga, indoors or out, to practise your favourite ice-skating figures or

deftly carve figure eights in the ice. When the temperature falls below freezing, many sites on both sides of the Daugava River are transformed into outdoor skating venues. The skatepark in Grīziņkalns is turned into an ice-skating rink, and rinks are

also opened in Uzvaras Park and Sniega Parks (Snow Park) in Mežaparks. Ice-skating rinks are also set up near many schools and in the city centre.

BOATING AND SUP BOARDING

Riga’s extensive waterways – the Daugava River, its bays and tributaries, the twists and turns of the city canal, Baltezers and Ķīšezers lakes – provide a unique opportunity to explore the city in a completely different way. That is, by meditatively gliding across the water on an SUP board or kayak.

Many SUP enthusiasts, such as those at Riga Wake Park and Burusports, organise tours on the city canal, the Daugava River and beyond. The well-

known adventure organisation Luzumpunkts also offers popular boating routes in Riga and its surroundings.

Typically, the kayaking and SUP routes start on the city canal, which runs underneath several small bridges. There, you’ll enjoy the old and modern architecture of Riga, experience the magic of its parks, and touch the rainbows created by the fountains before heading further into the vast waters of the Daugava River. As

you go up against the waves, you’ll appreciate the grandeur of the urban structures, including the major bridges, otherwise rarely experienced from below. Several of the river routes run around the lush greenery of Zaķusala and Lucavsala islands. The most challenging route is to the Riga shipyard, where you can sail under the monstrous hulls of gas tankers, passenger ships or fishing vessels on dry docks and get a look at the huge propellers.



www.RigasLaivas.lv

SKATEBOARDING

Riga's community of "boarders on wheels" is currently divided into two distinct groups of enthusiasts: the classic skateboard group and the longboard group. Skateboarders do their tricks and stunts in the city's skateparks, the most renowned of which is the Grīziņkalns skate park. This park was one of the first of its kind in Riga and gave rise to the

Ghetto Games, the best-known street sports movement in Latvia. Riga's largest indoor skate park is Monsterparks. But currently the most popular skate spot in Latvia – and a cult site of sorts, thanks to the tireless efforts of the internationally acclaimed Latvian skateboarder Madars Apse – is the plaza in front of the National Library of Latvia.

Meanwhile, long boarders use their boards as a fast and convenient form of transport through the streets and sidewalks of the cityscape. The longboard community also holds organised events and rides all year round, but the real virtuosos of this niche prove themselves at downhill races outside of Riga.

TENNIS TRADITIONS

Ever since Riga's Jeļena Ostapenko's sensational victory in the summer of 2017 at the Stade Roland Garros in the French Open finals in Paris, Riga's tennis traditions and local tennis courts have been thrust into the limelight.

Nowadays in Riga and its suburbs, on both banks of the Daugava River, there is a growing number of opportunities to play tennis in

all seasons, both indoors and out. Among the biggest tennis clubs are the two Enri clubs, the Centrālais Tenisa Klubs (Central Tennis Club) and the tennis club owned by Rīgas satiksme (Riga Transport) located in the suburb of Mežaparks. The ACB Tennis Club is located in Mārupe, just outside of Riga.

CYCLING

Many other cycling enthusiasts run cycling shops, workshops, cafés and bicycling movements, thereby supporting an active lifestyle in an urban environment and promoting sports and entertainment for fans of all kinds of cycling. Of these events, the most special is probably Riga Bike Week. During this celebration, the Steel Vintage bicycle ride for road and track bicycles made before 1995 shows off older bicycles, while the Tweed Ride showcases retro bicycles and garb. The event also highlights some of the current trends in urban bicycle culture, such as activities featuring fixed-gear bicycles.

Every day, however, you'll see the most vibrant mix of different kinds of cyclists on the streets of Riga – from athletic cyclists audaciously joining the flows of motorised traffic, to everyday cyclists following special bicycle paths, to urban connoisseurs on the Spīķeri and Ķengarags promenades along the Daugava River. During the warm season, a "hot" route is the Riga-Jūrmala bicycle trail, which follows the railway line outside the city, through the pine forests to the seaside beaches.



An aerial photograph of Riga, Latvia, taken from the left bank of the Daugava River. The image shows a mix of historical architecture, including the Riga Nativity of Christ Orthodox Cathedral with its prominent golden dome, and modern buildings. The city is surrounded by lush green trees, and the sky is a soft blue with some clouds. The title 'UNTRADITIONAL VIEWPOINTS' is overlaid in large, white, sans-serif capital letters.

UNTRADITIONAL VIEWPOINTS

A GLASS LIFT – UP TO THE 26TH-FLOOR BAR AT THE RADISSON BLU HOTEL LATVIJA

Skyline, the bar on the 26th floor of the Radisson Blu Hotel Latvija is possibly the most popular observation platform in all of Riga. The modern panorama lift has glass walls and catapults you upwards along the outside of the building, as if through time and into a completely different

city. Brīvības Street (or Brīvības Boulevard, as this section of the main artery is called) stretches down below like a precisely measured line through the middle of the city. At the height of summer, when the trees are green and full, it seems that a forest has taken over the city. Just

an arm's length away are the five golden domes of the Riga Nativity of Christ Orthodox Cathedral. The Radisson's 26th floor also provides an unusual perspective of the Freedom Monument. Don't forget to also come up here later in the evening, when all of the street lights have been turned on.

OLD AND NEW TOWERS OF RIGA – AS SEEN FROM THE LEFT BANK OF THE DAUGAVA

The skyline of Riga's historical centre, which enjoys UNESCO World Heritage Site status, is best viewed from the left bank of the Daugava River. Its main features include several church and cathedral towers,

the Baroque-style tower of the City Hall (Rātsnams), Riga Castle and the high-rise Latvian Academy of Sciences building. In addition to these classics, there are also a few structures whose architecture does not fit as well

with the historical styles, such as the Ministry of Agriculture building and the Radisson Blu Hotel Latvija built in the Soviet Modernism style. But these buildings are nevertheless a part of the skyline today.

ACADEMY OF SCIENCES VIEWING PLATFORM – A VIEW ACROSS THE MARKET AND TRAINS

The Latvian Academy of Sciences building in Riga is one of the most striking examples of Socialist Realism architecture in Latvia. There is an unmistakable similarity between it and the "Seven Sisters" in Moscow – seven high-rises whose form, in turn, was borrowed from

Western culture, for example, the Manhattan Municipal Building in New York City.

On the 17th floor of the Academy of Sciences building, 65 metres above ground, a viewing platform opens up to a broad view of the city. Perhaps the

most intriguing area to watch is the nearby Central Market. Its iconic architecture – five former zeppelin hangars – form a special visual dialogue with the five arches of the Railway Bridge in the background.

GALLERIA RIGA TERRACE – BETWEEN THE ROOFTOPS AND CHIMNEYS

Take a surreal stroll between the city's rooftops – and enjoy a 360-degree panorama – on the rooftop terrace of the seven-storey Galleria Riga shopping centre. Here it seems that the roofs across the street are just

an arm's length away. And what all can be seen from up here! Square, round and pyramid-shaped towerlets; brick chimneys in various colours; glass-topped stairwells... Come here at different times of the day, and

each time you'll notice something different: a special architectural detail, decorative sculpture or unusual construction.

RIGA FROM THE HIGHEST POINT – THE ZAĶUSALA TELEVISION TOWER

You can't get any higher than this! At 368.5 metres, the Riga Radio and Television Tower, also known as the Zaķusala TV Tower, is not only the highest tower in the Baltic States but also the third highest tower in Europe. From here, you can really get a bird's-eye view of the city.

The viewing platform is located 98 metres above the ground and provides a view of the Latvian capital and all of its suburbs. Here you can see the geographic placement in the Daugava River of the city's lush, green islands, including long, tongue-shaped Zaķusala Island right below your feet.



FIVE BRIDGES – FIVE DIFFERENT LINKS ACROSS THE DAUGAVA

The five bridges of Riga, which link the city centre on the right bank of the Daugava River and the suburbs on the left bank, are significant features of the cityscape. They can be seen from the highest viewing platforms in the city as well as from below (for example, on a boat), and each has its own character and energy. The pylon of the Vanšu (Cable) Bridge is 109 metres high and holds the cables that support the 312-metre span of the bridge. The

railing of the romantic Akmens (Rock) Bridge features wrought-iron ornamentation and eight fancy, cast-iron lanterns set on granite pillars. In the evenings, the five arches of the Dzelzceļa (Railway) Bridge are lighted up in blue and white, reflecting a surreal counterpart in the waters of the Daugava. Salu (Islands) Bridge is the longest bridge across the Daugava within Riga. And, although the orange, multi-pylon Dienvidu (South) Bridge is not

really a part of the city centre, this newest of Riga's bridges can be seen from the middle of Salu Bridge.

The bridges themselves provide wonderful views of the city and the river. Depending on your mood, feel the wind in your face while walking across a bridge, or find shelter from the wind, for example, in the pedestrian tunnel under Salu Bridge.



DAUGAVA PROMENADE – WHERE “THE COUNTRY ENTERS THE CITY” IN ĶENĢARAGS

In the southeastern part of Riga, a landscaped pedestrian and bicycle promenade stretches for over three kilometres along the right bank of the Daugava River. Here you can find something that many other European capitals lack, namely, the proximity of green spaces almost untouched by human hands. Here on the promenade one

can experience both the cyclic character of nature as well as the rapid changes in the urban environment. As you gaze at the wild and untouched banks across the Daugava River on one side, on the other you'll pass a fence surrounding the former Sarkanais kvadrāts (Red Square) rubber factory, established in the 1930s. Today, the fence has become

a sort of open-air street-art gallery. The path features several pedestrian bridges and viewing terraces, including a bird-watching tower. Climb to the top of the tower and look towards central Riga – to the Dienvidu Bridge and the television tower on Zaķusala Island – and you'll easily catch the feeling of nature entering the city and vice versa.

SPĪĶERI PROMENADE – ACROSS FROM ZAĶUSALA ISLAND

The Spīķeri Promenade is a recently opened public outdoor space that has not only helped to regenerate a formerly degraded yet unique part of the city; it has also provided city residents with a wonderful place to take a walk and spend some free time right in the centre of the city. The promenade, which is

connected to the Spīķeri Quarter by a tunnel under the main road, stretches along the banks of the Daugava River across from the television complex on Zaķusala Island. Sit here for a while and watch the light and shadows play on the shimmering waters or wind-whipped waves. The promenade begins where the city

canal enters the Daugava, next to the Railway Bridge, and leads to the foot of the Salu Bridge. There, on the other side of Krasta Street, begins Maskavas Forštate (Moscow Suburb) – another unique district of Riga with a historical charm all its own.

BIBLIOTĒKA N°1 – A RESTAURANT WITH A VIEW OF VĒRMANES GARDEN

At the request of Anna Gertrud Wöhrmann (Anna Ģertrūde Vērmāne), the largest donor to this park funded completely by public donations, various exotic tree species and a rose garden were established in the park. Naturally, a pavilion was built as well. Today, a monument to Wöhrmann stands in the middle of a round bed of roses, guarded

by two sculptures of reclining lions. And the Bibliotēka N°1 restaurant has found a home near where the pavilion used to stand. Because the park is located between some of the city's busiest streets, you can spend a peaceful (or exciting) afternoon people-watching from the restaurant's large windows, capturing some of the park's

atmosphere and magic for yourself. The mood from outside often sneaks into the restaurant as well – a frightened flock of pigeons in the park rising up into the air can make lunch guests put down their forks and pause their conversations for a brief, wonderful moment.

VIEW FROM ROOM 602 AT THE NEIBURGS HOTEL

Sometimes it's much nicer to curl up in front of the window in a comfortable, warm room and watch the storm clouds moving across the sky, the sun reflecting off the red tile roofs and the seagulls circling around. Luckily, just such a scenario is possible in

Room 602 of the Neiburgs hotel. After a day of walking around the city, settle in up here with a glass of wine and enjoy the view of the sunset.

This experience can also be combined with a small tour of

Riga's history. To wit, the first thing you'll notice outside the room's windows is a small globe adorning the roof of the building across the street. If you take a closer look, under the globe is a sign made of forged metal that reads "Museum".

That's because this building belongs to the Museum of the History of Riga and Navigation. But of course, the most prominent feature seen from the room is the stately tower of Riga

Cathedral with its copper roof. After a good night's rest, it's worth visiting the museum and, towards evening, attending a concert in the cathedral featuring its mighty organ. Afterwards, you can still

manage to get back to your room and watch another sunset from the window. After all, no two sunsets are alike.



LEGENDARY RIGANS



Eduards Smilgi's study in the Theater Museum named after him

EDUARDS SMIĻĢIS (1886–1966)

"The more fantastic, the more passionate, the more daring, the better!" said Latvian theatre director and actor Eduards Smilģis (1886–1966), thereby capturing the essence of art. Smilģis, who founded the Daile Theatre in Riga, is considered a reformer of Latvian dramatic art and the most illustrious

personality in the history of 20th-century Latvian theatre. He is a legend, a person who "established his own galaxy". To this day, the moniker "a Smilģis actor" requires no additional comment in local cultural circles, even though most of those worthy of the title are no longer alive.

The Smilģis family property in the Pārdaugava district of Riga (37/39 Eduarda Smilģa Street) is also a significant site in Latvian theatre history. It is the home of the Eduards Smilģis Theatre Museum, which highlights not only the legendary director but also some of the most vivid moments in Latvian theatre.

FRIEDRICH ZANDER (1887–1933)

Friedrich Zander - one of the most eminent inventors in the history of rocketry was born in Riga. The name of rocket designer Friedrich Zander can be found in two other places: in Kislovodsk in Russia, where he departed from this world, and on the moon, where in 1970 a crater was named after him. It was precisely Zander's invention of a jet-propelled engine that runs on liquefied oxygen and petrol that drew humankind closer to space travel and its first steps on the surface of the moon.

One of Zander's greatest passions was researching the fourth planet from our sun, Mars. An

avantgarde and even futuristic inventor, Zander mathematically calculated the trajectory of the flight to Mars while still a student at Riga Polytechnic Institute. He also modelled the complexity of interplanetary travel, focussing on preparations for his own utopian dream - to be among those who set foot on these celestial bodies.

Admittedly, half a century after Zander's death a number of his ideas have actually come to fruition, with no mention of the originator of these ideas. Among these is the idea of "gravity assist", used by the automatic interplanetary station Mariner-10 when orbiting Venus to gain

acceleration for the further journey to Mercury.

The University of Latvia has recently established the Zander Memorial Museum of Space Exploration, located within the university complex. The exhibition features displays on Friedrich Zander himself, space research and the history of astronomy. It also features the largest meteorite collection in the Baltics, old astronomical instruments and books. Meanwhile, the Latvian Academy of Sciences continues its tradition of awarding the Friedrich Zander Award for scientific research in mechanics and astronomy.

MIKHAIL EISENSTEIN (1867–1921) AND SERGEI EISENSTEIN (1898–1948)

Thanks to the surname Eisenstein, Riga entered the world of cinema and architecture. The city was the home to the Russian Empire's most distinguished architect, Mikhail Eisenstein, as well as the birthplace of his son, the notable Soviet film director Sergei Eisenstein.

In his day, the extravagant Jewish architect created true drama in the architecture of Riga by helping bring to it qualities of the avantgarde Art Nouveau style of that era. And drama is in fact the correct word, considering the reaction of the public back then – both wonder and condemnation – regarding the unusual, decorative and

subtly humorous buildings he designed. The best known of these is definitely the building at 10b Elizabetes Street, with its long, pensive mascarons, peacocks and surreal, robotic characters that seem to be enacting a live, architectural play. The façades of several other buildings in Riga "directed" by Mikhail Eisenstein feature similar dramatic figures, and such a concentration of his work can be found nowhere else.

The architect's son inherited this knack for directing, albeit in the world of cinema. Sergei Eisenstein was one of the world's best film directors and revolutionised the technique of film montage. Born

and raised in Riga until the age of 17, Sergei went on to direct Battleship Potemkin (1925), a film about a mutiny on a battleship that is considered probably the finest example of filmmaking ever made. Like a powerful magnet, he has inspired such legends in filmmaking as Jean-Jacques Annaud and Peter Greenaway (who in 2015 came out with Eisenstein in Guanajuato, a film about Eisenstein's time in Mexico) to make pilgrimages to Riga. In all, Eisenstein directed only seven films during his lifetime, but these films began a revolution in filmmaking, proving that cinema is able to express abstract thoughts through the use of specific, concrete images.



Building on Strelnieku iela 4a designed by M. Eisenstein

MIKHAIL TAL (1936–1992)

"The magician from Riga" – this was the nickname of legendary chess player Mikhail Tal, who, in the spring of 1960, used tactics based on intuition and improvisation to topple the rational, academic and seemingly undefeatable Soviet chess idol Mikhail Botvinnik from his throne. Tal was only 24 years old at the time and became the eighth and youngest world champion.

He also changed chess strategy forever. During the highest point in his professional chess playing career – the years between 1968 and 1982 – Tal had a record-breaking 81.18% percentage of wins, achieved in 101 games of chess in master-level tournaments. The chess grandmaster is still a living legend in Riga today.

For example, inspired by Tal, the new Tal Residence features 21st-century architecture that successfully complements the Art Nouveau neighbourhood of the city. And a monument to Tal in Vērmanes Park is the venue for the opening of the city's "chess season". The silver-haired chess enthusiasts and their spectators have become an integral part of summer in the city.

ISAIAH BERLIN (1909–1997)

"I am Isaiah Berlin, and I come from Riga." That is how the British philosopher of Jewish origin – one of the brightest minds of the 20th century, who will be remembered in history primarily for analysing the concept of liberty – usually introduced himself.

Although Berlin spent the first years of his life on Alberta Street together with his contemporary,

the eminent Soviet film producer Sergei Eisenstein, and to his dying day considered himself a Rigan, most of the philosopher's life was spent in Oxford working for Great Britain. Sir Isaiah Berlin was conferred numerous honorary titles, among them a British knighthood.

Isaiah Berlin Day was established in Riga in order to highlight the philosophical ideas of this

distinguished thinker in Latvia. Every year one of Berlin's philosophical topics that is pertinent to a current issue is chosen as a theme. 2014 saw the release of the film Escaping Riga, produced by Dāvis Sīmanis, which tells about the lives of two boys who are neighbours – Isaiah Berlin and Sergei Eisenstein – and their time spent in Riga and beyond.

VERA MUKHINA (1889–1953)

Riga is the birthplace of the renowned Russian sculptor Vera Mukhina. Her best-known work is Worker and Kolkhoz Woman. At a height of 24 metres and weighing 75 tonnes, the sculpture was made for the Soviet Union's pavilion at the 1937 World Fair in Paris. It won a gold medal at the fair and also praise from 20th-century art genius Pablo Picasso. Today the sculpture is exhibited by the entrance to the VDNKh exhibition centre in Moscow.

Even though Mukhina spent most of her life in Soviet Russia, she played an important part in a very significant moment of Latvian history. In 1945, she travelled from Moscow to Riga in order to defend

and protect a symbol of Latvian independence, the Freedom Monument. At the time, the ruling powers of the Latvian SSR were discussing the demolition of the monument, and a monument to Stalin was proposed for the site. Championing the artistic value of the Latvian monument, Mukhina categorically opposed its demolition, and her authority was respected.

The flax and hemp warehouses that once belonged to Mukhina's family still stand in the Moscow District of Riga. Now known as the Spīķeri, the former warehouse quarter is one of the most vivid architectural reminders of the city's industrial past. A memorial

museum has been established at 23/25 Turgeņeva Street, where Mukhina and her family lived until she was three years old. The 19th-century, Empire-style, wooden house was typical of Riga's Russian merchants at the time.

The graņonka drinking glass designed by Mukhina also became an icon of the Soviet era. At its peak of popularity, 600 million of the glasses were produced every year, and they could be bought at every household goods store. After several years of decline, the glasses are now becoming highly valued as a retro item and a fine example of design, so don't be surprised to find them at bars and cafés in Riga.

A number of addresses in Riga are associated with Wagner, and the Latvian National Opera and Ballet offers an excursion titled "Wagner: a legend of Riga", which reveals the Riga that Wagner knew – the places where the composer lived, worked and visited. Thus, these few pages of the famous composer's biography

reveal certain details about the city: places where Wagner lived; the building where, in addition to his duties as the chief conductor at the Riga City Theatre, he spent time composing Rienzi; and the Riga City Theatre itself, which left an indelible impression on him. In its pursuit of Wagner's steps, the tour route also highlights

the work of sculptor August Volz, whose portrait relief of the composer is located in the current opera and ballet building, and a sculpture of Wagner by Latvian sculptor Gleb Panteleyev, located by the entrance to the New Hall.

RICHARD WAGNER (1813–1883)

"Riga has been described to me as the most wonderful place on earth, particularly when it comes to earning money..." So wrote world-famous German composer and opera reformer Richard Wagner in a letter to his wife, Minna, shortly before

heading to Riga. However, due to unpaid loans and ongoing legal proceedings against the composer, the time he spent in Riga was brief – only from 1837 to 1839. And yet, these two years were steeped in creativity. Wagner composed the first

two acts of his opera Rienzi in Riga. This opera, which brought him worldwide fame, was only performed once in Riga – in 1878 – but it returned to the city in 2014 with a production led by Danish director Kirsten Dehlholm.



From Wagner's opera Tannhäuser in Latvian National Opera and Ballet

VIJA CELMIŅŠ (1938)

Although the world-famous Latvian-American artist Vija Celmiņš spent only the first six years of her life in Riga, where she was born, Latvia is always mentioned alongside her name in prestigious museum exhibitions.

The main focus of Celmiņš' works is the relationship between the surface of an image and the depth of space. She is interested in creating various settings using the options that different graphic art techniques provide. Her mezzotint ocean looks like a soft, flowing mass with a foggy, wispy focus, while her drypoint ocean

takes on a precise and hard ripple effect due to its fine lines.

Every piece of graphic art created by Celmiņš takes several months to complete. Using graphite on paper, she conjures up an infinitely deep world, be it the starry heavens, a desert or an ocean. Collectors are prepared to wait practically a whole lifetime and pay big money for her work. In 2012, Celmiņš' drawing Untitled #8 sold for 1,142,500 dollars at Christie's auction house in New York, bringing the artist an all-time record price.

In 2014, Celmiņš "returned" to Riga with a sweeping retrospective titled Dubultā realitāte (Double Reality) at the Riga Bourse Art Museum. The same year saw the release by the Juris Podnieks Studio of the documentary film Teritorija Vija Celmiņš (Vija Celmiņš: Reinterpreted), filmed when visiting the artist in New York and Long Island.

In 2017, Celmiņš donated two works of graphic art to the Latvian National Museum of Art: Untitled (Ocean mezzotint, 2016) and Untitled (Ocean drypoint, 2016).

GUNĀRS BIRKERTS (1925–2017)

Riga – the birthplace of well-known Latvian-American architect Gunārs Birkerts – has forged a place for itself on the global map of architecture. Birkerts, whom fate led away from Latvia in 1943 and later to Germany and the United States, always thought of himself as belonging to the school of Nordic modernism. From 1968 to 1981, he realised one of the most innovative projects of his day, the Federal Reserve Bank in Minneapolis, Minnesota – a project that brought him global renown. He also designed the much-admired Corning Museum of Glass in New York State and the University of Michigan Law Library Addition.

But Birkerts always considered his most important lifetime achievement to be the National Library of Latvia, also referred to as the Castle of Light (2014). Like Latvian folklore and folk songs, which Birkerts' parents had studied extensively, the building is saturated with symbolism and metaphor. In 2000, the National Library of Latvia project won the American Architecture Award established by the Chicago Athenaeum Museum of Architecture and Design.



Interior of the Latvian National Library.

OPERA AND BALLET STARS



Latvian National Opera and Ballet.

The grand Latvian National Opera and Ballet building in the very centre of Riga, built in a Hellenised Classicism style, is like a rare oyster that has allowed genuine pearls to grow concealed in its mantle – natural jewels that the city can be proud of in a global context. A number of world-renowned classical music, opera and ballet stage greats are associated with Riga and Latvia. These are talents that have been highly acclaimed by the world's best opera houses, from the Royal Opera in London's Covent Garden to the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

In the mid-20th century the world was to discover famous Latvian ballet dancer Māris Liepa (1936–1989), a member of the Moscow Bolshoi Theatre troupe who was awarded the Marius Petipa Prize and presented with the Vaslav Nijinsky Prize by the Paris Academy of Dance. Mikhail Baryshnikov (1948), a world-famous principal ballet dancer with the American Ballet Theatre and New York City Ballet, also spent his childhood in Riga.

A number of prominent contemporary opera stars have begun their careers on the stage of the Latvian Opera House. For example, Latvian mezzo-soprano Elīna Garanča (1976), who is no stranger to the stage of the Metropolitan Opera House nor that of Covent Garden. Also Kristīne Opolais (1979), who is one of the world's new opera stars and regularly performs at the world's most prestigious opera houses, such as the Metropolitan Opera House, the Vienna State Opera, the Berlin State Opera and the Teatro alla Scala in Milan, working with famous conductors such as Daniel Barenboim, Daniel Harding and Louis Langrée. Internationally acclaimed Latvian tenor Aleksandrs Antonenko (1975) has also gained recognition performing at the Metropolitan Opera House and other venues.

Music critics have included two contemporary Latvian conductors among the world's best conductors: Mariss Jansons (1943) and Andris Nelsons (1978). In 2016, Jansons was nominated for a Grammy Award, the world's most prestigious music award, for best orchestral performance; Nelsons, for his part, won the Grammy for best orchestral performance in that same year. Jansons is currently the chief conductor at the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, while Nelsons is the music director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

