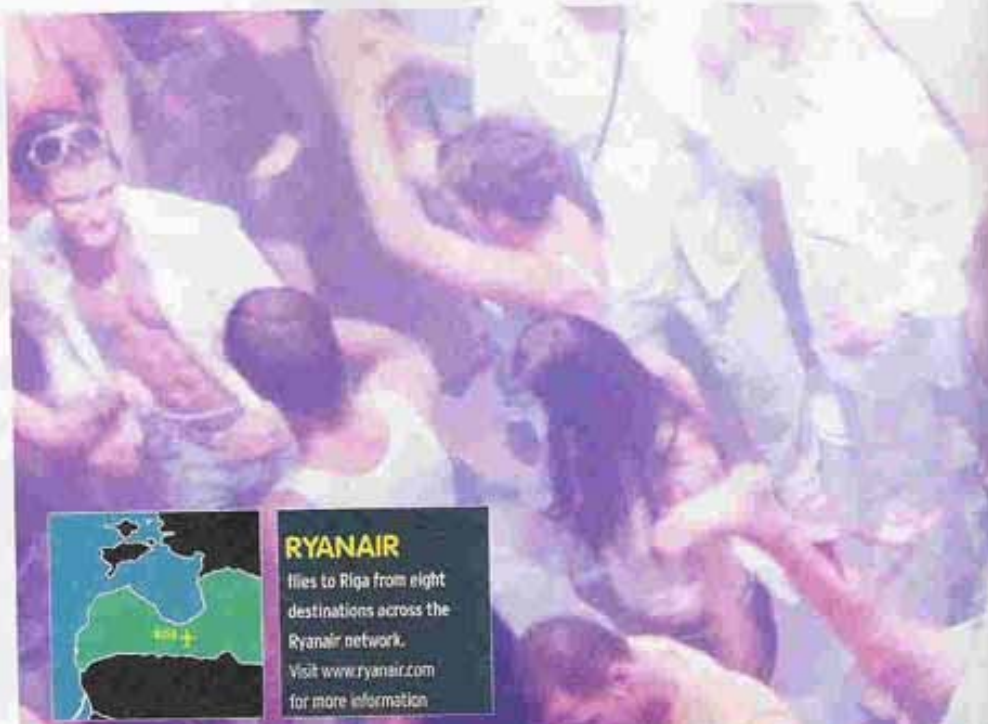


**STARRY NIGHT**

Below and left: going out in Riga means rubbing shoulders and shaking booty with the locals at the city's many bars and clubs

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ANY anachronistic notions about what the "old" East offers are quickly blown out of the water the minute you touch down in buzzing Riga. If your view of this Baltic country is Soviet-era deprivation, food queues and dodgy drinking dens, prepare to be thrown into a world of 24-hour revelry, where a plethora of funky bars, cafés and clubs all cater to the Latvian capital's party animal population.

There are teetotalers in Riga, but they're thin on the ground. This city likes to drink and hosts a throbbing nightlife. The old town is awash with bars, which range from lounge-style hangouts with DJs, comfy sofas and funky visuals through to spit-and-sawdust

Most of Riga's bars and clubs stay open till the late hours, with many buzzing past 3am seven days a week

places with lashings of atmosphere. Most of Riga's bars and clubs stay open till the late hours, with many buzzing past 3am seven days a week.

Part of the reason for the city's legendary reputation is its vibrant blend of cultures. Following World War II, Moscow shipped in ethnic Russians, many of whom stayed put after Latvia gained independence in 1991. Perhaps the city's inexhaustible energy stems from ethnic Latvians and Russians trying constantly to outdo each other. Or maybe it's the stag and hen parties, clubbers and up-for-it travellers from all over Europe who've →

RED-HOT RIGA





See the Soviet sights



01.
Academy of Sciences
Menacing Riga from
a height of 108m,
this architectural
monstrosity is one of
many "birthday cakes"
left behind by Stalin.
Ākademijas Laukums

02.
Monument to the
Latvian Riflemen
Controversial monument
that both honours the
Latvian riflemen who
fought in World War I
and those who later
joined the side of the
Bolsheviks during the
Russian Revolution.
Strelnieku Laukums

03.
Pokrov Cemetery
Fascinating for a stroll,
particularly to see the
special monuments for
communist soldiers who
died in World War II.
**Between Meness
and Sencu**

04.
Victory Monument
The most recent call for
the statue's demolition
came in January 2007.
Critics argue that the
brutal Red Army hardly
liberated Riga at the
end of World War II.
Victory Park

05.
Riga Aviation Museum
Ideal for closet anoraks,
this is the largest
collection of Soviet
aircraft outside the CIS.
**Near Riga
International Airport**



Forget its dour Soviet past, the Latvian capital is the new Europe's place to party, says **Jennifer Clarkson**



Get a view of the city

01.
Riga Radio and TV Tower
Look over the city and beyond, from the second-tallest tower in Europe. The viewing platform is 97m up the 368m landmark.
Zakusālas Krastmala 1

02.
Skyline Bar at the Reval Hotel Latvija
Knock back a cocktail as you gaze out from this 26th-floor bar.
Elizabetes 55

03.
Radisson SAS Daugava's Panorama Restaurant
Enjoy first-class food and superb panoramic views of the river and old town.
Kuga 24

04.
Academy of Sciences
Survey the land from this Soviet building at a level of 65m.
Akademijas Laukums 1

05.
St Peter's Church
Ride the elevator up 70m and savour the view from the tower.
Skarnu 19



CITY LIMITS

Left: party till dawn - it's the law in Latvia!

Centre: the Skyline Bar.
Below: Latvian riflemen



been coming here in recent years. Whatever the reason, there is no doubting the city's A-list party credentials.

A firm favourite with the local cognoscenti, Nobody Writes to the Colonel (Peldu 26/28) is an industrial-style bar, with live music and club nights. Or, check out the fashionably retro Skyline Bar on the 26th floor of Reval Hotel Latvija (Elizabetes 55) and enjoy the best views of any venue in the city. Sit back, sip a cocktail and watch the old town and art nouveau quarters unfold below you. Head for the sleek surrounds of B-Bars (Doma Laukums 2), where Riga Black Balsam, the lethal herbal liqueur adored by Latvians, is served in more than 100 permutations.

Riga's clubbing scene has gone through the roof over the past few years and you can catch international DJ talent at more than a dozen venues in the city. Nautilus (Kungu 8) is Riga's most bizarre nightspot, with décor based on a submarine theme and bar staff dressed in sailor suits. La Rocca (Brivibas 96) claims to be the biggest club in the Baltics, and the dancefloor certainly fits the bill. Better still, the drinks are reasonably priced and there are some top-quality weekend club nights. Another hot venue is Depo (Valnu 32), an underground hangout with muted lighting, a fashionably grungy clientele and regular guest DJs.

Riga is no slouch when it comes to live music either, with Bites Blues Club (Dzirnavu 34a) a fair stab at a genuine blues club. New Orleans it ain't, but regular live music and classic jazz artists beamed on to a big screen ensure a chilled-out evening. Elsewhere, Hamlet Club (Jena Seta 5) has suitably arty pretensions and puts on improvised performances, modern jazz and cultural events.

If you're tired of all the usual city-break suspects and fancy dropping in to a place where the citizens are in the mood for a serious party, then head east. Latvia only joined the European Union in 2004. On the streets of Riga it feels like they are still celebrating, with new arrivals more than welcome to join in.

Art on the town

Riga is home to many beautiful art nouveau buildings. If you don't stumble across them by accident, go in search of these

architectural gems; they are not to be missed.

Strelnieku 4a
Wrought-iron balconies, rooftop statues and geometric lines are all part of Mikhail Eisenstein's intricate designs.

Alberta 12 Konstantins Konstantins Peksens and Eizens Laube's striking façade fuses art nouveau and medieval design.

Alberta 13
Housing Riga Graduate School of Law and the Belgian Embassy.

Antonijas 2
The Russian Embassy is the standout art nouveau building on this street.

Elizabetes 10b
Eisenstein designed this impressive vibrant blue, dragon-adorned building.

