



**INTERNATIONAL
SCHOOL
OF LATVIA**

**Parent Teacher Organization
Newcomer Handbook**



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Message from the ISL Parent Teacher Organization (PTO)

This guide was generated by the PTO. The information compiled here is from the recommendations and experiences of parents/families in the ISL community. By no means is this guide considered to be a complete picture of resources in Latvia, but rather to serve as a starting point for new families.

The hope is that through continued feedback and additional information from ISL families, this handbook will become more comprehensive and grow to contain more recommendations, advice, and suggestions based on real-life experiences when moving to Latvia. The PTO looks forward to hearing about your experiences and suggestions for the guide. Please contact the PTO at pto@isl.edu.lv with any additions and/or questions to the guide. You can also join our facebook group:



Parent Teacher Organization @ ISL

Thank you!

PTO

Where to live in Latvia

There are quite a few options for housing in Riga/Jurmala and the surrounding areas. A few things to keep in mind when considering a location to live:

- Where will my work be located – there is commuting traffic into and out of Riga
- ISL school building is located in Pinki which is between Riga and Jurmala
- Will you drive your children to school or they will need to take school bus
- Does your family prefer urban living (Riga) or smaller town, beach community living
- Do you want a house or an apartment?

There are real estate websites and agents who can help you locate and look at potential homes. There are also relocation companies which help you find a place to live in addition to helping you find other services you might need. Some helpful websites:

www.city24.lv

www.ss.lv

www.balticsothebysrealty.com

www.rentinriga.lv

www.rentapartmentinriga.lv

www.latio.lv

www.arcoreal.lv

www.ober-haus.lv

www.incity.lv

Living in Riga

Riga is divided up into neighborhoods: Old Town, the quiet center (where most of the embassies are located), the center, outer areas of center (not generally expat areas), Mezaparks (about 15 minutes northeast of the city), Kipsala (a small island on the left bank of the Daugava river and a short distance from the center), Marupe (a suburb of Riga situated midway to the airport) and Jurmala, a long island 20 km from the center, Pinki (closest location to school, in between Riga and Jurmala).

It can be confusing and difficult to know what part of town would be best for your family. It is useful to have a real estate agent or someone who can help guide you through the parts of town and find what you require in a home. Price and size of apartments can vary across these different parts of Riga. Please talk to the ISL Bus Coordinator for ISL bus stops in Riga and Jurmala. A good relocation company, agent or housing guide can help you know what questions to ask. Knowing previous utility costs (heating fuel, electric, water) is important because it gets cold in Latvia and in some buildings, the heating costs may be very high—it's good to know ahead of time.

Living in Riga proper offers an urban living environment. The pros and cons will be different for each family. There is more traffic in the city, but there is also loads of stuff to do—many restaurants, movies, concerts, shopping, museums, etc. There are also suburbs of Riga which would offer an environment with less traffic and less of the city feel.

Living in Jurmala

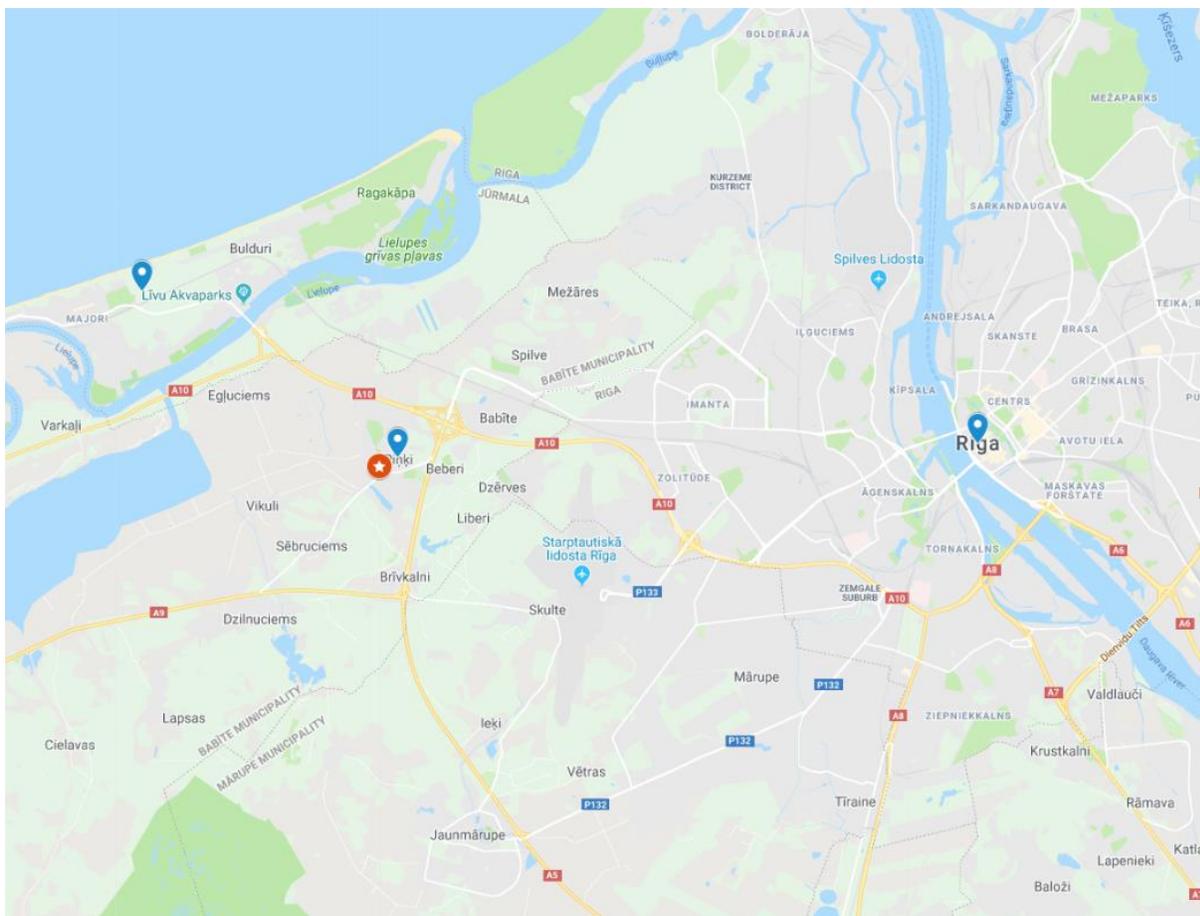
Jurmala is a beach community with a more relaxed atmosphere than Riga. It is important to remember that in the summer months, Jurmala is packed with crowds of vacationers. It can be helpful to talk to a real estate agent familiar with the Jurmala area.

Jurmala has both apartments and houses available for rent in varying stages of restoration. Because Jurmala is a vacation destination for many people in the summer months, the season in which you are looking for a home may affect the rent amount. There are houses in Jurmala that are rented for just the summer months at very high costs. If you are interested in living in Jurmala, don't be discouraged by the vacation rental prices. Landlords who want year round tenants should have more reasonable rental rates.

Living in Pinki area

Babīte Municipality (Latvian: Babītes novads) is a municipality in Latvia. The municipality was formed in 2009 when Babīte parish and Sala parish merged with the administrative centre becoming Piņķi.

Piņķi is a village in Babīte municipality, Latvia. Piņķi had 3,434 residents as of 2014. Pinki is the closest area to the school. [Saliēna](#) is very family friendly place to live with lots of expatriates. You can rent houses and/or apartments in Pinki/Saliēna, both are walking distance from the school. Your children will be able to get to school on bikes during good weather.



What to do on arrival

Mobile phones and Phone cards

In many of the shopping centers mobile phone service providers have shops where you can get a phone and sign up for service (BITE, Tele 2, LMT, etc.)

Immigration and Personal Code (Personas kods)

If you need to acquire a temporary residence permit, this is done through the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (www.pmlp.gov.lv/en/). Additional advice may be obtained from your embassy.

A personal code is an identification code you receive after registering with the Latvian government through immigration (not for diplomat families). Your personal code will be needed whenever you fill out documents: open a bank account, get an insurance contract, file a power of attorney, access health services etc.

There are Offices of Citizenship and Migration Affairs throughout Latvia. Contact details for the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs:

<http://www.pmlp.gov.lv/en/home/contacts/pmlp-divisions/>

Registering your vehicle

The Road Traffic Safety Office (CSDD) is the place you go to register and have a technical inspection for a vehicle (done once a year). The CSDD website (<https://www.csdd.lv/en/>) does have an English translation and specifies the time frames for registering a vehicle. There are CSDD locations throughout Latvia.

Important!

The minimal allowed tread depth for summer tires is 1,6 mm and for winter tires - 4 mm.

The use of winter tires is compulsory in the period from 1 December till 1 March.

The use of studded tires is allowed in the period from 1 October till 30 April. If you travel outside Latvia, please find out in advance the local rules on studded tires. It is not allowed to keep on summer tires throughout or use studded tires in summer.

Jurmala Pass

During the period from 1 April 1 to 30 September, entering the administrative territory of Jūrmala requires the purchase of a one-time entry pass for 2 EUR. This can also be purchased through the mobile application Mobilly - <https://www.mobilly.lv/pub/en/>. For more information, please see Jurmala website - <https://www.visitjurmala.lv/en/do/getting-here/by-car/how-to-get-with-a-car/>

If you live in Jurmala or your car is registered in Jurmala, you do not need to purchase entry pass. Entry is also free for diplomatic cars, those with red number plates.

Drinking Water

Water in Jurmala and Riga has a high percentage of iron and calcium. Sometimes it may smell like sulphur, so some people opt for water dispensers/coolers dispensing bottled water. Water providers in Latvia include [VENDEN](#), [Zakumuiza](#) and [Eden](#). The same bottled water is also available at gas stadions and grocery stores. The first purchase will include a deposit amount for the water container, following which you simply return your empty water containers, pay for the water and exchange them for full containers.

Language Schools

There are many language schools in Riga. Latvian is offered alongside other Baltic and Nordic languages, as well as Russian. Some places to learn Latvian are:

<http://nordisk.lv/>

<https://www.balticmedia.com>

Moving with Pets

If relocating to Latvia with pets, it is very important to check with your local veterinarian about necessary forms and procedures in regards to taking a pet to another country. These links give detailed information about requirements for bringing a pet to Latvia:

<http://www.petrelocation.com/resources/international-regulations/latvia>

A little extra time measuring the pet carrier and checking with the airlines could save a lot of headaches.

Caring for your pets once in Latvia

In and around the Riga area, there are many veterinary clinics/hospitals and there are also kennels for dogs and cats. There are pet stores located in many of the shopping malls and the central market as well. These pet stores carry a variety of well-known pet food brands, pet beds, treats, carriers, leashes, etc.

Veterinarian Services

<http://www.mbh.lv/en/about-clinic.html>

<http://www.dvc.lv/>

<http://www.vet.lv/>

Kennels

<http://www.zoohotel.lv/>

<https://4milaskepas.lv/dzivnieku-viesnica/>

<https://reksamaja.lv/pet-hotel-reksa-maja/>

Shelters

<http://patversme.lv/>

<http://slokaspatversme.lv/>

<http://ulubele.org/>

Leaving Latvia with your pets

There are additional requirements to depart Latvia with a pet. For more information, please visit:

<http://www.pvd.gov.lv/en/partikas-un-veterinarais-dienests/statiskas-lapas/startpage?nid=2531#jump>

Medical/ Health Services

Preventive Medical Services

There are many highly-trained, English-speaking family doctors here in Latvia, most of whom work within Riga. Routine physicals, updating of vaccinations and other preventative healthcare services can all be done by the family doctor. Information regarding vaccinations for traveling to Latvia can be found on the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention website (<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/latvia.aspx>).

Please note that the Latvian immunization calendar (www.vakcina.lv) requires vaccinations very similar to other countries. It is recommended to also get tick-borne encephalitis (TBE) vaccine once in Latvia.

ISL School Nurse can consult you about medical services provided in Latvia in more details.

Recommended Health Services in Latvia

<http://www.andakarina.lv>

www.premiummedical.lv

<http://arsmed.lv/en/>

<https://www.piramida.lv/home>

Emergency Medical Services

In the event of a medical emergency where an ambulance is needed, dial **113** (emergency medical services – the general emergency number to report e.g. a fire or accident is **112**). There are 2 major hospitals (*slimnica*) that have Emergency Rooms (*Neatliekamas palīdzības nodala*) and are equipped to deal with trauma and major medical problems.

For adults:

Paula Stradina kliniska universitātes slimnīca

<https://www.stradini.lv/lv/content/neatliekama-palidziba>

For kids:

Bernu kliniska universitātes slimnīca

www.bkus.lv

Ambulatory Clinics

There are several private clinics in Riga staffed with a wide variety of specialists (i.e. ENT, GI, dermatology) that are equipped to perform minor procedures, in-house lab testing and x-rays; some are even equipped to handle non-acute emergency care.

Dental Care

<http://www.swissdentalexerts.lv>

<http://www.baltic-dental.com/index.html>

<http://www.adenta.lv/en/treatment/price-list/>

<http://arsdentalclinic.lv/en/the-ars-dental-clinic/>

<http://dental.sirowaclinic.com/en/>

Restaurants and Groceries

Restaurants

Riga and the surrounding areas have many excellent restaurants, bakeries, cafes, and coffee shops. At the website <https://www.liveriga.com/en/81-restaurants> you can search for restaurants and just about anything else. But one of the best ways to find a good restaurant is to ask people or just try something new when walking around Riga. Twice a year, restaurants step up there game and reduce their prices during Riga Restaurant Week.

Groceries

While you might not be able to find every ingredient you want to make your favorite dishes from home, Riga has a number of local markets, super markets and specialty shops all around the city and surrounding area. Often the food you are looking for is available but you just need to figure out what it is called in Latvian. Many of the large shopping malls also have a chain grocery store, like Rimi, Maxima, Stockmann, Sky and specialty food shops.

In addition to the chain grocery stores and small specialty food shops, there are local markets where you can buy a wide variety of foods. The Central Market (behind Stockmann department store) has meat, fish, produce, dairy products, and many, many other items inside the buildings (the large airplane hangars), as well as a recently opened street food market which has become one of Riga's top gastronomic destinations. During the warmer seasons, food is also sold at outside stalls along with crafts, clothing, and household items. In many neighborhoods around Riga, especially in warmer weather, there are smaller local markets similar to the central market. If interested in these markets, ask your neighbors or landlord if there is a local market and where it is.

Grocery Stores and Markets

Rimi has various locations, including Barona Centrs, Origo (next to the Central Station), Olympia (shopping centre over the bridge) and Galleria Centrs in Old Town. A western-style grocery store which has almost all necessary ingredients, even a small Asian and Mexican section.

www.rimi.lv

Maxima is similar to Rimi with a slightly lower price point and has food as well as household items. Maxima has large and small stores, the size is indicated by the number of XXX after the name.

<https://www.maxima.lv/en>

Lats is a well priced, local chain of small supermarkets throughout Latvia. <http://www.latts.lv/>

Barbora is an online delivery service which delivers Maxima groceries within Riga, Jurmala and the surrounding areas. www.barbora.lv and mobile app.

Stockmann department store has a grocery store connected on the first floor of the building. Address: 13 Janvara 8, Riga www.stockmann.lv

Sky is an upmarket grocery store located on Ulmana gatve on the way to Jurmala, Biķernieku iela 120^b Dunties 19a (in shopping centre Sky&More).

<https://www.sky.lv/>

Gastronome

High quality food. You can find there cheese; bread; cakes; buffet of cooked or prepared food; treats (chocolates, candied fruits, etc.); Italian grocer shop; Gastronome has some very good fresh fish arriving on Monday evening and Thursday evening; two locations :

Address: on Krasta iela in MC² mall

<http://www.mc2.lv/en/delicatessen/>

The Central Market

Recommendations: Indoor and outdoor market stalls. They sell all types of meat, produce, and dairy products. Also sell household items and many, many other items. Street food hangar with wide range of world cuisines. Keep your purses and bags close to you or hidden, especially if the market is crowded. Open 8am – 5pm Tues-Sat, 8am-4pm Sun-Mon.

Address: Behind Stockmann department store, near Centrala Stacija (central train station)

www.centraltirgus.lv

Vidzemes Market

Recommendations: It is smaller and easier to get around than the Central Market.

Latvian is the primary language spoken here. Open 8am – 7pm, Sunday 8am – 4pm.

Address: Matīsa 2, on the corner of Brīvības and Matisa

Kalnčiema Quarter

Restored wooden houses encircling a square on the left bank of the Daugava. Farmers' and artisans' market every Saturday 10 am – 4 pm. Local speciality and organic foods, crafts and handiwork. Additional thematic markets throughout the year. www.kalnciemaiela.lv/en/market/

Agenskalns Tīrgus is near Kalnčiema, and has been under renovation for a while. More and more stalls are appearing in the outside area of the market, along with occasional live music and other events. <http://atirgus.lv/>

Imantas Tīrgus is a new market in Imanta that boast clean modern stalls inside a huge building with tall ceilings. The produce is very nice and the meat is fabulous. <https://imantastirgus.business.site/>

Shopping for Clothes and Shoes

There are many options for buying clothes and shoes for the whole family in Riga and the surrounding areas. Riga has several shopping centers or malls with shops that sell clothes and shoes for people of all ages. Prices of clothes and shoes will also vary greatly depending on what you want and where you shop.

Weather conditions partially dictate what people wear for clothes and shoes in Latvia. There are certain items of clothing that are useful. In the Spring and Autumn, there can be quite a bit of rain therefore, rain boots are worn by most people at this time. You can find rain boots in a wide variety of colors and patterns. Rain pants for children are important for outside play during these seasons. Adults mostly carry umbrellas. You can buy rain pants, jackets, umbrellas and rain boots in Latvia. Depending on where you are moving from, the prices may seem high for these items, so you may want to check out some of the store websites and try to compare prices.

Winter is another season requiring special clothing. Warm clothes are available for purchase in Latvia. You can buy snow suits and pants, ski jackets, wool coats, and snow boots at shops, but remember that depending on where you are moving from, the prices may or may not seem high here in Latvia. In some cases, it might make sense to bring these items with you.

Shopping Centers/Malls and department stores with clothes and shoes for the whole family

Mols (Krasta 46, Riga): www.mols.lv

Stockmann (Janvara iela 8, Riga): www.stockmann.lv

Olympia Shopping Center (Azenes 5, Riga): www.olimpia.lv

Alfa (Brivibas gatve 372): www.alfaparks.lv

Spice (Lielirbes iela 29, Riga): www.spice.lv

Galerija Centrs (Audeju iela 16, Riga---in Old Town): www.galerijacentrs.lv

Galleria Riga (Dzirnavu iela 67, Riga): www.galleriariga.lv

Origo Mall (Stacijas laukums 2, Riga, Inside Central Train Station): www.origo.lv

Domina Shopping (Ieriķu iela 3, Riga) : <https://www.domina-shopping.lv/en/>

Riga Plaza (Mūkusalas iela 71) <http://www.rigaplaza.lv/en/>

Akropole (Maskavas iela 257) <https://www.akropoleriga.lv/>

Tutoring, Sports, Music & Art Instruction

Music Instruction and Instruments

If you are interested in music lessons or purchasing an instrument, there are music schools and private instructors available in Riga/Jurmala/Babite and surrounding areas. Other parents at the school are an excellent resource.

Some great music stores:

<https://muzikascentrs.lv/>

<http://www.muzikasinstrumenti.lv/>

<http://www.muzikasveikals.lv/>

Music schools:

<http://www.babite.lv/lv/izglitiba/babites-muzikas-skola/>

<https://muzikasskola.jurmala.lv/>

<http://jmr1ms.lv/>

Art supplies:

<http://zimulisunota.lv/>

<http://maksliniekupreces.lv/category/akcijas/>

<http://pedants.lv/>

Art schools:

http://www.jurmala.makslaskola.lv/lv/par_skolu/

<http://www.muzikamakslamarupe.edu.lv/>

<http://www.jrrmv.lv/>

Private Tutoring

If you are looking for a private tutor for your child, you can start by talking to the ISL receptionist. School is keeping a list of tutours that are recomended by other families or work in school.

Sports Lessons

ISL offers a variety of sports and activities as part of their afterschool program (you can contact the Athletics Director at ISL). In addition, there are many oppourtunities for lessons and joining sports clubs/teams outside of school. Once in Latvia, other parents from the school will be an excellent resource for sports instruction.

Sport schools:

<http://www.babite.lv/lv/sports/babites-sporta-komplekss/>

<http://www.pardaugava.lv/>

<http://bjssridzene.lv>

<https://figureskatingschool.lv/en>

<http://igym.lv/>

<http://www.volvoledus.lv/en>

<https://www.baseins.eu/en/>

<http://www.judo.org.lv/>

<http://www.basketbolaskola.lv/bask/>

<http://www.rigaunited.com>

and many more.....

Transportation

There are many options for transportation within and between Riga, Jurmala, Pinki and the surrounding areas. The prices and schedules vary by mode of transport and the transportation method right for you will depend on things like location, cost, and flexibility in schedule. This section will offer resources and recommendations from the ISL community for the most widely used modes of transport.

- Car
- Trains
- Buses
- Trolley Buses
- Trams
- Minibuses
- Taxi

Train

There is a train route that runs between Riga and Jurmala. There are many stops along the way. There is a website, <http://www.pv.lv/en/> which allows you to enter your departure stop and your destination stop and the date and it gives you the time schedule and cost for that date. There are usually trains leaving every 30 minutes or so, even more often during peak summer months. The train is clean, safe, and usually on time. You can buy a train ticket in the train stations, but if they are closed or you are running late, you can get on the train without a ticket and pay the conductor. The ticket onboard the train may cost a little more than at the station. Passes are also available for purchase and you can find the information for these under the train schedule under the cost for tickets.

Buses, Trolley Buses, and Trams

These modes of transportation are used by many people to get around within Riga or Jurmala (buses only). The Riga transportation services website, <https://www.rigassatiksmelv/en/> has detailed information about schedules and routes for each type of service. You can either pay the driver when you get on the bus, trolley bus or tram, or you can purchase a card which allows you to ride for less. The stops around both Riga and Jurmala are marked by signs that identify the route number. A list of locations where you can buy the prepaid cards can be found on the Riga transportation services website above.

Minibuses

Minibuses are small buses (vans) that take people between Riga and Jurmala and surrounding areas. In Riga there are certain parts of town where you will see minibuses typically pick people up (like across from the central train station). In Jurmala, they seem to pick people up around city bus stops. Often times people just flag them down on a busy street. There are signs in the front window that say where the bus goes, but it is a good idea to also ask the driver. Some people don't like taking the minibuses because they sometimes over fill the bus and people are left standing in the aisle or they don't feel the drivers follow safe driving practices.

Taxi

There are many different taxi companies that operate in Riga and the surrounding areas. People seem to have their favorites and those they don't like. The important things to look for are that the car is an official taxi with a lit sign on top and the license plate should be yellow and start with TX. The driver should be using the meter to track the price of your trip. If the meter is broken, make sure you agree on a price before you take the trip or get a different taxi. You can often find cabs waiting outside large hotels or in heavily populated areas, but if you want to arrange for a cab to pick you up, you can call the company directly.

<http://baltictaxi.lv/en/>

<http://redcab.lv/?lang=en> (has a kids' taxi option which is great for transporting small babies or multiple children)

<http://www.pandataxi.lv/taxi-in-riga.html>

<https://taxify.eu/>

<https://bolt.eu/>

<https://taxi.yandex.com/#index>

Since 2018, taxi fees were deregulated, so most taxis, even if properly licensed, will overcharge you. Only Baltic Taxi (green) and Red Cab (red) maintained their fees, and they offer great service as well.

The "local Uber" is an app called **Bolt** and is an excellent, cheap and convenient way to get around Riga and the surrounding areas. Yandex Taxi also has an app for bookings. Download the app and register, it is simple to use!

Car

If you plan to have a car in Latvia, here are a few helpful tips. Parking is at a premium in Riga, especially around Old Town and if you park on the street, you will need to pay for a parking permit.

In Riga and other major Latvian cities, it is legal to park your car on the street or sidewalk in designated areas only. You must obtain a voucher from an automated parking machine and clearly display it on your dashboard before leaving the car. If parking is not permitted, there will be a circular blue sign with a red slash through the middle. After a certain time of day, parking will be free, so it is necessary to read the hours of operation on the street sign. You can also leave your car in a garage or underground parking lot. These facilities are clearly marked with large blue signs containing the letter P in white print. To avoid parking violations, only park in areas that are populated with other vehicles.

You can also pay for parking by using mobile application Mobilly: You can also use Mobilly to pay the Jurmala fee, and airport parking.

<https://www.mobilly.lv/pub/en/>

Parking is easier in Jurmala. While there are some places near the beach where you must pay to park, there are often small side streets that allow parking for free (just read the street signs).

Entertainment

Movies

Riga has very large and modern movie theaters which show new movies as well as concerts and operas. English language non-animated movies are usually in English with Russian and Latvian subtitles. Many of the children's animated movies are shown in Latvian and Russian. Below are links to some of the theater websites. *Movie theaters in Riga:*

Forum cinema www.forumcinemas.lv (next to Stockmann department store)

Multikino www.multikino.lv (in Riga Plaza shopping center)

Cinamon Kino <https://alfa.cinamonkino.com/>

Akropole Kino <https://www.apollokino.lv/home>

Circus

The history of the Riga Circus is almost 100 years old, and is the only permanent circus in the Baltics. There are performances throughout the year, but the most important are in the winter season, which starts in October and lasts until the end of March. Two to three regular programs run alongside a special Christmas and Easter show during this time.

Contact information:

<http://cirks.lv/en/>

Merkela 4, Riga

Ballet, Opera, and Concerts

Below are links where you can find more information.

Latvian National Opera www.opera.lv

Ticket website www.bilesuparadize.lv; www.bilesuserviss.lv

Riga this week (things to do in Riga) www.rigathisweek.lv

Riga in your pocket (things to do in Riga) www.inyourpocket.com/latvia/riga/culture

Museums

<http://www.muzeji.lv/en/>

During the Summer months, Jurmala also offers concerts and music festivals. You can find Jurmala events at www.jurmala.lv

Travelling in Latvia

While travelling in Latvia you will visit or just stop by many manors (muiza) or small castles; some are hotels, you can then enjoy a luxury stay for a while. <http://pilis.lv/lv/pilis-un-muizas>

Latvia is all about its beautiful preserved nature: pine forest, lakes, long beaches. The best way to enjoy this quiet nature is to go for weekends or holidays to the countryside. It is very easy to find country houses for the weekend, check out <http://www.celotajs.lv/en?lang=en>

Sigulda

(45mn drive from Riga Center) Sigulda is on a picturesque stretch of the primeval Gauja river valley. Because of the reddish Devonian sandstone which forms steep rocks and caves on both banks of the river, Sigulda has been called the "Switzerland of Vidzeme".

<http://tourism.sigulda.lv/>

Turaida castle and park, Gauja river, cable car over the Gauja valley, Tarzan activity, bobsled, skiing. Opera festival in July.

Good restaurant close to Turaida (Sigulda): Kungu Rija <http://kungurija.lv/en/> better to book before; playground for kids.

Reina Café - http://www.reinatrase.lv/vasaras/lv/golfs_56/laukums_62

Cesis

(1h30 drive from Riga Center) Cēsis is a town in northeastern Latvia, known for its medieval castle. First built in the 13th century and rebuilt many times since, Cēsis Castle features wall paintings, dungeons and towers with views. Its Castle Park includes an old brewery, a cemetery and the Transfiguration of Christ Orthodox Church. Also on castle grounds, the 18th-century Castle Manor House is home to the Cēsis History and Art Museum.

<http://www.cesis.lv/en>

Lake, castle, Ligatne national reserve, Gauja river (walks along or canoe), skiing (Zagarkalns).

<http://www.zagarkalns.lv/vasara/en/>

Limbaži

Limbaži is a town in the Vidzeme region of northern Latvia. Limbaži is located 90 km northeast of the capital Riga.

<https://limbazi.lv/>

Stay at <http://www.mezasalas.lv/index.php/en/>

Many activities offered; possible to have cooking lessons there.

Cesvaine

Cesvaine is a town in Cesvaine municipality, Vidzeme Region, Latvia. It is home to the Cesvaine Palace, built in 1896 near the ruins of previous medieval castles.

<http://www.cesvaine.lv/en/cesvaine-palace.html>

Grasi pils (www.grasufonds.lv) hotel that helps the orphanage to raise funds; nice manor, possible to have lunches or dinner; good location to enjoy skiing near Madona at Gaiziņkalns, highest hill in Latvia.

Kemeri

Beautiful marsh walks (watch out lots of mosquitoes in season). Kemeri National Park: <http://www.kemerunacionalaisparks.lv/>

Kandava - Very nice small city center; a farm near by to visit.

<http://visitkandava.lv/en>

Two very nice manor houses nearby to stay in:

<http://www.rumenesmuiza.lv/en> (only available on a per room basis at certain times, check in advance)

<http://www.kuksumuiza.lv/en.html>

Kuldīga - Bridge and waterfall.

<http://kuldiga.lv/en/>

Venta Rapid is a waterfall on the Venta River in Kuldīga, Latvia. It is the widest waterfall in Europe – 249 metres and up to 270 metres during spring floods. Its height is 1.80–2.20 metres and it changes depending on the water level in the river.

Kuldiga District Museum: <http://www.kuldigasmuzejs.lv/>

Kolka

Kolka is a village in Kolka parish, Dundaga municipality, on the tip of Cape Kolka in Courland in Latvia. Wild beach at the furthest point of the Baltic Gulf. “Where the two seas meet.”

<http://www.kolka.lv/>

Jelgava

Jelgava is a city in central Latvia about 41 kilometres southwest of Riga with about 63,000 inhabitants. It is the largest town in the region of Zemgale.

<http://www.jelgava.lv/en/start/>

Beautiful Palace in the city center: Jelgava Palace or Mitau Palace is the largest Baroque-style palace in the Baltic states. It was built in the 18th century. http://www.jelgavaspils.lv/en_US/

Bauska

Bauska is a town in Bauska Municipality, in the Zemgale region of southern Latvia. Bauska is located 66 km from the Latvian capital Riga. Castle <http://bauskaspils.lv/en/castle-and-museum>

<http://tourism.bauska.lv/>

Mezotne Manor nearby: <http://mezotnespils.lv/>

Rundāle

Rundāle Palace is one of the two major baroque palaces built for the Dukes of Courland in what is now Latvia. Beautiful gardens, a must see. Rose festivals over the summer, different concerts and events. <http://rundale.net/en/>

Tervete (near Dobeļe) - Forest full of witches and elves!

<http://www.mammadaba.lv/en/nature-objects-news/107-tervete-nature-park/2473-find-a-sunny-summer-joy-in-nature-park-in-tervete>

Travelling in or out Latvia

By Car/Bus

Short distances make travel within the Baltic States easy by car or even buses (special luxury buses: www.luxexpress.eu)

By Plane

Riga's airport <http://www.riga-airport.com/> is connected to most of the European capital cities with direct flights (www.airbaltic.com) or connecting flights (www.lufthansa.com/gr/en; www.finnair.com, www.turkishairlines.com, www.ryanair.com).

By Ferry

More information can be found here: <http://rop.lv/en/ferries-and-cruise/ferries.html>

Outside Latvia

LITHUANIA

VILNUS

ŠIAULIAI : crosses hill

NERINGA PENINSULA: fishermen village of NIDA, charming, nice walks on the nearby spectacular Dune and – Lithuanian desert; Guesthouse: Vandeja. Better off-season to avoid summer crowd.

ESTONIA

TALLINN (by plane or possible with express comfortable bus - 5hrs)

PARNU: villa Ammende,

MUHU island: Padaste Manor

SAREEMA island: SPA hotels with swimming pools in Kuressare

OTEPAA: ski resort

SWEDEN

Stockholm by ferry (www.tallinksilja.com/en/), very easy access if you want to travel within Sweden; ask for windows cabins (cabin with 4 beds); scenery when arriving in Stockholm's archipelago worth an early wake up (6am) Skiing in Sweden, check www.skiinfo.com, Romme Alpin is only 3hrs drive from Stockholm. On the way, visit some of the Malardalen's Castles on Malaren Lake

RUSSIA

MOSCOW

St PETERSBURG (also by night train direct from Riga to St Petersburg; an experience)

Visa is mandatory; as it can be difficult and time-consuming to get it directly from the Russian Embassy in Riga, most people go through travel agencies.

Charity, Volunteering, and Social Organizations

Charities

www.Ziedot.lv is a charity portal where you can go online to donate money. It is an opportunity for companies and individuals to use the internet to show their social responsibility to others. By donating money to Ziedot, you help children grow and implement many other charity projects. If you contribute something, you will get a report back telling you what your money went to. Ziedot is supported by Swedbank. Therefore, Swedbank guarantees a quick, safe and easy donating system at their website.

"Save the Children" at www.rnc-rtb.lv has a list of organizations that accept donations (money, clothing, etc.) for children in need here in Latvia. Save the Children is a Children's Rights protection organization, which operates in almost 30 different countries. Latvian Save the Children has approximately 40 branches and supports many different groups.

www.Palidzesim.lv is a website where you can donate money. They help children in Latvia. On their site, you can find stories about different children who might need donations (money or other materials). You can also contact them and get started on any of Palidzesim's projects. They provide assistance to a particular child, a particular family, or a particular child's home. If you donate to them, each donor visiting their web page can see how the donation has changed the child's life.

Volunteering

If you are interested in finding out about places to volunteer, you can contact charity groups directly or try the ISL CAS Coordinator.

[Dzivnieku Draugs](#) is an animal shelter. They always need volunteers to come and walk dogs. You must be a certain age like 13 to walk with the dogs. Smaller kids can only participate if they have a parent to help them walking with the dog.

At the www.charity-charities.org/volunteering/Latvia-volunteers/Riga.html website, people post volunteer opportunities. You can search by location or type of volunteer work.

Social Organizations

International Women's Club of Riga (IWCR) is an organization which provides a social network of activities for its members and supports a number of local charities focused on women and children in Latvia. The club has one major fundraiser a year and several smaller events which support the Club and its charities. Information about the IWCR is at www.iwcr.lv