

Latvia national day

Uniting in festive song just one of the many charms of Latvians

Peteris Vaivars
AMBASSADOR OF LATVIA

It is a great honor to address the readers of The Japan Times and the people of Japan on the occasion of the 94th Anniversary of the Proclamation of Independence of my country on Nov. 18, 1918.



On behalf of the people of Latvia and the President of Latvia H.E. Andris Berzins, allow me to express our deepest respect to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, to the Prime Minister H.E. Yoshihiko Noda and the people of Japan.

Latvia was hit particularly hard by the global economic crisis, however, today Latvia, with its population of just over 2 million people has seen the

economy grow at 6.8 percent in the first quarter of 2012, thus contributing to the total forecast gross domestic product growth of more than 4 percent this year, and becoming one of the fastest growing economies in the European Union again.

Our location gives us a unique advantage in the international market. Latvia is located in the northern part of Europe and in the middle of the three Baltic states, between Estonia and Lithuania. We are at the historical trading crossroads connecting Scandinavia, Western Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) markets.

Geographically, we are also one of the closest countries to Japan within the EU, and we also consider ourselves to be close to Japan in our mentality, as our people are hardworking, patient, diligent and attentive to details. The will for independence, freedom, change and



Capital: In Riga, the Freedom Monument (left) is a symbol of Latvia's independence; a Christmas tree stands by the House of the Blackheads near St. Peter's Church. EMBASSY OF LATVIA, RIGA
TOURISM DEVELOPMENT BUREAU

prosperity is one of our main values. If any of you are to visit Latvia, we are very confident that you will feel comfortable and at home in our country.



Latvia is known to be one of the greenest countries in Europe with its abundant nature and diverse landscapes, but we are also a country with deep his-

torical roots and rich culture. The capital city of Riga is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site and is famous not only for its historical aspects but also

for its wide collection of modern and unique Art Nouveau architecture, which is said to be one of the largest in the world. Once every five years, Riga becomes a place where Latvians from all over the world gather to sing and dance in the UNESCO listed "Latvia Song and Dance Festival." If you have a chance to visit Latvia next summer, you will see choir groups consisting of more than 30,000 singers joining together on the final stage to sing Latvia's well-known folk songs to unite the public. The Latvian Song and Dance Festival in 2013 will be very special as we are looking forward to seeing several Japanese choirs also joining the Latvian singers on stage.

Six and a half years have passed since the opening of our embassy in Tokyo. As the first ambassador to Japan, I feel that our countries are get-

ting closer and closer every year. Frequent visits by high-level officials, an increase in business exchanges, number of tourists and grass-root level contacts between our two countries continue to grow. We welcome our Japanese partners, friends and those interested to be even more active in approaching our country. I am certain that you will find our embassy a good partner in introducing your business to Latvia, and if not for business, you

will find our country an interesting destination to visit for a holiday. The Latvia Investment and Development Agency and the Latvia Tourism Promotion Board also have offices here in Tokyo to provide their services to Japanese customers.

I would also like to express my gratitude to The Japan Times for granting us this opportunity to publish this article, and congratulations to all Latvians living in Japan and abroad, on this very special day.

**Congratulations
to the People of the Republic of Latvia
on the 94th Anniversary of
Their Independence**

Japan Latvia Society In Kansai

3-3-5, Umeda, Kita-ku, Osaka