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Dear compatriots,

You are holding something very valuable in your hands, an informative booklet entitled *A Guide for Latvians Abroad* that will help us all better understand each other and will strengthen your ties to your ethnic homeland.

One of the main priorities of the society integration policy in Latvia is to foster cooperation with Latvians living abroad. In order to maintain, develop and promote this cooperation, the Cabinet of Ministers, in 2004, adopted a program entitled *The Support Program for the Latvian Diaspora, 2004—2009*. The program was developed under the supervision of the Secretariat of the Special Assignments Minister for Social Integration. In May, 2005, a department was established within the secretariat to work with compatriots living abroad.

The contribution that Latvian exiles have made to the Latvian state its people — by retaining their national pride and identity, nurturing the Latvian language and passing it down to future generations, defending the right of the Latvian nation to statehood and its rightful place amongst the nations of the world — is extremely significant. Because Latvians living abroad are an integral part of the Latvian nation, they now play an important role in promoting Latvian culture and traditions around the world. The contribution of compatriots in establishing a positive image of Latvia abroad is enormous. Thus, it is in Latvia's best interests to provide support for compatriots living abroad.

I am very pleased with the successful cooperation between the World Federation of Free Latvians and institutions in Latvia. This cooperation includes providing information about many issues important to Latvians living abroad, such as the possibilities of receiving aid from Latvian institutions for those interested in returning to the Fatherland, Latvia's health insurance and social security systems, legal services, the procedures for transferring pensions to Latvian banks, educational opportunities, including for those interested in learning the Latvian language, work and business opportunities, etc. I hope that this guide will, if not bring you home, at least create a feeling of home wherever you are.

Thank you for your contribution to the preservation of Latvianness and for promoting Latvia's name throughout the world.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ainars Latkovskis', with a large, stylized initial 'A'.

Ainars Latkovskis, Minister

The activities of the secretariat of the special assignments minister
for social integration to support compatriots living abroad

„Daring is beautiful.”
/Zenta Mauriņa/

Each of you holding this guide in your hands has dared to be needed. It is important for each of you to be involved, whether it be through your work, advice you can offer, or responsibilities you can undertake.

Only those who want to make the lives of others better and more beautiful are truly happy. These people are sometimes called ‘world saviors.’ It is better to try to save the world, though, than criticize it and not do anything about it. Someone dared to dream of flying and airplanes were invented, and someone dared to dream about reaching the horizon and ships were built. We all want to live in a better society and are working together to reach this dream.

The secretariat of the special assignments minister for social integration (hereinafter referred to as the Secretariat) was formed at the end of 2002. It is a state institution responsible for the state policy in the promotion of societal integration. The Secretariat has six main branches of activity, which are the promotion of societal integration, the strengthening of a civic society, the promotion of cooperation with compatriots abroad, the promotion of tolerance and eradication of discrimination, the protection and promotion of the Liiv cultural heritage and language, and the protection of minority rights and ethnic identity.

Since November 2003, one of the main tasks and priorities of the Secretariat has been to provide support to compatriots abroad. The Secretariat creates and maintains ties between compatriots in faraway places and Latvia, and helps Latvians abroad maintain and develop their ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious identities.

This is an enormous task. One of the most significant achievements of the Secretariat was the creation of the Latvian Diaspora Support Program (hereinafter referred to as the Program). This was accomplished in cooperation with social organizations for Latvians living abroad and experts in Latvia. The Program is an important document that stipulates the Latvian government’s responsibilities toward supporting compatriots living abroad. The Program contains a plan of action for the next five years which is divided into five goals. Now, a bit more about the goals. The first goal is to carry out activities to maintain and develop the sense of ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious belonging in representatives of the Latvian diaspora. This is done in various ways, such as the organization of Latvian language courses, the financing of Latvian language teachers, the provision of administrative and financial support to Latvian associations, societies and centers abroad, the organization of traditional arts and crafts courses, and the organization of various camps. The second goal involves providing and updating information (through informative materials, textbooks, and support to Latvian newspapers abroad) both to, and about, Latvians abroad. The third goal is to provide regular communication between Latvia and compatriots abroad. The fourth goal is to promote Latvian culture, traditions and art throughout the world. This includes providing support to Latvian choruses and dance groups, and organizing “Latvijas dienas.” The fifth goal is to ensure cooperation between institutions to support the Latvian diaspora abroad.

The Secretariat supports the efforts of foreign Latvian organizations to preserve and nurture their identity as Latvians. The support is financial, informative, and consultative. As of August 1, 2005, there is a special department within the Secretariat — the support department for compatriots living abroad — that implements and coordinates the Latvian Diaspora Support Program 2004—2009 and provides consultations to all Latvians living abroad.

A year has passed since the implementation of the Program began, a cooperation agreement with the World Federation of Free Latvians was signed, and the provision of real support to Latvians living abroad began. What has this year been like? I believe we can be satisfied. During this year, a lot has been accomplished, including the successful organization of various ceremonious events and children’s camps, the publishing of informative materials, the allocation of funds for the maintenance of Internet portals, and the provision of administrative support to social organizations. There are definite plans for the future, including several events which the Secretariat is planning together with the World Federation of Free Latvians for September, 2006. The aim of these events is to promote a discussion within society on issues having to do with Latvians abroad and their family members, their sense of belonging to their ethnic homeland and their role in what’s happening in Latvia today. The primary task of “Tautiešu mēnesis” (the month of the compatriots) is to inform Latvians in Latvia and abroad about each other, to reduce prejudice, and to promote a dialogue. “Tautiešu mēnesis” will include

the presentation of a research project on Latvians and their communities abroad, the conclusion of a children and youth competition „Ceļš uz mājām — tuvs vai tāls?...”, (The road home — a long one or not?), a forum for leaders of social organizations catering to compatriots abroad, and a World Federation of Free Latvians board meeting.

At the heart of any plan or activity are people’s attitudes towards it. I am especially thankful to the World Federation of Free Latvians, its board, the various organizations in the adopted countries, and each compatriot abroad who cares about the preservation of Latvianness for the high level of cooperation we’ve established. I want to thank each and every one of you. It was you who did not allow the flame of freedom and the hope for an independent Latvia to extinguish for decades. It was you who did not spare time, money, or effort to restore Latvia’s independence. However, those spiritual and historic values that you preserved for the future still need attention. Only by working together, living together, and loving and respecting Latvia together, will we be a nation united with a bright future and a role and place amongst other nations.

Thank you for the cooperation.

Truly yours,



*Kristīne Vāgnere
The head of the secretariat
of the special assignments minister for social integration*

PASAULES BRĪVO LATVIEŠU APVIENĪBA

*Amerikas Latviešu apvienība
Latviešu apvienība Amerikā un Junzēlandē
Latviešu Nacionālā apvienība Kanādā
Rietumeiropas latviešu apvienība
Dienvidamerikas latviešu apvienība
Krievijas latviešu kongress*



This book was created thanks to the cooperation between the World Federation of Free Latvians, the central national organizations and the Latvian government. This is one of the first steps in a close mutual cooperation that has developed between WFFL and the Latvian government. Cooperation with Latvians residing abroad has been designated a priority in the outline of Latvian foreign policy, the Parliamentary Cooperation Group for Cooperation with Compatriots Abroad was established in the Saeima, and a long-term Latvian Diaspora Support Program has been adopted, in the creation of which WFFL board members took part and Juris Audariņš was appointed the Ambassador of Special Assignment for cooperation with compatriots abroad.

The history of our country, its demographic situation and its long-term interests require that all Latvians be welcome in Latvia. About one-tenth of all Latvians live abroad. That is a lot. We must do everything to help maintain a Latvian community outside Latvia. At the same time we also must encourage Latvians to return to Latvia.

Thus, we are very happy that the number of those looking for and forming close ties with Latvia is growing, whether it is for professional, economic, political, cultural or purely emotional reasons. There are a growing number of people who want to live in Latvia, if only for some time.

This book is an attempt to provide useful information to those who are still looking for their way to Latvia.

With hopes for productive cooperation in the future,

WFFL Board Chairman



AMERIKAS LATVIEŠU APVIENĪBA
American Latvian Association in the United States, Inc.

400 HURLEY AVENUE
ROCKVILLE MD 20850-3121
TEL.: (301) 340-1914
FAX: (301) 340-8732
E MAIL: alainfo@alaua.org

Dear compatriots,

Several Latvian generations grew up in exile, isolated from their Fatherland. Now Latvia is free and open to every Latvian residing abroad. Many visit Latvia for holidays, relaxing there and strengthening their ties with friends and relatives.

However, the feeling may arise that there is still something missing and it is quite possible that many of you have entertained the thought that you should spend more time in Latvia, perhaps moving there for good. This is the reason we recommend this 'guide,' which contains practical information about returning partially or completely to Latvia.

This 'guide' was created in cooperation with the World Federation of Free Latvians and the Latvian government. Mother Latvia has not forgotten its children and looks after them.

Wishing you good luck,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dace Copeland". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

*Dace Copeland,
ALA Board Chairwoman
February 9, 2005*

Dear compatriots in Canada,

Finally, here is the book for compatriots going back to Latvia for awhile or maybe even moving back for good.

The first Latvians came to Canada as early as the 19th century. Even more Latvians arrived after the 1905 Revolution. The largest wave of refugees came after 1947.

Approximately 15,000 or more Latvians settled in and around Toronto. Altogether, almost 30,000 Latvians have found peace and prosperity in Canada.

Latvians in Toronto and other major centers of settlement have been socially and culturally active. This activity is based on the mutual goals of Latvians: to nurture and develop the culture of the Latvian spirit, to protect national traditions and the language and to maintain and strengthen the national spirit. These values have built a bridge to the Old Latvia.

For years, many have dreamed about returning to their homeland, while others have longed to visit the place where their ancestors once lived. Several compatriots of the middle and the younger generation have moved to Latvia and are now successfully managing their companies in Riga and in other Latvian cities. Some pensioners have moved as well, wanting to live in a Latvian environment among their countrymen and women.

Over the years, the foreign lands where we took sheltered have become nice places to live. The heart, though, still remembers its homeland, and the younger generation wants to experience the dreams of their ancestors which have been passed down in tales from generation to generation.

Is returning possible?

This book will be of indispensable help in the realization of dreams for both young and old.

The information gathered in this book will help solve problems with respects to returning to Latvia.

When the Latvian National Federation in Canada loses its members because they have returned to the homeland, we will have fulfilled our mission of maintaining Latvianness.

Good luck to the travelers and to those visiting Latvia!

Many thanks to everyone who helped gather and assemble this information.

Mārtiņš Sausiņš
Chairman
Latvian National Federation in Canada

Latvian Federation of Australia & New Zealand

The Latvian Federation of Australia & New Zealand congratulates all Latvians returning to live in Latvia and wishes everyone good luck. It is an important step that will take effort but it will definitely bring much joy. The Latvian Federation of Australia & New Zealand wishes success and happiness in your lives in Latvia.

Dace Dārziņa
Chairwoman

Greetings to Latvians abroad from the Latvian National Council in Great Britain (LNPL)

The LNPL was established in 1950 with the help of Kārlis Zariņš, a Latvian ambassador, to represent those Latvians who had come to Great Britain (GB) since 1946 from the western displaced persons' camps in Germany. The primary task of LNPL, as stated in its constitution, was the struggle for the restoration of Latvia's independence. Now, its main task is: 'To promote and support the freedom of the Latvian people and the independence of a democratic state.'

In early 1950s there were about 17,000 Latvians in Great Britain (see Latvians in Great Britain — LNPL 1995 DVF). After three years of working at workplaces appointed by the British Labor Ministry, approximately one half of the Latvians that had entered GB headed for Canada, Australia and the USA.

Since the restoration of Latvia's independence, several hundred Latvians from GB have moved back to Latvia. As of 2004, LNPL had 4000 registered Latvians residing in Great Britain. The number of Latvians that have entered GB for the purpose of earning money, especially after Latvia's accession into the European Union, is not known.

After more than 50 years in GB, Latvian social activities have slowed down. There are still Latvian weekend schools in London and Nottingham, choruses in London and in "Straumēni" and folk dancing groups in London and in Leeds. Ev. Lutheran services are still provided in about 12 places. News may be read in the European Latvian weekly newspaper **Brīvā Latvija (BL)** and the internet website www.labrit.co.uk

News briefs about LNPL may be found at www.lnpl.org.uk. The mailing address of LNPL is: 72 Queensborough Terrace, London, W2 3SH. The house is in the possession of the Daugavas Vanagu Fonds (DVF), thus the given address is their address. This building houses rehearsals of the London Latvian chorus, the London Latvian dancers and the London Latvian School. The building also houses the Latvian Investment and Development Agency and the Latvian Tourism Bureau.

The address of the Embassy of the Republic of Latvia is: 45 Nottingham Place, London, W1U 5LY; phone number: 0207 312 0040.

LNPL provides information and support to Latvians in Great Britain, as much as is possible, and defends Latvia's interests when the Embassy of the Republic of Latvia is unable to do so due to diplomatic protocol.

*Andrejs Ozoliņš,
LNPL Presidium Chairman.*

Greetings to all users of the Guide worldwide from the Latvian Community in Germany (LKV)

The LKV was established in 1946 to represent Latvians who had come to Germany during World War II, most of whom ended up living in displaced persons' camps in zones controlled by the USA, Great Britain and France. No one knows the exact number of Latvians living in Germany after the war, but there were approximately 150,000.

The LKV's main goal was originally to elect a democratic representative decision-making body — the Latvian Central Council (LCP). The members of the Community were united by their interest in Latvia, their wish to maintain and nurture the Latvian language and culture and their desire to regain Latvia's freedom and independence. The LKV's most outstanding achievement was ensuring the work of the Munster Latvian Gymnasium from 1946 to 1998. The LKV continues to support the educational aspirations of Latvian youth in various ways, including supporting the European Summer School (which originated in Munster 25 years ago), which takes place annually in Latvia.

In the late 1940s, Latvians began leaving Germany, mostly for the USA, Australia, Great Britain, and Canada. Now, about 4,000 Latvians still participate in social events in Germany. Most of these are 'old Latvians' from the last war and their children, who were born or raised in Germany. The number of compatriots who have come to Germany to earn money in recent years, especially after Latvia's accession to the EU, is still unknown.

After nearly 60 years of productive work, Latvian social activities have changed quite a bit. There is the Latvian Center in Munster (LCM), which houses LKV bureau, the library of the former Munster Latvian Gymnasium and a vast archive pertaining to life in exile. The LCM also provides short-term housing possibilities. Several centers in Germany offer Evangelical Lutheran services. Elmārs Ernsts Rozītis, Archbishop of the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church outside Latvia, lives and works in Germany. The address of the church is: Dean Gunārs Abakuks, Hintergasse 2, 67725 Boerstadt, phone number, fax: 0049-6357-5255). News about events in Germany may be read in the European Latvian weekly newspaper *Brīvā Latvija*, Doma laukums 1, Rīga LV 1914, phone number 00371 — 7223224, 7211776.

Latvian organizations:

Latvian Center 'Munster', Salzmannstr. 152, 48159 Muenster, www.lc.de Daugavas Vanagi, 'Bērzaine', Leinhaldenweg 28, 79104 Freiburg (quarters), phone number 0049-(0)761-551336

Baltic Christian Student Association, Annaberger Str. 400, 53175 Bonn-Bad Godesberg, (quarters), www.annaberg.de

Latvian Press Society, Breslauer Str. 44, 48157 Muenster

Society for former students and friends of Munster Latvian Gymnasium Pēteris Purmalis, .Muenzstrasse 1, 48143 Muenster, phone number 0049 — (0)251 — 44439

Latvian Tourism Bureau (to the Baltic states), Ebden-Reisen, Frankfurter Str. 54, 35440 Linden, phone number 0049-(0) 6403-74117 www.lettland-reisen.de

Useful information for everyone: www.latviesi.com

All of the listed organizations are open to fresh ideas. We are united by the Latvian state, language and culture. All decent compatriots are welcome to join us.

*Aija Ebdene
LKV Board Member
Salzmannstr. 152, 48159 Muenster
Ph. 0049-(0)251-213013
Fax: 0049-(0)251-218772
e-mail: ltk.muenster@t-online.de*

*Board Chairman: Dr. Andris Zemītis
zemitis@t-online.de*



Enlarged meeting of the Association of Latvians in Western Europe, September 26, Stockholm, premises of the Latvian Embassy.

From the left: *Andrejs Ozoliņš, Chairman of the Latvian National Council in Great Britain, Mudīte Hoogland Krasta, Chairwoman of the Latvian Central Council in Sweden and the Chairwoman of the Association of Latvians in Western Europe, Uldis Reveliņš, Board Member of Daugavas Vanagu Fonds, Rita Brūvere, Representative of the Latvian Association in the Czech Republic and Slovakia.*

Row two: *Andrejs Leimanis, Board Member of the Latvian Central Council in Sweden, Noldis Millers, Chairman of the Latvian Aid Committee, Aija Ebden, Vice-chairwoman of the Latvian Community in Germany, Andris Zemītis, Chairman of the Latvian Community in Germany.*

Row three: *Juris Rozītis, Presidium Chairman of the Latvian Central Council in Sweden, Ainars Zemītis, Board Member of the Latvian Community in Germany, Ilze Šakare, Vice-chairwoman of the Latvian Central Council in Sweden, Māra Strautmane, Chairwoman of the Latvian National Foundation, Lilija Zobens, Board Member of the Latvian National Council in Great Britain, Austra Krēsliņa, Advisor in Education Affairs of the Latvian Central Council in Sweden, Laima Speakman-Brown, Board Member of Latvian National Council in Great Britain.*

Greetings from the Association of Latvians in Western Europe (RLA)

During the last stages of World War II, about 125,000 Latvians left Latvia and headed to the West. At least 4,500 reached Sweden by boat, where they settled or headed to other countries after the war, mostly to the USA and Canada. The majority ended up in Germany, where after years in camps, they began emigrating to other countries that were willing to accept them as refugees. First, in 1946, Belgium started accepting men without families to work in coalmines. That same year, Great Britain started accepting women without families for simple jobs in hospitals. A year later, Great Britain began accepting people for work in agriculture, coalmines, the textile industry and housekeeping. These also were mostly people without families. It wasn't until the end of 1948 that the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand began accepting refugees with families. A small number of refugees settled in France, Italy, Switzerland, Denmark, Norway and other Western European countries. It is estimated that about 10,000 Latvians stayed in Germany for good.

In 1951, Latvian organizations in European asylum countries were united by the European Center for Latvian Restoration Committee (LAK EC). This organization played an important role in European Latvian political and cultural activities. They organized six European Latvian Song Festivals and numerous congresses for culture activists. LAK EC also helped ensure the education of the youth in Latvian language and history. Later, it took the European Latvian Summer School (EVS) under its wing. The Latvian Central Council in Sweden was a member of this organization since its establishment. After the restoration of Latvia's independence, the LAK EC needed to alter its statutes and functions. This was achieved by establishing the Association of Latvians in Western Europe (RLA) in 1995.

The RLA represents Latvian organizations in Western Europe. The organization's aim is to coordinate Latvian national political interests regarding information, education and culture. The RLA is managed by a presidium which consists of two members from Great Britain, Germany and Sweden. The chairman of the presidium is chosen for two years by the principle of rotation. In 2004, the following organizations were represented in the RLA presidium: the Latvian National Council in Great Britain, Daugavas Vanagu Fonds in Great Britain, the Latvian Community in Germany and the Latvian Central Council in Sweden. Latvians from other countries like Norway, France and the Czech Republic send representatives to RLA meetings, as well. Other Latvian organizations are invited to participate, too. Issues discussed in the RLA meetings include the Latvian newspaper *Brīvā Latvija*, the needs of the European Latvian Summer School, the opportunities Latvians in Europe have to support the development of Latvia and the Latvian government's support program for Latvians abroad. The RLA cooperates with Latvian representatives in other continents through the World Federation of Free Latvians (WFFL).

*December 1, 2004
Mudīte Hoogland Krasta
present
RLA Presidium Chairwoman*

Greetings from the Latvian Central Council in Sweden (ZLCP)

In the last years of World War II, more than 4,500 Latvians escaped to Sweden. Most came by boat from the coast of Kurzeme in 1944 and 1945. Later, they were followed by refugees who had gone to Germany or had been drafted by the German Army. After the decision of the Swedish government in 1946 to extradite Latvian legionnaires to the USSR, many felt unsafe in Sweden and headed for the US, Canada and other countries. As of 1952, about 4,000 Latvians remained in Sweden.

Latvians in Sweden, just like in other refuge countries, were very active. They established parishes, Sunday schools, choruses, folk dance groups, theater groups etc. They published Latvian newspapers and books and established various organizations. In the beginning, everyone hoped that their time in exile would be short. However Latvia remained under occupation for 50 years. The solidarity and identity of the Latvian community was maintained by common events and the shared hope that the unbelievable would happen one day and Latvia would once again become a free and independent country.

In Sweden, Latvian political activities toward a free Latvia were organized. The Latvian Central Council in Sweden was established in 1953. Those who had never personally experienced the terror of communism had a different approach to the struggle for a free Latvia. This gave tangible results in talks with Swedish politicians and organizations.

The first generation of exiles was replaced by a second one, and now, partly, by a third. Over time, Latvians became a part of the Swedish community but never abandoned the idea of a free Latvia and continued to maintain their sense of belonging to the Latvian nation. It is worth mentioning that the Swedish Latvian community has given Sweden a Minister for Justice, a Foreign Minister, the director of its military school and several well known journalists. Numerous internationally known artists, musicians and scientists, too, come from the Latvian community in Sweden. They, too, are true Latvians with opportunities to influence society for the good of Latvians and Latvia.

When Latvia regained its independence, Latvians in Sweden were overjoyed and were asked themselves what should now be done. Until then, they had focused all their efforts toward maintaining Latvianness and the struggle for a free Latvia. The question arose as to how to provide the most help to Latvia — by returning or by staying in Sweden. Structural changes were made in the aims and activities of Latvian organizations in Sweden. Many organizations started humanitarian, cultural and political work aimed at helping in the restoration of Latvia. Some Latvians returned partly or completely to Latvia. The necessity of Latvian organizations was lost in the eyes of the Swedish community as the Swedish people believed that Latvians could now return to Latvia.

The Latvian state welcomes those returning to Latvia but it also feels it is necessary for Latvians to continue working for the good of Latvia in other countries. It is important for the residents of Latvia to maintain contact with ‘foreign Latvians’ as they help Latvia establish useful contacts and gain influence throughout the world.

The work of Latvian organizations in Sweden played, and still plays, a large role. That is also because new Latvians are still now coming to Sweden. These are people whose spouses are Swedes, who are students, or who are coming for work.

In 2003, **the Latvian Central Council in Sweden** looked back at its past fifty years of work. A lot had changed during that time, both in world politics and in the lives of the exile Latvian community and organizations. The most important event was the restoration of Latvia’s independence. The goal that exiled social and political activists had been striving for was reached. The tasks of ZLCP changed with these new circumstances. Existing statutes had to be altered to adapt them to the new activities of the organization, which would be geared more toward the interests of Swedish Latvians. We mustn’t forget though that the newly restored Latvia still needs us, Latvians abroad, for our experience, knowledge and practical work.

At first, European Latvian organizations were united under the LAK EC (European Center for Latvian Restoration Committee), which was established in 1951. The leaders of Latvian exile organizations realized the importance of unification under one organization in order to ensure that world leaders better heard their voices. Thus, in 1956, the World Federation of Free Latvians was established, the main task of which was, and still is, to lead and coordinate the political activities of exile/foreign Latvians. Since the very beginning, the ZLCP has been represented in the board of the WFFL by one board member.

The ZLCP encouraged Latvia's accession into the European Union (EU) so that it would become a full-fledged part of Europe. It also encouraged Latvia to join NATO, as NATO statutes state, 'one for all, all for one,' providing the political safety that Latvia needs.

The ZLCP, together with other Latvian organizations in Sweden, plays a significant role in defending the interests of Swedish Latvians, maintaining contacts with other Latvian organizations throughout the world and working for the good of Latvia.

Swedish Latvians have many close ties to institutions in Latvia. Many have relatives who have moved back to Latvia. Many have not yet decided to follow. Many visit Latvia as tourists. This Guide will be useful to everyone.

*Mudīte Hoogland Krasta
ZLCP Board Chairwoman
Stockholm, December of 2004*

I Insights into the experiences of Latvian exiles

Around ten percent of the Latvian nation left Latvia and headed west at the end of 1944 and beginning of 1945. This is how life for Latvians in exile began. After the war, Latvians found refuge in those parts of Germany and Austria occupied by the Western allies. Nearly 5,000 Latvians crossed the Baltic Sea by boat and reached Sweden. At the time, nobody could have guessed that life in exile would continue for 45 years. August 21, 1991 is considered the end of it, as it was then that Latvian independence was restored.

Exile had three distinct stages:

1. The displaced persons' camps era,
2. Emigration and settling in other countries,
3. The gradual shift in exile leadership to the generation that was raised outside homeland.

These three stages did not start or end at definite times in history. The time of the largest number of residents in displaced persons' camps at one time was in 1946, when the last deserters came from the east — some coming from USSR-occupied Germany and others being former legionnaires returning from captivity.

Emigration to other countries started in 1947, when Great Britain, Belgium and France started recruiting workers. At the same time, emigrants were recruited to Australia and Canada. After 1948, when the Displaced Persons (DP) law was passed, extensive emigration began to the USA. In the summer of 1950, management of the displaced persons' camps was handed over to the Germans and the period of mass emigration ended a year later. About 10,000 compatriots stayed in Germany because they couldn't emigrate due to their health, age or other reasons. In subsequent decades, many Latvian exiles changed their place of living. Most settled in the USA.

The times of camps

At the end of World War II, more than 100,000 Latvians found refuge in the displaced persons' camps in Germany. They didn't want to return to USSR-occupied Latvia and were taken under the wing of the Western allied forces and later, refugee organizations. The archipelago made up of these displaced persons' camps was scattered over the entire territory of West Germany, but a small number of Latvians found refuge in Austria and Denmark. Life in the camps was quite isolated from the outside world. Thus, these camps were justifiably dubbed 'Little Latvia.' An unexpectedly vital and extensive Latvian cultural life blossomed in them.

There was a disproportionately large part of the intellectual and highly-educated crust of Latvian society that was among the 100,000 refugees that fled the country. This was understandable, as it was this particular part of the society that Stalin's terror aimed to annihilate during the Year of Terror (Baigajā gadā). Those who had managed to flee the terror were convinced they wouldn't have jobs in their profession or the chance to lead a normal life after the repeated occupation of Latvia.

The exiles were devastated at the loss of their homeland but they clearly saw their duty — to survive their time in exile and return to the Fatherland strong and unconquered. In the meantime, they had to do what they did best — continue their Latvian lives, maintain the Latvian culture and keep all Latvian exiles together.

The average size of displaced persons' camps was 1,000—2,000 people, but some were even larger. A small model of Latvian life was formed in almost all of them. This consisted of an elementary school, a high school, a theater group, a folk dance group, a chorus and other elements important to maintaining Latvian culture and a Latvian way of life.

Connections were soon established among the camps and they began organizing concert tours, visits from writers, touring theater performances, concerts that brought several choruses together, Boy Scout and Girl Guide activities and sporting competitions.

This era of the camps was beneficial for the Latvian exile community.

1. It helped prolong life in a Latvian environment and strengthen the feeling of Latvian unity.
2. Children and youth could continue their education in Latvian. It was even possible to start and continue one's academic education at the Pineberg Baltic University, which functioned for several years under the management of Baltic scientists.

3. The era of the camps prepared Latvians for their future lives away from their homeland and created impulses for the restoration of unity in later stages of emigration.

During the first years of exile there was the widespread belief among Latvians that the period of exile would not last long. A common toast on New Years was, 'Let us celebrate the next New Year back in our country, our Latvia.'

At the heart of this unrealistic and slowly fading belief were promises made by the Western democracies that US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill announced in the form of the Atlantic Charter during World War II. This charter promised that all countries that had lost their freedom as a result of the war would receive it back at the war's end. Latvian refugees had seen the mightiness of the USA in the last year of the war. It wasn't until later that the hope was lost that the US would be able to actively help retrieve the lost state.

Book publishing flourished at displaced persons' camps. Censure-free journalism developed too. During both the Soviet and German occupations, Latvian authors couldn't express their thoughts freely due to repression and censure. Numerous unpublished manuscripts traveled west in the bags of refugees. A long suppressed stream of publications, both literal and scientific, now came out. This, in itself, was a small cultural explosion.

The few thousands of Latvians who had fled across the sea to Sweden also widely represented the intelligentsia of the nation. Although they had arrived in a country that hadn't been devastated by the war, the struggle for survival prevented the refugees from becoming as culturally active as their compatriots in the displaced persons' camps. On the other hand, they had the opportunity to start a normal life in a relatively friendly and nice environment much sooner. The lives of Latvians in Sweden were some four or five years ahead of those who went through the camps and then emigrated overseas.

Emigration overseas

During the next stage of emigration the largest number of Latvians ended up in the USA, then Australia, Canada, Great Britain and South American countries. Only those who could not emigrate due to their age, illness, disability or for other reasons stayed in West Germany.

Life after emigration changed drastically. The children and youth were the first ones to learn the language of their adopted countries. Adults had to work jobs that didn't have anything to do with their previous qualifications. Only specialists in technical fields had the opportunity to quickly return to their professions. Specialists in the humanities, who constituted a majority of the refugees, had to change professions.

Despite the vast expanses of the new countries, it took only a few years before life was restored on a Latvian level and all the necessary institutions had been established, including parishes, societies and Saturday or Sunday schools. All the activities that Latvians needed to establish communities were resumed. Young people, too, established youth groups and student groups. Student organizations, Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, and even some H4 clubs (mazpulki) resumed their activities, despite the fact that there were almost no Latvians still working in the field of agriculture. Initial fears that the children and youth wouldn't be interested in maintaining their Latvianness proved to be groundless. Only after years and decades in exile did assimilation start wearing down the unity of the community.

The maintenance of Latvianness was now competing with the daily realities of living in a foreign world. The restoration, development and continuation of a Latvian environment required all reserves of strength that were left over after providing for a daily existence.

Latvians have always been hard working and active people, and prosperity came quickly in this new environment. This prosperity helped provide funds for the maintenance and development of a Latvian environment. Central organizations were established, tying geographically scattered Latvian communities to larger organizations that encompassed countries and regions.

The most significant difference between the era of the camps and the new reality was created gradually as the younger generation grew up being educated in local schools. Proportions were gradually changing. The number of people who had been educated in Latvia diminished as the older generation got older and began dying. The number of the young people who received their education abroad grew. Before long, those who didn't have even a single memory of life in Latvia became adults. They were followed by those born in exile.

The strongest influence on the Latvian environment abroad was left by the generation that had experienced Latvia's independence years. This generation comprised both authoritarian and democratic opinions. The views of both orientations often differed. Everyone cared equally about the youth and how to keep it Latvian. Opinions varied though. There were even some who tried to analogically compare belonging to a nation to trees. A Latvian won't change from a birch into a pine tree just because it has been planted in another country, they said. This was not a realistic way of thinking, as in emigrant countries like the USA, Canada and Australia, nationalism was usually lost by the second generation. The newly settled Latvians realized this through their contacts with 'old Latvians.' These earlier immigrants were already pensioners but their children didn't speak Latvian anymore.

It was quite common that Latvians bought their social houses and churches from Finns, Scandinavians and other nationalities as their organizations died out in the process of assimilation. The new generation was growing within the Latvian community and their first language was the language of their adopted countries but the knowledge of Latvian had to be developed with individual determination and the help of a Latvian environment.

How can assimilation be fought? This question weighed on the settlers' minds from the moment they arrived. Encouraged by both their parents and their own initiative, youth groups were established. These were then united by an organization encompassing the country or continent, such as the American Latvian Youth Association, the European Latvian Youth Association and the Latvian National Youth Association in Canada. These organizations brought young people together and organized youth days, seminars and other events where the new generation of exiles could be together.

Generational Change

In late 1950s several cultural differences began appearing between those who received their education in their adopted countries and those who brought their Latvianness with them from Latvia. A so-called 'generational breach' arose. Some ironically said that the older generation, as they left Kurzeme's burning shores in the flames of war, had become trapped in their own mental uncertainty, which was no longer compatible with a new, fast-paced, lifestyle.

After the death of Stalin, and especially after the 'thaw times' that followed in occupied Latvia, the issue of flexibility thinking about the Latvian nation in Latvia was becoming crucially important. The intelligentsia growing up in exile claimed that Latvianness was not frozen and taken from the homeland to be preserved in a jar for the future but that Latvianness was alive and changing with the times, even in exile. They said the exile generation that grew up in independent Latvia did not have a monopoly over decisions made in regards to these issues.

As with all communities living separated from their homeland, the Latvian exiles tended toward conservatism and self-isolation. When it became easier to visit Latvia, these opportunities were used by every generation but it was those in the generation that had been raised in exile that looked for, and found, contact with their peers in Latvia. Both sides discovered and got to know one other. For culture-bound people, both in Latvia and in exile, the common denominator was everything Latvian, and this helped destroy a wall built up by differing ideologies.

The Latvian atmosphere of the exile life was inevitably connected to politics. However, it shouldn't be assumed that the political exile could put its bridle on culture. Scattered throughout the world from the comparatively isolated environment of the displaced persons' camps, the exiles were inevitably surrounded by foreign influences. This was due, in part, to Latvians' individualist natures. Latvians tended to live at a respectful distance from one another even in densely populated cities. Many middle and older generation Latvian culture activists remained immune to the foreign environment, but young people being educated in foreign countries became what some in exile humorously call mental 'divdabji'.¹ This divided world was initially built on a Latvian foundation, and continued in a foreign environment more or less influenced by the Latvian world.

It is important to mention the Munster Gymnasium here. Until the very end of the period of exile, it offered youth from throughout the world a five-year education in a Latvian environment. However, even in Munster, this Latvianness wasn't unchanging. Its face was formed by the generational change in the rows of teachers who had themselves been born in exile. Despite all the changes, the Munsterians can definitely be regarded as the exiled youth's elite of Latvianness.

Those in the conservative faction of Latvian exiles were trying to keep unchanged their attitudes toward the Latvian lifestyle. Their slogan could be 'Let us preserve ourselves for Latvia, let us preserve the Latvianness that we took with us when we left our homeland.' Of course, with the change of generations, young, talented people entered society. These were people immersed in Latvianness but brought up abroad and, even if they had wanted to, who would have been unable to keep what had been inherited from the generation that left the homeland unchanged. Gradually, the young and dynamic in society took over. Not only did they take over the exile Latvian political leadership, but they also found the material means to ensure the preservation of Latvianness and that it could be passed down to yet another generation. This third generation was globally united by the Latvian language and the values of the Latvian culture, but it was no longer important to separate what had been brought from the homeland and what had been added over the years. The world had changed a lot in the meantime and they, too, were the result of these changes.

The common denominator was still Latvia and a Latvian nation that, in the last decades of exile, was no longer so unreachable or isolated. It was now possible to actually visit the country and meet its people.

The West politically acknowledged the occupation of Latvia and its ambassadors continued working in various countries. Exile Latvian politicians acknowledged Kārlis Zariņš, the ambassador to Great Britain, as Latvia's legal representative worldwide. Later, a parallel Latvian political representative body, the Assembly of Captive European Nations (ACEN), was formed. Its first president was the Latvian diplomat, Dr. Vilis Māsēns. This organization represented the Baltic States and other European countries that had come under the rule of the USSR. The popularity and weight of this organization was partly dependent on the US — USSR cold war situation. The more tense relations were between the two, the greater was the US's support for the organization. After John F. Kennedy introduced a policy intended to reduce tensions between the US and the USSR in the early '60s, the US stopped providing serious support to the ACEN.

As the new generation of exiles that grew up abroad began to gain influence, the World Federation of Free Latvians and the World Baltic Association (PBA) began playing a more important role in political life. Contrary to groups that had come before them, these organizations were not looking for funds from US sources. They wanted to be independent and raise funds from within the Latvian exile community. The Latvian Freedom Foundation was established and its aim was to

¹ Divdabis: participle, play on words as 'divas dabas' means double nature

gather and save up funds for the political struggle for the restoration of an independent Latvia. With increased funding, new opportunities arose to strengthen Baltic, and especially Latvian, political work autonomously from the policies of the adopted countries. Since 1970, the WFFL has been managed by the exile generation. Together with Lithuanians and Estonians, the Baltic lobby was created in Washington which actively sought support in US Congress and other governmental institutions for the restoration of Baltic independence. Similar activities spread in Canada, Australia and Europe. The persistent political work was paying off. The problems of the Baltic States were once again in the spotlight of the international community.

The USSR's efforts to refute the political activities of the Latvian exiles created quite the opposite effect, and the exiles became more and more successful. When the Baltic Awakening started in the late 1980s, thanks to the persistent efforts of the WFFL and PBA, the Baltic struggle and longing for independence was well known and understood in the West. This helped gain the international recognition that was so crucial in those days and months.

Latvians showed themselves to be more united and centralized at political lobbying than Estonians or Lithuanians. The Latvian Freedom Foundation, too, was far ahead in its development than its counterparts in our neighboring countries.

The period of exile ended when Latvia regained its independence on August 21, 1991. Now this community became a community of foreign Latvians. The duty of an exile would be to return to his Fatherland, become a useful citizen and use the knowledge he had gained abroad to help Latvia grow. However, a strong and politically active part of society in various influential countries of the world could also support and serve Latvia. To go or not to go, this was a difficult question for many. The 45 years living away from the homeland had done its share in alienating both nation and exile.

Exiles become foreign Latvians

After the restoration of independence on August 21, 1991, the relationship between Fatherland and exile changed drastically. The relationship was improved, especially after the law was passed granting exiles the right to regain their Latvian citizenship no matter what their current citizenship was. This step also helped determine how many of the pre-occupation Latvian citizens living abroad wanted to reinstate their formal ties with the country they had once lost. Some complications arose, as there was a lack of information about how Latvian citizenship, once regained, would be compatible with those of the exiles' current places of residence. Laws differed from country to country. In the US, where most former Latvian citizens live, dual citizenship was not a problem, but that was not the case in all countries.

Almost all families in exile had lost property back home. Would they receive it back? Would it be possible to arrange everything in a fair manner after so many years; after the occupation that had annihilated Latvian agriculture? Not everyone got their property back. There were plenty of problems, but, all in all, the Latvian state was quite responsive to its newly regained citizens and even to those who didn't try to regain their citizenship.

In the mid-1990s the Saeima decided that steps must be taken to encourage the maintenance and development of contacts with foreign Latvians. However, it took almost ten years before actual serious work began toward the realization of these declared intentions.

Although a small percentage of Latvians have moved from the West back to Latvia, there are many people who annually spend some time in Latvia. Many live both here and abroad. This soothes their longing for their homeland while at the same time allowing them to make use of what they have learned in their adopted countries. Almost everyone shares the same difficult problem — that their children and grandchildren are more closely tied to their adopted countries. Families, property, investments, pensions, insurance, medical care and other issues all make returning to Latvia a difficult decision, as there is no law, agreement or guarantee that if they abandon their lives abroad to return, they will be provided for in Latvia.

Each individual has his own issues and questions. Many of these could be solved if Latvia can solve its interstate relations with their adopted countries.

Another obstacle that hinders the joy of returning is that over the past 50 years, many changes have taken place in Latvia that may be difficult to accept for a Latvian who has lived for decades, or even an entire lifetime, abroad. History can't be changed, but this doesn't make it any easier for people to accept unpleasant changes.

Not everyone is going to return. It can be predicted that a majority of foreign Latvians are not going to return. Thus, the state has started a new stage of cooperation to establish closer ties to those living abroad who intend to stay there. To be a Latvian and to live abroad are not incompatible notions. But to stay Latvian through several generations of living abroad is almost impossible, as with the loss of the language, everything else is lost.

Cooperation with Latvia is possible. It is possible to teach the language to the next generation, just as it is possible to visit the Fatherland. It is possible for children to live in Latvia for awhile to learn the language and get to know the country and the people. Thus, it is possible to live abroad while still maintaining close ties to the country and its people to effectively maintain one's Latvianness. In order to do this, both sides have to cooperate. The new cooperation between Latvia and foreign Latvian organizations brings hope that this relationship will be a successful one and that foreign Latvians will belong to their nation unless they themselves choose otherwise.

The Latvian diaspora in the East

The Eastern Latvian diaspora is represented mostly by those Latvians living in the Russian Federation. It consists of three main groups, the 'Old Latvians,' who emigrated from Latvia beginning in the second half of the 19th century, the deportees of the Stalin era and the volunteer émigrés of Soviet times.

Since the early 1990s, various Latvian organizations have been active in Russia. These are located, for the most part, in the larger Russian cities where Latvian communities exist, like Moscow, St. Petersburg, Omsk, Tomsk, Krasnoyarsk, Magadan, Smolyenska, and Pleskava. There are also regional associations, like the Bashkortostan Latvian Culture Center, which encompasses all Latvians living in Bashkyria. The Komi-Baltija is a similar association that encompasses Latvian communities from Siktivkara, Inta and Uhta. Several Latvian Evangelic Lutheran parishes have also been reestablished. These are located in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Bashkortostan, the Lejas Bulānas village in the Krasnoyarska region and Magadan. A Baptist parish has also been established in the Bobrovka village of the Omsk region.

The Latvian lifestyle of the 'Old Latvians' differs from the lifestyles found in the city associations, as for 'Old Latvians,' it is a daily routine while those in the city associations are surrounded by a very foreign environment.

Representatives of the Eastern Latvian diaspora live in other countries as well, but in small numbers. These countries include, among others, Belarus, Moldova and Georgia.

II Foreign Latvians who found their way home

In this chapter we offer an insight into how many foreign Latvians have moved back to the Fatherland and how some of them are now doing. An inquiry was sent to a number of former exiles that we know of and we received a sufficient number of answers to get a pretty good overview of the lives of those people who have come back here from various adopted countries. In this summary, I tried to include at least one former exile's life in Latvia from each of the adopted countries. I have included the complete text of the first few life stories and extracts about topics not yet touched on from the following ones. I myself am enjoying life in Latvia for the second time. I came here for four years in 1993 and worked at the Accounting Methodology Department of the Finance Ministry, where I translated the international standards of accounting, various related laws, and textbooks from English into Latvian. I also worked at the hotel 'Radi un Draugi' (established by the Daugavas Vanagi of Great Britain), which had just opened. Unfortunately, I had to return to America due to family circumstances. I stayed there until the May, 2003, when I returned to Latvia for good, and I still consider this to be one of the best decisions I've ever made. As I can't imagine anything more interesting than the comments by the respondents of the inquiry, I'll let you read their stories, some of which are longer than others.

Astrīda Jansone

The first story is about Amanda Jātniece, a young Latvian with two small children. She moved here from America while her husband, a professional veterinarian, remained in America to give the family time to acclimate and earn money for their new lives in Latvia. In America, Amanda was a member of the Community of Latvian Dievturi and a board member of the North American 3x3 Council. She had been thinking about moving to Latvia since 1993, when her relatives told her that the land next to their house was for sale. Unfortunately, they missed out on that purchase but managed to buy land elsewhere in 2002, with the hope of moving there in 2005. However, due to her husband's job, the family house in the US had to be sold, so they made a decision in 2004 to move the family to Latvia that autumn, with plans for Amanda's husband to join them the following year if the family had acclimated to life in Latvia.

Amanda mentioned the upbringing of Latvian exiles as the most important reason for her decision to move. At Latvian school and at home, children were taught that the liberation of Latvia was the ultimate goal, so moving back to Latvia seemed the natural thing to do. Amanda said "The exiles' war time stories always moved me and I guess I feel a personal duty to my grandparents to 'complete the circle.' They had to leave their home and their land and I have the opportunity now to return there."

She also said she thinks it gets harder and harder with each generation to maintain the Latvian language and culture in a foreign environment. The high quality of life in America contributes to this, despite all its drawbacks and negative elements, like the current shift toward political conservatism and the widespread use of chemicals in food. Latvia, as a member of the European Union, is starting to seem like a more attractive place to raise children than America.

At the time Amanda was interviewed, she had only been living in Latvia for a couple of months, which was not long enough to give objective impressions. She said it was difficult because her husband and children were still in America and could not move because of his job. This was a source of stress for the whole family. Now, though, considering the circumstances, the small 'half-family' is feeling quite comfortable in Latvia.

One pleasant surprise was that, because of their dual citizenship (which the whole family has), they avoided the bureaucracy they would have had to otherwise navigate to secure residence permits. However, Amanda said she is worried about that dual citizenship, too. In accordance with Latvian law, upon reaching the age of 16, her children will have to decide which of their two citizenships to keep. She believes that a child is not ready to make this decision at such a young age.

When asked about what she dislikes most about Latvia, Amanda said she really disliked the extreme surliness and intolerance of many shop assistants and government officials. She said this was one of the Soviet absurdities that may have left a lasting influence on the entire country and its people.

Amanda said she thinks the biggest problems that young repatriate families in Latvia face are its low wages and the difficulty in finding suitable apartments. If the head of a family receives a small salary here, they can't afford to visit their relatives in America from time to time.

Former exiles, especially younger ones, shouldn't be surprised if they have conflicting feelings over deciding where to live. There are both good and bad aspects of living in either country. It is a difficult decision that will later always be doubted. But in reality, it is a great privilege to be able to choose where to live, and many local Latvians cannot really understand that. It is not uncommon to hear comments like "Life in America is good, so why did you move to Latvia?"

Amanda also said the lives of young repatriate families here would be easier if it was possible to find reliable nannies for their children, as she said she was unable to find a granny here that could take care of her children, as was the case in America.

Lastly, Amanda offered a piece of advice to 'New Latvians,' or repatriates: "It helps if you remind yourself that friendships in Latvia don't start as easily or as quickly as in America. I always chuckle when I'm waiting at school for my kids alongside a group of other mothers and nobody talks to each other. Everyone is looking at their shoes or at the sky or anywhere else but not at other people. It almost seems like people deliberately try to avoid those standing next to them. The only consolation is that if a friendship *is* formed despite everything, they say it's for life."

* * *

Aija Priedīte moved back to Latvia from Sweden. She began thinking about moving back in 1989 when she was offered a job at University of Latvia. In Sweden, she was a member of the Latvian Academic Organization and is now a member of the Ramave Latvian Association of Philologists. She said the most important reason for moving back to Latvia was the interesting job offer, which was exactly what she had been looking for. She has lived in Latvia since 1994 and has no regrets about her decision to move back. Aija said the nicest surprise for her was finding she could live here quite normally. She said it is very pleasant to experience for the first time that you don't have to spell your name for everyone and explain what it means. On the contrary, at some institutions she wasn't even asked for her passport, as it was clear to everyone that she was definitely a Latvian and there was no need to prove her citizenship.

What she doesn't like about Latvia is that many people still have a Soviet mindset, namely that one must bring chocolate to State Revenue Service officials to get them to accept company reports, the role of accountants at a company, that many salaries are paid under the table, the mess with health care, and the nostalgic feeling many people have for Soviet times they say weren't really that bad.

One of the biggest problems for her is that, "If someone doesn't like your views, then the eternal counterargument is that you don't understand; that you don't know because you haven't lived here. And the conversation is over."

She said there were several people and institutions that were helpful with her move back to Latvia. These included customs officials and officials at the Riga Sickness Fund (Slimo Kase) where she bought a health insurance policy. The Repatriation center was helpful, too, when her relatives were moving to Latvia in 2003.

Aija said it would make life for new repatriates easier if someone could help with health insurance. This could be done for a whole group through private agencies. Right now, the only organization that accepts individual insurance policies is the Riga Sickness Fund (Slimo Kase).

Before moving to Latvia, Aija recommended that people find an apartment, open bank accounts, transfer money and get all the formalities taken care of that arise when leaving one country and moving to another. She said it would be nice if everyone who wanted to move could get a 'check-list' at the embassy as to "what needs to be done, and in what order, when moving to Latvia." The order is especially important.

* * *

Pēteris Puķītis, 28, moved to Latvia from Toronto, Canada. He is not married and has not joined any organizations yet. He started contemplating life in Latvia back in 1993, with the thought that the Latvian economy would grow at a much faster rate than it would in old democracies like Canada. He was drawn to Latvia because of the love his parents instilled in him for his ancestral homeland. Although when interviewed, he had only been living in Latvia for a couple of months, he claimed to have done the right thing by moving here and had not really been faced with many problems. The first thing he did when he came to Latvia was to lay flowers at the Freedom Monument. He said it was a poignant moment for him, as it was the first time he did it as a resident of his own country.

Pēteris said he thinks people could use help in finding apartments and jobs when moving to Latvia. He may be able to help others find jobs, as he works for a recruitment and human resources company.

He also said the moving process would be easier for many potential repatriates if they could get some financial aid to help pay the moving expenses. Pēteris now works as the director of a recruitment and human resource company, the CVO Group (www.cvo.com). He is very busy and doesn't have much free time.

* * *

The next story is about a retired couple. **Pēteris** and **Ira Bolšaitis** moved to Latvia from the east coast in America. They were active members in almost all central Latvian organizations and a student corporation. In Latvia, they have already managed to join the Riga Latvian Society. They had been dreaming about returning to Latvia all their lives and had the chance to do so when Latvia became free and they were able to retire by age 59. When asked why they decided to return, Pēteris and Ira explained that he left Latvia at the age of seven and lived his entire life with the thought that his main goal in life was to return to a free homeland. Of course, they were fortunate that their financial situation allowed them to return without too much trouble. They have lived in Latvia for seven years and are still convinced they made the right decision. They said they used to hope Latvia would reach its current state of development 10 years from now.

Pēteris suggested that state institutions establish a bureau to locate exiles who wanted to return to Latvia and then coordinate their professional expertise with state priorities. For example, the promotion of scientific work and higher education (if those ever become priorities), the establishment of high-tech companies, etc.

Pēteris and Ira think that before moving, people should contact locals (relatives, friends) and, if possible, find a job. They think it might be a good idea to send compatriots living abroad information about all the positive things that happen in Latvia.

Pēteris himself manages real estate he purchased upon returning and is active at the Occupation Museum and several other non-profit organizations. He spends his free time enjoying Riga's rich cultural life, getting to know Latvia and celebrating his relatives' and friends' countless birthdays and name days.

* * *

Mārcis Gobiņš is a young father of four. He was born and grew up in Germany but has lived in Latvia for eight years now and is a member of the Latvian Transatlantic Organization (LATO). He had always dreamed of returning to live here, as he always considered Latvia his true homeland. By 1989, he had decided to move here after graduating. This he did in 1996 and he loves it here in Latvia despite the residual Soviet mentality.

He said he was encouraged to take this step by "Patriotism, the wish to live in my true homeland and the wish to contribute to the struggle for Latvia's freedom and, later, development. Moreover, an important factor was the Christian parish here in Riga that my wife Ilona and I wanted very much to be a part of."

The nicest surprise for Mārcis was that he immediately felt at home in Latvia, or the place where he belongs. He said it is simply great to live in your own homeland. Sometimes there are unpleasant situations due to the Soviet mentality that still persists in people here but he doesn't see that as a huge problem and has learned to deal with it.

Now Mārcis works at the EU PHARE project and the Riga Graduate School of Law. He sometimes makes a little on the side working as a freelance interpreter for the European Commission. He and his wife are raising four children and he is preparing to get a PhD in Law. He spends his free time with his family or at the parish.

* * *

Vilis Vītols moved to Latvia from Venezuela in March, 1999. Part of his family was already expecting the move, so it went smoothly. He is the founder of the Vītols Foundation, a member of the student fraternity *Fraternitas Vanenika*, and a member of the Latvian National Library Foundation. His family had always contemplated returning to Latvia but it only became possible after the restoration of independence. He said the main reason for returning was that his family and his heirs would sooner or later assimilate if they had stayed in Venezuela. After five years in Latvia, he is still confident he made the right choice. Life in Latvia has turned out to be more pleasant and interesting than he had imagined and the business opportunities are better than he had hoped for. He is bothered by the fact that compatriots here in Latvia, even those in high positions, lack patriotism.

Vilis is convinced that moving back to Latvia would be considerably easier for foreign Latvians if the government allocated more financial means to the Repatriation Center, as this is one of the very few institutions that gives actual aid to repatriates.

To other potential compatriots moving back to Latvia he recommended they start learning the language and reading as much as possible about Latvia. When asked what else Latvians who are considering returning should know, Vilis Vītols said:

"Latvia today is a land of opportunity and future. I have recommended to several foreign Latvian friends and my own children that they should consider moving to Latvia. Three of our children have moved here with their families and none of them regrets the decision. I am confident that Latvia can expect decades of uninterrupted development and growth. The period since the restoration of independence is part of this growth and it is going to continue. Examples indicating this can be found in Ireland, Spain and Portugal after they joined the European Union. There are other indications that suggest that Latvia's potential is even greater. It is especially advantageous for pensioners to move to Latvia, as they can live a much better lifestyle in Latvia with Western pensions. Life here is cheaper. Concerns about the quality of health care

are ungrounded. It has improved a lot in the last decade. From my own experience, I can say that I have had two major operations in the last two years and the results are perfect but the cost was one tenth or one twentieth what it would have been in the USA. Returning to Latvia is not just the fulfillment of one's patriotic duty, it can turn out to be a very smart choice from a financial point of view, especially for young, well-educated people. Filips Kļaviņš, a young lawyer from New York who has been very successful here in Latvia, said this. I agree with what he said completely."

Latvian high school graduates from Siberia who want to repatriate to Latvia, may turn to the Vitols Foundation (Lāčplēša iela 75—31LV 1011, Rīga or call 371 728 0122, fonds@latnet.lv) and request a stipend to attend one of Latvia's universities.

* * *

Agnija and Osvalds Aizstrauti are pensioners and former exiles who returned from Australia. Osvalds is a member of the student fraternity Cursica and both of them are members of the Janis Parish. (Jāņa Draudze). They started thinking about returning to Latvia in 1992 and did so a couple of years later. Both say it was the best decision they ever made and six months ago celebrated their eighth anniversary in Latvia. Now into their ninth year here, they still think life in Latvia is beautiful. They enjoy Latvia's beautiful nature, the change of seasons, gorgeous Riga and the country's accessible and diverse cultural events.

They still don't like the webs of red tape they encounter, the excessive use of alcohol, and certain changes in the character and behavior of the people. They also don't like the overly frequent changes in government, as these changes actually release the governments having to fulfill their promises. This is partly the reason for the widespread poverty that persists in the country after almost 15 years of independence.

As for advice Osvalds has for former exiles who are considering returning to Latvia, he said he thinks Westerners will be fine but that more attention should be paid to those returning from Russia and Siberia.

He recommends that compatriots who are considering returning to Latvia permanently first try living here for a couple of months. Young people should look for job opportunities. A place to live is another issue that needs to be settled beforehand.

Agnija and Osvalds said they were glad they are retired and didn't need to look for jobs. They can spend their free time taking an interest in politics and learning about the history and literature of the occupation period. They go to the theater and the opera often and also go to the countryside and visit relatives, friends, acquaintances and their children.

* * *

Iveta Blanka is a young Latvian who returned to Latvia from Siberia, where she was born and raised. She has been thinking about life in Latvia since early childhood. She started seriously planning the move after graduating from school in Russia and having to decide what to do with her life. She knew she was Latvian and that her place was in Latvia. It also helped that Latvia offered more opportunities Russia did. This is Iveta's third year in Latvia and she is glad she moved here because she has met many good and helpful people here. She dislikes the bureaucracy in Latvia, despite the fact that it is even worse in Russia. She cannot understand how Latvians could have such low self-esteem or why so many young Latvians' want to leave the country.

Considering the fact that she came to Latvia without any financial means, it was initially difficult for Iveta to find an apartment and she lived for more than a year with friends or good people. It was not easy to find a job either. When talking about this, she feels sad for the friends who would like to move to Latvia from Russia but can't, due to a lack of resources. She said the only institution that was helpful was the Repatriation Center. The center helped her get the necessary documents, including a repatriation certificate and residence permit, and got her unemployment relief for six months. The people at the Repatriation Center also helped her sort out the apartment issue, and a year after moving to Latvia she got a one-room apartment. After several temporary jobs, Iveta has finally found a job at the same Repatriation Center that had been so helpful to her.

She recommends that people wanting to move to Latvia from Russia contact everyone who can help them right from the start. They need to know what documents are needed and they must find out as much as they can about everyday life in Latvia. She said it would be best for them if they could stay with friends for awhile in order to get to know other locals.

Iveta is now working, studying English and helping her younger sister, who moved to Latvia six months ago. She is interested in cultural events, ice skating, swimming and meeting friends.

* * *

Dīna Šillere has also moved to Latvia from America. She is a member of American Latvian Association and the Daugavas Vanagi. She is also a member of the student sorority Gaujmaliete and has joined a chorus. She said she couldn't actively work in the Latvian society back in America due to her job situation but that she wanted to use her skills to help Latvia

and to meet her relatives back here. Thus, she moved to Latvia in 2002 and is now working in human resources at SIA Lattelekom. Interestingly, she intended to spend only one year in Latvia but has now grown used to life here and is no longer thinking of returning to America.

She was surprised at how much better her Latvian has gotten and how easy and quickly she has grown accustomed to life here. However, there are painful aspects too. She was very disappointed with some relatives who once were once so nice to her but now have lost interest in her now that she no longer has an American income. Locals' attitudes toward, and beliefs about, former exiles are also not always pleasant.

She admits the opportunity to meet other foreign Latvians residing in Latvia helped her get used to life here, as they have shared many of the same experiences. It would be good, she said if there were more opportunities like that.

* * *

Māris Graudiņš, too, has moved to Latvia from America. He is young and has established his own company in Latvia. He is one of the exiles who started thinking about returning to Latvia when it wasn't 'fashionable' yet, that is, in 1979. The move wasn't possible until the early '90s. He actively participated in the restoration of Latvian political life and still does not regret his decision.

He thinks life somewhere else wouldn't be as interesting and he enjoys Latvia's mass media environment, where he feels most comfortable. However, there are things he doesn't like about Latvia. Like many other Latvians raised in the West, he cannot understand how so many compatriots here can steal from their country, as was the case during Soviet times. It seems unacceptable to him that politicians lack civic-mindedness and instead look out for themselves and their friends.

He is convinced this guide on moving to Latvia will prove very useful for repatriates, as it will help them overcome the bureaucratic obstacles they will encounter.

* * *

Valters Nollendorfs used to live in America but moved back permanently to live in Latvia in 1996 as a full-fledged citizen. He still has no regrets about his decision. He admits one has to learn to deal with the post-Soviet mentality of the people here but said that this, too, was changing.

Valters sums up the most important things a repatriate needs to do before moving to Latvia. The following are his recommendations:

1. Find out as much as possible about the living conditions in Latvia;
2. Think carefully about your purpose for moving. It is important to know what you will do here and whether it will be for a company or doing non-profit social work;
3. It is important to try to get an apartment or house in Latvia; it helps to know where you are going to and helps make it feel like home;
4. It is important to contact relatives and friends to create a local psychological and social support network;
5. It is important to settle practical and personal ties in your adopted country;
6. If unsure, refresh your knowledge of Latvian.

* * *

Līga Rozentāle and her husband moved to Latvia from California in 2003. She works as an advisor at the Ministry of Defense. She belongs to the Latvian Association of Political Scientists and the Latvian Transatlantic Organization (LATO). She has joined a local chorus and travels a lot. She does not regret moving to Latvia, despite some unpleasant experiences she's had here. These are often caused by differences between local and foreign Latvians. If you are not one or the other, complications and misunderstandings may arise. Other problems are connected to finances. These include, amongst other things, receiving a lower income in Latvia, insufficient information about investment/pension funds and paying back student loans. It is difficult to transfer money to places outside of Europe.

The Repatriation Center was very helpful early on in helping fix permanent residence status for Līga's husband, who does not have Latvian citizenship. The Center also helped with compensation for moving expenses.

Līga recommends that people settle all their finances and pay all their bills before moving to Latvia, as it is expensive to transfer money from Latvia to America. She also recommends that foreign Latvians be a bit careful here. They should not think they can change everything 'make everything right,' in Latvia, as such an approach they will only earn them the locals' contempt.

* * *

Zinta Pone moved to Latvia from the North America and has lived here since 2001. She feels happy in Latvia. She sings with the Skandinieki in her free time and is otherwise involved in various folklore-related activities. She works as the head accountant at the State Agency for the Learning of the Latvian Language (Latviešu valodas apguves valsts aģentūra).

Although she does not have children yet, Zinta said, “It became too difficult to maintain my Latvianness in America. It seemed the Latvian community was constantly shrinking and if I wanted my children to grow up in a Latvian environment, I would have to do it in Latvia. I also wouldn’t want my children to have to deal with a dilemma like the one I’ve been faced with — to be Latvian or not to be Latvian, or to live here or to live there.”

She said she thinks that foreign Latvians, including herself, have to be patient and tolerant. They have to understand that this is a different country from the countries they are used to. They mustn’t think that Latvia is underdeveloped and wrong, that everything is better abroad, that foreigners know better and that everything needs to be changed in Latvia. On the contrary, they should try to adapt to the lifestyle, and if they want to change something, it should be done with goodness and not reproach or arrogance.

* * *

Of all those who responded it is **Kārlis Streips** who has lived in Latvia the longest. He came here from Chicago in 1989. He is a lifetime member of the American Latvian Association and is a member of the student fraternity *Fraternitas Talavija*. Interestingly, he came here to fill a job position that was offered to his mother. It was a position teaching English at the University of Latvia. His mother was unable to come that year so Kārlis came instead. Contrary to what other respondents said, Kārlis said, “I came and stayed because it has been interesting here and I’ve had great job opportunities. I can’t really say I heard the voice of Fatherland calling me. How long? Was it the right decision? I lived in Latvia from September, 1989, until July, 1990, and have lived here permanently since September, 1991. Of course it was the right decision. I wouldn’t be here anymore if it wasn’t.”

Kārlis said there are things he likes and doesn’t like here. “A pleasant surprise was how actively the Latvian nation tried to shake off the yoke of the USSR, although that was actually no surprise at all. The most unpleasant surprises were how ubiquitous Russian was (and is) in Latvia and how in those days Russian women turned their backsides to you if you addressed them in Latvian. A cabbie once threw me out of his cab in the middle of the street because he didn’t believe that someone speaking Latvian couldn’t understand Russian and thus assumed that I was a fascist. Of course, Riga was a gray Soviet city in 1989, with everything this implies. In many ways, this wasn’t very pleasant but I had a good place to stay, I was fed and I had crazy amounts of work to do so I didn’t have time to think about unpleasant surprises.”

“Problems? I haven’t had too many. My first apartment was provided by the VEF factory where I taught English. The Popular Front of Latvia, where I did some work on the side, helped me get used to life here. My next apartment was provided by the government, as I was working for the Foreign Ministry. But since then, I’ve had to provide for myself. Nowadays, Latvian institutions are helping me by providing me, a journalist, with interesting things to examine.”

* * *

Another repatriate who moved to Latvia from Australia is **Valda Liepiņa**. She has lived in Latvia for five years. In Australia she was a member of the Melbourne Latvian Society and worked as a journalist for the ‘*Austrālijas Latvietis*’ newspaper. When asked why she decided to return, her answer is clear and definite. “A Latvian’s place is in Latvia. If it is possible to help the further development of Latvia by being here, it should be done (sometimes more can be accomplished from outside). I wanted to live in Latvian society fully and not with one foot on each continent.”

Valda said her first year in Latvia was difficult but that she is now convinced that moving back was the right decision. However, this is not thanks to the readiness of Latvian society to welcome foreign Latvians. “I got a job working with an EU project. They took me because of my extensive experience. This was an obstacle for Latvian institutions and companies. I write weekly for ‘*Austrālijas Latvietis*’ and that means that I constantly have to think about what is happening, follow cultural life, etc. This is very interesting.”

She likes the kindness of some strangers in Latvia but also listed some things she doesn’t like: The lack of advice and help from old friends, handymen who only speak Russian, dishonest and unhelpful building managers, the bad attitudes and poor standards found in the service sphere, the difficulty of finding work (as a lot depends on friendships), the Russian language and the arrogant attitude of Russian speakers. She said she finds the negative attitude toward foreign Latvians by some Latvians to be unacceptable, and that it is difficult to understand the attitude, mentality and lack of work ethic that took hold during Soviet times.

Her answer is also clear and definite when asked about what could be done to improve the situation of former exiles. “Foreign Latvians already living here could informally share their experiences with those just arriving. In the beginning, it might seem that a person is self-sufficient, but after awhile one realizes that contact is needed with others who have had similar experiences. If for no other reason than to simply realize you are not alone with these problems. You have to be ready to fight to speak Latvian, mostly by simply stressing that you don’t speak Russian. If it happens at a shop, backing out of a transaction often makes the shop assistant learn Latvian very quickly.”

* * *

Sarmīte and **Uldis Grava** once lived near New York, spent eight years in Europe and have now been in Latvia for two and a half years. They like many things in Latvia but for Sarmīte it is difficult to get used to the difficulty with which friendships outside their circle of relatives are formed. No matter how much you try, contact with locals is only superficial and meetings always take place outside of the home. Sarmīte recommends that before moving, you should settle your pension and health insurance issues. Finances should be arranged so that it won't be any trouble to receive money through one of the local institutions.

* * *

The following is a list of repatriates that may be contacted if compatriots wishing to return are in need of further information:

- | | | |
|-----|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. | Agnija and Osvalds Aizstrauts | 733 1392; |
| 2. | Iveta Blanka | 685 2936 |
| 3. | Pēteris and Ira Bolšaitis | 728 3955 and 910 1062; |
| 4. | Mārcis Gobiņš | 948 3800; |
| 5. | Māris Graudiņš | 775 1991; |
| 6. | Astrīda Jansone | 729 7157 and 921 0929; |
| 7. | Amanda Jātniece | 761 6165 and 966 2861; |
| 8. | Zīnta Pone | 677 0991; |
| 9. | Pēteris Puķītis | 735 6110 and 935 5655; |
| 10. | Mirdza Saule-Zandberga | 761 8650 |
| 11. | Dīna Šillere | 705 5149 and 920 8672. |

III Repatriation and citizenship

1. Repatriation

1.1. Legal security of the repatriation process

The rights and obligations of repatriates and their family members are provided for by the following legislative acts of the Republic of Latvia:

- *the Constitution* protects people's fundamental rights;
- *The Law on Repatriation* states the fundamental provisions for repatriates to return to Latvia permanently;
- the law "*On the Entry and Residence of Aliens and Stateless Persons in Latvia*" states the procedure for repatriates and their family members to receive a residence permit;
- the law "*On Population Register*" stipulates the procedure for the registering of repatriates and their family members in the Population Register.
- the law "*On State and Municipal Help with Dwelling Issues*" stipulates the state and municipal aid available with issues regarding apartments;
- *the Citizenship Law* stipulates the procedure for repatriates who are not citizens of the Republic of Latvia and their family members for receiving Latvian citizenship;
- the law "*On State Pensions*" stipulates the rights to a state pension and the amounts of the pensions for repatriates and their family members;
- Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 344 of October 5, 1999 "*Procedure for the Management and Utilization of the Repatriation Foundation Funds*" stipulates the procedure for repatriates on how they can receive financial aid from the Repatriation Foundation. The provisions currently stipulate that reimbursable travel expenses may not exceed 1,000 lats;
- Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 351 of September 15, 1998 "*Procedure for Bringing Inherited Belongings, Effects for Personal Use and Household Objects into Latvia*" stipulates the procedure for securing customs tax exemptions for repatriates' and their family members' inherited belongings, personal effects and household objects;
- Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 214 of April 29, 2003 "*Provisions on a State Fee for the Consideration of Documents Needed to Request a Visa or a Residence Permit and Services Hereof*" stipulate that repatriates and their family members are eligible for a free immigration visa and a free residence permit upon permanently moving to Latvia;
- Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 213 of April 29, 2003 "*Provisions on Residence Permits*" stipulates those documents needed to request a permanent residence permit and the procedure for the issuing, registering and voiding of such permits.

More detailed information about issues concerning repatriation may be found in the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs website www.pmlp.gov.lv.

1.2. Information on repatriation and migrants

Statistical data

Repatriates are citizens of the Republic of Latvia or people who have at least one Latvian or Liiv parent or grandparent and who have voluntarily and permanently moved to live. (Article 2 of the Repatriation Law).

According to approximate estimates, about 100,000 Latvians live in the United States of America, 40,000 in Russia, 23,000 in Australia, 22,000 in Canada, 10,000 in Great Britain, 8,000 in Germany, 4,000 in Sweden. Smaller groups of Latvians live in other countries.

From 1995 through September, 2004, 4,896 people have repatriated to Latvia permanently. In 1995, 600 people repatriated, in 1996 — 710 people, 1997 — 851 people, 1998 — 828 people, 1999 — 559 people, 2000 — 401 people, 2001 — 269 people (187 — from the East (69,5%) and 82 — from the West (30,5%)), 2002 — 245 people (180 — from the East (74%) and 65 — from the West (26%)), 2003 — 290 people (174 — from the East (60%) and 116 — from the West (40 %)), 2004 (from January through September) — 143 people (62 — from the East (43%) and 81 — from the West (57%)).

1.3. The policy of the Republic of Latvia regarding repatriation

Latvia is the only ethnic territory in the world populated by the Latvian nation. Now that an independent Latvia has been restored, the state supports the reunification of the Latvian people and urges Latvians and Liivs who recognize their affiliation to Latvia to return to their ethnic homeland (Preamble of the Repatriation Law).

On February 6, 2001 (Protocol No. 6, Article 34), the Cabinet of Ministers adopted a national program "Society Integration in Latvia." The first chapter states the following:

"111. *Repatriation, migration and cooperation with compatriots abroad*

Aims: To establish a unified system to help every willing Latvian and Latvian citizen return to their homeland and encourage their integration into Latvian society; to create a system for the maintenance and strengthening of cooperation with compatriots abroad; to provide help to those people who do not want to integrate into Latvian society after the restoration of state independence and are contemplating moving to their ethnic homeland or another country."

Actual financial provisions

Each year since 1996, the state budget has allocated 51,000 lats from the Repatriation Fund (Article 7 of the Repatriation Law).

2. Citizenship (nationality)

2.1. Terminology and statistics

Terms:

- **Latvian citizen** — a person who has Latvian citizenship in accordance with the 1994 Citizenship Law
- **Non-citizen** — a citizen of the former USSR or his descendant who is either living in the Republic of Latvia or is temporarily absent who complies with the following criteria:
 - On July 1, 1992 the person was registered in the territory of Latvia and his last registered place of residence until July 1, 1992 was in the Republic of Latvia, or it has been established by a court ruling that the person lived in the territory of Latvia for no less than 10 uninterrupted years up to the above mentioned date.
 - the person is not a Latvian citizen
 - the person is not and has not been a citizen of another country

Alien — a citizen of another country (national)

Stateless person — a person which is not a citizen of any country

Statistics:

According to data compiled in the Population Register of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, as of April 1, 2005 there were 2,299,115 residents in Latvia. Of these 1,821,119 were Latvian citizens, 442,565 were non-citizens and 35,431 aliens.

Since 1999, when the number of people receiving citizenship began rapidly increasing, the Naturalization Board has received, on average, 14,000 applications for Latvian citizenship per year.

2.2. Legal security of the citizenship issue

Latvian citizenship issues are regulated by the following legislative acts:

- *The Citizenship Law* (adopted on July 22, 1994) regulates issues pertaining to citizenship in Latvia and stipulates the procedure for receiving and losing citizenship in our country;
- Cabinet of Ministers (hereinafter CM) Regulation No. 137 of February 22, 2005 "*Statutes of the Naturalization Board*" — on October 18, 1994, the Naturalization Board was established. This is a state institution working under the management of the minister of justice that implements the state policy regarding Latvian citizenship. The statutes stipulate the structure, functions, aims and competencies of the board.
- CM Regulation No. 32 of February 2, 1999 "*Procedure for Submitting and Considering an Application for the Recognition of a Child as a Latvian Citizen*" stipulates the procedure of submitting documents in order to recognize a child born in Latvia after August 21, 1991 to a family of non-citizens or stateless persons as a Latvian citizen;
- CM Regulation No. 33 of February 2, 1999 "*Provisions on the Testing of Knowledge of the Latvian Language, the Basics of the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia, the National Anthem and Latvian History for People who Want to Receive Latvian Citizenship by Naturalizing*" stipulates the procedure for testing the knowledge of Latvian as stipulated by the Citizenship Law, the basics of the Latvian Constitution, the text of the national anthem and Latvian history and the exceptions applicable in particular cases;
- CM Regulation No. 34 of February 2, 1999 "*The Procedure for Accepting and Considering Naturalization Applications*" stipulates what documents need to be attached to an application to receive Latvian citizenship through naturalization and the procedure for accepting and considering such applications;
- CM Regulation No. 410 of November 28, 2000 "*Provisions on the State Fee to Register the Waving or Restoring of Latvian Citizenship*" states the state fee for the waving of Latvian citizenship, the restoration of citizenship, the procedure for paying and exceptions;
- CM Regulation No. 13 of January 9, 2001 "*The Procedure for Registering the Loss and Restoration of Latvian Citizenship*" stipulates the procedure for the waving of Latvian citizenship; it also stipulates the procedures for the dispossession or restoration of Latvian citizenship;

- CM Regulation No. 234 of June 5, 2001 “*Provisions on the Amount of the State Fee for the Submission of Naturalization Application*” stipulates the amount of the state fee for the submission of a naturalization application and states those categories of people eligible to receive a lowered or waived state fee.

2.3. Ways of obtaining citizenship in Latvia

Registration of the status of a Latvian citizen

Latvian citizenship may be registered by:

- People who were Latvian citizens on June 17, 1940 and their descendents, except those people who have received the citizenship of another country since May 4, 1990;
- Latvians and Liivs, provided that their permanent place of residence is in Latvia;
- People whose permanent place of residence is in Latvia and who have received an elementary or general higher education in a Latvian-speaking school. Citizenship is also granted to the person’s children if they are up to 15 years of age whose permanent place of residence is in Latvia.

Naturalization

Latvian citizenship through naturalization may be obtained by people who:

- Are registered in the Population Register,
- Have reached the age of 15,
- Have lived in Latvia permanently for no less than 5 years (the 5 years are counted from the date when the permanent residency permit was issued),
- Know the Latvian language and the basic regulations of the Latvian Constitution, the text of the national anthem and Latvian history,
- Have a legal source of income,
- Are not otherwise restricted from obtaining citizenship,
- Do not have, or have renounced, the citizenship of another country.

Children up to the age of 15 may be naturalized along with their parents.

The standard rate for the submission of a naturalization application is 20 lats.

A reduced fee of 3 lats is applicable to the following groups of people:

- Pensioners,
- Disabled people of the II or III category,
- Students of state-accredited educational institutions,
- The unemployed,
- Families consisting of three or more minor children,
- Low-income families or individuals.

The following people are exempt from the state fee:

- Disabled people of the I category,
- Orphans and children without parents,
- The politically repressed,
- People sheltered by state or municipal social care institutions.

The naturalization examination consists of two tests:

1. Latvian language test, consisting of a written and an oral part. All four skills — listening, reading, writing and speaking — are tested;
2. Test on the basics of the Constitution, the words in the national anthem and Latvian history which may be taken in a written form or orally. The written test consists of 10 questions on Latvian history and 8 questions on the Constitution. The oral test involves answering one question on Latvian history and one on its Constitution. In both cases, the text of the national anthem has to be written down or spoken.

The content of the examination is dependent on the age and health of the examinee.

2.4. Dual citizenship

As stipulated by the Citizenship Law, a person obtaining Latvian citizenship may not have dual citizenship. This means that citizens of another country (aliens) must waive their current citizenship upon submitting the application to obtain Latvian citizenship.

The Transitional Provisions of the Citizenship Law stipulate exceptions, namely, Latvian citizens and their descendents who, between June 17, 1940 and May 4, 1990, left Latvia as refugees, were deported or could not return to Latvia due to the USSR or German occupations and became naturalized abroad. These people retained the right to register in the Population Register as Latvian citizens up until July 1, 1995. If these people want to receive Latvian citizenship after July 1, 1995, they must waive their other citizenship.

More detailed information on issues regarding Latvian citizenship may be found on the web page of the Naturalization Board at www.np.gov.lv. Questions may be submitted electronically to the Naturalization Board Information Center at ic@np.gov.lv. The free information number for the Naturalization Board is 800 20 50.

IV Opportunities to study and learn Latvian in Latvia

1. Education in Latvia

1.1. The Republic of Latvia's education system

Education in the Republic of Latvia is administered at three levels — state, municipal, and institutional.

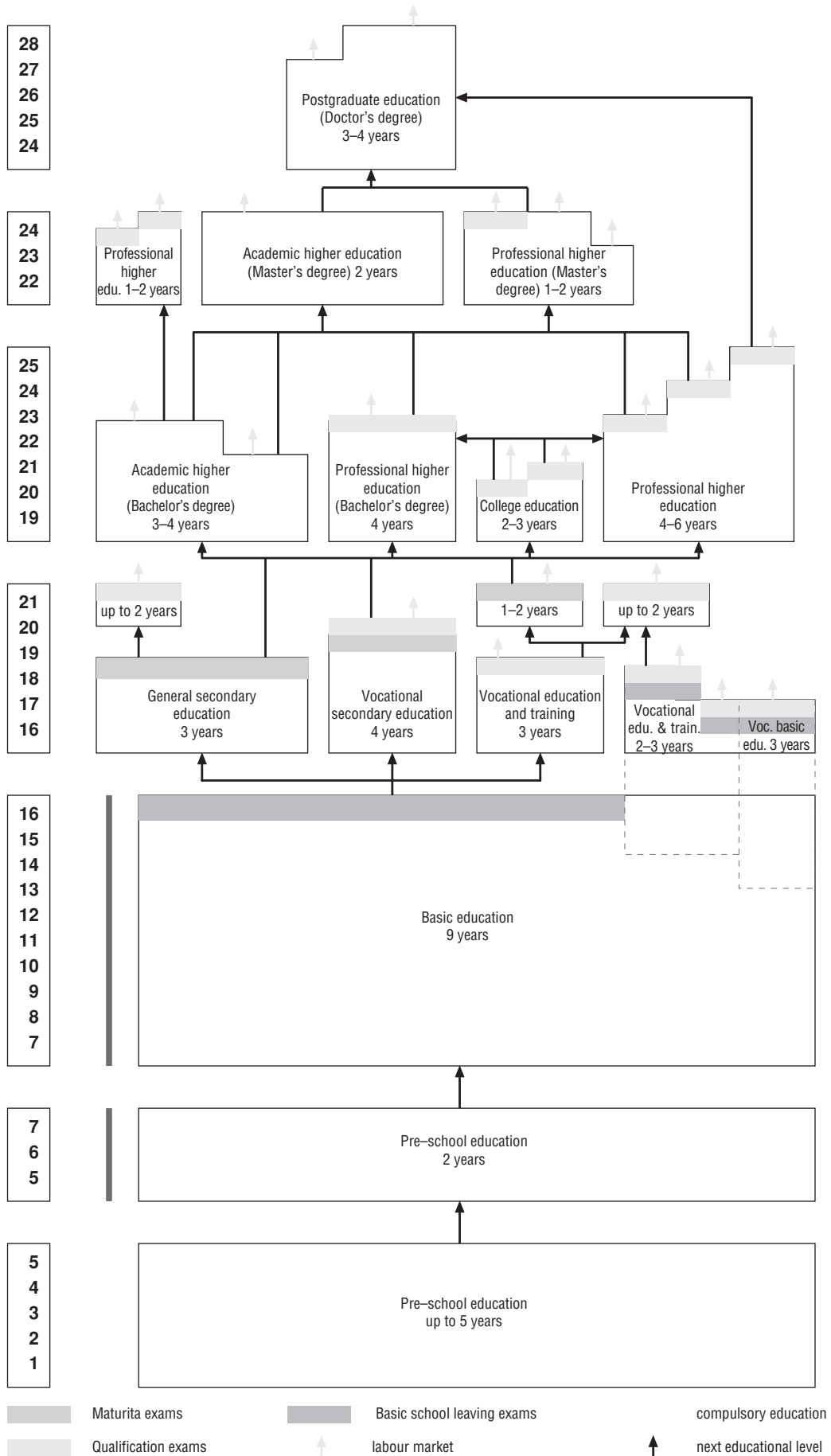
The primary legislator at the state level is the Saeima (the parliament). The Ministry of Education and Science is the primary education policy-making institution. It issues licenses and accredits educational institutions, which is an obligatory condition to open educational institutions of general education, determines education standards, and establishes the content and procedures for teacher education. Funding for teachers' salaries at state and municipal educational institutions is taken from the state budget.

Municipalities (in collaboration with the ministry of a respective field) may establish, reorganize or liquidate educational institutions in accordance with the normative acts regulating the field of education. Town and district municipalities oversee pre-schools, elementary, primary and secondary schools, except for those educational institutions that are under the direct subordination of the Cabinet of Ministers or are private educational institutions.

Educational institutions are relatively independent in organizing their activities, drafting their bylaws, hiring pedagogical and management personnel and assigning their work, and using their own resources. The Ministry of Education and Science is directly responsible for school inspection.

Accredited private educational institutions receive financial means for teacher salaries from the state if they implement accredited education programs in the official state language.

The Republic of Latvia's Education System



Education at state and municipal educational institutions is acquired in the official language. Education in other languages can be acquired at private educational institutions, as well as at state and municipal educational institutions if they implement minority education programs. Any person acquiring primary or secondary education in any other language must simultaneously learn the official language and must take the official language examination in accordance with procedures established by the government.

Papers needed to acquire an academic degree (bachelor's, master's or doctoral degrees) should be written and defended in the official language, except in cases prescribed by law.

Courses geared toward the improvement of professional skills or job retraining are conducted in the official language if they are funded by either state or municipal budgets.

1.2. Tuition fees

Tuition fees for **pre-school, primary and secondary education** at an educational institution founded by the state or municipality are covered by state or municipal budgets. Private institutions determine their own tuition fees

The state covers tuition fees in **higher** education programs for a certain number of students in accordance with the state's requests during each academic year. These students receive state scholarships. For other students, each higher educational institution may set its fee. Any student studying at a higher education institution may receive a state loan. An **alien or stateless person** must pay for their studies in accordance with the agreement they have signed with their respective educational institution. For citizens of the European Union and their children studying in Latvia, tuition fees are determined according to the same procedures that apply to citizens and permanent residents of Latvia.

1.3. School grading and documents testifying to the completion of education

In elementary school (i.e. from grade 1—4), children's knowledge and skills are not graded. Starting in grade 5, knowledge and skills are graded in a 10-point system. At the end of their primary education, pupils take centralized examinations. The Ministry of Education and Science determines the number and content of the examinations. Pupils who have received grades in all subjects and on all state primary education examinations are granted a diploma of primary education and a transcript. A primary education certificate shows the pupils grades. These documents, which testify to the holder having completed their primary education, entitle them to continue their education in any program of secondary education. If a student has not received a grade in any of the subjects or state examination, he/she is given a school report. A school report entitles a student to continue his/her education at a professional primary education or vocational education institution.

Centralized examinations are obligatory at the end of **general** secondary education. The content and procedure of the examinations are developed by the Ministry of Education and Science and approved by the Cabinet of Ministers. Each student must take five centralized examinations: one in a subject set by the Ministry of Education and Science, a second in the student's primary field of study, a third that is set by the school, and two others in subjects of the student's choosing. Students who have received a grade in all subjects and on all state secondary education examinations are granted a diploma of general secondary education and a transcript. Students receive certificates showing their grades in centralized examinations. These documents testifying to the completion of a secondary education entitle their holders to continue their education in any higher education program. If a student has not received a grade in any of the subjects or on any of the state examinations, he/she is given a school report.

1.4. Professional education

A professional education allows students to continue their educations after they have completed primary or secondary school. Professional education institutions offer programs aimed at preparing students for work in various fields. Professional secondary education curricula are determined according to the standards of professional secondary education and of each individual profession. Professional secondary education programs are drafted and implemented according to Latvia's professional needs. Vocational schools implement professional primary education programs (the length of studies is up to 3 years) and vocational education programs (the length of studies is 2—3 years). These programs are applicable to individuals with a primary education, and, in some cases, for individuals who have not completed their primary education, but not until the calendar year during which they turn 15. Those who haven't completed their primary education by the age of 15 may complete it while studying to complete their professional qualifications.

Vocational education programs contain a certain number of general education subjects that entitle graduates of the program to continue studying at professional secondary education programs in order to acquire knowledge and skills equal to a third-level professional qualification or to take a one year, catch up, general secondary education course to make them eligible for higher education.

Assessment of professional education results and documents certifying education

The fundamental principles and procedures used to assess an education are set by the education standard. Theoretical and practical classes taken, seminars, laboratory works, project consultations, independent study projects and subject and course examinations or tests are assessed using the 10-point grading system. Professional education programs are concluded with five centralized examinations, one of which is a qualification examination or another state examination. The other four centralized examinations are organized in accordance with those conditions that apply to a general secondary education.

A state recognized document of professional education is issued after a student completes an accredited professional education program and passes the final examinations of professional qualification or other examinations set in the state standard of professional education. In accordance with the professional education program, the following state recognized documents of professional education are issued: A Certificate of professional primary education (*Apliecība par profesionālo pamatizglītību*), a Certificate of professional secondary education (*Atestāts par profesionālo vidējo izglītību*), or a Diploma of professional secondary education. (*Diploms par profesionālo vidējo izglītību*) (Only the Diploma of professional secondary education entitles its holder to continue their education at professional education programs of at a college or university).

It is also possible to acquire professional further education programs (with a length of studies of 1—3 years) or professional improvement programs (with a length of studies of at least 160 academic hours) after the completion of a general secondary or vocational education. Internationally, this level of education is called an upper-secondary education (*pēcvidējā*), which is not the equivalent of a university education, and in Latvia this education is classified as a secondary education.

1.5. Higher education

A higher education can be acquired at a college or a higher school.

Colleges are the highest-level educational institutions that offer first level professional education programs (*pirajā līmeņa profesionālās augstākās izglītības programmas*). Colleges are the newest types of professional education institutions in Latvia and can exist either as independent educational institutions or as parts of higher schools. University colleges can exist as either independent schools or as parts of larger institutions. Despite the different names of educational institutions, graduates of both are on equal footing in the labor market and in the view of graduate schools, as the rules for drafting and offering education programs are unified.

Higher schools are the highest-level educational institutions offering second level professional educations and academic higher education programs. There are two types of higher schools — university and non-university. At university-type higher schools, education is geared toward research in different scientific fields. These schools offer academic education programs and professional programs related to these academic programs. Studies at higher schools of non-university type offer students the opportunity to attain professional knowledge and skills. Research in several fields of science, economics and art is carried out at these schools.

Terms of enrolment

A Certificate of professional secondary education or a Diploma of professional secondary education entitles a person to continue studying at a higher level of education in programs of higher academic education or professional higher education. Selection for admission to study programs is based on centralized examinations results. Since 2004, centralized examinations have replaced admissions examinations. A higher school may establish additional admissions requirements with regards to a candidate's previous education, experience and qualifications (e.g. in arts, music, sports) and publish these additional requirements at least five months prior to the beginning of enrolment. Selection procedures for different higher schools and programs vary mainly on the demand for study vacancies (financed both by the state and private funds). The admission procedure consists of one or more examinations (also the results of centralized examinations) and the competition of certificates/diplomas where grades may be taken into account. In some cases, the admissions procedure includes an interview with the members of a school's enrolment committee.

If the certificate/diploma of education has been obtained abroad, in accordance with the Law on Higher Schools, this document must be submitted for inspection to the Academic Information Center (more information in the Internet: <http://www.aic.lv>).

Study programs

Academic higher education programs offer a bachelor's academic degree in a particular field of science (there are eight established science fields — education sciences, humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, engineering and technology, agriculture sciences, health sciences, and environment sciences — each of which containing several sub-sectors).

Bachelor's studies take three to four years. When holding a bachelor's degree, a person may continue studies at higher professional education programs or acquire a master's degree.

Master's studies take one to two years. In total, five to six years are necessary to receive a master's degree. The length of the professional education program after bachelor's studies is one to two years.

A Master's degree entitles a student to enroll in a doctoral program. Studies in these programs take three to four years to complete.

Professional higher education programs offer a professional qualification and a professional degree, provided that the study program is at least four years long.

After obtaining a professional bachelor's degree, studies may be continued in a master's program to acquire a professional master's degree, which may be obtained after the total length of studies of at least five years.

People with a master's degree are entitled to continue their studies in doctoral programs to obtain a doctoral degree. Studies in this program take three to four years.

However, the division of higher education programs into academic and professional programs is not the only one. There is another division of professional higher education. The Law on Higher Education Establishments and the Law on

Professional Education prescribes two levels of professional higher education — **first level professional higher or college education** and **second level professional higher or university education**.

First level higher education programs provide the opportunity to learn specific professions (bank employees, entrepreneurship specialists, information technology specialists, lawyer assistants, engineering technical employees). However, there is no scientific research included in this education. A graduate's qualification complies with the fourth level of professional qualification (*the fourth level — a qualification enabling its bearer to perform complicated contract work in varying situations, to take responsibility for the allocation of resources, to organize and to administrate the work of other specialists and/or workers*). This qualification ensures competitiveness in the labor market and entitles its bearer to study in higher school programs to acquire a higher professional degree. The time needed to complete this fourth professional qualification level of studies is two to three years after the completion of a secondary education. These programs fall under the non-university type higher education programs.

Second level professional higher education complies with the fifth professional qualification level (*the fifth level — the highest specialist's qualification in a particular sphere enabling its bearer to perform independent analyses, make decisions, project and plan, organize, administrate, and oversee and/or undertake scientific research work in the respective field*). Usually a professional bachelor's degree in a particular sphere of economics is acquired along with the qualification. These programs fall under the university type higher education programs.

There are also so-called *short* second level professional study programs (one to two years) in which candidates acquire a qualification based on their previous first level higher education or bachelor's academic degree.

The length of time needed to acquire a fifth professional qualification level study programs in total is at least 4 years after the completion of one's secondary education and at least 2 years after the completion of one's college education.

1.6. Postgraduate studies

A master's degree entitles its bearer to enroll in a doctoral program, which takes 3—4 years to complete. In Latvia, it is possible to study in the following doctoral programs:

- Social sciences
- Natural sciences
- Law
- Technical sciences
- Humanities

2. Learning the Latvian language in Latvia

At the moment, the National Agency of Latvian Language Training (under the subordination of the Ministry of Education and Science) and Society Integration Foundation (under the authority of the Secretariat of the Minister for Special Assignments for Society Integration Affairs) offer people the chance to learn Latvian **with the state paying the tuition costs**.

The National Agency of Latvian Language Training (NALLT) was created to solve language learning problems and to help integrate society. For the time being, the NALLT is the only structured language and integration program accessible to the public. The aim of the NALLT is to cooperate with those people who would like to learn or improve their Latvian, take part in the development of Latvia and strengthen participation in Latvian social activities. Language learning is voluntary and is implemented by using a gradual and motivational learning system and through the creation of a positive learning environment. Study aids developed by the NALLT are used during the learning process, the motto of which is that the language must be learned not just to pass the exam.

The **Society Integration Foundation's (SIF)** projects are meant to support adults learning Latvian.

Numerous **training centers** offer Latvian language classes for a fee.

3. About the recognition of foreign qualifications

Individuals who studied abroad and want to continue their studies in Latvia or to practice an unregulated profession must submit their educational documentation (upon the request of the educational institution or employer) to the Academic Information Center (AIC), where these documents will be examined and where individuals who submitted the documents will be given a statement certifying the equality of the submitted education documents with the corresponding education documents in Latvia.

If individuals with foreign educations want to work in a regulated profession, their qualification must be recognized in accordance with the established procedure of the "Law on Regulated Professions and the Recognition of Professional Qualifications." This means that documents testifying to their bearer's education, professional qualifications and experience must be submitted to an information institution (usually to the Academic Information Center). After the evaluation process, a person will receive a decision from the respective institution (that issues certificates of professional qualification recognition), stating whether the qualification meets completely, partly or not at all the established requirements of the Republic of Latvia.

More information about the recognition of qualifications acquired abroad may be found on the Academic Information Center's Web site at <http://www.aic.lv>

V Taxes and job opportunities in Latvia

1. Taxes in the Republic of Latvia

1.1. General information on taxes in Latvia

Upon becoming a Latvian resident or acquiring income in Latvia, a person must abide by the Latvian legislative acts regarding taxes.

There are 10 types of taxes in Latvia. Taxes are payable according to procedures established by Latvian legislative acts. There are four types of direct and six types of indirect taxes.

Direct taxes are the following:

- enterprise income tax;
- personal income tax;
- mandatory State social insurance contributions;
- immovable property tax.

Indirect taxes are the following:

- value added tax;
- excise tax;
- customs tax;
- natural resources tax;
- lottery and gambling tax;
- passenger car and motorbike tax.

If a new resident acquires income from the country of his previous residence, then according to the legislative acts pertaining to taxes, the provisions of the convention concluded between the income-paying country and Latvia apply.

More detailed information on Latvian taxes may be found on the Finance Ministry's Web site at www.fm.gov.lv.

1.2. Tax laws of the Republic of Latvia that apply to natural and legal persons

When calculating your taxes, it doesn't matter if you are a representative of the Latvian diaspora or not. The criteria for the levying of taxes have been established by the law 'On Taxes and Fees' and particular tax laws.

Thus, if a person living abroad is a representative of the Latvian diaspora, this fact in itself does not mean that this person has to pay taxes in Latvia.

If a person owns immovable property in Latvia, this is subject to tax. The immovable property tax for land is 1.5 percent of the cadastral value of the land, and for buildings it is 1.5 percent of the balance or inventory value. Some categories of immovable property are not taxable, for example, on individual residential houses and ancillary buildings, provided they are not used for commercial activities, on parts of apartment buildings that are used for living or on ancillary buildings used for the maintenance of these buildings (including rented-out spaces used for living).

When calculating income tax, it matters if a person is a resident or a non-resident. The criteria for residents have been laid down in Article 14 of the law 'On Taxes and Fees.' In accordance with paragraph two of the above mentioned article, a natural person shall be considered a resident if his permanent place of residence is in the Republic of Latvia, this person spends 183 or more days in Latvia within the period of 12 months which start or end in the year of taxation, or if this person is a Latvian citizen and is employed abroad by the government of the Republic of Latvia.

In accordance with Article 2 of the law 'On the Income Tax of Residents,' a natural person who is a resident shall pay personal income taxes on income obtained in Latvia and abroad during that taxation year whereas a natural person who is a non-resident shall only pay taxes on income obtained in Latvia.

The taxable portion of personal income tax for residents is **all income obtained during that year of taxation** (including salary, income from commercial activities, etc.) from which non-taxable revenue, deductible expenses and tax breaks as

stipulated by the law are deducted. A non-resident's taxable income, in accordance with Paragraph 3 of Article 3 of the law 'On Personal Income Tax,' is income earned from a paid job, income from professional activities, income from professional artistic, sports or coaching activities in Latvia, income from a partnership registered in the Republic of Latvia, income from the use and expropriation of immovable property in the Republic of Latvia, income from the use of movable property in Latvia, dividends, interest income, payments for intellectual property, pensions, etc.

The resident income tax rate is 25%.

If an agreement (a convention) has been signed with a particular country for the prevention of double taxing and tax evasion, the provisions of the convention must be obeyed. If a business corporation is established, it must pay enterprise income taxes (at a tax rate of 15%).

If a representative of the diaspora wants to bring their belongings to Latvia, it should be taken into account that since May 1, 2004, European Union common market provisions have been implemented to abolish border controls and to provide for the free flow of goods and services. Thus, a natural person does not have to pay customs tax when bringing personal belongings into Latvia from another European Union member state.

Value added tax is not applicable in the above described situation, 'On Value Added Tax,' which states that the transfer of goods belonging to a natural person from one European Union member state to another European Union member state is not considered a transaction in which a value added tax should be imposed.

If a natural person is moving permanently to Latvia from a third country, in accordance with the fifth subparagraph of Article 6(2), a value added tax is not imposed on the import of those goods that are not subject to a customs tax

As of May 1, 2004, the Council Regulation No. 918/83 of March 28, 1983, the establishment of a Community system of relief from customs duties is in effect in Latvia. This regulation lists the provisions by which a natural person does not have to pay customs taxes when bringing goods into the common customs territory of the European Union for third countries or countries that are not member states of the European Union. Considering Article 2 of the regulation, personal belongings brought into Latvia by a natural person, provided they are moving to Latvia permanently from a place of permanent residence in a third country, shall be exempt from the customs tax.

Thus, if a natural person is bringing goods (personal belongings) in from a third country that are exempt from the customs tax in accordance with the Council Regulation No. 918/83 of March 28, 1983, these goods are also exempt from value added tax in accordance with fifth subparagraph of Article 6(2) of the law 'On Value Added Tax.'

More detailed information on taxes in Latvia may be found on the Finance Ministry Web site, <http://www.fm.gov.lv/>.

2. Working in the Republic of Latvia

2.1 About job opportunities

Foreign Latvians may use the services of State Employment Agency in their job search. There are three types of services that foreign Latvians may receive upon repatriating to Latvia:

1. Registering as a job seeker with the State Employment Agency. In order to register as a job seeker, a person has to comply with the criteria laid down in Article 15 of the Support Law for the Unemployed and Job Seekers. After registering as a job seeker, the person is eligible to participate in competitiveness increasing activities, to receive information about vacancies and requirements for these vacancies and to receive consultations on professional orientation (Article 16 of the Support Law for the Unemployed and Job Seekers);
2. Registering as an unemployed person with the State Employment Agency. In order to receive the status of an unemployed person, one has to comply with the requirements of Article 10 of the Support Law for the Unemployed and Job Seekers. People who have received the status of unemployed, in accordance with Article 13 of the Support Law for the Unemployed and Job Seekers, are eligible to participate in active employment activities, to receive unemployment insurance services in accordance with the law 'On Insurance in Cases of Unemployment,' to receive stipends and compensation for rent and transport expenses during professional training and to receive consultation regarding professional orientation.

The State Employment Agency provides information about vacancies in the Job Information Bureaus at its subsidiaries.

3. It is possible to find a job through licensed providers of employment. Because service providers are legal persons, these are paid services. The average cost for such services is 10 lats. It is important to use licensed businesses, as there is otherwise the risk of fraud. Further information on licensed employment providers may be found on the State Employment Agency Web page at www.nva.lv.

2.2. On work accidents

If a work-related accident has occurred, people should follow the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 293 of July 9, 2002 'Procedure for the Investigation and Registration of Work Accidents' and the requirements laid down in the Occupational Safety Law.

If an accident has occurred, the injured employee and those who witnessed the injury should immediately notify the employer, the direct supervisor or an occupational safety specialist. An Interior Ministry official with a special rank grade and the witnesses then immediately notify the direct supervisor or the most senior person on duty. These persons then must

notify the institution's head. Others who, in accordance with legislative acts, are ensured against accidents and occupational diseases, should notify the inspectors about the accident.

In accordance with Paragraph 5 of Article 17 of the Occupational Safety Law, it is the employee's duty to immediately notify the employer, direct supervisor or occupational safety specialist about a work-related accident or any work environment factors that pose or may pose a risk to the people's safety or health, including flaws in the company's occupational safety system.

In accordance with Paragraph 1 of Article 18(1) of the Occupational Safety Law, an employee has the right to refuse to work if the respective work poses, or may pose, a risk to his or others' safety or health and if that risk can not be eliminated.

In accordance with Article 19 of the Occupational Safety Law, an employee is entitled to compensation upon terminating employment or civil service relations due to safety and health risks at work if: the employee terminates his employment or civil service relations unilaterally because the employer is not taking all the necessary precautions *and* the risk poses a serious threat to the employees safety and health *and* this threat has been acknowledged in a State Labor Inspection opinion. It is then the employer's duty to pay the employee compensation in the amount of no less than 6 months the employee's average salary.

In addition to the above and in accordance with the law 'On Mandatory Social Insurance against Accidents at Work and Occupational Diseases,' an insured person who has suffered an accident at work or has fallen ill with an occupational disease is eligible to receive insurance remuneration.

Issues regarding the above-mentioned remuneration fall under the competency of the State Social Insurance Agency.

2.3. Transfer of pensions to banks in Latvia

All pensioners living in Latvia and receiving a pension in accordance with the law "On State Pensions," receive their pensions every month. Pensioner's, at their request, can choose to have their penions transferred to a bank of post office account or paid out at a place determined by the service provider.

VI Social security in the Republic of Latvia

1. Unemployment benefits in Latvia

The law 'On Unemployment Insurance' states that unemployment benefits are granted to people who have unemployment insurance in accordance with the law 'On State Social Insurance' and who have been granted 'unemployed' status.

Unemployed people eligible for unemployment benefits are those who have been insured for no less than one year, provided that mandatory social insurance contributions have been paid for them in the Republic of Latvia for no fewer than nine of previous 12 months leading up to the date of first receiving their 'unemployed' status.

An unemployed person who had been previously employed receives unemployment benefit proportional to how long he had been insured and to the portion of his income from which state social insurance contributions had been made (his insurance contribution salary).

- Insurance duration of 1 to 9 years (including) — 50% of the person's average insurance contribution salary;
- Insurance duration of 10 to 19 years (including) — 55% of their average insurance contribution salary;
- Insurance duration of 20 to 29 years (including) — 60% of their average insurance contribution salary;
- Insurance duration of over 30 years — 65% of the average insurance contribution salary;

Individuals may receive unemployment benefits for a total of nine months over a 12 month period.

Unemployment benefits are paid after considering the duration of an individual's unemployment:

- first 3 months — full amount;
- next 3 months — 75% of the amount granted
- last 3 months — 50% of the amount granted

The State Social Insurance Agency grants, calculates, and pays unemployment benefits.

2. Personal care facilities in Latvia

Long term social care and social rehabilitation institutions (hereinafter referred to as care institutions) provide full care and social rehabilitation to people who cannot care for themselves at home due to age or a health condition. It is the client's, or his provider's, duty to pay for the services received at a care institution. The provision of services and the making of payments are done in accordance with a mutually signed agreement between the provider of care services and the client or his provider.

As of January 1, 2004, there were 70 nursing homes in Latvia, where 2,322 employees cared for 4,744 senior citizens.

The average financial expenditure per person monthly was 140.98 lats. Of that, 1.01 lats a day were spent on food, 0.16 lats on medicine and another 15.53 lats annually on other inventory.

Living space per person is on average 8.17 m², which exceeds the minimum standard set by the state, 6 m² per person. Of all rooms, 25 percent are single and 56 percent are doubles.

As care institutions are subordinate to their respective municipal governments, it is the municipal government's responsibility to ensure and control service quality. More precise information about conditions and costs at a particular care institution may be received directly at this institution.

3. Health care in Latvia

As of May 1, 2004, when Latvia joined the European Union, all participants of the EU/EEA member state social security scheme who want to move to Latvia may request so-called 'e-form' at their state health or social security institution that confirm a person's eligibility to receive the same kind of state-guaranteed health insurance as participants in the Latvian health insurance scheme do. The following forms must be filled out when moving to Latvia and may be obtained at the Health Compulsory Insurance State Agency, hereinafter referred to as HCISA (*Veselības obligātās apdrošināšanas valsts aģentūra, VOAVA*):

1. Form E 106 'Certificate confirming the sickness and maternity insurance benefits for persons residing in a country other than the competent country' is issued to employees, self-employed people and the unemployed;
2. Form E 109 'Certificate for the registration of an employee's or a self-employed person's family members' is issued to family members dependent on an employee or self-employed person;
3. Form E 120 'Eligibility certification for people eligible for pensions and their family members to receive benefits in the form of services' is issued to people eligible for a pension and their dependent family members;
4. Form E 121 'Certificate for the registration of pensioners and their family members' is issued to pensioners and dependent family members.

Additional information may be found on the HSICA Web page at www.voava.lv, section 'Health care.' EU/EEA member states are: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Spain, Estonia, France, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Ireland, Luxembourg, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Poland, Sweden, Slovakia, Slovenia, Great Britain and North Ireland. An agreement with Switzerland 'On the free movement of people' which includes eligibility for medical help, will come into effect (with the new member states) at a later stage.

The health care system in Latvia is based on the principle of residence. The funds of the state mandatory health insurance are made up of peoples' income tax (28.4%) and a subsidy from the state budget. These funds guarantee the minimum provision of health care service. Currently, all Latvian citizens, permanent residents and those aliens who have received temporary residence permits, receive state guaranteed medical help. Health care services are provided by state, municipal and private medical institutions. State-covered health care services may be only received in medical institutions that have signed an agreement with a sickness fund (slimokase).

Health care is provided on several levels:

Primary or basic health care: the primary health care of patients at the stage of pre-hospitalization, which is performed by the primary care doctor (family doctor, primary care general practitioner or pediatrician) with his team and secondary health care which is performed by other specialists.

Secondary or specialized care: the patients are under the constant care of medics. Secondary and tertiary (especially complicated and highly qualified) services are provided.

Upon receiving medical help, the patient must pay a small amount of the service cost — **the patient co-payment**, which is a defined, direct patient payment collected by the medical institution for the provision of health care services.

3.1. Primary or basic health care

Family doctors

Primary health care (PHC) is provided by a team of PHC doctors that consists of a PHC doctor and a PHC nurse and/or a doctor's assistant. Family doctors, pediatricians and internists may work as a PHC doctors (hereinafter referred to as 'family doctors.')

Each resident must register with a family doctor. Further information on registering may be found in section 'Register of sickness fund participants.'

PHC doctors work in accordance with their field (family or general practitioner, pediatrician or internist) regulations, which are drafted by professional associations and adopted by the Health Ministry. If a case does not fall under a family doctor's competency, he sends the patient to a specialist in the respective field for additional diagnostic examinations.

Emergency medical help, if the patient's life is endangered, it is free of charge.

Specialist consultations

A family doctor must be informed on what kind of help a patient is receiving from a specialist, so a patient must receive a written referral from his/her family doctor to see a particular specialist. Without such a referral, the patient must pay for the visit to the specialist. When referring a patient to a specialist, the family doctor entrusts the respective specialist with the treatment of a particular illness. The specialist tells the patient how long or how often visits will be needed. This period is called 'a health care episode' and the patient does not need repeated referrals to go back to the same specialist for treatments of this particular illness. If a patient has been diagnosed with an illness, there is a list of specialists he may visit without a referral.

These are:

- Psychiatrist;
- Phthisiatry or tuberculosis specialist;
- Venereologist;
- Narcological specialist;
- Endocrinologist (for sugar diabetes patients)
- Oncologist
- Gynecologist (for patients registered with family doctors in Riga).

Children up to age 18 and draftees don't need a referral to visit a dentist who has signed an agreement with their sickness fund.

Dentistry

The state covers dental services for children up to age 18 and for draftees. Such state-covered services are provided by dentists who have agreements with the sickness fund or HCISA regional office. In other cases, all dental expenses are covered by the patient.

Registration of sickness fund participants

Who can register?

Any resident (who has been given a personal code) may register.

How to find a doctor?

First the patient must find out if the chosen doctor has signed an agreement with the HCISA or a regional sickness fund. Choosing a doctor is a serious process where the patient must receive their chosen doctor's consent to cooperate. Thus, the patient should definitely meet the doctor before registering to notify him/her of the patient's decision to entrust him with his or his family's health care.

A family doctor has the right to refuse registration in the following cases:

- The doctor has already registered the maximum number of patients (1,800—2,000 patients), and it is not possible to provide high-quality services for a larger number of patients;
- The patient does not reside in the area the doctor practices in.

A list of doctors may be found at HCISA subsidiaries or at regional sickness fund offices.

How to register?

1. Registration is free of charge.
2. An identification document (passport) must be produced upon registration. If registering a child, the child's birth certificate must be produced.
3. Registration with a doctor may take place either at the doctor's office or at the patient's home if the doctor has come for a home visit.
4. The doctor will give you a Sickness Fund participant registration card within 30 days of registration. The card is a document for receiving state covered medical services.

What should be done if a Sickness Fund participant registration card is lost?

If a card has been lost, its bearer must go to the medical institution that issued it and re-apply for one. In the application, the person must certify that the document was lost and make a request to receive a new registration card. Many medical institutions have their own application forms. A medical institution will issue a new registration card within a month of receiving the application.

The doctor has the right to refuse to register you as his/her patient if:

1. The doctor has already registered the maximum number of patients and the doctor can not provide high quality services to a larger number of patients. The maximum number of patients is:

Family doctor — **1,800** patients

General practitioner — **1,800** patients

Pediatrician — **1,000** patients;

2. If the patient does not reside in the area the doctor covers, meaning a home visit would take too much time.

3.2. Secondary health care

Secondary health care is provided by:

1. **Multi-functional hospitals** and regional/city central hospitals or **local hospitals**, which provide extensive and highly-qualified secondary health care;
2. **Health and social care centers**, which are hospitals that provide medical help in cases of emergency and perform social functions;
3. **Regional medical rehabilitation centers**, which provide patients with help regaining their physical, psychological or social functions or help patients adjust to changes in their lives;
4. **Specialized one-profile and long-term stay hospitals** specializing in the following fields:
 - oncology;
 - child delivery;
 - traumatology;
 - infectious diseases;
 - tuberculosis;
 - psychiatry;
 - narcology.

Planned treatment at a hospital

Procedure of referral to a hospital

In accordance with the Welfare Ministry's August 23, 2000 Order No. 240 'On the Organization and Payment Procedure of Primary Health Care,' a patient may be referred to in-hospital planned treatment by a:

Primary health care doctor (family doctor, general practitioner, or pediatrician);

Specialist to whom the patient was referred by their primary health care doctor, if the specialist has determined that in-hospital treatment is necessary;

Phthisiatry specialist, psychiatrist, veneorologist, narcologist, gynecologist, endocrinologist (who may refer sugar diabetes patients), or **dentist** (who may refer children up to the age of 18).

A primary health care doctor or specialist who refers a patient for in-hospital treatment will give the patient a written referral to a hospital that has an agreement with the sickness fund.

3.3. Waiting lists and their monitoring

In accordance with the Cabinet of Ministers' Regulation No. 305 of July 3, 2001, 'Procedure for Monitoring and Developing Waiting Lists for Planned Health Care Services,' waiting lists are compiled for the following planned health services:

- Orthopedics;
- Cardio surgery;
- Medical rehabilitation.

In accordance with the Health Ministry's Order No. 294 of October 28, 2003, the HCISA compiles the waiting list for children in the field of throat, nose and ear treatment (to receive cochlear implants).

- Sickness funds work with medical institutions to compile waiting lists. Lists are monitored by the HCISA in accordance with methods endorsed by the health minister.
- Waiting lists are compiled according to the residents' needs and the funding allocated to health care in the state budget for the current year.
- Patients are placed on waiting lists according to indications determined to receive health care services, provided the patient has a referral by a primary health care doctor or a specialist in a respective field.
- Only participants of sickness funds are placed on the waiting list.
- A patient's doctor places the patient on the waiting list and coordinates a suitable time and place when the patient can receive treatment with the respective sickness fund and the patient. The patient and the treatment provider determine the exact day and time for the treatment.
- If a planned course of treatment is not possible due to a patient's health or reasons beyond the control of the treatment provider, the sickness fund may determine another time for that treatment. It is up to the sickness fund to notify the patient.
- A patient may request information from the sickness fund about changes to the waiting list.
- If a patient wants to withdraw from the waiting list, the patient must submit a written request at the sickness fund.
- Patients may forego the waiting list by paying full price for the respective treatment.

3.4. Reimbursable medication

The procedure for receiving reimbursement for ambulatory care medication

All participants in sickness funds are eligible for reimbursement for medication they receive for ambulatory care, provided that their doctor has diagnosed them with a condition listed in the respective provisions.

Reimbursable medication may be **prescribed by family doctors, endocrinologists, oculists, oncologists, dermatologists — venereologists, neurologists (patients with certain conditions), psychiatrists, hematologist, and cardiologists.**

Each family doctor is allocated a certain amount of reimbursable medication that he may prescribe to his patients each year. The amount is calculated taking into consideration the number of patients the doctor has and the type of his patients' conditions (that is, if a doctor has patients with serious chronic diseases who need specific medication, this is taken into consideration when determining the doctor's budget for the year). The amount one can expect to be reimbursed for medication depends on the type and gravity of one's illness. The system is divided into four categories:

- *Category I* — 100% reimbursement, when the medication ensures the patient's life;
- *Category II* — 90% reimbursement, when without the medication, it would be difficult to ensure patient's life;
- *Category III* — 75% reimbursement, if the medication is needed to maintain a patient's health;
- *Category IV* — 50% reimbursement, if the medication is needed to improve a patient's life.

3.5. Patient co-payments and related issues

Upon receiving medical help, a patient must pay a small portion of the value of the service, or a **patient's co-payment**, which is a defined, direct payment by the patient collected by a medical institution for the provision of health care services.

Emergency medical help, if a patient's life is endangered, is free of charge. This is stipulated by the Cabinet of Ministers' Provisions No. 13 of January 12, 1999, 'Regulations for the Financing of Health Care.'

Ambulatory co-payments (before hospitalization)

Adults pay **0.50 lats** for an **ambulatory visit** and medical services at a medical institution. Children up to the age of 18 don't pay anything.

For a home visit in the territory covered by a particular doctor, the patient pays **2 lats**. A family doctor may agree to make a home visit to a patient even if he does not reside in the territory the doctor covers, but patient and doctor must then arrange for the payment of transport expenses.

For daytime in-hospital treatment, a patient pays **2.50 lats** for the first day and **1 lat** for each additional day of hospitalization.

In accordance with a list of prices approved by the Health Minister, a **patient's payment** has been defined for various medical treatments and diagnostic examinations.

1. Patient co-payments for heart and blood vessel system examinations	
1.1. Electrocardiography	0.50
1.2. Noninvasive functional heart examination	1.50
1.3. Functional examination of arterial head and extremity blood vessels	1.00
2. Patient co-payments for examinations of the nervous system (neurology), neuroelectrophysiological examinations (encephalography, myography etc)	1.00
3. Patient co-payments for examinations of the stomach and intestinal canal (gastroenterology)	
3.1. Stomach muriatic acid secretion test (stomach pH metry)	2.00
3.2. endoscopic examinations (also in-hospital)	3.00
4. Patient co-payments for sonoscopic examinations	1.00
5. Patient co-payments for x-ray examinations	
5.1. without radiopaque	0.50
5.2. with radiopaque	1.50
5.3. radionuclide diagnostics	1.50
6. Patient co-payments for computertomographic examinations (also in-hospital)	
6.1. without radiopaque	2.50
6.2. with radiopaque	5.00
7. Patient co-payments for magnetic resonance imaging (also in-hospital)	
7.1. without radiopaque	6.00
7.2. with radiopaque	9.00

Patient co-payments at a hospital

Referrals are needed to receive planned health care services at a hospital. Such referrals may be made by:

- **Family doctors;**
- **phthisiatry specialists, psychiatrists, venereologists, narcologists, endocrinologists** (for sugar diabetes patients) and **dentists** (for children up to the age of 18);
- **A specialist** to whom the patient was referred by his family doctor (for residents registered with family doctors in Riga).

Referrals are written to hospitals that have signed contracts with the HCISA.

Referred patients must pay a co-payment of **5 lats** for their first day at a **hospital**. Each additional day for adults costs **1.50 lats**.

Referred patients must make a co-payment of **2.50 lats** for their first day at a **day-time hospital** (stacionārs). Each additional day costs **1 lat**.

Each time a patient receives treatment at a hospital, the total amount of the patient's co-payment, excluding the medical manipulations listed below, **may not exceed 25 lats**.

A patient's co-payment for medical manipulations (surgery and procedures) is collected in accordance with a list of prices approved by the Health Minister:

1.1. For all medical procedures performed during a hospital stay (with the exception of operations, endoscopic, computed tomographic examinations and magnetic resonance imaging, which are paid for separately)	5 lats
1.2. For operations: (a patient's co-payment for operations includes anesthetic services)	
1.2.1. Otorinolaryngology, ophthalmology, face and jaw surgery, traumatology and orthopedics, operations on subliminal veins on the extremities	15 lats
1.2.2. Gynecology, urology (including the shattering of kidney stones), neurosurgery, abdominal surgery, thoracic surgery, diagnostic invasive cardiology, the implantation of an electro stimulator, spine surgery, arthroscopic surgery, plastic (reconstructive and hand) surgery (including microsurgery)	25 lats
1.2.3. Blood vessel reconstructive and plastic operations	30 lats
1.2.4. Endoprosthetics of large weight-bearing joints (knee and hip) (price does not include the implant), invasive cardiology	45 lats
1.2.5. Laparoscopic operations (including gynecological and urological) in cardio surgery	50 lats

When receiving treatment at departments of **psychiatry, oncology, and oncohematology**, or receiving treatment for **alcoholism, drug addiction or substance abuse**, or while going through **the second phase of rehabilitation**, a patient's co-payment for each day spent at the hospital is **0.45 lats**. No additional payments for medical procedures are required.

Each medical institution may offer additional cost services. The prices of these services must be shown on a separate service price list.

When receiving treatment, a patient has the right to receive thorough information about payments and must receive a receipt for each payment.

The following groups of residents are exempt from paying patient co-payments:

- Children up to the age of 18;
- Pregnant women and women in their post-natal period of up to 42 days if the services are in connection to post-natal monitoring and the course of their pregnancy;
- Poor people, if they have been acknowledged as such in accordance with the procedure laid down in the Cabinet of Ministers' provisions;
- Tuberculosis patients and patients receiving diagnostic examinations for tuberculosis;
- People receiving medical services for infectious diseases that are verified by a laboratory and registered in accordance with Cabinet of Ministers' provisions on the procedure for the registration of infectious diseases;
- People receiving emergency medical help;
- People in state specialized social care centers and municipal nursing homes;
- All inhabitants, if prophylactic checkups are done in accordance with the procedure laid down by the Health Ministry;
- All inhabitants receiving vaccination (prescribed by legislation and resolutions) or passive immunotherapy (within the framework of the state immunization program);
- Patients whose co-payments have reached 80 lats within one year, starting January 1. Such patients are **exempt from further co-payments for the rest of the year**.

What kind of health care services are not covered by the state?

The Cabinet of Ministers' Provisions No. 13 of January 12, 1999, 'Provisions on the Financing of Health Care' stipulates which health care services shall not be covered by the state. These are the following:

1. Health care services, if they haven't been listed in the agreement signed between the sickness fund and the service provider;
2. Planned operations, if the amount of money provided for in the agreement has been exceeded;
3. Planned medical help and examination (including the treatment of chronic diseases), if there is no doctor's referral (except for emergency medical help);
4. Orthodontic treatment (except for the first compensation), sealant usage, dental services for people older than 18 (except for draftees) and dental prosthetics. Groups of people listed under Article 14 of the 'Social Security Law for Participants of Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant Disaster Clean-up Workers and Victims of Chernobyl Disaster' are entitled to 50% coverage of dental services and 100% coverage of removable plastic dentures;
5. Subcutaneous, intramuscular, intravenous injections, injections in the skin (except for cases when emergency medical help or medical help for oncological or sugar diabetes patients, patients with psychiatric diseases, children up to the age of 18, tuberculosis patients, expectant mothers, women in their post-natal period of up to 42 days, hemophilia patients and pernicious anemia patients, is being provided);
6. Prophylactic treatment needed to start a job;
7. Regular medical check-ups needed due to work;
8. Treatment at sanatoriums or health resorts;
9. Abortions, if there are no medical or social indications;
10. Anonymous medical services and prophylactic treatments (except for HIV and syphilis tests)
11. Sexual-related treatment;
12. Provision of medical help at public events;
13. Cosmetic services and plastic surgeries;
14. Homeopathic treatment;

15. Purchase of corrective eyesight devices;
16. Psychotherapeutic help (except when help is provided by psychiatric hospitals);
17. Vaccination, unless it is performed in accordance with the order of the Health Minister or the procedure stipulated by Latvian legislative acts;
18. Prophylactic and other medical check-ups (except for check-ups listed under sub-paragraph 27.13 of the current provisions), if these are not connected to medical indications;
19. Substance abuse examinations at medical institutions;
20. In-hospital treatment of such patients who, in accordance with the opinion of the doctor, may be treated as out-patients;
21. Medical help abroad, unless stated otherwise in interstate agreements.

3.6. Medical services tourists might need when traveling

Unplanned and emergency medical services

Unplanned and emergency medical services in Latvia are available at numerous medical centers, hospitals, dental clinics, 24-hour trauma stations and 24-hour dental offices. If a tourist is concerned about the potential language barrier, consultations in English, German and French are available at the Diplomatic Service Medical Center, located at Elizabetes iela 57, 4th floor, which is open weekdays from 8.00—20.00, and Saturdays from 9.00—15.00. The center houses a family doctor, traumatologist, dentist, gynecologist, physical therapist, masseuse and other specialists. Most medical services in Latvia are paid services. Medical services are covered by insurance companies if the client is covered by a travel or health insurance policy. Upon leaving some countries, health/travel insurance is a must for tourists (e.g. the USA). In Latvia, it is not mandatory but is advisable, as it is much safer to travel this way.

Costs of medical services

The cost of medical services depends on the type of service and whether the beneficiary is a Latvian resident or a foreign citizen.

In case of an acute condition, an ambulance is free for Latvian residents. In case of a chronic condition, the patient must partly cover the travel expenses and pay 2.00 lats.

Patients are diagnosed by emergency doctors. Such provisions also apply to the citizens of those countries with which Latvia has signed interstate agreements on the provision of emergency medical help, that is, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, and Ukraine.

The cost of calling an ambulance (emergency medical help) in other cases for Latvian residents and travelers from eastern countries depends on the specialization of the emergency team (paramedic team, psychiatric or reanimation team, etc.) and the location of the patient. The cost is between 13—27 lats in Riga and 25—36 lats outside of Riga.

The cost of calling an ambulance (emergency medical help) for foreigners from western countries is much higher, coming to 45—98 lats in Riga and 54—142 lats outside of Riga.

Initial medical help at trauma centers is free of charge for everyone.

Staying and receiving treatment at a hospital for Latvian residents costs 1.5 lats/day. In the event of an acute condition or a trauma, the first 24 hour period at the hospital is free of charge. In the event of a chronic condition, the first payment is 5 lats.

Staying and receiving treatment at a hospital costs approximately 15 lats/day for foreign residents.

The approximate cost for dental services are 5 lats for a consultation and a check-up, 5—25 lats for the treatment of one tooth (depending on the work that needs to be done, materials used, etc.), and 3—10 lats for the extraction of a tooth.

Health or travel insurance will protect you from unexpected expenses.

Insurance companies offer health insurance for the duration of one's travels, which guarantees medical coverage in the event of a sudden illness or accident, including coverage for diagnostic tests, treatment, hospital costs, medicine, and emergency dental help. Latvian travelers, of course, may use any health insurance policies purchased in Latvia. It should be noted that travel insurance policies often offer other types of insurance as well, including accident insurance, civil liability insurance, flight delay and luggage insurance.

3.7. Opportunities offered by private health insurance companies that may be available to those repatriat to Latvia

The Latvian Association of Insurers (LAI) wants to inform people that its members, licensed insurance stock companies, offer their clients (natural and legal persons) a wide range of services in the area of health insurance, both in prices and services.

In accordance with the provisions of each particular policy and based on the agreement signed with the respective insurance company, you may be reimbursed for the following expenses:

- Patient's co-payment in the amount stipulated by Latvian legislative acts;
- Cost of medical services in hospital or in ambulatory care centers;
- Cost of medicine (partly or fully);
- Cost of dental services;
- Cost of optics;
- Rehabilitation and exercise.

Further information on insurance companies which offer health insurance services may be found on the Latvian Association of Insurers Web site at www.laa.lv. Here you will also find useful information which should be considered when signing an insurance agreement.

VII Latvian national currency, banks, credit cards and currency exchange

1. Latvian national currency — the lat

The national currency of the Republic of Latvia is the lat. There are 100 santims in one lat and it is the only legal means of payment in Latvia. The beginnings of the Latvian national currency can be traced back to the first period of Latvian independence when on August 3, 1922, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the “Regulations on Money” and the lat became the Latvian currency and its one one-hundredth denomination was named the santim. The description, numeration, registration, and monetary cover of the money are determined by the Council of the Bank of Latvia. Banknotes and coins denominated in lats were gradually reintroduced into circulation starting March 5, 1993, when the first renewed lat banknote — the 5 lat note of the Bank of Latvia — appeared. Currency reform in Latvia was fully completed by July 20, 1998, when the 500 lats banknote was put into circulation. At present, banknotes with nominal values of 5, 10, 20, 50, 100 and 500 lats, as well as coins with nominal values of 1, 2, 5, 10, 20 and 50 santims and 1, 2 and 100 lats are in circulation.

2. Banks, credit cards, currency exchange

Today there are about 20 banks in Latvia. The banking sphere is one of the most developed sectors of the economy. Since the early 1990s, the banks have done a great job of offering products to Latvian and foreign clients that comply with free market and world standards. Among the capital controlled by Latvian banks are large foreign investments, mainly from Sweden, Germany and Russia. The interest of foreign investors promotes the rapid development of Latvian banks, enabling them to be able to offer more, and better, qualitative and modern financial services to their clients.

Latvian banks differ greatly in size and the number of clients they serve. There are large universal banks that provide a complete spectrum of financial services to a wide range of clients, and there are comparatively small, specialized banks that serve some Latvian or foreign clients that offer a limited number of high quality services.

Financial institutions usually take big risks in their activities. In a short period of time, Latvian banks have already overcome several critical situations from which both banks and state banking supervisory bodies gained experience. Currently, the banks fall under the supervision of the Financial and Capital Markets Commission, according to the requirements set for European Union credit institutions. The largest Latvian banks are geared toward providing services to a wide range of clients by establishing a net of ATMs and branch offices throughout the country and offering the same banking services available in other countries. Internet banking services are also spreading rapidly. All Latvian banks issue payments and credit cards, as well as serving foreign banks. Aliens may open bank accounts in Latvian banks and perform any legal transactions through them, including controlling their accounts via the Internet. There is no cash limit when entering or leaving the country.

Latvia is one of the most cash-based societies in the world, and cash makes up about 30 percent of the total amount of money. By July 1, 2001, banknotes and coins of all denominations, with a total value of 500.4 million lats, were in the circulation. However, the development of non-cash methods of payment (through increased usage of bank-issued credit and debit cards and Internet and other bank services) has diminished the role of cash in the common circulation of money. Latvian hotels, restaurants, cafes and major shops accept EUROCARD, MASTERCARD, VISA, JCB, DINER’S CLUB, AMERICAN EXPRESS, EUROCHEQUE and chip cards issued by Latvian banks and it is possible to withdraw cash at Latvian bank branches and at 24-hour ATMs.

Foreign currency can be freely exchanged at a large number of currency exchange outlets but often it is the banks that offer the best exchange rate.

More detailed information about the development of the banking sphere in Latvia can be found on the Latvian Investment Bank Association’s Web site at <http://www.bankasoc.lv>

VIII Legal services, inheritance and bequest

1. Legal services

The wide range of legal services is available in Latvia. There are independent lawyers available for hire as well as large law firms. Legal providers need not be licensed in Latvia, so even people who have not had a legal education can advertise and offer any legal service. Recent legal amendments have removed all restrictions, so a person may now be defended by anyone in court. The only exception is sworn advocates who have united in a professional corporation — the Latvian Council of Sworn Advocates. The members of this organization are highly skilled and ethical. Only experienced lawyers with perfect reputations who have passed a complicated examination are admitted to the Council. Therefore, the quality of services offered by these Council members are usually higher in comparison with the services offered by other lawyers.

Charges for legal services in Latvia are set by mutual agreements between client and lawyer. Clients are charged for some services prior to their completion, while other services are charged by the hour. Hourly rates differ, according to each lawyer, and may range from 20 to 300 euros or more.

There are no large international law firms with branches in Latvia but the best local offices, cooperating with their foreign partners, are able to offer a high-level of legal services to their clients in Latvia and abroad. Most Latvian lawyers are fluent in foreign languages — mainly in Russian and English.

2. Inheritance and bequest

The Civil Law of Latvia determines the laws regarding inheritance in Latvia. It also determines that the delivery of inheritance delivery to a foreign country is possible only after legal claims made by people living in Latvia to an inheritance are satisfied. According to the Civil Law, inheritance comprises all movable and immovable property that was owned by the deceased at the time of death.

Succession opens upon the death of a person or upon him/her being declared presumed dead by a court decision. An invitation to inherit comes into effect when succession proceedings are opened. The invitation is based on the deceased's last will (expressed in a testament or bequest) or the law. A contractual right to inherit takes priority over a right derived from a will, and each of those takes priority over a claim based on law. All three kinds of inheritance rights may exist simultaneously.

When there is no inheritance contract or will or when it is void, heirs inherit pursuant to law. Pursuant to law, the following are invited to inherit: 1) the spouse, 2) kin and 3) adoptees.

The spouse receives a share equal to that of a child if the number of surviving children is less than four, but if there are four or more children — a one fourth. If the deceased spouse has neither surviving descendants nor adoptees, the surviving spouse receives half of the property and, in addition, the furniture. If the deceased spouse has no surviving descendants, adoptees, ascendants, nor brothers or sisters or their children, or if the survivors fail to take their share, then the surviving spouse receives the whole of the estate. However, if the marriage has ended in divorce or has been declared annulled, the former spouses do not inherit from each other.

The kin of the decedent shall inherit in accordance with a specific order, which is based partly on the type of kinship and partly on the degree of kinship. In respect of the order of succession, four classes of heirs by intestacy are distinguished:

1. in the first class, inherit, without distinction as to degree of kinship, all those descendants of the estate-leaver between whom, on the one part, and the estate-leaver on the other part, there are no other descendants who would be entitled to inherit;
2. in the second class inherit the ascendants of the nearest degree of kinship to the estate-leaver, as well as the estate-leaver's brothers and sisters of the whole blood and the children of those brothers and sisters of the whole blood who had predeceased the estate-leaver;
3. in the third class inherit the estate-leaver's half-brothers and half-sisters and the children of those half-brothers and half-sisters who had predeceased the estate-leaver;
4. in the fourth class inherit the remaining collateral kin of the nearest degree of kinship, without distinction between full and partial consanguinity.

Besides, an heir of a lower class shall not inherit while an heir of a higher class is alive.

Any unilateral instruction which someone has given in case of his or her death regarding all of his or her property or part of some property or regarding separate property or rights, is called a will. A testator may revoke, amend or add to a will at any time.

Wills, according to their form, are either public or private. Public wills must be made either before a notary public, a parish court or a consul of Latvia in a foreign state. A public will must be made in the presence of the testator in person with the participation of two witnesses. A will that is entered in the register of documents of a notary public or a consul or in the register of wills in a parish court are deemed to be the original of a public will. After the original is signed, the testator is given a copy, which is of equal validity as the original will.

Private wills may be deposited for safekeeping with a notary public or with a Latvian consul in a foreign state. Such wills are valid as public wills if the established procedure set in law is observed.

Law determines that the authenticity of a public will may not be doubted. Only a dispute of forgery may be raised against such a will.

When preparing a private will, at least two witnesses must be present. Private wills are prepared in writing. A written private will does not need necessarily be written by a testator himself or herself, but he or she must sign it. If a testator has written and signed the entire will himself or herself, then it is valid without witnesses. If a testator does not want the invited witnesses to know the contents of the will, then they do not have the right to require to be informed of it, and if they can confirm that the testator, in their presence, has stated that the document placed before them and signed by them expresses the last will instructions of the testator, it is deemed sufficient. A private will may be made in any language.

If, due to exceptional circumstances, an estate-leaver is unable to make a written private or public will, then he or she has the right to state his or her last will orally. Such an oral will must be spoken in the presence of two witnesses invited for this purpose. However, if upon the cessation of exceptional circumstances, it is possible for the estate-leaver to make a written will, then the oral will ceases to be valid three months after the cessation of the referred to exceptional circumstances.

A written will is valid even if made without witnesses when it is made by:

1. a person under circumstances in which it was not possible to invite witnesses;
2. a person in the armed forces in time of war;
3. parents for the benefit of their children;
4. a spouse for the benefit of the other spouse.

Contractual inheritance shall be founded by contract pursuant to which one party grants the rights to his or her future inheritance or its part to another party, or several parties grant such rights to each other. An inheritance contract must be certified pursuant to presentation procedures by a notary public. However, if the contract concerns immovable property, then, for it to be valid as against third persons, it must be registered in the Land Register. An inheritance contract establishes only a future invitation to inherit and therefore, while the estate-leaver is still alive, grants to a contractual heir only the right to wait for his or her future inheritance, but not an immediately effective right to the present property of the estate-leaver. The appointment of a contractual heir may not be revoked unilaterally, neither directly nor with a new instruction in contemplation of death, which contradicts the earlier, provided that the estate — leaver has not reserved the right, in the event of death, to still act differently with specific items of property or part of the estate.

In order to take an inheritance, both intestate as well as testamentary and contractual heirs must survive until the opening of succession and simultaneously the invitation to inherit. An invitation to inherit establishes only the possibility of becoming an heir. To take an inheritance, an invitee must express his or her willingness to accept the inheritance that has devolved to him or her. According to the law, no one is compelled to accept an inheritance that has devolved to them, but rather each may accept or renounce it according to one's preference. Only a contractual heir may not renounce an inheritance, if he or she has not specifically included such a right for himself or herself in inheritance contract.

If an estate-leaver has specified a deadline for accepting the inheritance, the appointed heir shall observe it. If such a deadline has not been specified but the heirs have been invited, then those invited to inherit must express their intent to accept the inheritance by the deadline specified in the invitation. If there has not been an invitation, then the heir must within a period of one year express his or her intent to accept the inheritance.

With the acceptance and taking of an inheritance, all the rights and obligations of the estate-leaver, insofar as they are not extinguished with the death of the estate-leaver, devolve to the heir. It is important to remember that the law provides several restrictions to aliens regarding inheritance of land in Latvia.

With the taking of the inheritance, together with the rights of the estate-leaver, also all his or her obligations, other than exclusively personal ones, devolve to the heir. Besides, an heir must fulfill all the tasks imposed upon him or her in the will, as well as all duties he or she has accepted pursuant to an inheritance contract. An heir may avoid the duties to be liable with his or her own property for the debts of the estate-leaver, if he or she makes use of the inventory right, i.e., makes an inventory of the whole inheritance.

In Latvia, a sworn notary public solves all matters regarding inheritance. Notary public commences an inheritance case after a respective claim to inheritance from an heir is received. Inheritance claim must be submitted to a sworn notary public practicing in the territory of the regional court, which was the last place of residence of the estate-leaver but if it is not known, a claim must be submitted according to the location of the whole or the main part of inheritance. If a claim to inheritance is declared legitimate, a sworn notary public issues a certificate of inheritance to an heir.

IX Re-registering a car and obtaining a driver's license in Latvia

1. Re-registering a car

The Law on Road Traffic is applicable also to vehicles registered abroad and their owners and drivers during their stay in Latvia.

A driver from a foreign country may drive a car in Latvia if he/she holds a driver's license issued by any European Union member state or a driver's license of one of the driver's license categories stated in the Convention on Road Traffic of 1968.

If a driver's stay in Latvia exceeds six months, his license must be replaced with a local (Latvian) one according to Latvian procedures. This requirement does not apply to those holding driver's licenses issued by a European Union member state or to those with diplomatic immunity and privileges.

Aliens and stateless people must register cars brought temporarily to Latvia and used in Latvia for more than three months. Registration must be performed according to the established procedure at the Road Traffic Safety Directorate of Latvia (*Latvijas Ceļu satiksmes drošības direkcija*).

2. Driver's licenses

In Latvia, drivers must produce the following documents upon the request of police officers, border-guards or customs employees:

1. Driver's license testifying to their right to drive a car of the respective category;
2. Car registration card;
3. Compulsory motor owner's third party liability insurance policy (*OCTA*);
4. Authorization to use the car (only when leaving Latvia) if the owner of the car or the holder of the car registration card is not present;
5. Proof of inspection.

A Latvian driver's license may be obtained if the person seeking one has attained a certain age, lives permanently in Latvia, has the right to reside in Latvia for more than six months and is healthy enough to drive a car. A driver's license is issued for a certain period of time.

The following are the most popular categories of driver's licenses in Latvia and the types of vehicles they permit their bearers to drive:

- A1, A, B1 — motorcycles;
- B, C1 and C — cars;
- D1 and D — buses.

Those who wish to obtain a driver's license (to obtain the right to drive a vehicle) must be at least 16-years-old to obtain category A1 or B1 driver's license, at least 18 to obtain a category A, B or C1 driver's license, and at least 21 to obtain a category C, D1, D, BE or C1E driver's license. A person must be at least 17 to obtain a license to drive a tractor. People are allowed to ride a moped from the age of 14 and to ride a bike without the accompaniment of an adult from the age of 12.

X Visas and border crossing procedures in the Republic of Latvia

1. Visas

Countries with which Latvia has mutual agreements on the abolition of visas:

Andorra, Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Greece, Croatia, Estonia, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Israel, Japan, Cyprus, Great Britain, Lichtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Finland, Spain, Switzerland, Hungary, Germany, and Sweden.

Countries to which Latvia has unilaterally abolished the visa regime:

The USA, the Vatican and

For those using the following travel documents:

- United Nations Organization passport,
- European Commission passport,
- EU member state diplomatic or service passport.

Documents necessary to obtain a Latvian visa

For a private visa:

- Passport (the validity of which has to exceed the validity of the visa for two months and having at least two empty pages);
- A completed application;
- A photograph (35 mm x 45 mm);
- An invitation (except for citizens of those countries that do not need an invitation approved by the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs of the Ministry of the Interior of Latvia in order to receive an entry visa);
- A fee for the issuance of the visa.

If necessary, consular officials are entitled to request additional information and documents.

2. Border crossing procedures in the Republic of Latvia

People can cross the borders of the Republic of Latvia at designated border crossing and border control points. People may cross at border control points at any time of the day whereas they can only cross at border crossing points during working hours.

Border controls are performed on those wishing to cross the state border. These include an inspection of the person wishing to cross the border, their travel documents, vehicle and its documents, and their luggage.

Upon crossing the border of the Republic of Latvia, a natural person must produce valid travel documents, obey road signs, including informational signs, and obey border control officials' instructions. A person wishing to cross the border must, upon request, present their personal belongings (luggage) for inspection and inform border control officials if they are carrying any objects or substances for which special permits are needed, such as guns, ammunition, explosives, drugs, psycho tropical substances, or radioactive substances.

Everyone crossing the border must go through at least a minimum border control inspection. At the train station, sea port or international airport there are special border control places that are always zoned off.

Border controls on cruise ships are based on ships' passenger lists. If a cruise ship spends less than 72 hours in the port, its passengers do not need Latvian visas.

If a child crosses the border together with a parent or guardian, a valid travel document is needed indicating the relationship between the child and the accompanying parent.

Children crossing the border accompanied by an authorized person must produce a certified power of attorney which has been written by at least one parent or guardian, a birth certificate or a certified copy of a guardian's certificate issued by the custody court or a certified copy of the establishment of guardianship issued by the custody court if the guardian has given his consent.

Children crossing the state border without parents or guardians must produce a document showing the certified consent of at least one parent or guardian, a birth certificate or a certified copy of the guardian's certificate issued by the custody court or a certified copy of the establishment of guardianship if the guardian has given his consent.

XI Useful information about Latvia

1. Residents and the demographic situation

Latvia is a multicultural country that was inhabited for several centuries by representatives of various nationalities. The largest ethnic groups, after Latvians, are Russians, Belarussians, Ukrainians, Poles, Lithuanians and Jews.

Residents of Latvia	Number of residents Year 2003	Number of residents %
Latvians	1,362,666	58.5
Russians	677,027	29.0
Belarussians	91,768	3.9
Ukrainians	60,566	2.6
Poles	57,901	2.5
Lithuanians	32,287	1.4
Jews	10,125	0.4
Roma	8,358	0.4
Germans	3,645	0.2
Estonians	2,569	0.1
Other nationalities	24,568	1.0
Total	2,331,480	

(www.csb.gov.lv)

77 percent of Latvia's residents are Latvian citizens. Most remaining residents are non-citizens (permanent residents) and aliens (1.5 percent).

54 percent of Latvia's residents are women, while 46 percent are men. The average lifespan for women is 76.8 years and for men is 65.4 years.

67.8 percent of all Latvian residents live in cities.

2. Geographical location

The development of the territory of the Republic of Latvia (64,600 km²) has been determined by its geographical location on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea. The total length of the Latvia's borders is 1,840 kilometers. The length Latvia's sea border is 490 km. The land border is 1,350 km. Latvia shares its land border with four countries: the Republic of Estonia to the north (343 km), the Russian Federation to the east (276 km), the Republic of Belarus to the south-east (161 km), and the Republic of Lithuania to the south (576 km).

Latvia's climate is determined by its geographical location in the western part of the East European plain.

One important factor influencing Latvia's natural diversity is its temperate climate and its belonging to the hemiboreal forest zone. Its location between the boreal and temperate broadleaf deciduous forest zones determines great diversity of nature with elements of boreal forests (fir-tree forests) and deciduous forests (oak-tree forests).

The highest point — Gaiziņkalns — 311.6 m

The maximum distance one can travel-

heading from the north to the south — 210 km

heading from the west to the east — 450 km

Time zone — +3 GMT

The capital — Rīga

The official language — Latvian

Political system — parliamentary republic
Economically active population — 61.8 %
Population density — 36.1 per sq.km
Latvia is located on the western part of the East European plain
Lowlands:

Coastal lowland,
Middle lowland of Latvia
Tālava lowland
Eastern lowland of Latvia

The Zemgale plain

The sun doesn't shine very often in Latvia, and its humidity balance is positive.

Average temperature in the summer — +15.8°C, in the winter — -4.5°C

74% of the territory of Latvia is covered by lowlands, 26% by highlands

Bedrock: sandstone, dolomite, limestone

777 rivers are longer than 10 km

The longest rivers:

The Daugava — 1,005 km (352 km — in the territory of Latvia)

The Gauja — 452 km

The Venta — 346 km (178 km — in the territory of Latvia)

The Lielupe — 119 km

The biggest lakes:

Lubāns — 80.7 km²

Rāznas ezers — 57.6 km²

Engures ezers — 40.5 km²

Burtnieks — 40.1 km²

The deepest lake — Dridzis — 65.1 m

Most islands — 36 islands — are on Ežezers

Distances from Riga (km)

Berlin — 1,300

Brussels — 2,030

Helsinki — 370

London — 2,370

Madrid — 3,650

Oslo — 870

Paris — 2,360

Prague — 1,360

Rome — 2,570

Stockholm — 440

Tallinn — 320

Vilnius — 290

Vienna — 1,380

3. Administrative division of Latvia. Towns and districts

Latvia is divided into the following regions: Kurzeme, Latgale, Vidzeme, Zemgale.

Kurzeme

Rocky coastal landscape, grassy plains, lavish fish hauls and amber that has washed ashore — these are things you can find on the coast in the south-west region of Latvia — Kurzeme. During Soviet times, most part of the shore was closed for tourists but now people visit it to enjoy the ecologically clean environment. Ancient fishing villages in coastal dunes welcome visitors with freshly smoked fish, country bathhouses and soft linen sheets at country homes. The furthest northern point of Latvia, Kolkas rags, is where the Big and Small Seas — the waters of the Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Riga — meet, creating a six km-long, dangerous sandbank in the sea. The historical 14 villages of the Liivs from Ģipka to Ovīši is where the Liiv language can still be heard. The proximity to the sea contributed to the prosperity of the dukedom of Kurzeme and, even now, Ventspils is the biggest ice-free port in the Baltic States.

Liepāja is called the town where wind was born. One-third of it is taken up by Karosta, with its fortifications and pillboxes from Tsarist times. Centenary musical traditions are one of the most characteristic things about Liepāja. The organ located in the Holy Trinity Church is the biggest in Latvia and one of the biggest in Europe. The Liepāja Symphony Orchestra is a union of highly professional musicians. Many people associate this city with its annual festival, "Liepājas

Dzintars”. **Talsi** is built on nine hills. Standing on top of one, a beautiful landscape, replete with two nearby lakes, opens before your eyes. A 350-year-old Elku linden (liepa) tree near Sasmakas lake in Valdemārpils is the largest of its kind in Europe, with an 8.5 meter long circumference. **Kuldīga** is called the Latvian Venice, as the banks of Alekšupīte are closely flanked by stone and wooden houses with tile roofs very characteristic of this town. The Ventas Rumba is one of the widest waterfalls in Europe (249 m). Vīnakalns in Sabile is one of the northernmost points where grapes are grown. In 1996, Abavas senleja was included in the list of 100 unique cultural territories by the World Cultural Heritage.

Vidzeme

There are many interesting things for visitors to Vidzeme to see: the **Gauja** — the longest river in Latvia (460 km), **Gaižiņš** — the highest hill in Latvia (311.6 m above the sea level), and **Gūtmaņala** — the biggest cave in Latvia (500 m³, 10 m high, 12 m wide, and 18.8 m deep). The coastal landscapes of the Baltic Sea in Vidzeme are enriched by the sandstone rocks of Mantiņi, Vitrupe’s rocky creeks, and the sandy beaches of Jūrmala and Saulkrasti. The Gauja draws water tourists. The Gauja’s Senleja, or valley, is very suitable for hiking alone or with one’s family. **Gaujas Nacionālais parks** is a famous natural tourist attraction. It was also the first national park in Latvia. Ancient Latvian castle mounds, medieval castles, sandstone caves, and a sculpture garden can be found at the foot of the picturesque hills near the river Gauja. The impressive linden trees remind visitors of the romantic legend of the Turaidas Roze. Exercise lovers can enjoy many ski slopes and the bobsleigh and toboggan track in Sigulda. The banks of the river **Amata** will surprise visitors with many outcrops of sandstone rocks. **Zvārtas iezis** in the ancient valley of the Amata is one of the highest sandstone outcrops in Latvia. **Ērgļu (Ērģeļu) klintis** are the highest cliffs overlooking the Gauja. Ancient towns of the Hanseatic League, **Valmiera, Cēsis** and **Limbaži**, offer a wide range of cultural monuments. Medieval Livonian Order castle ruins in Cēsis are home now to an annual classical music festival. The renovated **Āraišu ezerpils** takes you back in time to the 9th century. The city of Valmiera offers rock music festivals where both national and foreign artists take part. The only Latvian narrow-gauge railway from Gulbene to Alūksne is a unique, and still functioning, monument of technical history.

Zemgale

Zemgale is the smallest region of Latvia, where visitors can come to admire its many fine manor houses and castles. **Bauska district** features an abundance of ancient Zemgalian castle mounds and the beautiful Bauska Livonian Order Medieval Castle. A magnificent pearl of 18th century baroque Latvian architecture is the **Rundāle castle (Rundāles pils)**, designed by Fr.B.Rastrelli. The **Mežotne castle (Mežotnes pils)**, (built at the beginning of 19th century), Kaucminde and Bornsminde manors, Augstkalne and Vecauce neo-gothic castles, Vircava manor (favored by Duchess Doroteja) and Blakenfelde manor, where Luis XVIII of France once stayed, are all located not far from Bauska. Another Rastrelli project, the Jelgava castle, stands majestically in the Zemgale plains near the Lielupe river and nowadays houses the Latvia University of Agriculture. Jelgava became the capital of Kurzeme in the 18th century. Today, the castle’s cellars offer visitors the chance to look at sepulchers of dukes of Kurzeme and Zemgale. Zemgale is the birthplace of several Latvian presidents, including Jānis Čakste, Gustavs Zemgals, Alberts Kviesis and Kārlis Ulmanis. The Dobeles district features a site that was once used for ancient rituals, Pokaiņi, where people still go to get water from the Ūveļi spring (Ūveļu karaļavoti). The Hills, ravines, and pine woods of Tērvete offer a different landscape from the rest of the Zemgale plains. Many pines here are more than 300 years old and 40—47 meters tall. According to legend, this place was once the capital of western Zemgale, where Namejs and Viesturs ruled. Local people take pride in the Tērvete stud-farm’s sporting horses and Tērvetes beer. Tērvete is also home to Anna Brigadere’s (1861—1933) memorial museum „Sprīdīši.” Next to the museum there is a park with wooden statues made by K.Kugra representing characters from Brigadere’s plays: Sprīdītis, Lutašis, Meža Ūveņiņš and others.

Latgale

The eastern region of Latvia, Latgale, is called the Land of the Blue Lakes, and indeed, in the area of Aglona, Krāslava and Ezernieki, there are more lakes than anywhere else in Latvia. The largest lake in Latvia, Lubāns (82.1 km²) — is also located in Latgale, as is Latvia’s second largest, Lake Rāznas, which lies not far from Rēzekne. Only 45 km from the town you will find Ežezers, home to 36 islands, each a unique protected natural area.

The symbol of Rēzekne is Latgales Māra — a monument dedicated to the liberation of Latgale, which has twice lost its independence and twice had it restored. Many hills of the region store lavish mud reserves which are put to use by artists and craftspeople. More than 40 ceramists and two applied arts studios — “Rēzeknes aprīņķa podnieki” and “Podnieku skola” work in the area around Rēzekne.

Some of the characteristic features of Latgale include its ceramics — pitchers, pots, candlesticks made in warm colors and splendidly sparkling glazes — crucifixes along the roadsides and the Aglona Catholic Church, which was built in the 18th century and where 150,000 pilgrims from all over the world gather each year to celebrate the Assumption of the Virgin. The Slavic culture being so close and strong, the catholic spirit has influenced the development of culture in Latgale. Some Russian style villages (sādžas) are still present in Latgale. The nature park “**Daugavas loki**” in Daugavas senleja spreads from Krāslava to Daugavpils. In the picturesque bluffs (40 m) near ancient Latvian castle mounds, tourism and nature walks have been created as well as outlooks to see many rare plants that have been included in the Red Book. The biggest boulder in Latvia is located in Latgale — in Nicgale (130 m²).

Jūrmala

Jūrmala is a resort town that has long been known for being beneficial to peoples' health because of its mild climate, proximity to the sea, healthy air, medical mud-cures and mineral waters. It was the first Latvian town to become affiliated to the European Resorts Association. The 32 kilometer-long, white sandy beach with its Blue flags, vast pinewoods and river Lielupe add to the town's attractiveness. In Jūrmala, wooden summer cottages built at the beginning of the last century coexist successfully with the modern buildings of the resort establishments. It is a popular place for international conferences and meetings. You are welcome to come and enjoy the ancient Latvian festivities, town festivals, international festivals and concerts. Jūrmala is a town on the wave — on the wave of change and success; on the wave of love and hope. It invites everybody to return here again and again!

There are **77 towns** (23 of which have the population of more than 10,000) and **26 districts** in Latvia.

4. Latvian national cuisine

Pork, beef, poultry, fish, dairy products, root crops and rye bread form the basis of Latvian cuisine, thanks to the country's highly-developed agriculture and fishing industries. An ecologically clean environment, lost in so many other countries, allows Latvians to pick and enjoy wild forest berries and mushrooms. One special gourmet delicacy enjoyed here is game with lingonberry jam. Although many homemade preserves nowadays have been replaced by store-bought products, the growing popularity of living a healthy lifestyle has seen many people return to tried and tested foods and fresh country products. Although you may not find *stūķene* or *grūslis* (both of which are barley dishes) on the menu at a restaurant serving modern Latvian cuisine and few city-dwellers could make a pot of Kurzeme sour porridge, Latvians are still fond of various porridges infused with fried bacon and onions or butter and served with curdled milk or buttermilk.

Most Latvians enjoy freshly boiled broad beans, gray peas, butter beans, groats sausage, chanterelle or king bolete sauce with Priekule yellow potatoes garnished with fresh dill, fried pork ribs and Christmas bacon *pirāgi*. Flat, home baked rhubarb or apple cake (*plātsmaize*), *buberts* (a cream of wheat dessert) or cranberry jelly with whipped cream is a delicacy for both young and old. An integral part of a holiday feast consists of cold snacks, such as salads, fried and smoked pork, stuffed meat rolls, *roulettes*, smoked poultry, and boiled beef tongue served with mustard or horse radish.

The most popular fish snacks are slightly salted or smoked salmon, boiled eggs stuffed with sprats, baked lamprey and herring rolls. Latvians enjoy local freshwater fish too, including pike and perch, both in soups or fried. The most common spices and herbs in Latvian cuisine are dill, cumin, parsley (or celery leaves), onions, garlic and horseradish. The most popular cheese in Latvia is the *Jāņu* cheese which may be eaten not only at *Jāņi* but all year through.

Cheese goes very well with local beer. Each ethnic region of Latvia has its own beer brewing method. Latvian beer has been well received abroad too, for example, 'Aldara Luksus' received the Gold award in New York in 2000. Bauska's and Cēsu beer are also popular. The snack that goes best with beer is toasted garlic bread. During Latvia's cold winters, peasants drew strength from black bread with a slice of lard or hemp butter. Rye bread is also used to make lovely desserts, too, like rye bread layer cake.

Other popular drinks include fresh or fermented birch or maple juice, quince and cranberry drinks, and herb teas (which have medical qualities) like chamomile, linden, peppermint, caraway, and blueberry herb tea. Rīgas Melnais balzams or hot milk with honey are excellent in cold weather. Traditional Latvian cuisine has borrowed many ideas from German, Swedish and Slavic cuisine, so it doesn't often constitute an extreme dining experience for most foreigners (unless we are talking about blueberry dumplings or kidney soup). However, one need not look far in Riga for a restaurant serving other ethnic cuisines, including French and Thai or pizzas or McDonald's, which is popular among young people.

5. Holidays celebrated in Latvia

Holidays:

January 1 — New Years day;

Good Friday, Easter Sunday and Easter Monday;

May 1 — Labor day; Convocation of the Constituent Assembly of the Republic of Latvia;

May 4 — Restoration of Independence of the Republic of Latvia;

Second Sunday of May — Mother's day

Whitsunday;

June 23 — *Līgo* day;

June 24 — *Jāņi* (summer solstice);

November 18 — Proclamation of the Republic of Latvia;

December 25 & 26 — Christmas (winter solstice);

December 31 — New Year's Eve.

Remembrance days:

January 20 — Commemoration Day of Defenders of the Barricades in 1991

January 26 — International (de jure) Recognition of the Republic of Latvia

March 25 — Commemoration Day of Victims of Communist Terror

May 8 — The Crushing of Nazism and Commemoration Day of Victims of World War II

May 9 — Europe Day
 June 14 — Commemoration Day of Victims of Communist Terror
 June 17 — Occupation of the Republic of Latvia
 June 22 — Heroes' Commemoration Day (Anniversary of the Battle of Cēsis)
 July 4 — Commemoration Day of Genocide against Jews
 August 11 — Commemoration Day of Latvian Freedom Fighters
 August 21 — Passing of the Constitutional Law on the Status of the Republic of Latvia as a State and Actual Restoration of the Republic of Latvia
 September 1 — Knowledge Day
 September 22 — Baltic Unity Day
 November 11 — Latvian Freedom Fighters' Remembrance Day — Lāčplēsis Day
 First Sunday of December — Commemoration Day of Victims of Genocide Against the Latvian People by the Totalitarian Communist Regime.

6. Measures and weights in Latvia

Latvia uses the International Measurement System adopted at the General Conference on Weights and Measures.

International Measurement System's measurements and measurements used in Latvia which have not been included in the International Measurement System:

No.	Physical Property	Measurement		Symbol
		Including in the IMS	not included in the IMS	
1.	Length	meter	light year astronomical unit parsec angstrom nautical mile foot inch	m l.y. AU pc Å n.m. ft in
2.	Plane angle	radians	degree minute second gon	rad ° ' " gon
3.	Solid angle	steradian		sr
4.	Optical power		dioptr	D
5.	Area		hectare are barn	ha a b
6.	Volume		liter barrel gallon	l vai L barels gal
7.	Time	second	minute hour day year tropical year	s min h d a a trop
8.	Speed		knot	kn
9.	Frequency	hertz		Hz
10.	Mass	kilogram gram	ton carat Trojan ounce unified atomic mass	kg g t carat — u
11.	Linear mass density		tex	tex
12.	Force	newton		N

13.	Pressure	pascal	bar kilogram force per square meter physical atmosphere technical atmosphere torr mercury column millimeter Water column millimeter	Pa bar kgf/m ² atm at Torr mmHg mmH ₂ O
14.	Dynamic viscosity		poise	P
15.	Kinematic viscosity		stokes	St
16.	Energy, work, heat	joule		J
17.	Energy		electron volt	eV
18.	Heat		international calorie	cal
19.	Power, radiant flux	watt		W
20.	Power		Horsepower (metric)	ZS
21.	Reactive power		var	var
22.	Thermodynamic temperature	kelvin		K
23.	Temperature (Celsius)	Celsius degree		°C
24.	Electrical current	ampere		A
25.	Electric charge, electricity	coulomb		C
26.	Electrical potential, potential difference, voltage, electromotive force	volt		V
27.	Electrical capacity	farad		F
28.	Magnetic flux density	tesla		T
29.	Magnetic flux	weber		Wb
30.	Inductance	henry		H
31.	Electrical resistance	ohm		W
32.	Electrical conductance	siemen		S
33.	Luminous intensity	candela		cd
34.	Luminous flux	lumen		lm
35.	Illuminance	lux		lx
36.	Loudness of sound, level of sound intensity		bel decibel	B dB
37.	Substance	mole		mol
38.	Radioactivity	bequerel	curie	Bq Ci
39.	Absorbed dose	gray	rad	Gy rad
40.	Equivalent dose	sievert	rem	Sv rem
41.	Irradiation		roentgen	R

Multiples and fractions of the International Measurement System:

No.	factor	Multiples and Fractions		No.	factor	Multiples and Fractions	
		name	symbol			name	symbol
1.	10 ²⁴	yotta	Y	11.	10 ⁻¹	deci	d
2.	10 ²¹	zetta	Z	12.	10 ⁻²	centi	c
3.	10 ¹⁸	exa	E	13.	10 ⁻³	milli	m
4.	10 ¹⁵	peta	P	14.	10 ⁻⁶	micro	μ
5.	10 ¹²	tera	T	15.	10 ⁻⁹	nano	n
6.	10 ⁹	giga	G	16.	10 ⁻¹²	pico	p
7.	10 ⁶	mega	M	17.	10 ⁻¹⁵	femto	f
8.	10 ³	kilo	k	18.	10 ⁻¹⁸	atto	a
9.	10 ²	hecto	h	19.	10 ⁻²¹	zepto	z
10.	10	deca	da	20.	10 ⁻²⁴	yocto	y

7. Postal services and rates

Postal services

Riga post offices are open on workdays from 9.00 to 18.00, Saturdays from 9.00 to 13.00, but are closed on Sundays. Countryside post offices have shorter working hours. The main Riga post office (number 51) is located at Brīvības 19, phone 7018734, fax 7018747. Working hours: workdays from 7.00 to 23.00, Saturdays, Sundays and holidays from 8.00 to 22.00. Post office number 50 is located at Stacijas laukums 1, by the Central Train Station. Working hours in the summer: from 8.00 to 20.00, Saturdays from 8.00 to 18.00, Sundays from 10.00 to 16.00. Working hours in the winter: workdays from 8.00 to 19.00, Saturdays from 8.00 to 18.00, Sundays from 10.00 to 16.00.

The Latvian Post Office offers a number of services, including the sending of letters, flats, parcels and small parcels, telefax, courier services, local and international phone calls, local and international money transfers, etc. It costs 0.10 lats to send a postcard within Latvia, 0.20 lats to send a postcard to another European country and 0.30 lats to other countries. It costs 0.15 lats to send a letter within Latvia, 0.30 lats to send a letter to other European countries and 0.40 lats to other countries. Mail boxes are yellow and are attached to building walls. Stamps may be bought at post offices or newspaper kiosks. It takes five to seven days to mail something from Latvia to another European country, and 10 to 14 days to mail something to America or Australia, but the actual service is often faster than that.

Express mail:

DHL Freight Express Latvia	Lidosta "Rīga", ph. 7070400, toll free ph. 8000345
TNT Express Worldwide	A. Briāna iela 18, Rīga, ph. 7501647
UPS United Parcel Service	K. Ulmaņa gatve 2, Rīga, ph. 7805650
EMS Express Mail Service	Brīvības iela 19, Rīga, ph. 7018738
Federal Express	Pumpura iela 5, Rīga, ph. 7326067
Autopasts	Prāgas iela 1, Rīga, ph. 7229684

Postal rates

Type of service	Rate (lats)
<i>Postcards</i>	
Regular postcards	0.10
Registered postcards	0.35

Regular, registered and insured letters and extra-cost features

Weight	Regular letters (lats)
Up to 20 grams	0.15
From 20 to 40 grams	0.20
From 40 to 60 grams	0.25
From 60 to 80 grams	0.30
From 80 to 100 grams	0.35
From 100 to 250 grams	0.40
From 250 to 500 grams	0.45
From 500 to 1,000 grams	0.60
From 1,000 to 2,000 grams	0.85

Registered letters are charged as regular letters according to their weight plus additional cost for its registration 0.25

Insured letters* are charged as regular letters according to their weight plus cost of its registration (0.25 lats) and cost of insurance in accordance with the postal money transfer rate, except for the additional cost

Understamped mail — additional cost is charged 0.25

*Value Added Tax of 18% has not been included in the given rates

Regular and registered printed matter

No.	Weight	Regular flats (lats)
1.3.1.	Up to 20 grams	0.12
1.3.2.	From 20 to 100 grams	0.28
1.3.3.	From 100 to 250 grams	0.32
1.3.4.	From 250 to 500 grams	0.36
1.3.5.	From 500 to 1,000 grams	0.48
1.3.6.	From 1,000 to 2,000 grams	0.68
1.3.7.	From 2,000 to 3,000 grams	0.88
1.3.8.	From 3,000 to 4,000 grams	1.08
1.3.9.	From 4,000 to 5,000 grams	1.28
1.3.10.	Registered flats — in addition to the cost of weight of regular flat, a cost for its registration is added	0.25

Small parcels

No.	Weight	Rate (lats)
2.1.	Up to 100 grams	0.60
2.2.	From 100 to 250 grams	0.65 *
2.3.	From 250 to 500 grams	0.70 *
2.4.	From 500 to 1,000 grams	0.85 *
2.5.	From 1,000 to 2,000 grams	1.10 *
2.6.	From 2,000 to 3,000 grams	1.35 *
2.7.	In addition to the cost of the weight of the parcel, additional cost is charged for insurance in accordance with the money transfer rate, except for the additional cost	

Parcels

No.	Weight	Rate (lats)
3.1.	Up to 1 kg	0,85
3.2.	From 1 to 3 kg	1,35
3.3.	From 3 to 5 kg	1,50
3.4.	From 5 to 10 kg	1,75
3.5.	From 10 to 15 kg	2,00
3.6.	From 15 to 20 kg	2,50
3.7.	In addition to the cost of the weight of the parcel, insurance cost in accordance with the money transfer rate, except for the additional cost, is added.	

8. Telecommunications

Telecommunications and international codes

To call internationally from Latvia, you need to use an international telephone code. Public telephones are located on streets, at train stations, bus stations, supermarkets etc. Information may be found in public telephone booths on how to make local calls, including the list of international codes, phone books, etc. To call from public telephones, you need a card (telekarte), which can be bought at many kiosks and shops. They come in values of 2, 5 and 10 lats.

You can also receive phone calls to public telephones and call collect. You can make toll-free calls to emergency services like fire, police, ambulance and emergency gas service.

International calling codes:

Australia	972	England	44	India	91	Norway	47	Switzerland	41
Austria	43	Estonia	372	Ireland	353	Poland	48	The Czech Republic	420
Belarus	375	Finland	358	Israel	972	Portugal	351	The Netherlands	31
Belgium	32	France	33	Italy	39	Romania	40	Turkey	90
Bulgaria	359	Germany	49	Japan	81	Russian	7	Ukraine	380
Canada	1	Great Britain	44	Lichtenstein	41	Slovakia	421	USA	1
Cuba	53	Greece	30	Lithuania	370	Slovenia	386	Uzbekistan	7
China	86	Hungary	36	Luxembourg	352	Spain	34	Denmark	45
Iceland	354	Mexico	52	Sweden	46				

To call abroad, dial the code of the city or region after the international code.

Calls to Latvia

The international code for Latvia is + **371**.

To call to a specific region, you have to dial the regional code too.

Aizkraukle	51	Alūksne	43	Balvi	45	Bauska	39	Cēsis	41
Daugavpils	54	Dobele	37	Gulbene	44	Jelgava	30	Jēkabpils	52
Krāslava	56	Kuldīga	33	Liepāja	34	Limbaži	40	Ludza	57
Madona	48	Ogre	50	Preiļi	53	Rēzekne	46	Saldus	38
Talsi	32	Tukums	31	Valka	47	Valmiera	42	Ventspils	36

Operator for local calls — 116

Operator for international calls — 115

Lattelekom help service — 8008008

Mobile communications operators:

Latvijas Mobilais Telefons, Brīvības iela 55, Rīga, ph. (24h) 8000076, www.lmt.lv

Prepaid calling card — O karte. Price — 9.70 — 30 lats.

Tele 2, Merķeļa iela 21, Rīga, ph. (24h): 7060600, www.tele2.lv. Prepaid calling card — Zelta zivtiņa. Price — Ls 8.50 — 18.50 lats.

Prepaid calling cards may be bought at gas stations, press and mobile telephone shops, and mobile telephone service centers.

9. Emergency services

FIREFIGHTERS 01

Riga

From a mobile	112
Central firefighter communication office	7285645
Center section of Riga	7272575
Kurzemes section of Riga	7459478
Latgales section of Riga	7226137
Vidzemes section of Riga	7552257
Zemgales section of Riga	7615727
Ziemeļu section of Riga	7392502
Riga region, Jūrmala	
Ādaži	7997001
Baldone	7932701
Jūrmala	7769182
Olaine	7965001
Saulkrasti	7951201
Sigulda	7971001
Vangaži	7995401

POLICE 02

Riga

Riga city main police department	7086421
Center section of Riga	7086200
Kurzemes section of Riga	7611221
Latgales section of Riga	7086302
Vidzemes section of Riga	7551151
Zemgales section of Riga	7609900
Ziemeļu section of Riga	7392588
Riga municipal police	
Center section of Riga	7285439
Kurzemes section of Riga	7810340
Latgales section of Riga	7803103
Vidzemes section of Riga	7802372
Zemgales section of Riga	7613621
Ziemeļu section of Riga	7501295
Precinct "Centrs"	7274497
Precinct "Berģi"	7994096

Riga region, Jūrmala

Ādaži	7997002
Babīte	7914964
Baldone	7932702
Baloži	7917700
Garkalne	7998500
Inčukalns	7977102
Jūrmala	7760320
Mārupe — Babīte	7933431
Olaine	7962775
Ropaži	7918212
Salaspils	7947375
Saulkrasti	7951202
Sigulda	7972002
Vangaži	7995402
Zvejniekiem	7954109
Police hotline	7086677

Riga traffic police	7377000
Riga region traffic police	7947766
Jūrmalas traffic police	7075111
Home guard headquarters	7371120

EMERGENCY MEDICAL HELP 03

Riga

Riga emergency medical help station	03
Emergency medical help information desk	7375449
Emergency medical help information about the current day	7375472
Riga 1. Hospital admissions department	7366321
Riga 1. Hospital information desk	7270136
Riga 2. Hospital traumatology department	7614033
Hospital "Gaiļezers" admissions department	7042446
Hospital "Gaiļezers" information desk	7042424
Hospital "Bīķernieki" admissions department	7586778
Traumatology and orthopedy hospital admissions department	7393008
Traumatology and orthopedy hospital traumatology department	7399441
P. Stradiņa Clinical University Hospital admissions department	7611412
P. Stradiņa Clinical University Hospital information desk	7611201
Children Clinical University Hospital admissions department	7622267
Children Clinical University Hospital traumatology department	7622484
Children Clinical University Hospital information desk	7622997
Children Hospital "Gaiļezers" admissions department	7536708
Riga City Maternity Hospital admissions department	7011300
Riga City Maternity Hospital information desk	7011225
Latvia Infectology Center admissions department	7014552
Latvia Naval Medical Center admissions department	7391630
Face and jaw traumatology center and night dental office	7452015
State Burn Center admissions department	7586778
Hospital "Gaiļezers" eye traumatology department	7042455

Riga region 03

Ādažu hospital and emergency medical help	7997003
Baldones hospital emergency medical help	7932425
Baldones hospital admissions department	7932790
Ķekavas emergency medical help	7937370
Piņķu emergency medical help	7914003
Siguldas emergency medical help	7973003
Riga Region Hospital admissions department	7972808
Saulkrastu hospital emergency medical help	7951203
Salaspils polyclinic emergency medical help	7940003
Stopiņu, Ropažu, Garkalnes help service emergency medical help	7520930
Health center "Olaine" emergency medical help	7965003

Jūrmala 03

Jūrmalas emergency medical help station	7764303
Bulduru Hospital admissions department	7752254
Catastrophe Medical Center	7617611
	7615534
Consultations and evacuation (paid services)	
Medical evacuation from any country to any country	9002626
Emergency medical help and first aid training	7223053

DENTISTRY

State Dentistry Center (BOVU)	7452015
I. D. Dental Clinic	7221249
	9295615
Medical Association "Unda"	7574136
Clinic "Dr. Millers Medent"	7243024
	7282142
"Arke" (SIA)	7310422

TRAUMATOLOGY CENTERS

State Dentistry Center (BOVU) Face and Jaw Traumatology Center	7452015
State Burn Center	7582484
Eye Traumatology Center (24 hours) (adults only)	7042455
LMA Children Hospital traumatology center	7622484
Traumatology Hospital traumatology center	7399441

OTHER MEDICAL SERVICES

Emergency 24 hour narcological help	7204065
Riga Children Right Protection Center	7334441
Medical Association "ARS"	7201003
Medical Care Bureau	7373706
Care for the sick	9478702
State Sanitary Inspection	9265384
Organization "Glābiet bērņus" hotline	7289348
AIDS hotline	7543777
Pharmacy Information Bureau	7281705
State Psychic Care Center information desk	7221066

GAS EMERGENCY SERVICES 04

Rīga	04
Jūrmala	04
	7762162
Olaine (liquefied gas)	7962004
Salaspils	7940001
Saulkrasti (liquefied gas)	7952904
Sigulda	7974004

SERVICES AND INFORMATION CENTERS

Latvijas Mobilais telefons	8000076
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ZL HOTLINE

	7770777
	9444777
Customs information — SIA "Komin" (Ls 0,80 + PVN)	9004003
Consumer services information	7333000
wholesale information	7400000
Hotel booking (in Riga)	7286650
Precise time in Latvian	154
Precise time in Russian	174

10. Archives

Establishments of the state archive system in Latvia:

- Directorate General of Latvia State Archives;
- Latvia State Historical Archive;
- State Archive of Latvia;
- Latvia State Archive of Audiovisual Documents;
- State Archive of Personnel Files;
- Central Microfilming and Document Restoration Laboratory;
- Special Library of the State Archives;
- Regional State Archive of Alūksne;
- Regional State Archive of Cēsis; Regional State Archive of Daugavpils;
- Regional State Archive of Jelgava;
- Regional State Archive of Jēkabpils;
- Regional State Archive of Liepāja;
- Regional State Archive of Rēzekne;
- Regional State Archive of Sigulda;
- Regional State Archive of Tukums;
- Regional State Archive of Valmiera;
- Regional State Archive of Ventspils

The Directorate General of Latvia State Archives has been under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Culture since January, 2001. It was established in 1991 to supervise and control the accumulation, registration, maintenance

and accessibility of State Archive of Latvia documents and their usage in state archive and public, state and municipal institutions and in administering state archive system.

The state archives evaluate the documents of state and municipal institutions, accumulate documents of archival value, ensure their maintenance, and ensure the execution of inquiries submitted by physical entities and institutions of the Republic of Latvia or those of other countries.

The most popular archival services are the following: request of archival statements, adjustment of documents on the basis of contractual obligations, and the services of reading-rooms and the library.

The library's collection of 54,438 books, 4,388 sets of newspapers, 14,565 magazines, 4,052 archive information fund units, and 25,000 leaflets (1905—1946) is accessible to archive employees and anyone interested in it.

More information on the system of Latvia State Archives can be found on the State Archives of Latvia Web site at <http://www.arhivi.lv>

11. Hotels in Latvia

Hotels and resort hotels in Latvia are divided into five categories (the symbols used to show categories are stars). Guest houses and motels are divided into four categories (the symbols used are Roman numerals).

Some guest houses often give faulty information by naming the number of stars instead of its Roman number category. The category is determined by the room sizes, bed sizes, the level of service, etc.

There are currently 115 certificates issued to 76 hotels, 9 resort hotels, 26 guest houses, 2 motels and 2 camp sites. There is currently a great shortage of high-quality motels, camp sites and youth travel accommodations in Latvia.

It should be noted that a one or two-star hotel does not mean that it is a low-quality hotel. Such hotels, too, comply with certain standards, but the range of services they offer is not as wide as those offered in five star hotels, which contain several conference halls, a health club, a pool, a beauty salon and a hair-dressing salon.

According to Central Statistics Board data on guest accommodation and service places in 2003, the Hotel and Restaurant Center has certified 44 percent of hotels (including guest houses and holiday homes), 57 percent of all hotels, resort hotels and motels and 63 percent of hotels. These are relatively high percentages, which are still growing.

As of October, 2004:

Certified hotels and resort hotels in Latvia

Clasification	Number
One-star	7
Two-star	21
Three-star	45
Four-star	7
Five-star	5

Certified guest houses in Latvia

Category	Number
I	5
II	4
III	13
IV	4

Certified motels in Latvia

Category	Number
I	1
II	0
III	1
IV	0

Certified camping places in Latvia

Category	Number
I	0
II	0
III	2

Source: *Hotel and Restaurant Center*

12. Museums

The museum network in Latvia, which comprises more than 200 museums, offers a wide variety of services, expositions, exhibitions, educational programs and entertainment events. Information on museums (addresses, working hours etc) may be found on the Latvian Museum Association Web site at www.muzeji.lv. The Museum State Board gathers and analyzes information on the work of museums annually. This information is available on the Ministry of Culture Web site at www.km.gov.lv/Muzeji.

Popular museums are located both in Riga and in Latvia's various regions. Judging from the number of visitors, the following have proven especially interesting: The Turaida Museum-National Park, Ventspils' Museum, the Ethnographic Open-air Museum of Latvia, the Natural Museum of Latvia, and the Cēsu History and Art Museum. Visitors are always interested in the Latvian Occupation Museum, which was established in early '90s and was initiated by compatriots living abroad. Latvian museums are visited by more than 1.5 million people, both from Latvia and abroad, each year.

There are almost 5 million various culturally-historical objects in Latvian museums. People entrust museums with unique valuable things as our museums have proven to be professional and highly-ethical institutions.

The Latvian museum network is alive and growing. New museums are established every year, even as others lose popularity. They are all unified by a mutual sense of mission to preserve and promote Latvia's national cultural heritage.

Secretariat of the Special Assignments Minister for Social Integration

Rīga, Elizabetes iela 20, LV — 1050

Ph.: 7365332; fax: 9432975

iumsils@integracija.gov.lv

www.integracija.gov.lv