



Food Is Culture

WILD AT PALATE





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EUROPEAN REGION
OF GASTRONOMY

CANDIDATE 2017

Riga – Gauja Region, Latvia

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Introduction

In developing our bid for the title of European Region of Gastronomy 2017, we asked ourselves a question that often arouses public debate – has tradition become outdated and boring? Or rather could it become a starting point for new ideas and progress, while simultaneously allowing us to maintain a link with our national roots?

Latvia's gastronomy is multi-layered – just like our traditional layered rye-bread dessert. Where a layer of crumbed rye bread – baked on maple leaves – is covered with a layer of pureed cranberries gathered in the nearby marsh, topped with cream from the neighbour's dairy cows whipped up by Grandma, then another layer of bread, berries, whipped cream and so on ...

In exactly the same way, our plates have had German and Swedish, Polish and Russian culinary culture laid over the pagan natural heritage left by our ancestors, without ever overwhelming it. If we examine the gastronomic part of the eight main celebrations in the ancient solar calendar, they had one thing in common – almost everything that was put on the table could be seen just outside the window. The birch sap of spring enabled us to cleanse the fatigue and toxins of winter from our bones, the cow in a meadow of wild flowers gave milk for the round cheeses symbolising the summer sun, the blossoms and grasses served as seasoning or remedial herbal teas. The forests supplied game, mushrooms and berries, while the rivers, lakes and sea gave us fish.

And today's Latvian has lost neither the hunter-gathering nor land-tending gene. As soon as nature reawakens, we

are out there with our baskets and knives foraging for the first mushrooms, every family has a hunter or angler enabling us to put game or fish on the table, almost everyone has a summer cottage, so Latvian families often grow their own potatoes for winter rather than buy them from a shop. Recent years have seen nature's bounty not only enrich our own home-cooked meals, but with the development of small catering businesses in both urban and rural areas, provide interesting fare for both local and foreign visitors. In addi-

If we examine the gastronomic part of the eight main celebrations in the ancient solar calendar, they had one thing in common – almost everything that was put on the table could be seen just outside the window

tion, plates and dishes from natural materials – wood, clay, stone, glass – handmade by skilled craftspeople make for a unique eating experience.

Capital city Riga's interaction with the Gauja region is determined by their geographical proximity, activity in the sphere of idea generation and the natural movement of people. Cities provide education, often also platforms for research and discovery, for its part, Latvia's countryside continues to provide unique ingredients and products from

an unspoiled environment. Moreover, farmers are also experimenting in our rural areas – both with new breeds of traditional livestock and downright exotic farm animals and crops, such as beavers, hemp and snails. In the same vein, the countryside is seeing an increase both in cooperatives combining the interests of farmers in regions, and in small-scale processors, which enables the rural bounty to

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be conserved, transforming it into delicious products for the domestic and export markets.

Riga's challenge to the Gauja region, the 12 seasonal products selected as part of the *Delightfully Delicious Destination* movement, also becomes one of the core themes of the European Region of Gastronomy 2017 (ERG 2017) bid. These products will become a platform for the exchange of experience and cooperation between the region's population, farmers, entrepreneurs, education institutions and professional chefs.

Sorrel, rhubarb, as well as birch and maple sap in the spring, catfish, sour cherries and cloudberry in summer, venison, boletus mushrooms in the autumn, as well as rye bread, turnips and rowan berries in winter will become a kind of palette with which to colour the palates of Latvia's people and visitors with wild, contemporarily authentic flavours.



A photograph of a forest landscape. In the foreground, there are several young, green pine trees growing amidst tall, green grass. The background is filled with a dense forest of taller trees, their trunks visible through a thick mist or fog. The overall atmosphere is serene and somewhat mysterious.

Facts about the Riga – Gauja Region

Riga





Riga is Latvia's capital and oldest city. Riga has been an important economic, political and cultural centre since the Middle Ages and continues to evolve. It is also the largest city in and key economic centre of the Baltic States. Riga is home to one third of Latvia's population – 698 086 people. The population density is 2 117 people per square kilometre.

The city is also home to some of the country's largest manufacturers.

Products and services produced in Riga account for some 53-54% of Latvia's GDP. The per capita value of Riga's GDP is

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almost 40% higher than the Latvian average and more than 50% higher than that of the other regions.

The Riga City Council has nominated the food and beverage industry as one of the city's priority sectors in terms of increasing its competitiveness.

Tourism is considered a key part of Latvia's and Riga's economies, providing a significant proportion of export revenue. In 2014, 2 million foreign visitors came to Riga, almost 60% of the total number of tourists visiting the country.

Riga Central Market is the biggest market in Europe.

When Riga Central Market was first opened in 1930 it was the largest and most progressive marketplace in Europe. Through different times *Riga Central Market* has kept its place in the heart of Riga, providing variety, personal service, vivid conversations and heartfelt stories, light hearted haggling and bright colours.

It occupies 72.3 thousand square metres of space and has over 3000 trade stands, each 1 to 100 square metres in size. The market has five pavilions in the historical buildings – they were originally used as Zeppelin hangars. Every day the Central Market offers vegetables, dairy produce, meat, fish and grocery pavilions, open areas, manufactured goods market, night market and Farmer's day-and-night market.

The market is visited by 80 to 100 thousand people a day.

Irrespective of age, the market has always been a symbol of well-being and delight.

In autumn Riga Central Market is full of a bright harvest of fruits and vegetables given by the Latvian countryside.

In addition we are used to finding a way to preserve the delicious bounty of nature during the severe winters. All year round there is no shortage of milk and meat, you will find the largest fish assortment as well as bakery products, exotic fruits, spices, honey, nuts and even more.

Riga Central Market is great entertainment as well. It will attract with its laughter and diversity. It brings people together, because they know that it is the best place to find healthy and quality food.

The Gauja Region





The Gauja National Park (GNP) was Latvia's first national park, established in 1973 with the aim of preserving the Gauja river valley and its surrounding unique natural treasures, while also providing recreational functions which are key to the development of tourism in the Riga – Gauja Region. Thus, the area's national park status can be considered an added value, ensuring the high ecological value of its air, land, water and other natural resources. The high proportion of natural areas and forests provide many edi-

In terms of market sectors, the most economically active is agriculture: cereal crops, meat and dairy animals – cattle, sheep, goats, pigs – and the cultivation of other crops in covered or open areas

ble-crop populations (wild berries, mushrooms, herbs, etc.) that are freely available to all. Tourism in the GNP region accounts for almost 2% of the GDP generated by tourism overall, consequently GNP region tourism (not including Riga) contributes nearly EUR 30 million to the total economic impact of tourism. Travellers in the GNP region stayed 1.7 times longer than the average for Latvia. 11.2% of the total spend by travellers in the GNP region was on catering services. The GNP region is visited by about 1 million local and foreign travellers annually.

Population density per square kilometre: the Latvian average 34.5; in the Gauja region – 15.4.

In terms of market sectors, the most economically active is agriculture: cereal crops, meat and dairy animals – cattle, sheep, goats, pigs – and the cultivation of other crops in covered or open areas. The area possesses farms engaged in agricultural production and processing, providing a complete chain of production cycles both within single undertakings or farms, and between groups of companies.

Considering food production methods, both ancient and progressive approaches are found within the GNP. Smaller plants are those maintaining traditional values and retaining ancient knowledge by using them in practice, while larger plants are updating ancient production processes, thereby promoting local gastronomy and culture on a larger scale in support of the high demand in urban areas and the region itself.

Thus, Riga – Gauja Region players have all the prerequisites to reduce the fragmentation of stakeholders in the gastronomic field and achieve unity in the cultural, hospitality, tourism, agricultural, industrial and heritage spheres. The Riga – Gauja Region can facilitate an increase in the appreciation of food and gastronomy, the development of creative industries, as well as utilise gastronomy as a more powerful creator of the region's identity, while maintaining the connection between food, history and cultural heritage.

Valmiera

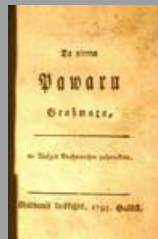




Valmiera is the regional centre of Vidzeme, located between *Natura2000* territories.

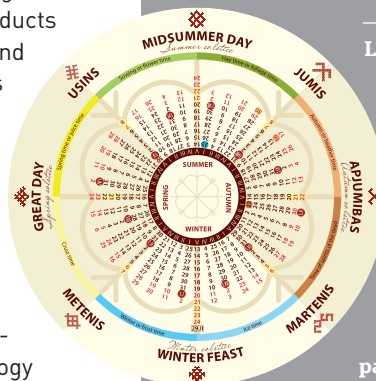
Valmiera was founded in 1283. 33% of the urban area consists of forests, parks, the Gauja River, meadows and natural areas. Valmiera has a population of more than 25 000. Valmiera has one of Latvia's largest dairy-processing enterprises *Valmieras piens*, the *Māršava* agricultural cooperative, as well as a rapidly developing small- and medium-sized food businesses sector – *Valmiermuižas alus* brewery, the *Liepkalni* bakery and others. The city has substantial farms and home processors, offering both ingredients for manufacturers and finished products (cultivated blueberries and cranberries, fruits and vegetables, hemp, milk, meat, medicinal herbs and herbal teas) as well as high-quality restaurants able to create meals as works of art. Both *Dikļi Palace* and Valmiera's *Rātes Vārti* restaurants are among the best in Latvia.

Valmiera is the region's academic centre, training future food technology, hospitality and tourism professionals among others. So, for example, the Valmiera Technical College trains specialists in hotel services, catering, food technology and restaurant services. In its turn, Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences offers degree courses in business management, tourism organisation and management, as well as a study programme, Tourist Guide – travel and event organiser.



At the end of the 18th century, the first cookery book in Latvian was published in the Valmiera district. Noteworthy Enlightenment-era personage Christoph Harder, Lutheran pastor of Rubene, translated it from the German language in 1795 and printed it at the parsonage itself with the title *The First Cookbook*. Its capacious 334 pages were an unusually lengthy testimony to the tastes, eating habits and fastidiousness of noble families.

The recipes include not only a range of exotic dishes, but also many dishes, since forgotten, prepared from local natural ingredients. Foods being named in both German and Latvian suggest the book was intended for manor cooks, most of whom were Latvians. Two original copies of the book remain in the Rare Books and Manuscripts section of the National Library of Latvia.



Latvians' ancient gastronomic cultural traditions are based on the movement of the Sun through its four natural cycles – events are aligned with the seasons. The solar year comprises eight time phases (*meti* or *saulgrieži*). Each phase is marked in the nation's culture by a special celebration and a symbolic meal made from ingredients locally available in the particular season. These sun-linked rites are the intangible cultural heritage of the Latvian people, having helped maintain our relationship with nature and its primordality, so enabling us to offer the Wild At Palate concept in the 21st century.

Cesis





Cesis is the third oldest town in Latvia. From as long ago as the end of the 19th century, Cesis has been known as a centre of the arts, culture and recreation. In recent years too, Cesis has positioned culture and tourism as one of its main development emphases, creating a municipal agency, the Cesis Cultural and Tourism Centre, attracting European Union structural funds to upgrade the infrastructure of cultural institutions, and promoting extensive public involvement in the organisation of cultural activities.

The Cesis District has an area of 171.73 km², of which the town of Cesis covers 19.28 km². Most of the district is forest – 50%, and agricultural land – 34%.

The population of the District was 18 947 at 01.07.2015. Population density is 116 inhabitants per square kilometre. Historically, the population of the Cesis District has been quite homogeneous in terms of nationality. In 2014, 86% of the population were Latvians, 10% Russians and 4% other nationalities.

1 917 active companies are registered in the Cesis District, 93% of them being micro- and small enterprises. 12% of employed people work in the accommodation and catering sector and 7% in agriculture, forestry and fish farming. Currently four restaurants, five high-quality cafes, eleven cafes, three bars and six other types of food-service provider operate in Cesis and within a 10 km radius of the town. Cesis is also home to several food companies – alcoholic and soft drinks manufacturer *Cēsu Alus*, honey processor *Vinnis*, drinking water extraction and bottling companies *Venden* and *Svētavots*, and the *Beatus* bakery and culinary product company.

Cesis was first mentioned in the *Heinrici Cronicon Lyvoniæ* in 1206 as the wooden stronghold of the Curonian Wends at Riekstu Hill. Around 1209, German crusaders began construction of a stone castle that later became the administrative centre for the Livonian Order of knights. Up to 1561, Cesis – or Wenden, as it was called in German – was the seat of the Order's Masters. That gave Cesis the rare privilege of having its own money mint, useful in a Hanseatic town.

Cesis is one of the few Latvian towns not to be destroyed during last century's wars, therefore it has preserved much of its medieval charm – a network of ancient, cobbled streets, as well as the two oldest stone buildings in Northern Latvia – the Livonian Order Castle, the best preserved period ruins in Latvia, and Sv. Jāņa (St. John's) Church. We can glimpse how people lived in Cesis and what they enjoyed in the pages of an audit carried out in 1590:

Alongside stands an empty bakery without doors, but with wall hooks and four latticed windows. Still further you have a kitchen, reached through a one-hinged door. Then there is a cook's room, with hinged and bolted doors, also a table. Last is the brewery, with hinged doors and iron lattice on its two windows. It has a vat for mashing beer with a capacity of three barrels, and three beer tubs.

This is the first mention of a brewery in Northern Europe, though we know that locals enjoyed beer much earlier.

By the end of the 18th century, Count von Sievers had built *Cēsu Jaunā pils* – or the Cesis New Manor – on the foundations of the old castle's fortified gatehouse. Head for the top of its round Lademacher Tower to enjoy a fine view of the Gauja valley and the ruins of the old castle.

Sigulda





Nestling on the two banks of the primordial Gauja valley, **Sigulda** is one of the most beautiful towns in Latvia. It has enticed travellers from all over the world for centuries, to experience the breath-taking view across the Gauja valley with their own eyes and discover the numerous unique attractions located all over Sigulda and nearby.

The greatest challenge is to raise the prestige of local ingredients and produce, so that people involved in preparing meals would like to work with them and create new, amazing dishes. On the other hand, it is important that gourmands get more information about the heritage of local gastronomy.

The Sigulda District is recognised as a tourist, recreational and active lifestyle centre both internationally and Latvia-wide. This is ensured by its natural resources, cultural and historical sites, *Aerodium* vertical wind tunnel, adventure parks, ski slopes and other thrilling activities. Most of these resources are concentrated in Sigulda town and its immediate surroundings, including listed historic monument, the Turaida Museum Reserve.

In addition, the Sigulda District is the Baltic region's major winter sports centre thanks to its favourable location and unique sports infrastructure – a bobsleigh and luge track, artificially frozen cross-country ski track, etc.

The Sigulda District covers an area of 360.3km² and is rich in unspoiled natural areas, 21% of which comprises Latvia's oldest and largest national park – the Gauja National Park.

Sigulda had 18 350 declared residents at the beginning of 2015.

If you ever had the opportunity to enjoy a rare caraway seed liqueur with your after-dinner coffee, you probably wondered what the *Allasch* on the bottle meant. No, it's not an old German word meaning 'sweet', 'exuberant' or 'magic'. *Allasch* or *Allaži* is the name of a village in Latvia, near Sigulda. Its legend tells us that, at the beginning of the 19th century, the local Baron Wilhelm von Blanckenhagen, an advisor to Russia's Tsar Alexander I, received a generous gift – a recipe for distilling caraway liqueur, brought to Russia from Amsterdam by none other than Peter the Great. Production of *Allasch Kümmel* began in 1823, and in 1830 it won an award at the prestigious Leipzig international exhibition. The caraway liqueur grew in popularity, and even Britain's royal family became devoted customers of the faraway *Allaži* manor. *Allasch Kümmel* was so famous that even today, most caraway liqueurs around the world bear the *Allasch* name.

After Latvia declared independence in 1918, most manors were nationalised and the von Blanckenhagens left Latvia, continuing to produce their liqueur first in Schwerin, and later in Amsterdam.

Allažu ķimelis, a local version of *Allasch Kümmel*, is now being produced by local spirits and beverage giant *Latvijas Balzāms*, though connoisseurs remain to be convinced it is as good as the original.

More recently, caraway liqueur produced by local enthusiasts has been highly rated in blind tests, and the local community is planting caraway to bring production of once famous *Allasch Kümmel* back to *Allaži*.

Organisers and Main Partners

The Riga – Gauja Region's candidature for the ERG 2017 title is being coordinated by the Riga Tourism Development Bureau in collaboration with three Gauja region municipalities – Sigulda, Cesis and Valmiera, together with the Gauja National Park tourism cluster.

Each of the parties involved has delegated an authorised person to the project, responsible for implementing communications and activities in their own municipality.

Organisers:

- Riga Tourism Development Bureau
- Sigulda District Municipality
- Valmiera City Municipality
- Cesis District Municipality
- Gauja National Park tourism cluster

Partners:

- The Latvian Institute
- The Ministry of Economics and State Tourism Development Agency
- Investment and Development Agency of Latvia
- Latvian Hotels and Restaurants Association
- Riga City Council (Foreign Affairs Department, Urban Development Department)
- Chefs' Club
- Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences
- University of Latvia Research Institute

- SMEs in the Riga – Gauja Region
- Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Event partners:

- Riga Central Market
- Spiķeri
- Kalnciema iela Market
- *Valmiermuižas alus, Ar gardu muti Valmiermuižā* (Tasty morsels in Valmiermuiža) seasonal markets, Simjūda market in Valmiera
- Museum of Natural History
- Valmiera Museum
- Dikli Palace
- Valmiera Technical College
- Vidzeme food cluster
- Nature Conservation Agency
- NGOs
- Entrepreneurs etc.



Wild At Palate Concept





Thinking about Latvia's gastronomy in 2017, we decided to revolve our carousel of taste and colour around a mere twelve products. Why? Because, firstly, we wanted to draw the attention of diners and chefs, growers and producers – all stakeholders in the food chain – to turning tradition into innovation.

The products we have chosen reflect the annual celebrations in Latvia's ancient solar calendar – and the custom of putting on the table what is currently available in the forest

The custom of putting on the table what is currently available in the forest and garden, to honour the bounty given us by nature

and garden, to honour the bounty given us by nature. At the same time, they meet the Latvian Chefs' Club manifesto for contemporary Latvian cuisine "to create new recipes with contemporary utilisation of local products" and "diversify diet using seasonal products".

Six of the twelve materials come directly from nature and the other six will also surprise not a few foreigners. In this way we are implementing our other major goal – to express the necessity for nature conservation and sustainable farming.

Of course, our chosen dozen will not be the only things that will be eaten in Latvia in a few years' time. Tables will also still hold traditional dairy products – home-made cottage cheese and cheeses from cooperative dairies or hand-made by artisans, a huge variety of river, lake and sea fish, fresh and smoked, such staple foods as the potato beloved by Latvians, a wide range of grains – and much much more.

Nevertheless, we are confident that focusing on twelve products will unleash the creative spirit of both professional and home chefs, will oblige us to explore in-depth the hidden talents of each of the actors in our play – and that this creative approach will continue to develop Latvian gastronomy generally in the future. Perhaps in twelve years' time, we will be known as wild-at-palate Latvians.

Spring





Rhubarb. Every Latvian household has a Rhubarb patch, not only for its useful traits, but also for its good looks. Frequently used in large amounts for gastronomic immoderations – Rhubarb pie, Rhubarb dumplings, Rhubarb jelly, Rhubarb ice-cream, Rhubarb Chutney, Rhubarb jam, Rhubarb salad, Rhubarb wine, candied Rhubarb, etc.



Sorrel. The first appearance of Sorrel obliges even inexperienced city-dwellers to go out in the meadows and seek these small, bright-green, vitamin-rich leaves, an unmistakable sign that spring has truly arrived. Latvians use Sorrel in many ways – for salads together with chives or rustic goosefoot, nettles, dandelion leaves, and a mix of Wood Sorrel and buds (a dream for raw-food eaters and vegans!), for breakfast with cottage cheese, as a filling in *pirāgi*, complemented by a handful of spinach and Latvian goat cheese, in nourishing stews, and, of course, in soup.

Birch and Maple sap. The colder the winter, the sweeter the sap. The sap is used as a fermented or non-fermented drink, to make wine, sorbets, in ice flakes, salad dressings, bouillons, spirits, beauty compresses, and as a detoxing cure – a good thing there's so much of it. At home, fermented saps are filled into bottles and supplemented with a pinch of sugar, some raisins, a blackcurrant twig, or lemon peel. The bottles are closed tightly and stored horizontally on the cellar floor or buried in the ground. When opened at the mid-summer festivities – presto, your very own champagne!

A large, dark, eel-like fish with long whiskers is the central focus, resting on a light-colored wooden cutting board. The fish has a sleek, elongated body with a dark, almost black, iridescent sheen. Its long, thin whiskers extend forward from its head. The background is a rustic, teal-colored wooden surface with various kitchen items blurred in the distance, including a yellow bottle, a small white bowl, and a dark object. The word "Summer" is written in a white, serif font across the middle of the fish's body.

Summer



Catfish. Latvia's largest fish, they can reach as much as three metres in length and weigh up to a quarter of a tonne. Catfish catch particular attention in gastronomy, too, as their flesh is both fatty and fibrous, especially when heavier than 15 kg. This is why Daugava River fishermen cut the flesh into smaller pieces before cold-smoking it. Transforming catfish into a subtle food appropriate for restaurants requires leaving whole gutted catfish in the cold for two to three days, just like game, resulting in a delicate, lightly pink texture. The bones make a pungent bouillon.



Sour cherries. Sour cherries are much better for our health than their sweet cousins, as, in addition to vitamins and mineral substances, they contain a lot of melatonin, which helps our bodies and minds combat aging and insomnia. In terms of gastronomy though, serious home cooks believe that jams, syrups or wines should only contain sour cherries. Furthermore, a pillow filled with sour cherry pips makes an excellent souvenir for visitors to Latvia.

Cloudberries. These blushing, fragile Nordic berries grow in Latvia's high marshes, as it is too hot for them to grow down south. Cloudberries conceal themselves in ever deeper and more remote marshes. If you are lucky enough to find some, they can be used to make an exquisite jam, an ideal complement to dessert cheeses; or in an unsurpassable compote. After all, the cloudberry is the queen of contemporary forest gastronomy.

Autumn





Quince. Quince – the hard, golden yellow fruit and only member of the *Cydonia* family – has become known as our lemon, the pride of Latvia and one of contemporary Latvian cuisine's trademarks.

Today, quince is an element in the culinary art, utilised as a marinade for lamb, a component of tangy homemade dessert wines, and for jams perfect for select cheese plates. Overwhelmingly popular as a candied snack, fortunately it is good for you.



Venison. Latvia abounds in deer parks, wide open, impeccably managed, with clean air and water, and lushly forested. Venison is perfect for autumn stews – a scrumptious staple of any family's Saturday or Sunday dinner and served as tartare or steaks in select restaurants. It only remains to decide which Latvian wild autumn-berry wine and sauce – prepared from local herbs, mushrooms – and lightly cooked or mashed vegetables – to serve it with. As for a venison roast – is there anything more appropriate for a celebratory meal? Perfect for observing Latvia's Independence Day on 18 November!

Boletus mushroom. We Latvians are a mushroom-picking nation, and the *boletus* is considered the pinnacle for today's hunter-gatherers. And then: simply sautéed with butter, braised in cream with new potatoes, marinated, sun-dried, as filling for *pīrāgi*, a side dish for seafood, beef, as a pate ... we could continue this delicious list forever! Remember though – the ones you pick yourself taste best!

A loaf of dark, crusty bread, possibly rye or pumpernickel, is being pulled from a stone oven. The bread is resting on a wooden peel. The oven's interior is made of rough-hewn stone, and the lighting is warm and focused on the bread. The word "Winter" is overlaid in white text on the bread.

Winter



Rye bread. It goes without saying: nowhere on planet Earth is there rye bread more delicious than in Latvia, for its unique flavour is an outcome of our history, our memories, dreams and understanding of how things are. It is hardly surprising that rye bread is what every Latvian child living abroad craves most. Today – the bread leavened and baked according to our forefathers’ customs is a rediscovered treasure deserving to be accompanied by the best that our soil, gardens and forests can provide. Deserving too, of the accolades bestowed by the world’s finest culinary artists and most avant-garde thinkers.



Rowan berries. Dried and powdered, red-orange rowan berries become a subtle spice for a variety of sauces and marinades. In chutneys and marmalades, they provide an ideal accent for meat dishes or mild cheeses. And seeped in spirit, they unleash the best that berries can offer alcohol. Rowan berries have more Vitamin C than lemons, more beta carotene than carrots, and more iron than apples, and eight irreplaceable amino acids.

Turnip. The turnip is considered to be Latvia’s oldest root-crop with records dating back to the 5th century. The oldest and most eaten until that new sensation – the potato, appeared on the scene.

Making our small contribution to the current renaissance in long forgotten herbs and veggies – we humbly offer you the turnip – stupendous in stews or sautés! Or simply baked in the oven, but better yet – in a salad with smoked fish and nuts. The turnip – just doing what comes naturally!

Main Goal and Objectives

Raise local and international awareness of Latvia as a destination for gastronomy, highlighting the region's distinctiveness in promoting the development of tourism.

Develop gastronomic tourism in Latvian and foreign target markets;

Unite entrepreneurs and other industry players in the creation of sustainable new models for regional cooperation in the joint development of gastronomy;

Maintain the region's gastronomic heritage and Latvian traditions, while developing innovation throughout the gastronomic chain;

Ensure the sharing of knowledge at the regional, national and international levels, contributing to the achievement of the fundamental ERG principles, gastronomic creativity, developments in gastronomy; tourism development and innovation.







Gastronomy and Tourism

A complex history is encoded in the characteristic gastronomy of the region – rustically simple products intermingle with small-town housewives' imaginations in meal preparation, Germanic manor affluence with the extensive options of Riga merchants, authentic ancient Latvian festive meals with contemporary playful searches for true taste. This is sustained by the solid and living connection the people of the Riga – Gauja Region maintain with their native land, nature, tradition and craftsmanship. Developing and improving gastronomic tourism will allow the general public to get to know the unique taste of this region – demonstrating the application of the knowledge and skills passed down from generation to generation and the rebirth of local products in a higher league on the basis of the most recent trends in gourmandism.

This goal will bring together professionals from different spheres and entrepreneurs – farmers, manufacturers, artisans, researchers, hoteliers, restaurateurs, tourism and event organisers, and various service providers, in this way enriching the cultural and business environment as well as raising awareness of the Riga – Gauja gastronomic region and developing tourism therein.

Activities:

- Development of new gastronomic routes based on the enjoyment of unique flavours and acquiring knowledge, as well as discovering the region;
- Creation of a Riga – Gauja gastronomic menu;
- Development of educational programmes on gastronomy at museums;
- Support for events run by the region's entrepreneurs promoting gastronomy as a direction for Latvian or national culture and tourism, as well as demonstrating the 'chain' principle in local gastronomic production, processing and consumption;
- Linking gastronomy and crockery design, reinforcing the use of natural materials in food presentation and gastronomy as art;
- Conservation of gastronomic heritage – rejuvenation and promotion of historic recipes;
- Organisation of Riga – Gauja regional master classes based on recipes from ancient cookbooks, combining them with leisurely stays in noble palaces and manor houses in the Riga – Gauja Region;
- Organisation of health cures and body detoxing/invigorating treatments;
- A medieval gastronomy festival;
- Themed weekend cookery classes, starting with the gathering of ingredients in the wild, the preparation of delicious meals, coupled with high-quality relaxation close to nature.

Total cost: **EUR 350 000**



Gastronomy and Health

Pure and high-quality food is a long-term investment in the quality of life. Latvian ancestral lore also considers people's physical and mental strength, attained through a healthy attitude towards food based on ancestral wisdom, a regular lifestyle and physical activity, as the underpinning foundation of public welfare and growth opportunities. That is why knowledge of and practical experience with food and a healthy lifestyle must already be gained at school, giving children the opportunity to present balanced meals, appropriate to the season and location, fresh fruit, drinks. Spa and sports centres, clubs and various public events and an active local community are the greatest allies in the further education of adults about a sustainable quality of life. It is only natural for restaurants and hotels in the European Region of Gastronomy to use known and traceable foods that have been grown in a pure and harmonious environment and prepared in accordance with healthy dietary principles. This is organically complemented by the Latvian tradition to fully utilise nature's bounty in enhancing bodily and mental well-being – in beauty treatments, traditional sauna rituals, relaxing treatments and health cures. The best medicines for Latvians can be found in the wild and the best herbs are just outside the window.

Activities:

- Cooperation with State and public organisations, experts, to promote the importance of healthy food and a healthy lifestyle – Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Weight Watchers, nutritionists, herbalists, cultural institutions, entrepreneurs, spa centres, hospitals and other partners;
- Linking different approaches to the use of healthy products with the activities of manufacturers, consumers, technology suppliers – workshops on how to store, prepare and serve products;
- Various events at education institutions to promote healthy eating;
- Use of food products of known and traceable origin in Riga – Gauja region restaurants and cafes;
- Use of nature's bounty in sauna culture and beauty care;
- Promotion of healthy eating habits at major Riga – Gauja Region public events.

Total cost: **50 000 EUR**



Gastronomy and Education

The multi-layered history and rich traditions of the Riga – Gauja region are among the avenues of research for the region's education institutions. Studies at different levels, from schoolchildren's themed project weeks, right up to master's or even doctoral works promote the younger generation's interest in gastronomy as an essential component of culture and the nation's self-worth. Ecological education is also becoming more widespread – the latest scientific knowledge is tested in practice, for example, growing one's own vegetables or herbs and using them in the preparation of meals, learning and drawing inspiration from outstanding Latvian and international chefs. This is the best way to convert the public from passive observers into interested participants who, in their excitement, attract others, addressing them with the help of the media.

Continuous upgrading of knowledge is also a necessity for those involved in the gastronomy sector – waiting staff, chefs, organisers of Latvian festivities, hoteliers, tourism service providers and entrepreneurs. Exchanges of experience between the region's, the best national and foreign specialists is important here.

Activities:

- Support for events facilitating the involvement of entrepreneurs in lifelong learning activities, raising the quality level of knowledge and services;
- Organisation of international and local seminars on gastronomy;
- Activities at comprehensive schools – Job Shadowing Days, Career Days, etc.;
- Ecological education – an opportunity to find out about the real growth processes of different vegetables and herbs;
- Improving the reputation of the hospitality sector – good practice and experience transfer for professional chefs and waiting staff;
- Workshops on healthy eating habits, based on local raw materials;
- Organisation of forums and conferences for Riga – Gauja Region project managers and partners, focusing on gastronomy and its role in the region's competitiveness, reinforcement of identity and the development of innovation;
- Participation in international competitions: Baltic Culinary Star, World Cup, Erfurt World Championships;
- Participation in RIGA FOOD and other gastronomic and tourism exhibitions;
- Opening of a world-renowned *Bocuse d'Or Academy* in Riga;
- Chefs' Club book of recipes;
- Updating of historic Latvian recipes to reinforce national identity.

Total cost: **EUR 300 000**



Gastronomy and Innovation

Gastronomy is a very gratifying sector for innovation – treasures of the region's traditional cuisine can be presented at a new degree of quality, presenting food as a scientific achievement, as an adventure, as art, as provocation, as a component of performance art, and as a philosophy. The capabilities of modern technologies, a contemporary lifestyle, the creativity of chefs, traditions passed down through generations and scientific achievement meld to form a fusion fitting for a European Region of Gastronomy. Combining this with production which can transform pristine and untouched nature's bounty and rural harvests into high-quality products with high added value, the region will be able to successfully compete in the global market, where consumers' interest in the ecological and responsible preparation of food is increasing rapidly. And if one can get to know and enjoy such food in a natural environment – straight from the vegetable patch, the forest, the apiary, the mill, the smokehouse – without interrupting logical sequences established over centuries, people will choose to do so.

Activities:

- Revitalisation of products, historically made in the Riga – Gauja Region, in a new aspect;
- Teaching of traditional gastronomic values in new formats at a new degree of quality;
- Creation of a platform where local producers can promote and sell their products;
- Adventurous gastronomic performances in unusual venues;
- Contemporary Latvian taste competitions, creating new and creative recipes using innovative techniques, ingredients, thereby fostering culinary creativity.

Total cost: **EUR 250 000**



Gastronomy and Society

A central role in the implementation of the European Region of Gastronomy project has been reserved for public participation. Interest and the desire to taste things are key words for products on offer at urban and rural markets or traditional fairs, for pub and restaurant fare, at workshops and discussions, as well as in internet media surfed for information, recipes, peer assessment.

Nonetheless, public participation should also be understood as support for the sector's companies which have become a component of the region's brand, the quality and safety of their manufacturing processes, nature conservation and product promotion.

Activities:

- Local delicacy markets with farmers', homemade and artisan products;*
- 'A mushrooming/berry picking/fishing marathon' or excursions with guides;
- Organisation of various competitions or support for the purpose of public participation and the promotion of healthier foods;
- Gastronomic events in non-traditional locations;*
- Restaurant Week;
- The Riga Festival restaurant, involvement of regional partners;*
- Publication of healthy, seasonal recipes and media partnerships;
- Gastronomic weekends in Riga – Gauja Region towns;
- Festival of the world's most popular food films;*
- Digitisation of Latvia's first cookbook (1795).

Total cost: **EUR 400 000**

* Activities, involving international ERG partners



Gastronomy and Networking

Most of the area of the European Region of Gastronomy is taken up by the Gauja National Park, whose status alone attests to the highest quality enjoyment, cognition and management of a natural and pristine environment. Gastronomy as an essential part of culture organically fits into the region's traditional cultural activities, such as farmers' and artisans' markets, town and district festivals, open-air musical and art performances. These give everyone the opportunity to really sense the true flavour of each event through tasting, snacking, partaking of a festive meal, or buying a tasty souvenir for their loved ones. But it is equally important to increase interest in gastronomy on an everyday basis, not just on festive occasions. Smaller cafes, taverns, restaurants, shops, factories, farms – suffused with local colour – offering and promoting local products made by local artisans and entrepreneurs, set up special small-scale celebrations or classes enabling participation and thus the gaining of new gastronomic experience, as well as locations meeting the needs and interests of gourmets where the *grand manner* can be enjoyed alongside *haute cuisine* with *apartamentos supplémentaire* in the quietude of a rural manor house or overlooking the tiled roofs of a medieval town.

Activities:

- Different types of traditional and seasonal fairs with home-made and farmers' products, tastings and Latvian traditions to understand their cultural worth;*
- Creation of a gastronomic offering in line with the quality of the region's cultural worth;
- Linking science and gastronomy – development of new products, creating a new gastronomic offering through the involvement of processing technologies;*
- Exchange of experience between producers and retailers in Latvia's towns and regions;
- Exchange/internship programmes for Riga – Gauja Region chefs and waiting staff under European programmes;*
- Cooperation with the *Delice* project;
- Cooperation with interior and exterior designers and craftspeople utilising natural materials or work in a subtle traditional Latvian style enabling the preservation of authentic values in terms of both gastronomic creative and enjoyment environments, and in its products.

Total cost: **EUR 180 000**

* Activities, involving international ERG partners

A man with light brown hair, wearing a blue zip-up jacket, is focused on sorting through a large quantity of dark blueberries. He is holding a red plastic basket with both hands, and the basket is overflowing with the fruit. Below the basket, a yellow bucket is visible, partially filled with blueberries. The background is slightly blurred, showing a wooden fence and green foliage, suggesting an outdoor setting like a farm or berry field. The lighting is natural, highlighting the texture of the blueberries and the man's concentration.

Gaining the title of European Region of Gastronomy 2017 is a unique opportunity to present Latvian cuisine, as well as firmly put the Riga – Gauja Region on the European gastronomic map. One of the most significant instruments for achieving this objective is the promotion of the project and planned activities at local, national and international levels.

Marketing and Communication Plan

Both we ourselves, as organisers of the project, and our project partners have already started working with entrepreneurs, organisations and other stakeholders to talk about and present the project, its objectives, shared values and the quality criteria for participation in the project, as well as having initiated a calendar of planned activities, thus promoting the involvement of all stakeholders in the project.

As with the 2017 action plan, marketing activities are also being launched as soon as this year – we are including the ERG 2015 project and the potential 2017 title in all tourism-oriented presentations regularly shown at seminars and work groups, both abroad and in the domestic market. We also plan to participate in international tourism exhibitions with a supplemented array of information on gastro-nomic-tourism opportunities in the region and its surrounding districts (new routes, events, deals, etc.).

After gaining the title, the base platform for placing information about the project will be the websites of the project municipalities, as well as the tourism sector's information platforms.

Regular communication with the media is planned throughout the entire course of the project, informing them about current activities, as well as providing information on the importance of gastronomy in increasing the competitiveness of the region. Particular emphasis will be placed on the project being covered in international publications. This will be achieved by organising foreign media visits to

the Riga – Gauja Region with a focus on gastronomy. We also plan to address Europe's most influential gastronomy and tourism media.

Naturally, the importance of social media has not been forgotten – we will be setting up new social network entities, as well as maintaining and supplementing those of stakeholders, also addressing bloggers.

In order to maximise regular dissemination of information, we also plan to attract a number of media partners – radio, TV, newspapers, etc. Regional television station *Enter Gauja TV* has already shown interest, broadcasting themed stories about active ERG projects/activities and the partners involved, as well as other relevant information.

As an essential aspect of the Riga – Gauja Region bid is also ancient Latvian wisdom and the Solar calendar, these will be integrated and promoted in ancient and contemporary manifestations, including them in tourism materials (printed, electronic, video, audio), events, routes, thus also facilitating local-experience tourism.

Any activity is unthinkable without visual material, so we will also be producing photos and videos of the Latvian flavours in the Riga – Gauja Region (ingredients, products, processing, technologies, consumption, involvement in tourism) to promote gastronomic culture and tourism internationally and locally.

In collaboration with Riga – Gauja Region region producers, we will stimulate awareness of the ERG by placing the project logo on product packaging.

Budget

The ERG 2017 budget plans to utilise a number of sources: from Riga – Gauja regional players – local government funding by the project's implementers and funding from the partners and organisations involved who, over time, show interest in supporting activities related to gastronomy. Similarly, we will try to attract EU funding for the implementation of a number of project activities.

The planned budget

Gastronomy and Tourism

Total cost: EUR 350 000

Gastronomy and Health

Total cost: 50 000 EUR

Gastronomy and Education

Total cost: EUR 300 000

Gastronomy and Innovation

Total cost: EUR 250 000

Gastronomy and Society

Total cost: EUR 400 000

Gastronomy and Networking

Total cost: EUR 180 000

Total EUR 1.53 million



Sustainability and Legacy

Gastronomy and Sustainability

The idea for the Riga – Gauja Region to bid for European Region of Gastronomy has seen five main organisers join together – the Riga Tourism Development Bureau, the Sigulda, Valmiera and Cesis municipalities and the Gauja National Park tourism cluster. Similarly, the project idea has also excited many partners including the Latvian Chefs' Club, the Latvian Institute, Latvia's Hotel and Restaurant Association and the Riga City Council.

The multi-faceted nature of the bodies involved in the project, their different capabilities and levels of responsibility provide for long-term, continuous and result-oriented cooperation. That is why one of the first challenges for the Riga – Gauja gastronomic region is building a common understanding of a high-quality, ecological gastronomy, characteristic of Latvia and rich in locally grown and manufactured products.

Latvian wisdom formulated over thousands of years is very much in line with current global dining trends – natural, seasonal, grown near home, prepared by respecting traditions and the responsible use of resources. A prominent role in the project has been handed to ancient, but still celebrated Latvian festivities and the cultural heritage we have preserved, as well as to the identification and promotion of seasonal celebrations, artisan skills, the enhancement of the concepts of spatial ecology and aesthetics for the development of the region's gastronomic and creative industries.



Equally, project members have considered how every link in the gastronomy chain – from seeds planted in untainted and fertile soil to the manufacturer, or the product put on the table, surprising diners with their bouquet of flavours – be as sustainable as possible and have less environmental impact. To reduce impact on the environment, water and energy resources as well as reducing the amount of food waste. In view of the Riga – Gauja Region including the treasure that is Latvia's largest and oldest national park, nature

The multi-faceted nature of the bodies involved in the project, their different capabilities and levels of responsibility provide for long-term, continuous and result-oriented cooperation

conservation and a sustainable management approach are indispensable in the context of project activities.

This concept is like a tree with a deep root system, a sturdy trunk and a broad crown of branches reaching for the sky – rooted in the region's traditions, experience, knowledge and skills, reinforced by local people's ecological and responsible thinking and actions, it reaches towards a diverse, full and healthy life for every human being, in which taste has been nominated for a very important role.

Evaluation

A thorough assessment and evaluation will be carried out after completing the ERG 2017 year to determine the benefits of the project.

A number of instruments will be utilised at the evaluation stage – cooperation with education institutions and research institutes will continue in this phase, with surveys of both visitors and professionals at a number of project events, evaluating the influence of both local and international media, analysing public data, as well as research into social media – the size of audiences reached, public participation and influence on followers. Similarly, one of the criteria in the evaluation process will be indicators from a gastronomic audit to be carried out in 2015/2016.

The following are specific evaluation activities and criteria to be examined:

- More visitor arrivals (indicator – number of travellers);
- More sales (measurement indicators: rooms/airplane seats/restaurant meals/wine/beer/car rentals, etc.);
- More media coverage;
- New competitive advantage or unique selling proposition (measurement indicators (i.e. unique food and drink));
- More tax revenue to government authorities (measurement indicators: municipality tax revenues);
- Increased community awareness about tourism in general (measurement indicators: attitudes, awareness of local residents);

- Increased community pride in and awareness of the area's food and drink resources.

To obtain an as independent and neutral point of view as possible, independent experts will also be invited. The list is currently being clarified. Of course, the importance of ERG partners has not been forgotten in this phase – a special questionnaire will be used to survey all current and new ERG partners.

We want to use the evaluation results not only to determine the benefits during project implementation, but also to identify those ideas and activities that would be viable in the future and that would definitely be worth continuing. After monitoring is fully completed, we will also present the results to all the institutions and organisations involved, inviting them to continue and build on what was launched and achieved during the ERG year.





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