



Like Prague, Latvia's capital offers a blend of medieval streets and 20th-century architecture, alongside superb museums and nightlife. Unlike Prague, it also offers spectacular sandy beaches within easy reach of the city's historic centre.

the alternative to Prague, Czech Republic

# RIGA

Latvia

With its UNESCO-listed Old Town chock-full of medieval, Gothic and Baroque buildings, Riga is often dubbed "the new Prague". From a high vantage point, there are clear parallels, with the city's stunning sweep of church spires, orange roofs and narrow streets set alongside a wide expanse of river. But a short stroll around the streets of the Latvian capital will quickly reveal a different picture. What's remarkable about this city isn't so much its centuries-old buildings, but its turn-of-the-20th-century ones: Riga is a hub of Art Nouveau architecture.

Prague may have given the world Art Nouveau icon Alphonse Mucha, but Riga is the city that really took the movement to its heart. As it underwent large-scale expansion in the late 1800s and early 1900s, vast swathes of the city's New Town were designed in this in-vogue style. There are eye-catching examples around almost every corner – don't miss the distinctive peach-coloured German Embassy, the ornate blue-and-white Mikhail Eisenstein mansion and the

elegantly decorated Riga Synagogue. There's even an Art Nouveau Centre here, housed within what was once the private apartment of Konstantins Pēkšēns, a prominent architect of the movement. Step inside this museum to see its spectacular spiral staircase (one of the capital's most photographed sights).

As a rule of thumb, "step inside" is good advice, as what lies within Riga's buildings is often just as fascinating as what is outside. This city has a host of world-class museums, including the Latvian War Museum (which tells the story of the country's conflicts over the years, particularly the 1918–20 War of Liberation) and the Open-Air Ethnographic Museum (which features homesteads from around the country).

While its museums are world-class, Riga's nightlife scene is also something to write home about. Long the most lively of the Baltic capitals, Riga is home to an array of pubs, cocktails joints, jazz bars and techno clubs, all of which keep the streets buzzing well into the early hours.



Clockwise from left  
Latvia's picturesque  
cityscape, bordering the  
Daugava River; Mikhail  
Eisenstein's Art Nouveau  
mansion; performers  
dressed in traditional attire

This eastern European gem has an extra ace up its sleeve: the ocean. Miles of sandy shoreline skirt the bracing Baltic Sea on the edge of the city, while just a little further west lies Jūrmala, a popular resort town with its long stretch of white sand. Riga is defined by its proximity to the sea, something its Czech counterpart cannot compete with. So, while these two pretty cities have a lot in common, Riga is not the new Prague. It's so much more.

## Still going to Prague?

After ticking off the big-ticket sights in the Old Town, head to one of the city's lesser-known, up-and-coming neighbourhoods such as verdant Vinohrady, industrial Karlín or eclectic Holešovice.

**Getting There** Riga International Airport is the largest in the Baltic states. Riga's centre is very walkable, while buses and trams connect the outer districts.  
[www.liveriga.com](http://www.liveriga.com)

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