



reading

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BOOKS ABOUT LATVIA

Latvia's literature is not known internationally or widely translated but it is impressive and varied. Here's some of best-regarded recent Latvian fiction plus important non-fiction that will help you explore the country's history and fast-changing modern society. Enjoy!

Fiction

Berzins, Maris. *The Taste of Lead* (2015)

Set in Latvia during the desperate years of 1939-41, this novel tells the story of an unlikely and reluctant hero. With wit and irony, it explores how a bookish young man finds himself compelled to act as he is confronted by German occupation and the Holocaust.

Bezmozgjis, David. *Natasha and Other Stories* (2004)

Since the 1980s, many of Latvia's Jewish community have moved to new lands. This series of English-language short stories explores the dilemmas facing the Berman family as they look back to Latvia and forward to a new life and language in Canada. Bezmozgjis, a Canadian Jew born in Riga, writes with humor and compassion about the travails of immigration.

Ikstena, Nora. *Soviet Milk* (2018)

A blistering but beautiful novel about a Latvian mother and daughter dealing, in very different ways, with the Soviet rule of their land. Based on the author's own life, this tale of women battling a totalitarian state became a bestseller in Latvia and is one of the country's most highly regarded books internationally.

Jonevs, Janis. *Doom 94* (2018)

This coming-of-age story involves a 14-year-old boy obsessed by the strange sub-culture of Latvian heavy metal. Alongside the humor and the headbanging, this is also an insightful portrait of Latvia in the first years after the collapse of communism.

Skujinš, Zigmunds. *Flesh-Coloured Dominoes* (1999)

A dazzling work of imagination, this surrealist novel doubles up as an alternative history of Latvia. It dances between the 18th-century German gentry ruling Latvia and the nation in modern times.

Non-Fiction

Dreifelds, Juris. *Latvia in Transition* (1996)

Written just five years after the fall of communism, Dreifelds portrays Latvia as an optimistic that is nonetheless uncertain of its future. The book shows how the 1987-90 struggle for independence from the Soviet Union drew on broad popular support and reflected a powerful Latvian tradition. It looks at the successes of the first years of independence but also the difficulties, including a rapidly rising crime rate.

Ezergailis, Andrew. *The Holocaust in Latvia, 1941-1944: The Missing Center* (1996)

This was the first comprehensive account of the Holocaust in Latvia and remains an essential book on the subject. Ezergailis examines, in chilling detail, the role of both Germans and Latvians in what some historians have described as a Shoah of bullets. He shows that the mass shootings of Latvian Jews began immediately after the German invasion, that they were systematic and carefully organized, and that the Latvian Arajs Commando Unit played a central role.



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Kalnins, Mara. *Latvia: A Short History* (2015)

This succinct account of the history of the Latvian people begins some four and a half millennia ago and takes us up to the present day. Latvia's history, including centuries of domination by European powers, is both complex and often tragic, but Kalnins manages to convey the story clearly and expertly.

O'Connor, Kevin. *The History of the Baltic States* (2003)

The Baltic States of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia are often cited as success stories of the post-Communist era as they became stable and prosperous independent nations. This book explores the diversity and shared history of these close neighbors from the Ice Age to the Cold War and beyond. It focuses, in particular, on 20th century developments.

Pabrikis, Artis & Purs, Aldis. *Latvia: The Challenges of Change* (2001)

Latvia in the 20th century underwent a series of radical and often cataclysmic transformations including the chaos and revolution of World War I, a short-lived period of independence, German occupation and the Holocaust, and the brutality of Soviet rule. This book examines this age of extremes and examines the achievements and challenges of Latvia in the post-Communist era.

Press, Bernhard. *The Murder of the Jews in Latvia: 1941-1945* (2000)

This book discusses the systematic slaughter of Latvia's Jews while providing a powerful, unadorned account of one survivor's story. Press recounts his escape from the Riga ghetto, his years of hiding, the persecution he and other survivors faced after the war, and the five years of hard labor he endured in a Soviet prison camp.