



INFO PACK

VOLUNTEERING WORK IN
BALVI AND VILAKA
MUNICIPALITIES

- *NGO "Kalmārs"* -

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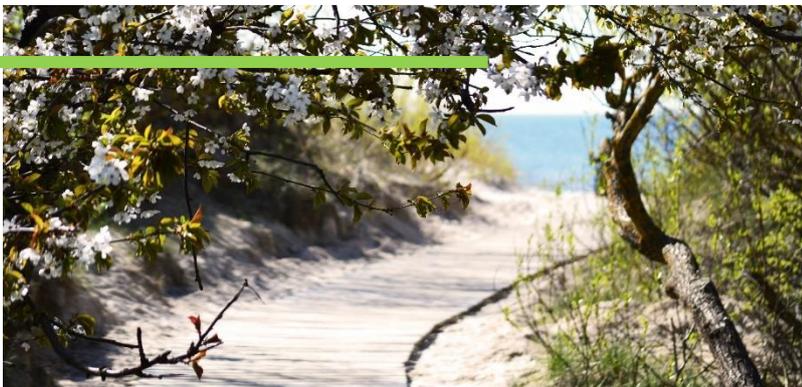
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FACTS ABOUT LATVIA



Latvians are a people to look up to. **Latvia has the world's tallest women**, with the average lady coming in at an impressive 170 cm. The men are no midgets either, holding fourth place.

Riga's Central Market is one of Europe's biggest markets. It is famed for its pavilions housed in giant zeppelin hangars left behind by the German army after World War I.



With over 500 km of coast, Latvia has tons of beaches. There's space for everyone, whether you want fun in the sun or miles of sand to yourself, and best of all its all open to the public.

You don't need to go to a health food store in Latvia to find organic food, because locals find fantastic ingredients on their own. From birch sap juice in spring to berries in summer and mushrooms in autumn, **Latvians are a nation of foragers**.





Over half its territory covered by forest, so Latvia is a very green place. Locals love to pick mushrooms and berries, and at Midsummer young couples duck into the woods to look for the mythical flowering fern. No such plant exists, but the search goes on...

Latvia has a huge capital relative to its tiny population, with over **one third of the population living in Riga**. But you wouldn't know it on a summer weekend when everyone heads for their cottage in the countryside.



With over 1 million folk songs, Latvians love to sing. You can catch over 10,000 of them on stage at once at the Song Festivals, and Dance festival with more than 40 thousand participants. Every five Years Latvia celebrates song and dances in Latvian song and dance festival.

Latvia is a small country, but at one stage it had **colonies abroad**. In the 1600's, the independent Duchy of Courland covering western Latvia was a powerful maritime nation and controlled part of Gambia in Africa and the Caribbean island of Tobago.



More interesting facts about Latvia You can check here: <https://www.latvia.travel/en/article/interesting-facts-about-latvia>

Weather in Latvia



The **WINTER** in Latvia usually lasts from mid-December to the beginning of March. Air temperature can fluctuate from +5 degrees Celsius all the way down to -30 degrees.

In Latvia, the **SPRING** may begin already at the end of February or as late as in late April, and the spring season lasts until the beginning of June. The average air temperature in spring is 0 to +15 degrees.



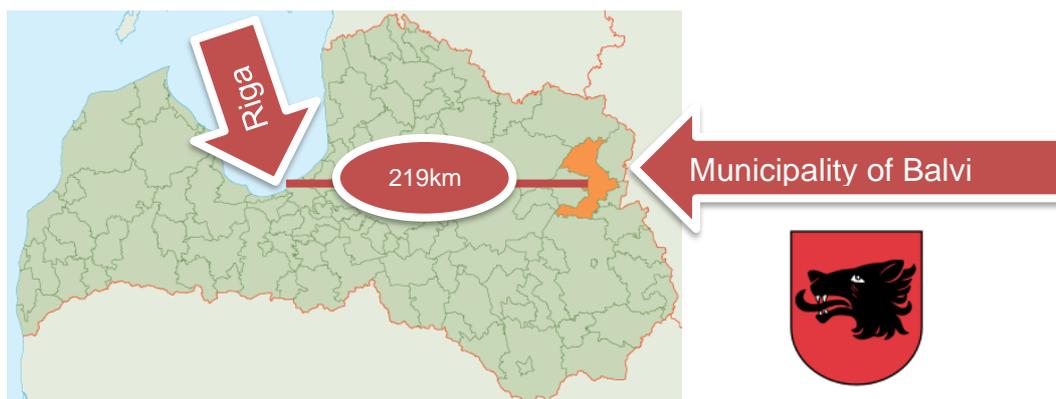
The **SUMMER** in Latvia starts in June and continues until September. The average air temperature in the summer is around +19 degrees, but on some days it may rise to +30 degrees. The latter half of the summer may bring sudden thunderstorms.

AUTUMN in Latvia lasts from September to December. The average air temperature decreases from +10 degrees in September to 0 degrees in November, sometimes it can get cooler, even till -10 degrees.



Read more about weather here: <https://www.latvia.travel/en/article/weather-latvia>

MUNICIPALITY OF BALVI



City of Balvi:

- City rights since 1928 – young town but there have been settlements there long before
- Population: approx. 6500 in Balvi
- Administrative seat of region
- Between two lakes (Balvu ezers and Pērkuno ezers, connected by river Bolupe)
- City was burnt down in 1944 by the Germans and rebuilt under the Soviets in 1945
- Attractions: Manor Castle at the shore of the lake, Manor Park, Lāča Garden, Ūdensroze (=Water lily) fountain, SUP boarding, Wake park
- Cultural center of the region: Cultural house and Balvi Central Library; Balvi Manor as concert hall; many collectives celebrating folks arts; Balvi Culture and Recreational Centre; Balvi District Museum; Art, music and sports schools, e.g. Balvi Music school , 2 churches
- About municipality: www.balvi.lv
- About tourism: www.turisms.balvi.lv



Municipality of Balvi has in total almost 12 thousand inhabitants (11 977 in 2019), and the territory has one city- Balvi and 10 parishes. The area is 1 044 km². There are many forests, rivers and lakes in municipality. The main business: agriculture, wood processing and logging.

In Balvi District, the ancient co-exists with the modern. Historic buildings have found modern use, and ethnographic and contemporary cultural traditions are pursued to maintain.

Forests, agricultural land, swamps, meadows and lakes make the characteristic landscape of Balvi District. The beautiful countryside cottages built by the local people, the roadside crosses or crucifixes, characteristic of Latgale, church spires - the dominants of the village landscape, do not go unnoticed and catch one's eye.

Balvi District can be proud of the ancient traditions of cooking, as well as the ecological quality of local produce. Freshly baked bread, aromatic meat and fish smokes, fresh fruit and berries, healthy vegetables, home-dried herb tea - this is the taste of the Balvi District.

We invite you to a leisurely rest In Balvi District! Enjoy the countryside and the magic of nature, discover and try out the oldest crafts in craftsmen's workshops! A special role in preserving and promoting the intangible cultural heritage belongs to the Balvi District Museum, where you can get acquainted with the North-Latgalian cultural environment, ethnography and craftsmanship in the digital modern exposition. Sports and a healthy lifestyle are preconditions for feeling good and for achievements in work and training. Therefore there are several possibilities for active rest in Balvi Region, as well as various sports events are organized that bring together athletes from the near and far beyond.

Well-equipped sports ground, bmx track, disc golf park, wake-up park on the shore of Lake Balvi. Entrepreneurship and the economic activity of the population are the basis for the growth and development of Balvi District. The main business sectors are agriculture, logging, wood processing, forestry, construction of residential and non-residential buildings, retail trade. Every year, the most successful farmers and entrepreneurs of Balvi District are honored at a special event.

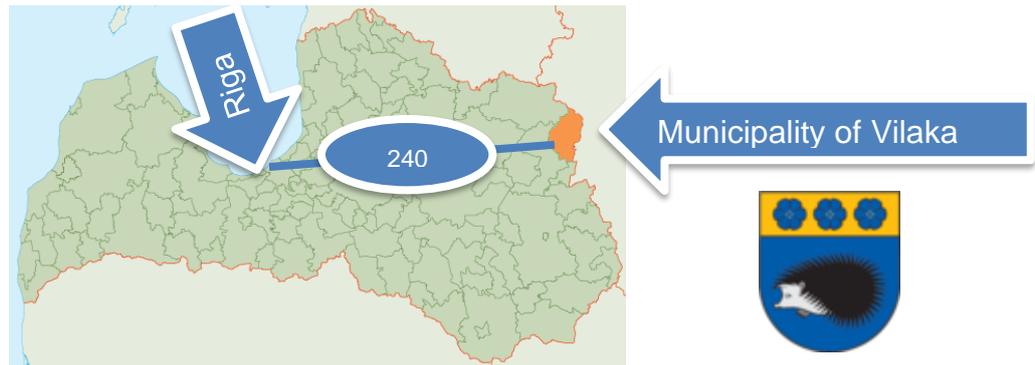
Well-organized schools, interest and vocational education institutions in Balvi District are waiting for their students, sports facilities – for athletes. There are active young people in the region who are eager to learn, train, make progress at local, national and international level.



Balvi children and youth center (Balvu Bērnu un jauniešu centrs) has been active in the field of intensive education and youth work for about ten years. The Center has been cooperating with the youth NGO "Kalmārs" since its foundation (2013). Creating ideas together, supporting the social activities of new bidding members. Currently, the youth center

implements 19 interest education programs. Organizes non-formal education training for young people. This moment already for two years, Kalmars, has been running Erasmus + and Solidarity corpus projects to introduce the prize community to Europes multicultural environment. The association organizes events and activities in conjunction with the youth center, providing a variety of leisure activities. The aim of the organization is to provide youth participation activities by activating their participation in local community activities.

MUNICIPALITY OF VILAKA



Vilaka:

- 28 km from Balvi, 8 km from Russia
- Next to Viļaka lake (Viļakas ezers)
- Attractions: Viļaka Catholic Church, Viļaka Medieval Castle, castle ruins of Marienhauzen, Museum, SUP boarding, boating, fishing, Viļaka island walking trail
- German name: Marienhauzen
- Population: approx. 1200 in Viļaka town
- City rights since 1945
- Castle of Marienhauzen – a center of North Latgale in 13. century
- Administrative center of Viļaka municipality which was formed in 2009
- Landscape: forests, rivers, lakes -> many hiking and cycling ways
- Currently many projects to improve infrastructure
- About municipality: www.vilaka.lv
- About tourism: www.visitvilaka.lv



Municipality of Vilaka has in total almost 5 thousand inhabitants (4569 in 2019), and the territory has one city-Vilaka and 6 parishes. The area is 639 km². The main business: agriculture, wood processing and retail.

In Vilaka District everyone can find some cultural heritage and 21st century idea implementation, because municipality every year implements different projects that help with the infrastructure, create new tourism places to visit, as well keep the heritage and traditions, because we have one of the oldest Latgalian song and poem festival, as well ruins of Marienhauzen castle that was an important place in 13th of century.

Vilaka District can be proud of the traditions, that are still in modern days available to see and to feel, local food, that farmers grow here in municipality and You can try it. All the meadows are full with flowers and herbal, that You can pick for Your tea. The forests give You fresh breath and a day full of relaxation and hikings.

We invite you to visit Viļaka District! To enjoy the hiking trail in Balkani, to have a walk in forest Stompaku purvi, to visit island of Viļaka lake and have some nice trail there, to visit churches and hundred year house, that has kept traditions in it, to cook Latvian bread, to swim in lake, to SUP board or to ride electronic scooters. There is so much to do!

We are a small municipality in rural area and if You like to be in nature, to have clean air and places to have a walk, be active or just relaxed, then this is a place to visit!



Youngsters can take advantage of the opportunities of the youth centre at 3 premises in the county. They are located in Vilaka, Semenova and Rekova. Young people are invited to come with their own initiative and their willingness to work. The youth centre is a place to spend your spare time meaningfully. Young people have the opportunity to

engage in different international and local projects, as well the opportunity to list his or her hours of volunteering and obtain a statement. Individual work with young people ensures their self-growth. Activities are also carried out to promote the entrepreneurial and career development of youngsters. The youth centre cooperates successfully with schools and student parliament in organizing activities and promoting self-growth. The youth centre in Vilaka and Rekova is visited by young people aged 14-18 and by children of primary school age in Semenova, so activities are extended to age groups. Creative workshops, game evenings, movie evenings, self-education trainings, non-formal education conference, day camp for children, cycling tours, volunteering - this and more are all available at our youth center.

THE VOLUNTEERING WORK/SCHEDULE



SELF-INITIATIVE ACTIVITIES

Volunteers have time to plan and organize self-initiative activities. At least one smaller activity every week (language/art/music etc. class) and one bigger event (cultural day, environment evening, sports games etc.) every month.

ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN YOUTH CENTER ACTIVITIES

Youth centers in Balvi and Vilaka municipalities already have their own yearly activities and volunteers help to prepare them (decorations, workshops other help needed) and participate in them as well. All activities are non-formal.



TIME FOR GROWING AND LEARNING

Volunteers will have time to learn Latvian language in OLS system, as well meeting at least two times a month teacher and learning face-to-face Latvian.

Every volunteer has a mentor, that helps to integrate in new environment, and the time is marked as well in schedule.

In the end of project- all volunteers receive Youthpass, before that every week is time for weekly report, where volunteers assess Youthpass competences and week in general.

Work plan:

- Two days out of five volunteers spend in Vilaka municipality (going there by bus) and three days are in Balvi municipality;
- Volunteers visit schools, parishes in municipality and youth centers – to introduce with themselves and have activities;
- Volunteer = college with same voice as everyone else;
- Mondays – planning and preparing for the week, doing other tasks;
- Fridays – assessing the week and writing weekly report, doing other tasks;
- The working day is 6-8 h/ week;
- Schedule may change because of the big events in youth centers – we have a bit flexible working frame;
- Volunteers have winter Holidays (2 weeks) and a week of vacation time in Summer (from 22. June).



Living/ safety plan:

- Every start of the month volunteer receives pocket and food money (as agreed in agreement) – total 9 EUR/ day;
- Volunteers live in Balvi, in dormitories with separate rooms (accommodation is covered from the project money);
- While being in Latvia, every volunteer receives Latvian phone number with unlimited internet – to be safe and reachable any time of the day (SIM card, call and internet plan is covered from project money);
- To go to activities outside Balvi, volunteers use buses and collect the checks and in the end of the month fill a form and give to NGO to receive money back (work travel is covered from project money), the bus schedule You can find at this page: <https://www.1188.lv/en/transport/buses> (Typing: Balvu AO (Balvi – living place for volunteers), Vilakas AO (Vilaka other host youth center), Semenova (smaller village youth center, that is under Vilaka Youth center), Rekova (smaller village youth center that is under Vilaka youth center), Tilža (youth room, that is under Balvi youth center));
- Coming to Latvia from home country and going back is covered from project;
- VISA is covered from project;
- Every volunteer needs to have CIGNA insurance (EU countries as well European Health card).



Support through volunteering work:

- Mentor: each volunteer will have a mentor, who will help to integrate and be a guide in this journey;
- Technical mentor (host organization): there is one technical mentor from youth center in Balvi, who helps with SIM cards, bank accounts, departments, technical questions activities;
- Supervisor (coordinating organization): person who helps with Youthpass, answers questions about project, interviews and prepares volunteers before coming to Latvia (some tasks need to be done, before coming to Latvia, just to prepare a bit for culture and activities), as well helps with different situations, monitors the project and other more emotional things;
- Host organizations support volunteer ideas and activities through all the project, implement new ideas and help volunteers with things that to implement activities;
- Sending organization: supports as in agreement, the volunteer, before going to project – preparation, through project, and back home;
- Latvian National Agency – support trough trainings for volunteers (on- arrival, mid-term training);
- OLS – language learning system for learning Latvian, as well meeting teacher face to face 2 times a month to learn Latvian language.
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Basic things to know/ prepare, before coming to Latvia:

- Learning phrases in Latvian, to be polite (we sent them to volunteers, who are selected for the project);
- Preparing things for cultural activities (thing, what You could take with You for sharing Your culture);
- Money currency is euro, You can use cash, or a card, but remember, the charge for taking out of bank account may be from 2 euro up to 10 euro, depending on Your bank account;
- Preparing clothes for different seasons (the degrees can vary from +30 up to – 30) and different weather (humid, windy, sunny, hot, cold, stormy, rainy etc.);
- We use European plug for electronics, 220V;
- Being ready to live in small town and be in rural area for the volunteering service;
- Being ready to take time to gain trust from kids and youth (at start they may be shy, because Latvians are more introvert people, but when they open, they are excited to have You as a volunteer);
- Being flexible and open minded, because this is a creative and non-formal work, with youngsters and youth!

THE ORGANIZATIONS



NGO “Kalmars”

- Youth Association/ Social benefit non-profit organization
- PIC code: 910514945
- Coordinating (as well sending) organization
- Address: Brīvības iela 46, Balvi, Balvi municipality, LV-4501, Latvia

Balvi children and youth center

- Youth center/ after school lessons for self-development for children and youth
- PIC code: 915639649
- Host organization
- Address: Brīvības iela 46, Balvi, Balvi municipality, LV-4501, Latvia



Vilaka youth initiative center

- Youth center with two other facilities in municipality villages
- PIC code: 941063834
- Host organization
- Address: Pils iela 11, Vilaka, Vilaka municipality, LV-4583, Latvia

For more information about NGO projects, ask coordinator Santa Komane:

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