

01 Riga Castle



During the centuries, this land has been referred to by several names: Letgale, Letija, Livonia, Inflantia, Ostseeprovince, Ostland, Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic, and finally – the Republic of Latvia. It has been ruled by the ancient Latvian tribes, Germans, Poles, Swedes, Danes, Russians, communists, and now - by a democratically elected parliament. Only Riga has always been Riga in all languages. Riga is also the only city out of the nine largest cities of Latvia that has never had a different name in any of

the foreign languages. The second largest city of the country, Daugavpils, on the other hand, was called Dinaburg by Germans, and Dvinsk by Russians.

In order to ascertain the identity of the governing power of the country, you have to look at the Tower of the Holy Spirit of Riga Castle to see the flag. The flag of the Republic of Latvia flies there now. During periods when the President of the country is in residence, the President's banner also flies above the tower. The Castle of Riga has always been the center of power. For some time, Livonia included part of Estonia's territory as well, and that too was governed from here. The government of Latvia is also quartered in this historical castle.

The castle enables those in command of it to control access to the biggest port in all of the Baltic region, which is located here - on the banks of the River Daugava.

The construction of the Castle was initiated by the German vassal state during Livonian times, in 1330. It would become the fortress providing military protection for Riga. In those days, there were openings in its walls and cannons on the towers. The basement held the magazine where ammunition was stored. In 1561, after long and bloody battles between Livonia and Poland, regents sent by the king of Poland settled in the castle. In the year 1621, after the Polish-Swedish war, the Governor General assigned by the King of Sweden had his residence here. It is interesting that at that time Riga became the biggest city of the Swedish Kingdom, because it had more inhabitants than Stockholm, the capital of Sweden! After a long and harsh war between Russians and Swedes, the largest part of the land fell into the hands of the Russian Empire in 1709. Riga Castle was captured during the intense battles and was visited by the emperor himself – by Tsar Peter the Great. Riga fell into the hands of Russia during the period, when in the marshlands near the Gulf of Finland, the first pilings were driven and dams were constructed during the building of the new capital of Russia - St. Petersburg. Up until 1917, the governor generals of the Russian Livland province resided in the Castle. A rather interesting and little known fact is that during Russian times, Riga Castle played a significant geopolitical role of European importance. This was the place where the outcome of the military expedition of Napoleon in 1812 during the French-Russian war was decided. Right after crossing the border of Russia, Napoleon instructed the powerful army of Marshal MacDonald to take the shortest route to the Russian capital of St. Petersburg. This route led through Riga. The Russian minister of war at the time was a former resident of Riga - the rich and quick-witted squire Barclay de Tolly (a man of Scottish origin). Of all persons, he was best qualified to evaluate the super-strategic importance and the defence capabilities of Riga City. While Napoleon was chasing after the regiments of Russian commander-in-chief Kutuzov far in the East, the minister himself supervised the defence of the Castle of Riga. Just before the French attack, the wooden suburbs of Riga were burnt down, leaving the attackers in open terrain without cover. It was a cold winter, and right before the impending French landing from the far side of the River Daugava,