

# Character traits

According by source for demographic data: International Data Base (*for detail information, please visit: <https://www.16personalities.com/country-profiles/latvia>*) compared to other countries in Europe, respondents from Latvia are likely to be:

- ...slightly more Introverted
- ...more Intuitive
- ...more Thinking
- ...slightly more Prospecting
- ...slightly more Turbulent

## ***Communication Styles***

Latvians differ from one another. Latvians generally have a very strong sense of space and will generally stand a few feet from the other person. Distance can be even greater when speaking or dealing with strangers. Each person's degree of comfort with touching and their preference for personal space varies. Eye contact is important but not necessarily as a measure of person's trustworthiness. Latvians will not necessarily maintain constant eye contact, but will not feel comfortable if a person refuses or is reluctant to make eye contact.

It is customary to shake hands, with both men and women when greeting the person. According to the rule of etiquette - the older person (or a woman) is the first who extends the hand, but most often the rule is not followed. In certain cases, notably among intellectuals and artists, men and women will give each other a kiss on a cheek (seldom on both cheeks). While talking, men generally do not touch other men. This rule also applies for contact between men and women and among woman.

There are some gestures that are considered rude (waiving a pointed index finger, persistent pointing at someone). Latvians make relatively little use of gestures and at times find a lot of gesturing distracting or even annoying. Latvians are aware that people of other cultures use more gestures. Normal tone of voice and directness are the norm. Perhaps the most unique feature of Latvians is their reserve. This reserve can be downright disturbing for those non-Latvians who tend to be full of smiles and small talk. Latvians generally do not engage in small talk with people they do not know well and they do not feel uncomfortable

about long silences in conversations with strangers.

## ***Gender***

Latvians have always respected equality in the issues involving gender. Women have been highly regarded in business and politics (note: in Latvia at the time of writing, The President of the Republic, the President (Chair) of the Parliament (Saeima), the Foreign Minister, the Minister of Culture are headed by women). This is a confusing subject for non-Latvians to understand. Newcomers will be surprised by the inordinate amount of young, sometimes, very young women, working in positions of power. Most young women carry relatively little debt and combined with low housing costs, this allows them a great deal of autonomy before or without marriage.

On the other hand, chivalry is alive and well in Latvia. In Latvia: men open the doors for women and pay for their dinners as well. The good manners are accompanied by a healthy dose of flirting as well. It is impossible to provide advice in this regard but it is helpful to know that mild flirtation is a norm, meaning that men make a habit of complimenting their female colleagues and women tend to expect to be complimented. In general, men are expected to help women in and out of cars, offer a hand or arm while navigating cobblestone streets, insist (not simply offer) on carrying all heavy bags and again, insist, on paying for everything. Non-Latvian women faced with such a situation should remember that these things are cultural norms and that nothing is expected in return. Accept the offers of help graciously and a small thank you for dinner is much more acceptable than spending half of it fighting for the right to pay; you won't win and the host will feel uncomfortable.

## ***Class***

There are no class distinctions of society in Latvia. There are individuals who believe that they belong to the "elite class", but it makes no difference in the workplaces. Economically speaking, a new middle class has emerged since the independence of Latvia, along with a small nouveau riche. Some members of these groups made their money by questionable means during the period of privatization in the 1990s. Others, especially younger people, have used their education and experience to gain lucrative jobs in the private sector and given low, controlled housing costs and freedom from large debt loads, are able to enjoy

their salaries.

Young people, whether they have the means or not, like at least to look as if they are living well. Women invest a good deal of their salaries in looking good and dressing well, most people own cell phones and use them without reserve and the plethora of designer stores in Riga provides some indication of the buying power of Latvians.

### ***Ethnicity***

Ethnicity matters are somewhat important in Latvia due to the fact there is a large contingent of ethnic Russians who are not willing to accept the notion of a free and independent Republic of Latvia, the official language of which is Latvian. This is one area where discussions should be avoided. Ethnicity remains a difficult issue for Latvians. Sharing their country with an almost equal number of ethnic Russians for the good part of the century, the balance of power was turned on its head in 1991. During the Soviet period, Russians held most positions of power. With independence Latvians have emerged to run their country while Russians, with many exceptions, make up the bulk of service industries and grey economy. Most older Russians never learned Latvian, despite having lived most of their lives there. The Latvian government is struggling with this issue, imposing rigorous citizenship laws that demand a solid knowledge of Latvian and at the same time, exploring means to ensure that the next generation of Russians becomes bilingual and able to integrate themselves into the economy.

The shared history has produced a number of contradictions. Since Russian was so predominant, Latvians have incorporated a number of Russian words into their daily vocabulary. Interestingly and perhaps because the younger generation is more removed from the realities of the Soviet occupation and Stalinist period, young Latvians find some aspects of the Soviet Union amusing, and as a result, some bars memorializing the Soviet period have sprung up and it would not be unheard of to see young Latvians celebrating, tongue-in-cheek, old Soviet holidays. In addition there are the many "foreign Latvians" as they call both Latvians who emigrated to a number of countries, including Canada, during the Soviet period and the children of these emigrants. Foreign Latvians began returning en masse in the early years of independence and, for the most part, have been eagerly welcomed back. There are dozens of examples of foreign Latvians who have successfully taken up new lives in Latvia and they have

undoubtedly contributed to the revitalization of the newly born nation. Latvia is one of few successful countries born out of the Soviet Union and some scholars give some credit for this to the involvement of the western educated and experienced foreign Latvians. But the fact that one group grew up under the Soviet regime while the other lived under very different governments in the West has produced tensions as differences emerge.

### ***Relationship-building***

The relationships should be cordial, but the importance of the personal relationship is an open question, and will depend on circumstances and individual situation. The importance of establishing personal relationships with key colleagues or clients cannot be overstated. Perhaps because Latvia is such a small country, most people tend to retain the same friends throughout their lives. Most Latvians spend their weekends away from Riga, returning to their home towns, allowing them the luxury of spending time with old friends. Second, in a country where you cannot really run away from anywhere, it is not in your best interest to make enemies.

In Latvia, friendship and loyalty are treasured. It may take some time to get to know someone but once you do, the friendship will be very deep. Latvian friends become very involved in each other's lives and very few circumstances will change that. The best way to integrate into Latvian life, both work and private, is to begin making friends. You may have to initiate the friendship since many Latvians will be too shy to start. Invite someone for coffee, ask for advice on going to the opera and take up all invitations to help you sightsee. If you happen to make one good friend, it is likely that you will be introduced to family and friends and eventually included in that social circle.