



## A note from Daiga.

Welcome to Riga — and thank you for choosing this guide.

I've been showing people around Latvia for years, and Riga's Old Town and Art Nouveau district are the two places I never tire of. Every time I walk these streets I notice something I hadn't seen before. That's not a cliché — it's genuinely true of places with 800 years of stories in a few square kilometres.

This guide gives you what I'd tell a friend: where to go, what to look for, where to eat without paying tourist prices, and the stories behind the things you'll see. Practical, honest, and specific.

You don't need a guide to walk these streets. But I hope this makes you look at them differently.

### Daiga

Founder · Barefoot Baltic

Licensed guide, Latvia



Daiga · Your Guide

# The World's Finest Art Nouveau District

800 buildings · One-third of the historic centre · UNESCO World Heritage Site 1997

In 1900, Riga was the Russian Empire's third-largest port. Serious money, rapid expansion, and a newly cleared building zone where the old city walls had come down. The architectural fashion of the moment was Art Nouveau — Jügendstils in Latvian. So Riga built. Fast. Entire streets went up within a few years. The result is not scattered gems — it's a whole district. One-third of the historic centre. 800 buildings. Stand at the corner of Alberta iela and you'll count four Art Nouveau buildings

📍 [Open 9-stop walking route in Google Maps →](#)

Start: Freedom Monument (Brīvības bulvāris) · All stops pre-loaded · Walking mode

## The Walk — 9 Stops

Start: Freedom Monument → Alberta iela → Kronvalda Park

### Freedom Monument

S

*Brīvības bulvāris*

Your starting point. Walk northwest along Elizabetes iela to enter the district.

### Elizabetes iela 10b "The Amphora"

2

*Eisenstein, 1903*

Most photographed building in the district. Six storeys, sky-blue ceramic tiles, peacocks, stern female faces at the top. Fully restored. Stand back

### Alberta iela 13

4

*Eisenstein, 1904*

Built for a state councillor. Eisenstein was fined for building 25 cm over the plot boundary. He never paid. Now home to the Riga Graduate School of

### Alberta iela 11

6

*Eižens Laube, 1908*

National Romanticism — Latvian folk symbols (auseklis, sun wheels, oak leaves) carved into the stone. Architecture as a political statement in

### Alberta iela 2a

F

*Eisenstein, 1906*

Isaiah Berlin's childhood home, 1905–1915. One of the great political philosophers. There is no plaque. Colossal faces on the upper floors. The

### Elizabetes iela 33

1

*Eisenstein, 1901*

Eisenstein's first Art Nouveau attempt. Transitional — decorative masks, stylised plants, geometric forms. All the ingredients, not yet the

### Antonijas iela 8 — Dragon Door

3

*Pēkšēns, 1903*

Two carved stone dragons guard the entrance. Local tradition: they protect the owner and bring wealth. Daiga bought copies. Still waiting on the

### Alberta iela 12 — Museum 🏠

M

*Pēkšēns & Laube, 1903*

The Art Nouveau Museum. Pēkšēns' own apartment, restored to exact 1903 condition. Spiral staircase, period hats, cast iron bath on

### Alberta iela 4

7

*Eisenstein, 1904*

Two lions on the roof corners. Medusa heads at the entrance. Griffins at the door. Step back across the street to see the full composition,

## Three Styles — Learn to Read the Buildings

1901-1906

ERA

### *Eclectic Art Nouveau*

Dramatic ornamental style. Faces, mythological figures, serpents, eagles. Mikhail Eisenstein was the master. This is what ends up on the postcards.

→ **Alberta 2a, 4, 6, 8 · Elizabetes 10b**

~1905 +

ERA

### *Perpendicular / Rational*

Cleaner, vertical, geometric ornament. The facade reflects the structure behind it. More restrained — look for vertical window groupings and

→ **Several buildings on side streets**

1905-1911

ERA

### *National Romantic*

Latvian architects weaving folk symbols into Art Nouveau. Auseklis, sun wheels, oak leaves. Laube wrote a manifesto defending it. Architecture as

→ **Alberta iela 11 and 12**

## Buildings Directory

Every key address on the walk

| ADDRESS                    | ARCHITECT     | YEAR | STYLE                | WHAT TO LOOK FOR   |
|----------------------------|---------------|------|----------------------|--|
| <b>Alberta iela 2a</b>     | Eisenstein    | 1906 | <b>Eclectic</b>      | Colossal faces on 3rd floor, sphinxes, eagles. Isaiah Ber... |
| <b>Alberta iela 4</b>      | Eisenstein    | 1904 | <b>Eclectic</b>      | Two lions at roof corners. Medusa heads at entrance. S...    |
| <b>Alberta iela 6</b>      | Eisenstein    | 1903 | <b>Eclectic</b>      | Peacocks, geometric figures. Keyhole-shaped window ...       |
| <b>Alberta iela 8</b>      | Eisenstein    | 1903 | <b>Eclectic</b>      | Part of the coherent Alberta iela ensemble. Planned fr...    |
| <b>Alberta iela 11</b>     | Laube         | 1908 | <b>Nat. Romantic</b> | Folk symbols: auseklis, oak leaves, sun wheels. Laube ...    |
| <b>Alberta iela 12</b> □   | Pēkšēns/Laube | 1903 | <b>Nat. Romantic</b> | Museum. Pēkšēns' own home, period apartment. Spiral...       |
| <b>Alberta iela 13</b>     | Eisenstein    | 1904 | <b>Eclectic</b>      | Built 25 cm over boundary. Fined. Never paid. Now the...     |
| <b>Elizabetes iela 10b</b> | Eisenstein    | 1903 | <b>Eclectic</b>      | "The Amphora". Sky-blue tiles, peacocks, female faces...     |
| <b>Antonijas iela 8</b>    | Pēkšēns       | 1903 | <b>Eclectic</b>      | Dragon Door. Two stone dragons — said to bring wealt...      |

## What to Look For — Details That Reward Attention

### □ The Faces

Everywhere — serene, anguished, watchful, dreaming. Staring down from 3rd and 4th floors, framed by flowing hair. Nobody fully agrees what they represent. One visitor

### ⚖ The Asymmetry

Classical architecture is rigidly symmetrical. Art Nouveau breaks this deliberately. Windows of different sizes, doors off-centre, decorative weight shifted to one side.

### □ Folk Symbols as Politics

On National Romantic buildings: the auseklis (morning star), oak leaves, sun wheels, tree of life. Ancient Latvian folk symbols carved into facades on streets that had been

### □ Eisenstein's Scandal

His baroque excess drew criticism. After 1906 the press turned against him. He left Riga and died in Berlin in 1921. His son Sergei went on to direct Battleship Potemkin.

### □ Isaiah Berlin's Childhood Home

Alberta iela 2a was home to philosopher Isaiah Berlin, 1905–1915. One of the most significant political thinkers of the 20th century. On Liberty, Two Concepts of Freedom.

### □ Look Up, Then Step Back

Most of the detail is on the 3rd and 4th floors — ground floors have often been altered by later tenants. Cross to the opposite pavement and look up. Alberta iela is wide enough

## Art Nouveau Museum — Alberta iela 12

### *Inside Pēkšēns' own apartment — restored to exact 1903 condition*

- Alberta iela 12, Riga (the corner tower building)
- €5 adults · groups & students discounted
- Tuesday – Sunday, 10:00 – 18:00 · Closed Monday
- The spiral staircase — visible from entrance
- Cast iron bath on lion's paws
- Borrow period hats, take photos
- Short English-subtitled film in basement
- Allow 45–60 minutes

## Practical Information

### □ Getting There

On foot from Old Town: ~10 min  
Walk north along Brīvības iela  
Turn left onto Elizabetes iela  
Trams 5, 7, 9: stop Strēlnieku/Alberta

### □ Water & Toilets

Buy water at Rimi (Brīvības iela) before start  
Museum (Alberta 12): Free with €5 entry  
Kronvalda Park: Public toilets ~€0.20  
Art Cafe Sienna, Strēlnieku 3: buy coffee

### □ Best Time to Visit

07:00-09:00: Soft light, almost no tourists  
10:00-12:00: Museum opens, practical  
16:00-18:00: Golden hour on facades  
Avoid Sat/Sun midday in summer

### □ Money & Transport

Currency: Euro (€) · Cards everywhere  
Bolt taxi from Old Town: ~€4-6  
E-scooters: Bolt/Lime throughout district  
Museum entry: €5 cash or card

## Events in & Around the District

### May Art Nouveau Day

Alberta iela & district · Annual

Open doors to normally closed buildings. Guided tours, talks,

### Sep Riga Architecture Week

City-wide · Annual

Guided walks, open buildings, lectures. Art Nouveau district

### Jun 23-24 Jāņi — Midsummer

National holiday

Latvia's most important festival. Bonfires, flower wreaths. Old

### Nov-Jan Christmas Market

Dome Square / Old Town, 10 min

Art Nouveau buildings in winter with minimal tourists. The

### Apr/May Baltā Nakts (White Night)

Arts festival · City-wide

All-night arts festival. Art Nouveau buildings have been used

### 2028 Song & Dance Festival

UNESCO tradition · City-wide

Every 5 years. Tens of thousands of performers. Grand

## Latvian Pronunciation — Art Nouveau Edition

| LATVIAN                | SAY IT LIKE THIS                 | NOTES  |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| <i>Jugendstils</i>     | <b>YOO-gend-steels</b>           | Art Nouveau in Latvian. From German Jugendstil (Youth Style... |
| <i>Alberta iela</i>    | <b>al-BEAR-ta YEH-la</b>         | The main Art Nouveau street.                                   |
| <i>Elizabetes iela</i> | <b>eh-lee-ZAH-beh-tes YEH-la</b> | Elizabeth Street — The Amphora is at no. 10b.                  |
| <i>Antonijas iela</i>  | <b>an-TOH-nee-yas YEH-la</b>     | Dragon Door street.  |
| <i>Klusais centrs</i>  | <b>KLOO-sais TSEN-trs</b>        | The Quiet Centre — local name for the Art Nouveau district.    |
| <i>Pēkšēns</i>         | <b>PEKH-shens</b>                | Architect Konstantīns Pēkšēns. Stress on first syllable.       |
| <i>Eižens Laube</i>    | <b>AY-zhens LAU-beh</b>          | Architect. Ž = soft zh, as in "measure".                       |
| <i>Auseklis</i>        | <b>AU-sek-lis</b>                | Morning star — Latvian folk symbol carved on National Roma...  |
| <i>Rīga</i>            | <b>REE-ga</b>                    | The capital. Slight roll on the R.                             |
| <i>Paldies</i>         | <b>PAL-dyehs</b>                 | Thank you. People genuinely appreciate hearing it.             |

## The Spotter Challenge — For Kids (& Curious Adults)

**Two lions on a rooftop**

Alberta iela 4 — roof corners

**Two stone dragons**

Antonijas iela 8 — guarding the door

**A face staring down at you**

Any building — find the most dramatic one

**A peacock carved in stone**

Elizabetes iela 10b — the blue building

**Sky-blue tiles on a building**

Elizabetes iela 10b — "The Amphora"

**An eagle with spread wings**

Alberta iela 2a — near the roofline

**A sun symbol carved in stone**

Alberta iela 11 — Latvian folk symbol

**A window with a strange shape**

Alberta iela 6 — keyhole window, upper floor

**The spiral staircase**

Inside the museum, Alberta iela 12

**Wearing a period hat in 1903**

Museum only — they lend them out

# Barefoot Baltic



*Local guides. Real stories. Latvia.*

## Get in touch with Daiga

Questions, bookings, or just to say hello — Daiga reads every message personally.



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