



# Trekking the Planet

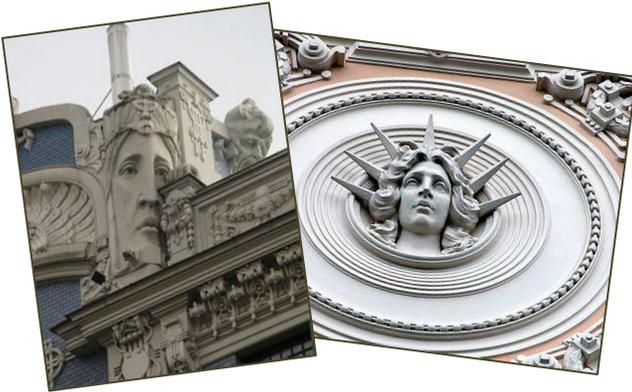
Discovering the Cultural and Natural Significance of the World



## Where are we now?

- Darren and Sandy are in Riga, Latvia, located at 57° N and 24° E.
- We have traveled approximately 29,945 miles (48,192 kilometers) from our starting point in California.





Art Nouveau architecture in Riga  
(sources: [Wikitravel.org](http://Wikitravel.org), [Wikipedia.org](http://Wikipedia.org))

### Did you know?

In August 1989 the three Baltic countries of Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia conducted a peaceful demonstration to publicize their opposition to Soviet rule. Known as the "Baltic Way", approximately two million people joined hands to create a human chain through the three countries that was about 370 miles (600 kilometers) long. Within six months of the protest, Lithuania became the first to declare their independence from the Soviet Union.

source: [Wikipedia.org](http://Wikipedia.org)



Riga Castle,  
built in 1330  
(source:  
[UNESCOWorldHeritagesites.com](http://UNESCOWorldHeritagesites.com))

## People and Culture

- Latvia was self-governing until the 13<sup>th</sup> century. It was then ruled by Germans, Poles, Swedes and Russians. In 1917 it regained its independence for the first time in almost 600 years.
- During World War II the Russians, then the Germans, took over Latvia. It was part of the post-war Soviet Eastern Bloc until the fall of communism. Latvia joined the European Union in 2004.
- Riga is the capital and largest city with a population of about 730,000. Slightly less than half of Latvia's total inhabitants live in this city's area. Riga's old town is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and it has the largest concentration of *Jugendstil* (German Art Nouveau) architecture in the world.
- Latvians and Livonians, the indigenous people of Latvia, comprise about 60% of the population. Russians are the next largest ethnic group with about 27% of the population.
- Food in Latvia can consist of deep fried chicken or pork with dark rye bread as well as salads and vegetables. Desserts feature forest berries.
- Ice hockey is the most popular sport in the country.

## Nature and Environment

- Latvia is the 124<sup>th</sup> largest country in the world. It is mostly flat with hills in the eastern portion in the country. Ten percent of the land is below sea level.
- Its location on the coast of the Baltic Sea influences Latvia's weather, resulting in warm summers and extremely cold winters. Moisture is common all year, with heavy rains in the summer and extreme snowfalls in the winter.
- Although it is only about 6.5 feet (2 meters) high, Ventas Rumba is the widest waterfall in Europe at about 360 feet (110 meters) wide. Latvia also has over 12,000 rivers, but only 17 are greater than 60 miles (97 kilometers) long. There are over 3,000 lakes.
- There are four national parks in Latvia. Gauja National Park is the oldest and most popular. It is located along the Gauja River and features rock formations and caves.



*Ventas Rumba Falls (source: [Flickr.com](#) /Siggi Mus)*

## The Baltic States

This area of Europe is comprised of the three countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The name comes from the Baltic Sea, on which all three have shoreline. These countries share similar history, having gained some Independence after World War I and then again in the early 1990s. All joined the European Union in 2004.



*Gauja National Park (source: [Flickr.com/Peter Fend'a](#))*



*Map of the Baltic States (sources: [Wikitravel.org](#), [Worldatlas.com](#))*

## Our Plans

- We arrived in Riga, our first stop in Europe, after a flight from Tashkent, Uzbekistan. While here, we plan to visit the historic architecture and some museums while in this city.
- After three days in Riga we will travel overland to Tallinn, Estonia, for a few days.
- Our next stop will be the Scandinavian countries of Finland, Sweden and Norway and our first European trek. What questions do you have for us as we begin our time in Europe? We look forward to hearing from you!

## Language

Latvian is the official language of Latvia. It belongs to the Baltic group of languages and is related to Lithuanian language. There were once 10 languages in the Baltic group and Latvian and Lithuanian are now the only two that are not extinct. Estonian is part of the Finnic group of languages, which includes Finnish. Russian is also widely spoken in Latvia.

source: [Wikipedia.org](http://Wikipedia.org)

## More Information

- <http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/countries/latvia-facts/>
- <http://www.latvia.travel/en/gauja-national-park>
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography\\_of\\_Latvia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography_of_Latvia)
- <http://lifestyle.iloveindia.com/lounge/facts-about-latvia-1467.html>
- <http://www.quickbooker.com/latvia/travel-guide/latvia-fast-facts.html>
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latvia>
- <http://baltictouristguide.com/en-us/interesting-facts-tourists/beautiful-sites-latvia/traditions-information-riga.php>
- <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/lg.html>

*To learn more about endangered and extinct languages and view them on a map, visit [UNESCO Atlas of World Languages in Danger](#).*

## Our Partners



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 3.0 Unported License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/).