



Latvia 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Financial Security; Fraud; Winter weather; Floods; Drug Trafficking

Europe > Latvia; Europe > Latvia > Riga

2/8/2016

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Latvia is a relatively safe country in which the overall crime and safety situation has remained static for several years. Riga enjoys many public parks and a boisterous Old Town.

Post Crime Rating: Medium

Crime Threats

Crime statistics tend to trend higher during the summer due to increases in tourism and associated crimes of opportunity. Non-confrontational property crimes of opportunity (pickpocketing, swindling, bag snatching) occur during daylight hours.

Latvia is not immune from credit card fraud, yet concerted efforts by law enforcement have

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helped reduce the number of incidents.

Prostitution occurs on a small, localized scale. Local authorities have cracked down on notorious establishments. As a result, incidents of scams and fraud at these places have decreased over the years.

East European organized crime syndicates are active in cyber-crime, narcotics, prostitution, and other illicit enterprises.

Other Areas of Concern

Most incidents of crime affecting U.S. citizens involve property crime and occur in public parks or Old Town Riga. These hubs of activity often contain large numbers of intoxicated visitors and locals as well as others intent on taking advantage of them, especially at night. The central market and the Old Town are popular areas with pickpockets. The underground tunnels linking Old Town to the bus station and nearby shopping mall are also particularly attractive to opportunistic criminals.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

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Roads in the cities are well-maintained, and drivers are generally courteous. Road conditions in rural areas vary from good to poor. In the cities, the streets are often narrow but generally illuminated. Major highways are in good repair; however, road conditions change quickly due to extreme weather (snow, ice, severe cold). Secondary roads may suffer disrepair with potholes, poor lighting, and a lack of proper signage. Speeding and drunk driving are often contributing factors in vehicle accidents.

Visitors should exercise extra caution while driving during the winter, as snow accumulation and long periods of darkness make it difficult to see other vehicles and pedestrians, especially at intersections and crosswalks. Stay alert when navigating the streets as a pedestrian or driver. Park in well-illuminated, visible areas. Do not keep any items of value in plain sight inside the vehicle.

Public Transportation Conditions

Public transportation is relatively safe and widely available in the cities. Common sense precautions (keeping wallets/purses secure, avoiding close contact with other passengers) are recommended when traveling on public transportation. Visitors are recommended to use radio-dispatched and metered taxi cabs (Red Cab Taxi, Baltic Taxi).

Aviation/Airport Conditions

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Riga International Airport is the main airport in Latvia and serves as the regional hub for the Baltics. It is a modern and secure facility.

Other Travel Conditions

During the winter, extreme weather makes seeing pedestrians difficult. It is recommended that pedestrians use reflectors and reflective clothing, which are available in all major Latvian supermarkets, especially during the dark winter. Pedestrians should walk on sidewalks and cross streets at crosswalks or intersections whenever possible.

Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Low

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

There are no known indigenous terrorist organizations in Latvia. With its inclusion in the Schengen Zone, the ease with which undesirable elements can enter Latvia has increased, and its terrorism threat is consistent with most of Europe.

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Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Post Political Violence Rating: Low

Civil Unrest

Demonstrations relating to particularly sensitive social topics have occasionally turned violent, resulting in arrests and disruption.

Religious/Ethnic Violence

Latvia has a large ethnic Russian population. Though tension between ethnic Russian and ethnic Latvian residents is sometimes visible in news media and political debate, it rarely results in violence.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

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Spring floods regularly impact the southeast region along the Daugava River basin.

Critical Infrastructure Concerns

The worst accident in Latvia's recent history occurred when the roof of a shopping center collapsed in Riga on November 21, 2013. Scores were injured and more than 50 people killed, including several firefighters who were assisting in rescue efforts.

Personnel-Background Concerns

Travelers with disabilities may encounter difficulties accessing some establishments in Old Town Riga, as wheelchair accessible entrances are uncommon.

Drug-related Crimes

The most frequently seized illegal drugs entering Latvia and/or transiting to Russia are cocaine, heroin, and synthetic drugs. Drug cartels have used Baltic banks for money laundering operations. Officials are working closely with U.S. and international law

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enforcement to curb the flow of illegal narcotics and its proceeds into and through Latvia.

Police Response

The police force is proficient and capable, though response times can be lengthy. Senior officers benefit from training abroad in areas of community policing and racial sensitivity. Municipal police officers are high-profile and abundant throughout the public parks and in Old Town Riga. Camera technology is used to reduce police response times and identify potential criminal incidents. Riga's tourist police unit, comprised of specially trained officers skilled in a variety of languages, has reduced the number of criminal incidents reported against foreign visitors in Old Town Riga.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

In the unlikely event that a foreign visitor is detained or harassed by the police, the individual should comply with police instructions. However, a request for an interpreter and to contact the individual's embassy should be made immediately.

Crime Victim Assistance

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For all emergencies, dial “112.” English speaking operators are available. In addition, a special 24-hour tourist hotline has been established by the tourist police unit at +371-6718-1818. The operator can advise where the victim may file a police report.

Police/Security Agencies

Latvia’s Ministry of Interior police forces include the State Police, Security Police, and Riga Port Police. The State Police are generally responsible for community policing, traffic, criminal investigations, and public order. The Security Police focus on counterterrorism, protection, and intelligence. The Port Police control the port. Municipal police agencies, including for Riga, operate within their jurisdictions similar to the State Police.

Medical Emergencies

For medical emergencies, dial “113” to reach the Emergency Medical Services Agency directly.

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

Clinic “Gailezers” (Part of “Riga Eastern Clinical University Hospital and Clinic)

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2 Hipokrata Iela

Riga, LV-1038

Tel: +371-6704-1001, +371-6704-1002

Pauls Stradins Clinical University Hospital

13 Pilsonu Iela

Riga, LV-1002

Tel: +371-6706-9600

Children's Hospital (BKUS)

Vienbias Gatve 45

Riga, LV-1004

Tel: +371-6706-4400

Recommended Air Ambulance Services

Latvia's Emergency Medical Services Agency provides air ambulance capability and can be

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reached at: +371-6733-7000.

Recommended Insurance Posture

Foreign visitors are advised to maintain private health insurance and medevac insurance.

Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

For additional information on vaccines and health guidance, please visit the CDC at: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/latvia>.

OSAC Country Council Information

There is no OSAC Country Council, though the Regional Security Office and American Chamber of Commerce share a collaborative relationship on security issues of mutual interest. To reach OSAC's Europe team, please email OSACEUR@state.gov.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

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Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

1 Samnera Velsa iela

Riga, LV-1510

The Consular Section provides U.S. Citizen Services weekdays between 2:00-4:00 p.m. Appointments are recommended, except for emergency services (arrest, serious illness, injury, destitution, or death of a U.S. citizen). Individual requests for morning appointments may be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Embassy Contact Numbers

Regional Security Office: +371-6710-7267

Embassy Operator: +371-6710-7000

Duty Officer: +371-2920-5708 (After hours only)

Embassy Website: <http://riga.usembassy.gov/index.html>

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Embassy Guidance

Enroll in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program so the Embassy can keep you up to date with important safety and security announcements.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Scams

Be aware of individuals, particularly young, attractive women, asking visitors to buy them drinks. Scams sometimes occur in less reputable establishments, whereby the visitor is later presented with an exorbitant bill based on a separate menu and then detained until the bill is paid, sometimes through physical intimidation.

Situational Awareness Best Practices

Latvia's relatively safe environment should not mislead travelers to believe they are immune from crimes of opportunity. Visitors should exercise the same basic security precautions that they would while traveling in any major international city. Common sense security precautions (safeguarding valuables, good situational awareness) helps visitors reduce their vulnerability to most criminal incidents. Extra care should be taken to safeguard wallets and purses in Old

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Town and the underground tunnels.

Avoid dimly illuminated parks and streets at night. If possible, travel in a group. Do not leave personal property unattended; secure valuables at all times. Avoid the open display of expensive items. Use caution when using ATMs on the street, especially in Old Town.

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