

Association "Workshop of Solutions"

Compass for Living in Latvia for Students – Third-country Nationals



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COMPASS FOR LIVING IN LATVIA



for Students – Third-country Nationals

Dear Students!

This guide will be an assistant to you – the students, who live outside the European Union and plan to study in Latvia or have already arrived and need answers to the questions regarding studies and living in Latvia.

Alongside the resources in English and Russian language, this guide includes also those in Latvian (for example, links to the news portals), because many foreign students whom we met here in Latvia expressed a wish to learn Latvian.

The current guide was prepared with assistance and support of foreign students who already study in Latvia, the university staff, state institutions and representatives of non-governmental institutions.

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Wishing you a wealth of experience and success in your studies in Latvia,

Yours,
“Workshop of Solutions”
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What should I know about Latvia?

Latvia is located in the North East of Europe, on the coast of the Baltic Sea. It is one of the three Baltic States and a member state of the European Union.

The territory of Latvia is 64 589 km² and it is inhabited by approximately 2 million people (59.2% Latvians and 40.8% - Russians, Belarussians, Ukrainians, Poles, Lithuanians, Jews and other nationalities).

The history of independent Latvia began on November 18, 1918, after the fall of the Russian Empire in the First World War. The independence of Latvia lasted only until the Second World War, because in 1940 the country was occupied by the Soviet Army and in 1941 Latvia was annexed by the Soviet Union.

The people of Latvia have suffered three mass deportations between the years 1941 and 1949. Only after 50 years of occupation, in 1991, Latvia along with other Baltic countries – Estonia and Lithuania – regained independence. In 2004 Latvia acceded to the NATO and the European Union.

Latvians mostly are somewhat cautious in their attitude to foreigners, because they still do not feel like a confident majority in their own country. They are less open to multicultural contacts than other nations. It can be explained with a sense of insecurity and the consequences of the USSR migration policy in the ethnic composition of the Latvian society.

The official state language in Latvia is the **Latvian language**.

Many people can also speak foreign languages – mostly Russian, English, German.

Information about Latvia – facts, photographs, travel information and a lot more can be found at www.li.lv. Download video files and presentations, find out the news and facts about the Latvian culture, history, society and nature.

The students from countries outside the EU about Latvia:

Small, proud, educated, perfect, a way, Baltic, warmhearted, friendly, beautiful, traditional, expensive, interesting, a new country, but with a good potential, peaceful, marvellous, cool, lovely, changes, Riga, other motherland, cold, fun, recreation, damp, small, party, Jurmala, bridge, rain.



What documents do I need to receive a residence permit?

The list of the documents can be conveniently obtained on the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (OCMA) website, use Entry and Residence Wizard <http://www.pmlp.gov.lv/en/pakalpojumi/iecelosana.html>
Information is available in Latvian, English and Russian language.

Who submits the documents and where should they be submitted?

According to the general practice, a person must submit the documents for obtaining the residence permit at the Republic of Latvia consulate or embassy. If you require assistance with submission of documents to OCMA, ask the institution of higher education (accredited educational institution), which has enrolled you as its student in Latvia.

Residence permit:

- OCMA is obliged to respond to the residence permit application within 30 days from the day of submission.
- The refusal to grant the residence permit may be contested by yourself or the Latvian university of your choice, by filing a complaint to the Head of OCMA in 30 days counting from the day the refusal was issued. The reasons of refusal to grant you the residence permit must be clearly stated by OCMA – for example, provision of untruthful information, insufficient funds for subsistence, insufficient proof of your attachment to the country of your origin, etc. Negative reply to this complaint by the Head of OCMA can be further contested in court. OCMA draws attention to the fact that only the applications in Latvian language are accepted.
- After receiving a positive decision regarding issue of temporary residence permit, the applicant must receive a single entry visa for entering Latvia in the diplomatic or consular mission.
- Within 7 days after your arrival you must attend OCMA in person to receive the residence permit. You will be then asked to show a valid health insurance policy covering health care expenses in the Republic of Latvia.

- The residence permit for studies in an accredited higher education institution in Latvia is valid for 1 year. If your studies are going to be longer, the residence permit will have to be obtained repeatedly before the validity of the current permit has run out.
- You should be aware that the issued residence permit may be revoked, if: you submitted false information about yourself, worked without a work permit, you have quit your studies (and thereby lost the status of a student, for which the permit was issued), tax debts, etc. Among the reasons for revoking the residence permit there is also a continuous stay outside Latvia for more than 3 months.

The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs reminds:

- If you have decided to continue your studies in Latvia, the new residence permit must be applied for in good time – not later than 30 days before the expiry date of your current permit! Don't forget to check also the validity of your personal identification document, e.g. passport!
- Do not forget to declare your address of residence! It can be done in any division of OCMA by filling in a form (<http://www.pmlp.gov.lv/en/pakalpojumi/dzivesvieta.html>) and paying the state tax of 3 LVL.
- If any item of the personal information you submitted when applying for the residence permit has changed, please, inform OCMA no later than in 3 days' time!
- If you plan to work, consult the specialists regarding the taxes that you will have to pay and remember that the main goal of your current residence in Latvia is studies!

Can my family visit me in Latvia? What about parents and friends?

If you have obtained a residence permit for the time of your studies in Latvia, your spouse, under-age children and people whose guardian you are, have a right to apply for a residence permit for the same period of time.

Other family members and friends can only visit you with a tourist visa, which they must obtain themselves. The maximum period of their stay according to this visa may not exceed 90 days within half a year, counting from the first day of arrival.

Additional sources of information:

- Republic of Latvia Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs:
<http://www.pmlp.gov.lv> (provides information also in Russian and English).
Tel. (+371) 67588675, e-mail: pmlp@pmlp.gov.lv
- Republic of Latvia State Border Guard:
<http://www.rs.gov.lv> (information mostly in Latvian).
Tel. (+371) 67075616, e-mail: kanceleja@rs.gov.lv; robezsardze@rs.gov.lv
- Republic of Latvia Ministry of Foreign Affairs:
<http://www.mfa.gov.lv> (information in English and Russian).
Tel. (+371) 67016201, e-mail: mfa.cha@mfa.gov.lv



What do I have to know as a student?

How can I change a university in Latvia if I have an agreement with my current university?

All the responsibility for your stay in Latvia as a national of a country outside the EU, has been assumed by your university. After you have concluded an agreement with your university and obtained the residence permit, the change of the university may be complicated. Your current university has invested resources and efforts to settle the formalities of your studies; therefore it counts on you remaining its student until the expiry of the agreement. Therefore your current university can be rather reluctant to support you in the formalities connected with switching to another university.

If you terminate the study agreement, your university is obliged to inform the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs in 3 days' time. It will result in cancelling of your residence permit.

However, if you have found a study programme, which is more compatible with your interests and have firmly decided to change the university, you must:

1) Carefully read the study agreement and act according to its terms regarding breach of the contract.

2) If the terms seem unfair, you must lodge an objection with your current university. If the disagreement cannot be solved by mutual negotiations, you can seek help at the Consumer Rights' Protection Centre (CRPC), where consultations can be obtained in Latvian, Russian and English.

<http://www.ptac.gov.lv> , tel.: +371 65452554, e-mail: ptac@ptac.gov.lv

More about unfair contract terms: <http://www.ptac.gov.lv/page/267>

3) You must reach the agreement with the new university of your choice about the studies and conclude the study agreement. Then you must apply for a new residence permit, based on the new study agreement.

Is it possible to obtain a scholarship?

The state of Latvia does not provide scholarships for foreign students. The only exception is the student exchange programmes between two universities (one of Latvia and another in your country), which sometimes provide full or partial coverage of study and/or residence costs. The information about the programmes available to you can be obtained in the Ministry of

Education of your country. Students coming from outside the EU can look for support at private charitable foundations.

Students from the former USSR countries have received support from the Open Society Institute established by George Soros. The Institute has established separate foundations in numerous countries – if your country has one, its staff will inform you of the available scholarships. For further reference, please, see www.soros.org

Universities also are striving to attract funds from private foundations to support students from abroad. It may be useful to consult the website of your chosen university. You will find the links to the universities' websites at www.aiknc.lv/en/list.php

How to find out whether the university and the programme of your choice are accredited?

The information about the accreditation and / or licensing of the university and the study programme of your choice can be obtained at Higher Education Quality Evaluation Centre Ltd." (HEQEC), <http://www.aiknc.lv> (information in Latvian and English), e-mail: aiknc@aiknc.lv, tel: +371 67213870

Is there a risk that my diploma may not be recognised?

In Latvia you may receive a diploma that is recognised by the state and/or your higher education institution. Only those diplomas are internationally recognised that have been accepted by the state. However, if your employer is a private company, it may employ a person whose diploma has been recognised only by the university. If your diploma is recognised by the Republic of Latvia, you can receive a confirmation of its validity and translation of credits practically in any country of the world. However, the institutions of your country may refuse to review the diploma that has been recognised only by your higher education institution and not the Latvian state.

To receive a diploma recognised by the Republic of Latvia, both the institution of higher education and the study programme of your choice must be accredited.

You can receive a diploma acknowledged by the university of your choice, if this university is accredited, but the study programme has been only licensed. Licensing is the first step on the programme's way to accreditation, - possibly by the time your studies are finished, the programme will be accredited.

- **What is a licence?** The licence is the right issued by the state to enroll and educate students.
- **What is accreditation?** Accreditation is the state guarantee confirming the quality of the studies (from this follows the right of the university to issue diplomas recognised by the state).

If neither the university nor the study programme have been accredited, the diploma thereof is invalid. If you study in an extension or a branch of a university, you must make sure that it, too, has been accredited.

The list of the accredited institutions of higher education, as well as accredited or licensed study programmes is available at **Higher Education Quality Evaluation Centre home page:** www.aiknc.lv (information in Latvian and English).

Where can I find out about the procedure of academic recognition in other countries?

Information about the academic recognition of a foreign country's (including Latvia) education documents can be obtained in your national information centre for academic recognition (ENIC: European Network of Information Centres in the European Region / NARIC: National

Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union) - www.enic-naric.net. Countries, which do not have such centres, usually provide this information through their Ministries of Education. Before you leave Latvia upon conclusion of your studies, please, check with the foreign affairs department of your university whether for the recognition of the diploma in your country you need to certify its validity in Latvia.

The validity is certified by the Republic of Latvia Ministry of Foreign Affairs Consular Department (Elizabetes iela 57, tel. 8000 5905, <http://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/service/>), upon submission of a letter from Republic of Latvia Ministry of Science and Education, confirming that the university is accredited and including the name and surname of its rector.

How can I find out about the recognition of the professional qualification I have received in Latvia by another member state of the EU?

You may obtain this recognition if the particular profession is regulated by the EU member state of your choice (it could be so even if that same profession is not regulated in Latvia). The list of professions regulated by the European Commission can be found at http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/qualifications/regprof/index.cfm?newLang=en

Please contact also the information centre of that respective country http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/qualifications/contactpoints/index.htm

Which higher education institutions have students from countries outside the EU?

Usually the statistics about the students for each year is compiled and published on the Ministry of Education and Science website (in Latvian only): <http://izm.izm.gov.lv/registri-statistika.html>

Just to have an idea, the data of the study year 2009/2010:

- **University of Latvia** – Sri Lanka 20, Georgia 17, Syria 12, Pakistan 7, Lebanon 6, Japan 3, Russia 2, India 2, Armenia 1, Mauritius 2, Thailand 1, Nepal 1, Morocco 1
- **Riga Technical University** – Uzbekistan 7, Syria 5, Nigeria 4, Kyrgyzstan 4, Turkey 3, Nepal 3, Israel 3, South Korea 3, Azerbaijan 3, Tajikistan 3, USA 2, Brazil 2, India 2, Lebanon 2, Pakistan 1, China 1, Armenia 1, Australia 1, Bangladesh 1, Russia 1.
- **Riga Stradiņš University** – Sri Lanka 22, Israel 4, USA 2, Canada 2, India 1, Russia 1, Nigeria 1.
- **Riga Graduate School of Law** – Georgia 8, Cosovo 2, Kyrgyzstan 1, Russia 1, Albania 1, Uzbekistan 1, USA 1, Australia 1, Ukraine 1.
- **RISEBA** – Russia 18, Ukraine 4, Belarus 2, Armenia 1, Georgia 1, Uzbekistan 1, Kyrgyzstan 1.
- **Baltic International Academy** – Russia 86, Georgia 63, Belarus 20, Uzbekistan 18, Ukraine 18, Kazakhstan 9, Azerbaijan 6, Israel 5, Moldova 3, Armenia 2, Turkmenistan 1.
- **Graduate School of Information Systems Management** – Ukraine 187, Russia 28, Belarus 11, Bangladesh 5, Mongolia 3, Georgia 2, Uzbekistan 1, Cote d'Ivoire 1.
- **Transport and Telecommunication Institute** – Russia 17, Belarus 7, Ukraine 3, Nigeria 2, Tajikistan 1, Uzbekistan 1
- **„Turība” School of Business Administration** – Belarus 4, Bangladesh 2, Azerbaijan 1, Canada 1, Russia 1, China 1, Pakistan 1, Turkey 1.
- **Riga Aviation Institute** – Russia 179, Armenia 8, Georgia 6, Belarus 1



What to do if I fall a victim of a crime?

If you have encountered fraud, hooliganism, robbery or other crimes directed at yourself, call the police on tel. **112** or **02** as soon as possible.

The home page of the State Police - www.vp.gov.lv (in Latvian and English).

If a police official has treated you unfairly or transgressed police authority, you must report to the Internal Security Bureau of State police.

Contact information: www.vp.gov.lv/structure/view.php?id=57#&darb=32

When do I need legal counsel?

If you have become a victim or a culprit, if you want to establish an enterprise, to settle a dispute with a third party or to solve other legal issues, you may require the services of a lawyer. A lawyer is best to be found through recommendation, but if it is not possible, the list of lawyers/solicitors can be found on the website of the Latvian Council of Sworn Advocates:

www.advokatura.lv (basic information in English available),

Tel: (+371) 67358487, e-mail: adv-pad@latnet.lv

Additionally, it is advisable to check the home pages of law firms, to clarify their specialisation and their ability to communicate in a foreign language.

Currently the foreigners with temporary residence permit are not entitled to state-funded legal assistance provided in civil cases by Legal Aid Administration (www.jpa.gov.lv). If you are charged with a criminal offence, you, just like any person, are entitled to attorney counsel regardless of your citizenship. If you cannot afford it, the state must provide this service free of charge.

In Latvia legal assistance and representation in court (except the criminal cases) are also provided by other types of lawyers – legal consultants, law firms, etc. However, you need to be particularly careful when checking their qualifications, reputation, education.



What rules of conduct must I follow?

Laws and rules that must be observed by students:

- Smoking is prohibited within 10 m from the entrances of institutions of national and local government, as well as in bars and cafes, parks, at the public transport stops.
- Sale of alcoholic drinks is prohibited in all the territory of Latvia from 22:00 to 8:00 o'clock.
- It is prohibited to be in the state of heavy intoxication in public places, carry open bottles or cans of alcoholic drinks and drink them in public places.
- There is a penalty for relieving oneself in places not designated for this purpose!
- Drugs are legally prohibited in Latvia. Possessing, carrying and using the drugs can turn out to be a criminal offence

What to do if I am not satisfied with the decision or actions of an official and/or a public institution?

Every person has a right to appeal a decision or actions of an official or an institution at a higher instance and, ultimately, the court of law. Since the documentation must be prepared in the official language – Latvian - most likely you will require the assistance of a lawyer, the Ombudsman or, alternatively, an NGO specialised in protection of specific rights.

The Ombudsman is an official elected by the Parliament, independent in its actions and governed only by law. Ombudsman's mission is encouragement of the protection of human rights and promotion of a legal and expedient State authority observing the principle of good administration. Any person may submit a question, application or complaint to the Ombudsman regarding these issues. The address: Baznīcas iela 25, Rīga, LV-1010, tel. 67686768, e-mail: tiesibsargs@tiesibsargs.lv, www.tiesibsargs.lv (information in Latvian, English and Russian).

Latvian Centre for Human Rights ((LCHR) is an independent non-governmental organisation specialising in human rights education, research on human rights and inter-ethnic relations, promotion of the dialogue in society. One of the LCHR directions of work is fight against discrimination.

LCHR provides legal and other consultations and informative support in case of hate crimes, and accepts reports on hate crime incidents. Tel. (+371) 67039290, e-mail: office@humanrights.org.lv www.humanrights.org.lv (information in Latvian, English and Russian).



May I work?

The right to become a paid employee

If a student has obtained a residence permit for studies at a Latvian university, he or she may work 20 hours a week during the study period and 40 hours a week during the holidays (study breaks), if a work permit has been obtained.

The Immigration Law stipulates that a foreigner needs a work permit if he or she wishes to enter into work relations and concludes an employment contract or any other type of contract that presumes work (including that of a board member of a company or a member of an executive institution), or becomes a self-employed person. It is true also in case of the students who have received a residence permit.

The work permit to a full-time student from a country outside the EU is issued only if the employment contract stipulates less than 20 hours of work per week (OCMA determines this by the employment contract signed by the student), or if he or she is self-employed and the planned period of stay in Latvia is not shorter than one year.

The work permit is issued by OCMA (without confirming the work invitation by employer in a branch of OCMA) corresponding to the validity period of the residence permit. The holder of the work permit is entitled to work with any employer (the work permit is not limited to a particular employer).

Labour market conditions

Latvia currently has a high level of unemployment and it protects its labour market. Most professions, especially those in the services sector, require the knowledge of the official state language (Latvian).

Concluding the employment contract

A wealth of information regarding employment contracts, documents and consultations is available at www.zinisavastiesibas.lv/info_103.htm (in Latvian).

Regarding the labour rights we recommend to consult the State Labour Inspectorate of Latvia, www.vdi.gov.lv/lv (in Latvian), Tel. (+371) 67186522, 67186523.

Anonymous hotline (+371) 67312167, e-mail: vdi@vdi.gov.lv

Establishing an enterprise

Citizens of foreign countries are permitted to establish enterprises in Latvia. Entrepreneurial activities are regulated by the Republic of Latvia Law of Commerce.

In Latvian: www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=5490

In English: www.ur.gov.lv/eng/regulative-enactments.html

The steps of establishing an enterprise – decision on choosing the type of entrepreneurial activity – foundation meeting – registration of the enterprise (limited liability company) – opening of a bank account – registration at the State Revenue Service.

Foundation of an enterprise must be registered at the Register of Enterprises (RE). All the documents for submission must be prepared in the Latvian language. Detailed information about establishment of an enterprise is available on the website of RE:

In Latvian: www.ur.gov.lv/registri.html

In Russian: www.ur.gov.lv/rus/komersanti.html

In English: www.ur.gov.lv/eng/registries.html

Tel: (+371) 67031703, E-mail: info@ur.gov.lv

Taxes

If you are an employee, you must make sure that all the taxes are paid by your employer.

A self-employed person is individually responsible for paying taxes and must register with the State Revenue Service (SRS) www.vid.gov.lv/default.aspx?hl=2

The informative telephones of SRS: 1898 or 67001898, toll-free hotline: 80009070.

Status of a self-employed

A self-employed person is engaged in economic activity generating a turnover up to 10 000 LVL per year. The economic activity of this scale is not registered in the Register of Enterprises, only with the State Revenue Service. It is registered with the SRS on the basis of an agreement with a customer/contracting authority on provision of a service. This agreement must be registered with the SRS.

www.vid.gov.lv (in Latvian, English and Russian).

The SRS accepts applications and reports only in the state language (Latvian). Registered enterprises and self-employed persons may declare their income and submit the reports electronically. A self-employed person may provide such services as translation, IT consultations, etc, to a variety of clients, issuing invoices for the services provided.



Where to live?

The safest option is at the outset to stay at the dormitories of your university or in the absence of such - to follow the recommendations of the university of your choice. If you wish to rent an apartment or a room, please read the recommendations first:

www.zinisavastiesibas.lv/info_102.htm

Some of the biggest and most trustworthy real estate companies are:

Latio <http://www.latio.lv>

Arco Real Estate www.arcoreal.lv

Rentinriga www.rentinriga.lv

Oberhaus www.ober-haus.lv

Balsts www.balsts.lv

Please remember, that you must declare your place of residence at the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (OCMA) no later than in 30 days after you move in your new home or change to a new residence. Please read more at www.pmlp.gov.lv/en

Universities strongly recommend not changing your place of residence in the first two weeks after your arrival – just to avoid misunderstandings in communication with the university and OCMA!



Where should I turn in case of emergency?

Emergency telephone numbers:

Rescue service - **112**

Fire fighters – **01; 112**

Police – **02; 112**

Ambulance – **03; 112**

Failure in the gas supply system – **04; 112**

Traffic accidents – **67086422**

If you require more information, please seek assistance at your university. If you are in Latvia, you can call the public inquiry telephone numbers **1188** or **1189** (paid service).

What to do in a situation of crisis?

If you require assistance of a psychologist or a consultation of a social worker, you can receive support at Family Crisis Centre „Milgrāvis”, Ezera iela 21, e-mail: k.milgravis@gmail.com tel. (+371) 67012515, www.krize.lv (in Latvian and English).

Crisis centre “Skalbes” support 24 hour crisis hotline: 67222922 (Lattelecom landline) and mobile tel. 27722292 (Bite).

Address: Kungu iela 34, Riga, www.skalbes.lv (in Latvian, Russian and English).



Where can I find help in case of illness / injury?

Health care guaranteed by the state of Latvia is available only to the foreigners with a permanent residence permit in Latvia.

If you apply for a short-term visa or a long-term visa, you must submit a health insurance policy valid in the territory of Republic of Latvia and other countries, members of the Schengen Agreement. Your health insurance policy must cover health care expenses in the Republic of Latvia, including expenses of return of the policy holder to the home country in case of a serious illness

Regulations of health insurance for foreign persons to obtain the residence permit

Your health insurance policy must cover the expenses at least of the following health care services:

- emergency medical assistance;
- hospital treatment in case of a condition critical to life and health;
- transportation to the nearest medical institution;
- transportation to the home country in case of serious illness or death.

The minimum liability limit of the insurance indicated in the policy during the term of insurance must not be lower than the limit set by the legislation – 30 000 EUR in case of a short-term visa or 30 000 LVL when applying for a long-term visa, the long-term visa valid also as a short-term visa, or a residence permit.

The validity term of the policy must not be shorter than the expected period of stay in the Republic of Latvia or the Republic of Latvia and one or more other countries – members of the Schengen Agreement.

After obtaining the residence permit, it is recommended to purchase an additional health insurance policy also to provide for illness, because medical services in Latvia are very expensive. Individual health insurance policies for one year to foreigners are offered by the companies **If** - www.if.lv (in Latvian, Russian and English)) and **AON** www.aonstudentinsurance.com. The policy covers both outpatient and hospital health care services. The price of the policy is approximately 130 LVL (185 EUR) or more, depending on the services it covers.

Attention! Carry your health insurance policy with you at all times!

How to call the ambulance?

The emergency ambulance must be called in case of sudden illness or injury, if the situation is life-threatening. Call **03** or **112**. To ensure timely and adequate assistance, you must give very precise and detailed answers to the operator's questions. Depending on your information, the operator will send a medical team to treat the patient or instruct you what to do if the doctor's assistance is not necessary.

Assistance in Russian and English is provided by the following private medical institutions:

Medicīnas sabiedrība „ARS” – Skolas iela 5, tel. (+371) 67201006; (+371) 67201007; (+371) 67201003 (home visits), www.ars-med.lv

Veselības centrs 4 – Kr.Barona iela 117, tel. (+371) 67847120, www.vc4.lv

If you can speak Russian, most likely you will be able to talk with medical personal in state medical institutions and private practices, as well.



How to get from point A to point B in Riga?

Public transport services in Riga are provided by „**Rīgas satiksme**” – it offers tram, trolleybus and bus services. Choose the mode of transportation and find the routes on the website: www.rigassatiksme.lv (in Latvian, English and Russian).

Full-time students in Riga can apply for a 50% discount on the public transport fares. The information about applying for the discount can be obtained at your university or by calling „Rīgas satiksme” enquiries, tel. **8000 1919**.

Transport tickets are sold in press kiosks *Narvessen* and *Plus Punkts*, and ticket machines. You can also buy the ticket from the driver of the public transport vehicle, but it will cost more.

There are private services of minibus and taxi companies available

What sightseeing and travel opportunities do I have?

During vacations explore Latvia – its bigger cities (Daugavpils, Liepāja, Jelgava, Ventspils), the seaside resort Jūrmala or charming small towns (Cēsis, Sigulda, Talsi, Kuldīga), walk along the Baltic Sea coast, spend some time by Latgale region’s countless lakes, roam the nature trails or visit old manors or castles (www.pilis.lv). Use the Tourist information offices or the Internet to choose the most attractive and affordable vacation in Latvia.

The places where to stay in countryside can be found in www.laukucelotajs.lv

We particularly recommend www.anothertravelguide.com - here you will find some less usual destinations in Riga, Liepāja, and the rest of Latvia.

Check also www.citariga.lv

Travelling in Latvia is most convenient by bus, because the bus route network covers most of Latvia’s territory – for routes and fares see www.autoosta.lv (telephone inquiry No **90000009** – paid service). Alternately, take a train www.ldz.lv (telephone inquiry No **1181** – paid service).

If you have a Schengen visa, you can spend a longer holiday in Europe – **Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Malta, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Greece, Italy, Iceland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Finland, Spain, Switzerland, Germany and Sweden.**

However, the Schengen visa does not include the United Kingdom and Ireland – if you come from a country outside the EU, separate visas for these countries will be necessary.

International bus services from Riga to many East and West European countries are provided by private companies, such as *Ecolines, Eurolines* and *Nordeka*.

Check the routes and schedules at www.autoosta.lv (for telephone inquiries **90000009** – paid service 0.25 LVL a minute). For ticket reservation call **90001111** (0.36 LVL/min), or send e-mail: autoosta@autoosta.lv.

The information can also be obtained on the websites of the bus companies: www.ecolines.lv, www.eurolines.lv, www.nordeka.lv

Additional useful travel information can be found at:

www.liveriga.com

www.riga-airport.com

www.icelo.lv

www.tours.lv

www.celotajs.lv

www.travellatvia.lv



How can I get involved in social activities?

Volunteer work

Latvia has several organisations, which welcome help of the volunteers and provide support necessary for work. By volunteering you will gain experience, find new contacts, test your strength in the spheres of interest to you, make friends and spend time usefully.

The Internet portal for volunteer work www.brivpratigais.lv (in Latvian) offers the information on employers – NGOs, organisers of cultural and sports events, health care institutions. There you also can enter the information on the work you would like to do in your spare time.

EU programme “Youth in Action”

The programme established within European Union “Youth in Action” offers the volunteer work opportunities to students from the following regions outside EU: Southeast Europe, East Europe and Caucasus, Mediterranean and other countries, that have entered into cooperation agreements with the EU countries in such spheres as youth, participation in youth projects, including opportunities for voluntary work. www.jaunatne.gov.lv (in Latvian, English and Russian).

Erasmus Student Network in Latvia

Erasmus Student Network is an organisation of the European students. It works for the benefit of students, organises intercultural cooperation. ESN is a volunteer organisation based on the principle „student-to-student”. ESN-Rīga is a branch of this network in Latvia, and it is looking for the opportunities to involve in its social activities also the students that come from the countries outside the EU. Contacts: buddy@lu.lv , www.esn.lv (ESN Riga website providing also the information on the events organised by ESN).

Students’ Organisations

Each university in Latvia has a **Students’ Self-Government** – Studentu pašpārvalde - (the bigger universities may even have separate organisations at each faculty), which accepts students regardless of their nationality. The aims of the Students’ Self-Governments may slightly vary from one university to another, but usually they are: to protect and represent the interests of all

students in academic, material, cultural and social matters at the university as well as at other institutions. This organisation is also an intermediary between the student and the university administration. You can find the Students' Self-Government of your university through the administration. The information is also provided by the Student Union of Latvia:
www.lsa.lv/studejoso-pasparvaldes.html

Student unions delegate their representatives to **the Student Union of Latvia - Latvijas Studentu apvienība** www.lsa.lv (in Latvian), http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Student_Union_of_Latvia which protects the interests of students (including solutions of international students' problems) at the level of government.

Contacts: **The Student Union of Latvia**

Address: Dzirnavu iela 42-11, Rīga, LV-1010, Tel: +371 67216061, e-mail: lsa@lsa.lv

Philanthropy

There are foundations and associations in Latvia that promote philanthropy, help the socially disadvantaged people. The bigger hospitals also have established foundations to gather resources for improvement of services and help the patients who need specific support. The most popular philanthropical foundation in Latvia is **Ziedot.lv** (www.ziedot.lv). On the website of the foundation you can choose the project you wish to support, and the foundation will provide its donors with the reports on development of the project and on other supporters.

You are welcome to the charity shop "**Otra elpa**" – "Second Breath", where you can donate the clothes, books and other things that you do not use anymore. Browse the bookshelf of the shop – there are books in different languages!

Address: Marijas iela 13, 2nd floor, Tel. (+371) 67287172, www.otraelpa.lv

Associations of National Cultures

There are numerous associations whose goal is to preserve and foster the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities living in Latvia

- They are united in **Ita Kozakēviča Latvian Association of National Cultures' Associations**. The main goals are preservation and strengthening of the ancestral heritage; building harmonious intercultural relationship; promotion of dialogue, integration and tolerance ideas; recognition and development of national identity, consolidation of people.

The following associations are members of this organisation: Belarusian, Ukrainian, Russian, Armenian, Tartar, Bashkir, Moldavian, Azerbaijani, Uzbek, Lebanese, Jewish and Georgian.

Tel.: (+371) 26848862, (+371) 27024786, e-mail: ankol@mailbox.riga.lv

<http://lnkba.wordpress.com/2008/11/11/itas-kozakevicas-latvijas-nacionalo-kulturas-biedribu-asociacija/>

- **AfroLatvian Association (AfroLat)**

An NGO actively promoting tolerance, opposing racism and advocating the intercultural dialogue.

Tel.: (+371) 29243992 ; e-mail: africalv@hotmail.com, www.afrolat.lv

- **Arabic Culture Center**

The association has been established to promote social integration of Arabs in Latvia and the European Union, as well as to strengthen social and cultural ties of Latvian and Arab people.

In Latvian: <http://bakc.lv/lat/parmums.php>, in English: <http://bakc.lv/en/aboutus.php>

Tel. (+371 67213693), (+371) 26588961, email: info@bakc.lv

Civic society organisations

Overall there are 10 000 associations and foundations representing almost every sphere of life – philanthropy, youth, social assistance, human rights, etc. Almost 100 of these organisations, which focus on promotion of public interests, are represented by the association **Civic Alliance of Latvia** (Latvijas Pilsoniskā alianse - eLPA). It is also an NGO resource centre for NGOs in Riga. On eLPA website you can find a database of NGOs (in Latvian), as well as news about the NGO sector (in Russian and English).

Tel.: (+371) 67846464, e-mail: alianse@nvo.lv
www.nvo.lv (in Latvian, English and Russian).

In the sphere of fighting the corruption the most recognised is the Transparency International Latvian chapter – Society for openness “**Delna**”.

www.delna.lv (in Latvian, English and Russian).

Development cooperation organisations

Numerous Latvian organisations implement projects abroad and help to share Latvia’s experience with countries outside the EU. These organisations can be found in **Latvian Platform for Development Cooperation** (Latvijas Platformā attīstības sadarbībai - LAPAS). Here you can find information about NGOs cooperating with such countries as Moldova, Georgia, Belarus, India, African countries etc.

www.lapas.lv (in Latvian, English and Russian).
Tel.: (+371) 67846469, e-mail: info@lapas.lv

Religious organisations

Latvia is a **multiconfessional** country. Reformation in the territory of Latvia and Riga began already in 1521, and before World War 2 the Protestant Lutheran church was seen as a dominant church in this country. However, throughout its history, Latvia has been an attractive destination for various rulers and political regimes. One part of Latvia has for a long period been under the rule of Poland, another – of Sweden, it has also belonged to the Russian Empire, and until the 20th century it was also ruled by the Germans. Historically, **three large Christian confessions have been established in Latvia: Lutheran, Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox churches**. There are also Old Believer communities, mostly in the East of Latvia.

Approximately 100 years ago **Baptists** introduced their faith in the Latvian society.

There are a few **Muslim** and several **Jewish** congregations.

There are also a number of **Eastern religions** represented in Latvia as well as Asian cultural centres and societies, as well as numerous religious movements and organisations.

- Information about the **Orthodox congregations**:

www.pravoslavie.lv (in Latvian and Russian).

- Information about the **Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia** www.lelb.lv/en and its congregations: www.lelb.lv (in Latvian and English)

- Information about the **Roman Catholic Church** and its congregations (interactive map): www.katolis.lv

- Information about the **Baptist** congregations www2.lbds.lv (only in Latvian).
- Information about the **Jewish** religious congregations and their activities can be found in the Council of Jewish Community in Latvia (in Riga, Skolas iela 6), www.jews.lv
- The **Muslim** congregations in Latvia have been registered in Riga and Ventspils. The Muslim community has a Sunday school, it organises religious festivals and prayers. There are two largest congregations in Riga:
 - Riga City Muslim Congregation IMAN, Brīvības iela 104, Tel.: (+371) 26883284.
 - Riga City Muslim Congregation, Lielvārdes iela 103, Tel.: (+371) 29139400.
- There is an **Anglican** congregation and a church with services in English. Anglikāņu 2, LV-1050. More information – www.anglicanriga.lv (in Latvian and English).

How to establish an association or a foundation?

Citizens of foreign countries are allowed to establish their own associations and foundations. This process is regulated by the Law on Associations and Foundations

In Latvian: www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=81050

In English: www.ur.gov.lv/eng/regulativeenactments.html

The main steps of establishing the foundation: general meeting, registration at the Register of Enterprises, opening of a bank account, registration at the State Revenue Service.

Detailed information is provided on the Register of Enterprises website.

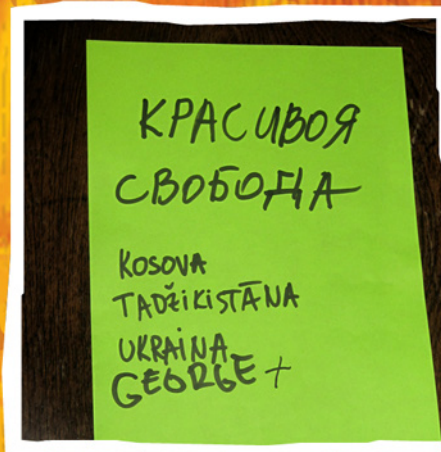
In Latvian: www.ur.gov.lv/biedribas.html

In Russian: www.ur.gov.lv/rus/organizaciji.html

In English: www.ur.gov.lv/eng/organizations.html

The association is allowed to carry out economic activities (to provide services, products) in order to support the association, and to have employees, including foreign students who have received work permits, if they do not work more than 20 hours per week.

Associations may express the official opinion regarding the draft laws that are being prepared in the ministries and the parliament of Latvia.



Weather, holidays, recreation and shopping

Weather conditions in Latvia are rather inconsistent, a rain or snow may interrupt your outdoor recreation plans.

General information:

Latvian summers are sunny and warm, average temperature is +19° C, the hottest summer months are July and August. On a very hot day temperature can reach +30° C.

Spring and autumn weather may be rather capricious. It may be rather cool, average temperature about +10° C in the daytime.

In winter there is usually snow from December until March, the average temperature -6° C below 0. The coolest month of winter is January. Temperatures in winter can sometimes fall to -20° C below 0

On national holidays and festivals entire Latvia is celebrating.

Old traditional festivals are related to the cycle of the sun through the year: for example, the Midsummer Night – the evening of June 23 and the following night – is celebrated in the countryside with bonfires, singing, dancing, local cheese and beer.

Easter, like Christmas, is a Christian festivity, but it is also celebrated by painting eggs, having egg fights and swinging in swings to avoid gnat bites in summer.

More information about the holiday events: www.kultura.lv

National holidays:

- January 1 – New Year;
- March/April (according to the Church calendar) – Easter;
- May 1 – Labour Day;
- May 4 – a Declaration of the Restoration of Independence of the Republic of Latvia;
- June 23-24 Līgo evening and Jāņi (Midsummer);
- November 18 – The Proclamation of the Republic of Latvia;
- December 23-26 – Christmas;
- December 31 – New Year's Eve

If you wish to see the current **cultural events in Riga** and find opportunities for recreation, visit www.rigathisweek.lv and www.liveriga.com

Restaurants, cafes and bars are usually open from 10:00 to 22:00 from Sunday to Thursday, but on Fridays and Saturdays they stay open until 24:00 or through the night.

**The foreign students recommend:
the clubs and bars friendliest to foreigners:**

- Studio 69, Tērbatas 73, <http://info.studio69.lv/>
- Godvil, Brīvības 214 b, www.godvil.lv
- Colonnade, Dzirnavu 57, www.colonnade.lv
- Essential, Skolas 2, www.essential.lv
- Crystal Club, Lāčplēša 52/54, www.crystalclub.lv
- bārs Cuba Cafe, Jauniela 15, www.cubacafe.lv
- La Belle Epoque (more known as the French Bar, a place for foreign students), Mazā Monētu iela (Old Town)
- Amber Night, Elizabetes 55
- Brazilian bar Caipirinha Bar, Jauniela 19 (Old Town)
- Pulkvedim neviens neraksta (for short: Pulkvedis), Peldu iela 26/28 (Old Town), www.pulkvedis.lv
- Paldies Dievam piektdiena ir klāt, 11. Novembra krastmala 9 (Old Town), www.piektdiena.lv

...and the friendliest cafés:

- Mojo Cafe, Pils ielā 7 (Old Town)
- Riga Technical University Cafe, Kaļķu iela 1 (Old Town)
- Double Coffee, www.doublecoffee.lv
- Costa Coffee, www.coffeeneration.lv

Food delivery services:

- www.indexcafe.lv
- www.e-pica.lv

In rainy or snowy weather it is nice to seek shelter in **movie theatres** or **museums**.

More information:

- www.forumcinemas.lv
- www.cinamonkino.lv
- www.multikino.lv
- www.muzeji.lv, tel.: (+371) 26029527, e-mail: sandra.mackevica@inbox.lv

Supermarkets and large shopping centres usually work from 8:00 to 22:00 without holidays.

The most popular shopping centres:

- Spice www.spice.lv
- Stockmann www.stockmann.lv
- Origo www.origo.lv
- Galerija Centrs www.galerijacentrs.lv
- Olympia www.olympia.lv
- Domina Shopping www.domina-shopping.lv
- Mols www.mols.lv
- Sky and more www.skyandmore.lv
- Alfa www.alfaparks.lv
- Riga Plaza www.rigaplaza.lv



Multimedia portals

The most popular communication portals and social networks:

- **Social network** www.facebook.com

This network is very popular in Latvia and it is used by more than 80 million people worldwide being available in many languages. The portal contains a group named CompassLV – a place where to share experience and make friends.

<http://www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=140630259339738#!/CompassLV>

- **Communication portal** www.draugiem.lv

This social network was started in 2004 in Latvia. The meaning of its name is „For Friends“. It is the first and most popular of social networks in Latvia. Registration by invitation only. The portal is available in Latvian, Russian, English, German, etc.

- **Social network** www.one.lv

The largest online social network for the Russian speaking people of Latvia. Available in Latvian and Russian.

- **Alternative communication portal** www.orb.lv

Internet radio, file exchange, photo/video galleries, discussions, blogs, chat, email – all in one. Registration by invitation only. Available in Latvian and Russian.

The most popular Internet advertisement portals:

- **Classifieds** www.ss.lv

Here you can enter or find advertisements of many types, for example, job vacancies, apartments for rent, selling and buying of household appliances, clothes, etc. Available in Latvian and Russian.

- **Advertisements and classifieds** www.reklama.lv

Advertisements of various types, including cars, real estate, etc. Free private and commercial advertisements. Available in Latvian and Russian.

- **Real estate advertisements** www.city24.lv

A place for private or commercial ads for rent, sale or purchase of houses, flats, etc. Available in Latvian, Russian and English.

- **Job vacancy portal** www.cv.lv

Vacancies, courses, studies, internships, CV database, etc. Available in Latvian, Russian and English.

- **Opportunities for internship and practice** www.prakse.lv

Work and internship vacancies, study opportunities, career tips. This is a popular portal among young people in Latvia who want to gain an insight into the job market. Available in Latvian.

The most popular news portals:

- **Informative portal** www.tvnet.lv

Latvian and world news, picture galleries, video and audio recordings, discussions. Available in Latvian and Russian.

- **News portal** www.apollo.lv

Latvian and world news – economics, sports, politics, entertainment, lifestyle – fashion, relationships, etc. Available in Latvian.

- **News portal** www.novonews.lv

The latest news in Russian.

- **News portal** www.delfi.lv

The most popular news portal in Latvia. Topical daily news, information about entertainment and events, etc. Available in Latvian and Russian.

- **Inquiry service** www.1188.lv

Information service of Latvia - information on transportation, internet map, TV programs, weather forecast, entertainment, etc. Available in Latvian, Russian and English.

Other:

- **Business portal** www.db.lv

Business journal. News and archives are grouped by business spheres, a tool of news search. Available in Latvian and Russian.

- **Finance vortal** www.financenet.lv

News, comments, opinions, financial market surveys. Available in Latvian.

- **Public policy portal** www.politika.lv

Information and analysis to promote deeper understanding of Latvian political processes and a forum for discussions, publications of research. A useful academic resource. Available in Latvian and English.

- **Tolerance portal** www.dialogi.lv

Publications about NGO, students' and specialists' activities related to integration and intercultural relations. A library on resources related to tolerance and intercultural dialogue. Available in Latvian and Russian.

- **Literature and culture portal** www.orbita.lv

Available in Russian.

- **Portal of Latvian culture** www.kultura.lv

Music, art, theatre, dance, films, books, concerts, plays, exhibitions, events, news, major personalities in culture, and projects. Available in Latvian, Russian and English.

Guides:

- **Riga This Week** www.rigathisweek.lv

Riga city guide. Sightseeing, dining, lodging and the calendar of events in Riga. Available in English.

- **In Your Pocket** www.inyourpocket.com

Riga city guide in English – culture events, hotels, nightclubs, tourism information about other cities of Latvia.

- **Riga Out There** www.rigaoutthere.com

A tourism portal and city guide in English.

- **Riga Tourism home page** <http://www.liveriga.com>

Riga City Council tourist information in Latvian, English, Russian and other languages.

- **Anothertravelguide** www.anothertravelguide.com

An Internet magazine for independent travellers. Destinations all over the world, but, choosing „Latvia” from the menu, you will find unusual routes to enjoy and surprise you in Riga and Latvia. Available in Latvian, Russian and English.

- **Other Riga - Cita Riga** www.citariga.lv

A tourist information portal, which introduces the „authentic” Riga, its districts, suburbs and history. Available in Latvian, Russian, English and German.