

## LATVIA CUSTOMS

### Greetings:

Latvians shake hands when they greet, being careful to make and hold eye contact. To show special respect or deep friendship, men and women might add a light kiss.

It is considered impolite for people to shake hands across a doorway; instead, one is expected to step into the room with the other person before shaking hands.

To introduce themselves, Latvians state their name and surname.

### Gestures:

Latvians freely use hand gestures to emphasize verbal expressions. Otherwise, they are reserved with their hands.

People generally do not wave, since they greet (with a handshake) only people they know.

Direct eye contact connotes honesty and sincerity.

### Holidays:

Official holidays include New Year's Day, Easter (Friday–Monday), Labor Day (1 May), Mother's Day (second Sunday of May), Whitsunday, *Līgo* Day and *Jāņi* (Midsummer's Day, 23–24 June), Independence Day (18 Nov.), Christmas (25–26 Dec.), and New Year's Eve (31 Dec.).

For Easter, people color eggs by boiling them along with onion skins and wildflowers. At the Sunday family meal, each person selects an egg and takes turns cracking it against others' eggs. Amid laughter and much strategy, the person with the last egg to crack is deemed the winner. *Jāņi* is the year's most festive holiday. Held on the summer solstice, it marks the beginning of the summer's "white nights," when the sun sets for only a few hours. Food is prepared weeks in advance. Businesses close for two days. Huge bonfires are lit, and revelers attend parties, dances, and concerts. They sing songs and many stay up all night.

For public holidays, Latvians fly flags, attend speeches, and have parades. Flag masts carry black ribbons on commemorative days: 25 March (for victims of communism), 8 May (for victims of World War II), 14 June (for victims of 1941 deportations), 4 July (for victims of anti-Semitic genocide), and 11 November (Veterans' Day).