



'CHANGING CORBY' Past, Present, Future! *Our Latvian Community ...*



This is a very brief 'potted' history and some interesting facts and figures about Latvia that Judy felt you may find of interest. There is much more you can find out about this fascinating country on the internet. BUT, here goes:

Geography

The Republic of Latvia is a Baltic country which borders Estonia in the north, Lithuania in the south, Russia in the east and Belarus in the south-east. The Baltic Sea forms the western border. Latvia is home to the widest waterfall in Europe: Ventas Rumba, at 110 m (360 ft) wide, though only 2 m high.

The Baltic region is famous for its amber.



History

The area of Latvia has been inhabited since 9000BC and Baltic tribes, the ancestors of present-day Latvians, arrived around 3000 BC. Throughout its history, Latvia has at some point fallen under the rule of the Russians, Germans, Swedish and Polish. This has led to a huge 'melting pot' of cultures, still evident today.

Latvia first became an independent state in 1918 but during the second world war both the Russians and the Germans occupied the country and after the war ended Latvia was once more under Russian Rule and became known as The Latvian SSR. This situation remained until the 1980s when the Latvian's held protests and actively campaigned to regain their independence. In early 1991, a referendum resulted in a large majority favouring secession from the former USSR, and on 21 August, Latvia declared full independence once more. The country has been a member of the European Union since 2004, and joined the Eurozone in 2014. The population in 2017 was 2.2 million with Latvians accounting for 61 per cent of the population the rest being Russian. This said the capital city, Riga, has one third of all of Latvia's inhabitants.

Food

Karbonade – Latvian Pork Cutlets



Pork features heavily on Latvian menus and 'Karbonade' is one of the country's most popular dishes. Much like a schnitzel, the pork is pounded flat and then fried in breadcrumbs. It's typically served with a heap of creamy mushrooms on top and with some dill-seasoned potatoes on the side.

Naming a single national dish for the whole country, especially when Latvia has assimilated so many influences from the surrounding countries, is rather difficult. However, it is fair to say that Latvians eat a lot of potato pancakes (as do the rest of Eastern Europe) and grey peas and bacon (a traditional Christmas dish) also feature heavily. However, along with Karbonade, Piragi could be said to be one of the more common, popular dishes. They are crescent-shaped baked pastry filled with onions, bacon (sometimes other meats) and are often served with mushroom soup and pickled onions.

Religion

Until the 12th century, Latvians were pagans. Christianity arrived in the 12th and 13th century and was the most influential religion in the region until the arrival of Communism in the 20th century when all religions were banned. Today the majority of Latvians are part of the Lutheran Church with Catholic and Orthodox Christian minorities.

Song and Dance

Latvia has a long-established Song and Dance festival that takes place in the capital Riga every 5 years. It was started in 1873 and the last one (2018) was particularly special as Latvia celebrated its centenary – it first gained independence in 1918. The next one is to be held in 2023.

For one week every five years the Nationwide Latvian Song and Dance Festival gathers thousands of singers and folk dancers for a series of performances in Riga.

Highlights include the parade during which the city's main thoroughfare is shut down to traffic to allow the participants to pass through. Crowds line the streets to cheer on the participants, wave to friends and family, and even rush to give them flowers as they walk past.

Favourites also include the closing night performance at the legendary open-air venue in Mežaparks which sees around 15,000 singers come together in a joint choir and hundreds of dancers perform alongside.

Concerts and competitions take place throughout the week and many are ticketed, however, visitors can attend free events at places like Vērmanģdārzs Park, and the general atmosphere in the city is fantastic. It's rare to see so many people dressed in national costume.

The Festival is included in the UNESCO Oral History and Non-material Cultural Heritage List.



15,000 people singing below and several 100 dancers above!

