

Culture

Useful links

- Religions of Latvia
<http://www.onlatvia.com/topics/culture-of-latvia/religions-in-latvia>
- The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia
<http://www.lelb.lv/en/>
- Catholic Church in Latvia
<http://katolis.lv/en/church-in-latvia.html>
- The Orthodox Church in Latvia from X to XX century
<http://www.russkije.lv/en/lib/read/the-orthodox-church-in-latvia.html>
- The ancient Latvian religion Dievturiba
http://www.lituanus.org/1987/87_3_06.htm
- Religion in Latvia
https://ipfs.io/ipfs/QmXoyvizjW3WknFiJnKLwHCnL72vedxjQkDDP1mXWo6uco/wiki/Religion_in_Latvia.html
- Latvian traditions
<http://www.latvia.eu/traditions>
- The Ethnographic Open Air Museum
<http://brivdabasmuzejs.lv/en/>
- The culture of Latvia
<http://www.everyculture.com/Ja-Ma/Latvia.html>
- Latvian cuisine and food
<http://www.latvia.eu/traditions-culture/cuisine>
- Top 10 Attractions in Latvia
<http://www.latvia.travel/en/article/top-10-attractions-latvia>
- Latvian cultural characteristics
<http://www.rsu.lv/eng/images/Documents/Publications/Latvians.pdf>
- Culture of Latvia
<http://www.everyculture.com/Ja-Ma/Latvia.html>

Latvia Guide - briefly

Facts and Statistics

- Location: Eastern Europe, bordering the Baltic Sea, between Estonia and Lithuania
- Capital: Riga
- Climate: maritime; wet, moderate winters
- Population: 2,165,165 (2014 est.)
- Ethnic Make-up: Latvian 57.7%, Russian 29.6%, Belarusian 4.1%, Ukrainian 2.7%, Polish 2.5%, Lithuanian 1.4%, other 2% (2002)
- Religions: Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Russian Orthodox
- Government: parliamentary democracy

Language in Latvia

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 sub-branch of Uralic language family, which enjoys protection by law. The 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.

Religion

At one time, Latvians ascribed to naturalist or what might be termed 'pagan' beliefs in natural deities. Although no longer practised as a religion the tradition lives on in folk songs, legends and festivals. Christianity arrived during the 12th and 13th centuries while the Russian Orthodox religion took hold in the 18th century. The effect religion had on the population greatly diminished during Communist occupation, when followers were harassed and discriminated against. Today the constitution guarantees freedom of religion. There has been a religious resurgence since the fall of the Communist regime, with the majority of the population belonging to the Lutheran church, although there are also large Catholic and Orthodox Christian minorities.

A Nation of Singers

Latvia is called "the singing nation". It unusual to find a Latvian who has not sung

in a choir or some other group at some point in their life. Every few years all Latvia's choirs, as well as folk dance groups, gather together for the Song Festival, which includes several thousand singers. Folk songs are one of Latvia's national treasures. The Latvian folk song ("daina") is one of the distinguishing features of Latvian culture. There are three essential elements of these folk songs: tradition, literature and symbolism. The daina is a form of oral art and is a symbol that has both shaped and epitomized Latvia's national identity for the last two centuries. Dating back well over a thousand years, more than 1.2 million texts and 30,000 melodies have been identified.

The Family

The family is still the centre of the social structure. Even in urban areas it is common for generations of extended family to live together in the same apartment. Most families have only one or two children. The family provides both emotional and financial support to its members. It is common for parents to provide financial assistance to adult children. In return, children are expected to take care of their elderly parents. It is uncommon to move from the area where you are born. Even if a child goes to a city to work, they tend to go home for holidays.

A Hierarchical Society

Latvia is a hierarchical society. People are respected because of their age and position. Older people are viewed as wise and are granted respect. Latvians expect the most senior person, by age or position to make decisions that are in the best interest of the group.

Privacy Please

Although friendly and informal with close friends and family, Latvians are reserved and formal when dealing with outsiders. They are private people and do not flaunt their possessions or readily display emotions. They believe that self-control is a behaviour to be emulated. They do not ask personal questions and may not respond should you intrude on their privacy.

Personal life is kept separate from business. If a friendship develops at work and is carried into the personal arena, this camaraderie is not brought into the office. Personal matters are not discussed with friends.

Meeting and Greeting

A quick, firm handshake with direct eye contact is the traditional greeting. Latvians have rather controlled facial expressions and are not quick to smile. Their initial reserve warms up after they get to know you. When greeting a close friend or family member, some Latvians offer a light kiss on the cheek, although many do not, so it is not a universal measure of the intimacy of the relationship. Titles are very important and denote respect. When introducing someone, it is common to state their first and surname with the honorific title “kungs” for a man and “kundze” for a woman appended. Wait until invited to use their first name.

Gift Giving Etiquette

In general, Latvians exchange gifts with family and close friends for Christmas, birthdays and other events such as baptisms and weddings. Gifts need not be expensive; it is more important to buy something that shows you have thought about the recipient. If you are invited to a Latvian’s house, take a box of choco.

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