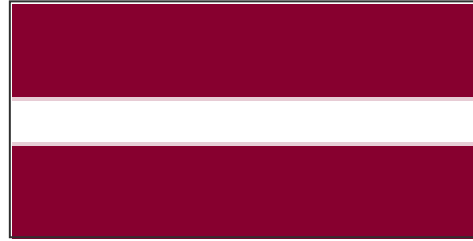
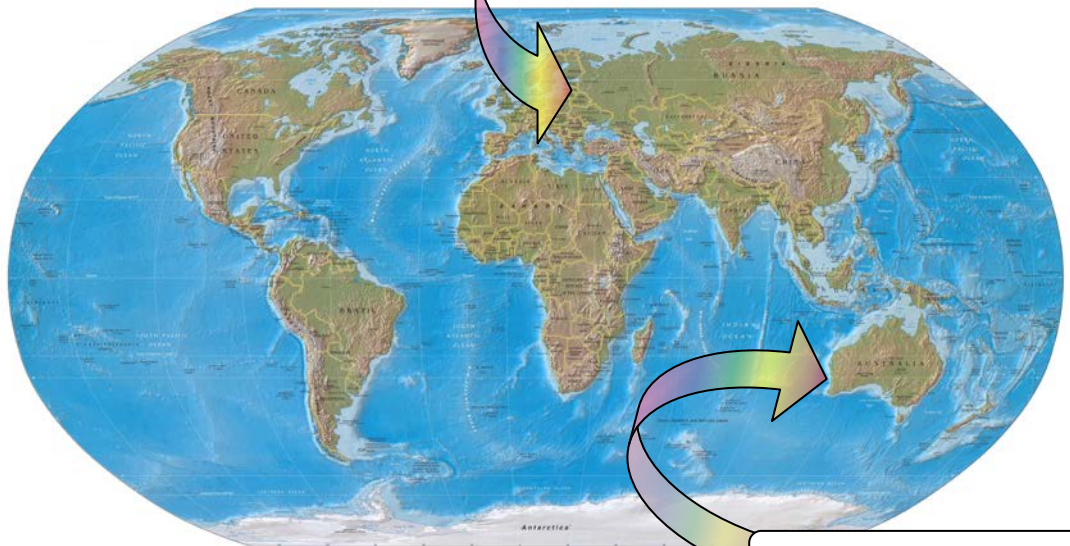


LATVIA



We were there



Now we are here

FACTS:

- **Full name:** Republic of Latvia
- **Population:** 2.3 million (UN, 2005)
- **Capital:** Riga
- **Area:** 64,589 sq km (24,938 sq miles)
- **Major languages:** Latvian, Russian
- **Major religion:** Christianity
- **Life expectancy:** 66 years (men), 77 years (women) (UN)
- **Monetary unit:** 1 lats = 100 santims
- **Main exports:** Timber and wood products, fish and fish products
- **GNI per capita:** US \$6,760 (World Bank, 2006)
- **Internet domain:** .lv
- **International dialing code:** + 371

Latvian Community in WA

Latvian Association of Australia and New Zealand

146 Riverview Ave., Sth Guilford WA 6055 Ph: 08 9277 6884

Latvian Centre Pty Ltd

Cleaver Tce, Belmont WA 6104 Ph: 9277 6830

Overview of cultural groups

Latvia's population has been multiethnic for centuries, though the demographics shifted dramatically in the twentieth century due to the World Wars, the emigration and removal of Baltic Germans, the Holocaust, and occupation by the Soviet Union.

Latvians and Livonians, the indigenous peoples of Latvia, now form about 60% of the population; 28% of the inhabitants are Russian. Approximately 56% of the ethnic Russians living in Latvia are citizens of Latvia. In 2005 there were even fewer Latvians than in 1989, though their share of the population was larger 1,357,099 - 58.8% of the inhabitants.

Language/dialects spoken

The official language of Latvia is Latvian, which belongs to the Baltic language group of the Indo-European language family. Another notable language of Latvia is the nearly extinct Livonian language of Baltic-Finnic subbranch of Uralic language family, which enjoys protection by law; Latgalian language (a dialect of Latvian) is also protected by Latvian law as historical variation of Latvian language. Russian is by far the most widespread minority language.

Other languages used are: Belarusian, Ukrainian, Polish, and Lithuanian.

Dietary preferences

Although Latvian cuisine has traditionally been based on agricultural produce, meat also features prominently in the Latvian diet. People living along the 500 km of Latvian coastline have always been involved in fishing, and fish has been an integral part of their diet. Fish are also caught inland, but these freshwater species are considered more of delicacies, in the same way as crayfish are.

Women were the cooks in traditional Latvian homes and responsible for feeding the household three times a day. Longer days in summer meant that people worked longer, and thus ate four meals a day. At first, food was prepared in clay pots which were placed in the fire or on the open hearth. Over time, cauldrons hung above the hearth and bread ovens for baking leavened bread became popular.

Latvian foods are characteristically bland, **without a use of strong spices**, and have a reasonably high fat content. As a result of the territory of Latvia being ruled by the German aristocracy for seven centuries, Latvian peasants learned to use new ingredients and to prepare food in different ways. For example, one of the most popular Latvian foods today - **sautéed sauerkraut** - is a tradition inherited from the Germans.

On an average day Latvians usually eat a moderate breakfast before going to work. People drink a morning coffee or tea and eat sandwiches with cheese, sausage, tomatoes or cucumber. For many Latvians the day is not imaginable without a drink of milk, which is usually drunk at breakfast. A boiled egg or omelette is also a popular breakfast dish for many.

Lunch in Latvia is eaten between midday and three. People usually eat a hot lunch, which consists of a type of **fried meat** (pork chops, rissoles, sautéed fillet, steak, chicken) or **fish** (salmon, trout, cod, pilchard), **potatoes** (boiled, fried, or mashed), **boiled rice** or **buckwheat**, and a **fresh salad**. Sour cream is usually eaten as an accompaniment, or a sauce using cream

as a base. Some people also eat soup as an entrée, which in Latvia is usually made with pork (or can also be made with a fish stock), adding onions and carrots. **Meat soups** may also contain potatoes, beets, sauerkraut, beans,

peas, sorrel or fresh nettles. Many different kind of desserts are eaten. These usually are made of dairy products and fruit, with gelatin or potato starch added.

At lunch time Latvians drink fruit juices, *kefirs* (cultured milk), milk, tea or coffee.

On arriving home from work, a second lunch, or supper, is made. This is eaten around six or seven in the evening. At this time there is a large diversity in the Latvian home - supper can consist of soup, various salads, or can be a hot meal (similar to lunch), or a more traditional food, for example, a **milk-based soup**. However, many people who do not wish to spend a lot of time preparing food after work buy ready-made or frozen foods, or eat a number of sandwiches or buns together with a cup of tea. Latvians also enjoy eating pastries and other bakery products, and pizza has also become a popular and easy meal to prepare.

Religion/spirituality/observances

The largest religion is Christianity, although only 7% of populations attend religious services regularly. The largest groups in 2006 are: Roman Catholic 500,000; Lutheran 450,000; Eastern Orthodox 350,000. Old Believers, Baptists, Pentecostals, Seventh-Day Adventists, Jews, and Methodists are also represented.

Lutheranism was much stronger before the Soviet occupation, when the majority was Lutheran, but since then Lutheranism in all the Baltic States has declined to a much greater extent than has Roman Catholicism. The country's Orthodox Christians belong to the Latvian Orthodox Church, a semi-autonomous body within the Russian Orthodox Church.

According to the most recent Eurobarometer Poll 2005, 37% of Latvian citizens responded that "they believe there is a god", whereas 49% answered that "they believe there is some sort of spirit or life force" and 10% that "they do not believe there is any sort of spirit, god, or life force".

Public Holidays:

Date	English Name	Local Name
May 1	Convocation of the Constitutional Assembly of the Republic of Latvia	
May 4	Declaration of independence	Neatkarības deklarācijas pasludināšanas diena
May 14	Mother's Day	
June 4	Summerdays	
June 23	Midsummer Eve	Līgo Diena
June 24	Midsummer	Jāņi
November 18	Proclamation of the Republic of Latvia	Latvijas Republikas proklamēšanas diena

Customs/traditions

Latvian culture is strongly influenced by folklore and by the people's attachment to their land. Christian rituals often are intermingled with ancient customs, and pagan geometric symbols remain evident in the applied arts. Ancient folksongs, or *dainas*, that were first collected and published in the mid-nineteenth century, most notably by Krisjanis Barons, are a cultural treasure. In 1888 the great epic poem *Lacplēsis* (Bear Slayer) by Andrejs Pumpurs was

published, marking the dawn of modern Latvian literature. Janis Rainis (1865-1929) usually tops the list of Latvia's greatest writers. One of the most prominent figures in Latvian literature today is the poet Imants Ziedonis, who also has established a fund to promote the development of Latvian culture.

Latvia has a number of theatres (mostly in Riga), an opera, a symphony orchestra, and a permanent circus. Riga's Dome Cathedral houses one of the largest and most famous organs in the world. The works of many prominent Latvian artists are displayed at the National Fine Arts Museum and at the many art galleries in Riga. Other museums include the Museum of History and Navigation and the Museum of Natural History. There are 168 public libraries in the capital. Books and periodicals are published in Latvian and in other languages.

Recreational activities

Latvia has a long basketball tradition and basketball is sometimes mentioned as a national sport. Latvia won the first European championship in 1935 and hosted the second championship in 1937.

In Soviet period, Latvian men's basketball team, ASK Rīga was dominant in the Soviet League in 1950s and early 1960s, winning several Soviet league championships and three European Champion's Cups, in 1958, 1959 and 1960.

Latvia returned to international competition as an independent country in 1992. The qualifiers of 1992 Summer Olympics were the first tournament for Latvia's team.

The most successful tournament for Latvia was 2001 European Championships when the Latvian team finished in the 8th place.

In EuroBasket Women 2007 national women's basketball team reached semifinals, best results by first national basketball team after gaining independence from Soviet Union. Latvia eventually lost and reached 4th place, losing to Belarus.

Environment

Located on the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea, Latvia lies on the East European Plain. It consists of fertile, low-lying plains, largely covered by forest, mostly pines, and the highest point being the Gaiziņkalns at 311.6m. Common species of wildlife in Latvia include deer, wild boar, fox, beaver and wolves. The major rivers include the Daugava, the Lielupe, the Gauja, and the Salaca. An inlet of the Baltic Sea, the shallow Gulf of Riga is situated in the northwest of the country. Latvia's coastline extends for 531 kilometers. Its neighbors include Estonia to the north 267 kilometers of common border, Lithuania to the south 453 kilometers, Belarus to the southeast 141 kilometers, and Russia to the east 217 kilometers. Prior to World War II, Latvia bordered eastern Poland, but as a result of boundary changes by the Soviet Union, this part of Poland was attached to Belarus. Latvia lost a part of the former Abrene District (2% of its territory) to Russia in the 1940s.

The Latvian climate is humid, continental and temperate owing to the maritime influence of the Baltic Sea. Summers are warm and the weather in spring and autumn fairly mild, however, the winters can be extreme due to the northern location. Rainfall is common throughout the year with the heaviest rainfall falling in August. During severe spells of winter weather in Latvia is dominated by cold winds from the interior of Russia and severe snowfalls are common.

Your Notes and Comments: