

# THREE DECADES OF POST-SOVIET PERIOD: ANALYSES OF OUTBOUND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS AND ENVIRONMENT IN LATVIA

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## **Abstract**

After regaining independence, the borders were opened for Latvian residents, and they had the possibility to leave behind the travel or non-travel principles of the Soviet Union period, as well as go into the global tourism market. Post-Soviet transformation that was seen in different sectors, including the change in tourism and travel habits, which happened slowly. Since every decade of these three post-Soviet decades has its own development characteristics and is impacted by different external environment elements, the aim of this study is to analyse the tendencies of each decade and its most impactful external environment factors in Latvia. Even though the impact of the economic environment has always been meaningful in tourism, the main factor that impacted the first post-Soviet decade was without doubt the political environment. With the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the improvement of the economic situation, world's technological achievements enter Latvia's tourism industry. Different sociocultural factors highlight different outbound tourism tendencies in each decade. Travel habits of Latvian residents have changed over time – values and expectations have changed for travelling abroad. As expectations and knowledge increase, Latvian travellers join the tendencies and travel habits of the collective European travellers.

**Keywords:** tourism, outbound tourism, post-Soviet country, tourism development, macroeconomic environment

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## Introduction

The tourism industry is recognised as fragile and particularly sensitive to cyclical changes in countries of origin, as well as to global and regional economic conditions, political system and epidemics etc. (Detotto, Giannoni, Goavec, 2021). The post-Soviet transition process of political and economic changes was uneven among the Eastern European countries (Croes, Ridderstaat, Bak, Zientara, 2021), therefore the analyses of three decades of post-Soviet period of tourism development in Latvia will indicate the specific patterns that in a certain way can be characteristic for other Eastern European countries. Researchers of tourism development emphasise the importance of economic freedom by analysing differences in economic development and performance, highlighting public policy in the tourism sector and the importance of political stability in ensuring the sustainable development of tourism (Detotto, Giannoni, Goavec, 2021).

The tourism industry can be analysed through the following perspectives – domestic tourism, outbound tourism, inbound tourism, leisure tourism, business tourism (Gavurova, Suhanyi, Rigelsky, 2020). Travelling for leisure and for business purposes will be used in the analyses of outbound travel of Latvian residents. Generally, outbound tourism development and demand is a relatively less studied tourism type with a small number of published articles in comparison to the inbound tourism demand studies (Lin, Liu, Song, 2015; Gavurova, Suhanyi, Rigelsky, 2020), as outbound tourism describes import for the studied country. Outbound tourism development patterns and expenditures can be analysed both using a micro-level, as well as macro-level approaches. Outbound tourism macro-level approach indicates overall patterns, economic development, and uses macroeconomic time series data in order to show aggregate expenditure tendencies of international tourism (Gozgor, Demir, 2018; Gavurova, Suhanyi, Rigelsky, 2020). Scholars outline the lack of research investigating tourism companies in developing countries, including the lack of studies analysing macroeconomic perspective of developing countries including Eastern Europe (Tleuberdinova, Shayekina, Salauatova, Pratt, 2021).

The aim of this article is to analyse the different decades of tourism development in post-Soviet period Latvia, especially outlining the first years after regaining independence, looking for the origins of outbound travel patterns in the transition period. The macroeconomic analyses are mainly based on the data provided by Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia. More specific tendencies and detailed explanations are compiled from the press starting from the early 1990s, as well as in-depth interviews with entrepreneurs were conducted in the period between February to August, 2020.

## **Opening the Soviet “iron curtain” for outbound travel in the 1990s. Influence of political environment on the development of tourism in Latvia**

Renewing Latvia's independence on May 4, 1990 fully opened the “iron curtain” that M. Gorbachov's political course had slowly started to open. The “iron curtain” is a symbol of ideological and economic isolation of the Soviet area from market led economies (Croes, Ridderstaat, Bak, Zientara, 2021). The free Latvian residents were now able to travel not only to republics of USSR, but also to other countries without needing “recommendations” from the communist youth and the communist party. From the time the constitutional law was agreed upon until the end of 1991, 93 countries recognised renewal of Latvia's independence and its national independence, but international recognition of the independence of Latvia continued in the following years. This process without doubt impacted the possibilities of Latvian residents to travel abroad, lessening the amount of bureaucratic procedures and the time needed for sorting them out.

After Latvia regained its independence, a question of importance was raised about what kind of personal documents the citizens of the renewed Latvia will use to travel abroad. A compromise was made – continuation of the previous documents people had and, in case it was necessary, continue giving out former USSR passports that were left under the control of Ministry of the Interior. Meanwhile, creation of Latvian identity documents was underway. A political decision was made to create three types of identity documents – citizen of Latvia passport, diplomatic Latvian passport and identity card for people without state. The first Latvian passports were handed out in June 1992 and became the official travel document of Latvian citizens.<sup>2</sup>

One factor that restricts travel is the necessity of having a visa to travel within another country, hence it was important to develop a non-visa regime relationship with as many countries as possible after regaining the independence. The first countries that Latvia made a deal with to cancel the visa regime were United Kingdom, North Ireland, Czech Republic and Hungary (1993). In 1995, Baltic united visa area was expanded when “Protocol of migration politics” of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania was signed. However, the implementation of non-visa regime was very slow from 1993–1997. Poland, Slovakia and Ireland were added to the list of countries mentioned above. In 1997, when Latvia's integration in the European Union was intensified, non-visa regime was possible with strategically

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.pmlp.gov.lv/lv/sakums/pakalpojumi/personu-apliecinosi-dokumenti/pases/pases/latvijas-pasu-vesture/>.

important Scandinavian countries – Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Norway and Iceland. Switzerland, Lichtenstein, Andorra and Malta joined the list in 1998. Bilateral agreements were made with a selection of countries (Italy, Israel, Austria, Turkey, Croatia and Ukraine) for diplomatic and service passport holders to enter without needing a visa. In the summer of 1997, the government of Latvia approved a concept to develop a non-visa regime. This document determined the strategy for the implementation of a non-visa regime between Latvia and foreign countries (Birkavs, 1998).

In the early 1990s, acquiring visas was very challenging for both unorganised travellers and tourist groups, because there were long queues to get a visa in addition to the fact that Latvia didn't have an embassy of every country. It was possible to get visas free of charge to countries like Italy, Denmark and Sweden, but to visit Finland one had to pay 20 US dollars, to Germany – 20 German marks, to Switzerland – 10 lats, to Israel – 7 lats, to Canada – 55 Canadian dollars (Pelūde un Neimanis, 1994; Indāns, 1994). It is noteworthy that it wasn't a small sum of money at that time – minimum wage during that time was 22–28 lats a month (Ministry of Welfare, Minimum Monthly Wage by Year). In the initial stage of the renewed Latvian state, different statistical collection methods were being developed, including data about the flow of travellers to and from Latvia, hence comprehensive statistical data does not exist about the travel of Latvian residents abroad in the early 1990s. The first published statistical data, compiled by Border Guard forces of the Ministry of the Interior of Republic of Latvia, shows that more than two million Latvian residents crossed the border in 1993. By the end of the century, this number increased roughly 14%, reaching more than two and a half million (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Dynamics of Latvian travellers crossing Latvian border in 1993–2000**

Year	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Outgoing tourists from Latvia (thds)	2269	1794	1812	1798	1877	1961	2256	2596
Changes compared with previous year, %	x	-11	+1	-0.8	+4.4	+4.5	+15	+15

Source: table made by authors based on Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia data

In the 1990s, travelling abroad was characterised by using motor vehicles, mostly tourist buses (see Table 2). Only 5–6% of travellers used planes to travel abroad because this type of transportation was expensive, there weren't many air travel destinations from Riga airport, it wasn't as easy as it is now to purchase a plane ticket – it was only possible in airline representative offices and travel agencies.

**Table 2. Share of mode of transportation used by residents of Latvia for outgoing trips, 1995–2000, %**

Year	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Road transportation	72.2	75.6	75.8	78.6	84.8	87.6
Railway transportation	19.4	16.2	15.2	10.2	7.9	6.0
Air transportation	5.8	5.9	5.9	6.5	5.7	5.2
Sea transportation	2.5	2.3	3.1	4.7	1.6	1.2

Source: table made by authors based on Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia data

Travelling abroad with a bus in the 1990s was an extreme adventure, often total costs were decreased by travel organisers offering trips with multiple nights on the bus – sometimes those were nights to or from a destination leading through Poland, but on longer trips nights were spent in the bus in the destination country. During that time, buses often were worn out “Hungarian Ikaruses” that were a far cry from today’s comfortable tourist buses. These 15–20 years old worn out “Ikarus” buses tended to break down, and cause travellers and organisers big challenges while travelling.

Group bus trips in the early 1990s were associated with security challenges on the road. Lithuania–Poland transit road was considered a dangerous part of the journey when travelling with a bus. In the early 1990s, travellers were discouraged from stopping on the road because not only passengers on travel buses, but also passengers on long distance buses were victims to gangs of robbers in the Polish forests.

Safer travel and payment options overseas were ensured by travel cheques and international payment cards. From 1993, it was possible to purchase *Thomas Cook* and *American Express* travel cheques – money was turned into cheques in Latvia and then withdrawn in local currency in destination country. Travelling cheques made travellers feel safer going through countries that were considered unsafe, like, Poland, Lithuania, Russia and Belarus, because lost and stolen travel cheques could be renewed in any country within 24 hours. Latvian residents could use payment cards starting from mid 1990s, when Latvian banks obtained the rights to give out and service internationally recognised payment cards *Eurocard/Mastercard*, as well as payment card *Visa Electron*.

The so called “business trips” were popular in the 1990s, where people travelled to markets in Poland and other countries. At first, these trips were used to sell one’s own products to afford travelling, but later – to purchase different goods for personal use and for selling them in Latvia. Markets in Lithuania, Turkey and United Arab Emirates were among the favourite destinations at the time. As purchasing power increased, Latvian residents

started to travel to shopping tourism destinations of higher quality, such as German shopping centres and Italian fashion outlet centres.

Statistical data shows that in the 1990s railway transportation was the second most used travel transportation after motor vehicles. It was provided not only by the former USSR train lines to Moscow, but also by, for example, “Baltic Express” train that took the route Tallinn – Tartu – Valga – Riga – Kaunas – Šeštokai – Warsaw. Every evening five minutes to midnight the train left from Riga central railway station to Kaunas, on the way crossing the Lithuanian border, where border guards checked passenger passports and train compartments. Early in the morning, the train arrived in Šeštokai (a town near the Polish border) where passengers had to change from a train suitable for USSR railway lines (1520mm wide) to a train for European railway lines (1435mm wide). That train then took travellers to Lithuania–Poland border, which used to be the last border of USSR, continuing to Warsaw. This route was started on May 22, 1993, but was closed in 1997 due to financial losses.

It was possible to travel to other European cities from the Polish capital. Back then, a journey from Riga to Vienna cost only 42 lats and 24 santims (Bicēna, 1995, 12). There was also a possibility to spend two nights and one day to get to Berlin with a direct train from Riga, but it was necessary for Latvian citizens to obtain a Belarus transit visa, since the train crossed its territory. In 58 hours it was possible to get to Sofia, however transit visas were also needed in this case because this train crossed territories of Belarus, Ukraine and Rumania.

In the early 1990s, Latvian residents also went to further travel destinations. The Tourist Club of University of Latvia in collaboration with Latvian High Mountain club, whose goal was to master world’s highest summits, organised Latvia’s first Himalayan expedition in 1993 led by one of the most notable Latvian alpinists – Teodors Ķirsis. Organisers had arranged a *TU-154* airplane to take a group of more than 100 people on adventures to Katmandu. For 10 days travellers had the opportunity to explore this exotic land, which only recently was made available to tourists. After the airline “Aeroflot” ceased its monopoly, four airlines offered regular and charter flights in the end of 1991. The largest of them was the heir of “Aeroflot” – “Latvijas Avioliņijas” or “LatAvio” that offered passenger transportation to Copenhagen, Stockholm, Helsinki, Vienna, all of the capitals and specific state centres of Commonwealth of Independent States using Soviet Union style *TU-154*, *TU-134* and *AN-24* airplanes (Vucina, 1992). The well-known airlines of the world welcomed this new Latvian company with understanding and, rather than causing problems, helped it. Passengers were diverse – those who “don’t count dollars” and those in poverty. At that time, “Latvijas Avioliņijas” flights were the cheapest, but

also lacked comfort and service, yet it was still considerably better than what people had gotten used to in “Aeroflot” airplanes over the years. However, during that time only a third of airplanes belonging to Latvian airlines were used because TU style airplanes were not well known and so were not a popular means of transport (Ģiga, 1993). The work of airline companies in the early 1990s was challenging. Airline companies collaborated with tourism agencies to ensure more airplanes were used, but the travel agencies had to get the expensive fuel. In 1992 charter flights to Beijing and Cairo, later to Tel Aviv and Tunis were organised in this way (Latvian airlines are in a difficult situation, 1992). In 1993, Riga international airport served 12 920 airplanes and 310 132 passengers, of which 70% were regular flights, 11% charter flights, 1% private flights and 9% Russian air force that was still located in the territory of Riga airport (Celmiņš, 1994).

Airline *RIAIR* or “Riga airline” was founded in 1992, which was another intermediate stage between Soviet Union time and Western aviation. In the beginning, it started passenger transportation with *SAAB-340*, later with *Boeing* aircrafts flying to Moscow and London. *RIAIR* had signed an *Interline* contract with “British Airways” and “Transaero” airlines that gave an opportunity to purchase *RIAIR* flights in “British Airways” ticket offices, and create connected flights with “Transaero” (Kusiņa, 1996, 25).

The creation of national airline “airBaltic” was a notable turn in the development of outbound tourism. The airline was founded on August 28, 1995 as a limited company, after the national Latvian airline “LatAvio” was liquidated. It was founded by the government of Latvia together with Latvia–USA joint venture “Baltic International Airlines” and Scandinavian airlines. The newly founded airline was owned by the state of Latvia with 51% of shares, the rest of the share owners were *SAS* (28,5%), “Baltic International USA” (8%) and two investment companies – “Swedfund International AB” (6,2 %) and “Danish Investment Fund for Central and Eastern Europe (IO)” (6,2 %). First flights were started on October 1<sup>st</sup> of the same year with the airplane *Saab-340*, but in 1996 the airline bought *Avro RJ70*. In the end of 1998, *SAS* bought all the shares owned by “Baltic International USA” and became actively involved in the management of the airline. In 1999, all *Saab-340* “airBaltic” airplanes were replaced with *Fokker 50* airplanes.

In 1995, “airBaltic” flew 559 flights and transported 13 423 passengers. The following year it reached 4863 flights with 97 428 passengers, but at the end of the century in 2000 the airline had flown 7999 flights with 219 427 passengers.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> “airBaltic” unpublished information

In the early 1990s, multiple foreign country airlines started to offer air transportation services: Sandinavia's SAS, Germany's "Lufthansa", Finland's "Finnair" (flights from Riga airport were started in spring, 1992), Poland's LOT (since March 1993), Czech Republic's ČSA.

Travelling habits of Latvian residents have changed over time, especially values and expectations that are important when travelling abroad. A large part of the trips in the 1990s looked like a sprint to the most popular tourist attractions in many countries. Sometimes, it was enough to just cross a country in transit for people to be content of the fact that they can add another country to the list of the countries they have visited. It was not that important, how long the visit lasted and what was seen, as long as there was something to add to the catalogue of visited countries.

Already starting from the early 1990s, most popular and most often visited destination countries could be distinguished – Latvia's neighbouring countries Lithuania, Estonia, Russia and Belarus; Central and Western European countries – Germany, Poland, France and Austria; as well as Northern European countries – Sweden, Finland and Denmark. USA was the most often visited country overseas (see Table 3).

**Table 3. The most popular travel destinations for residents of Latvia in 1996–2000, % from total**

Year	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Lithuania	36.4	42	45.9	43.4	43.3
Estonia	12.6	13.5	15.9	18	20.4
Russia	19.9	16.6	14.9	14.8	17.7
Belarus	9.1	10.2	7.5	9.8	7.9
Germany	5.5	3	2.5	2.2	1.6
Poland	4.9	3.5	3	2	1.6
Sweden	1.7	3.5	2.4	1.7	1.5
Finland	0.6	0.5	0.6	0.9	0.8
Ukraine	1.7	2	1.2	0.8	0.4
Denmark	...	0.4	0.8	0.8	0.4
France	0.6	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.3
Austria	...	0.2	0.3	0.6	0.4
USA	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.6	0.5

Source: table made by authors based on Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia data

Neighbouring countries Lithuania and Estonia were mostly visited in one day trips by Latvian residents. Shopping still was a popular reason for



visiting Lithuania and Estonia. In 1996, only 15–20% of Latvian travellers took a trip for more than one day. The most popular overnight trip destinations were the neighbouring countries Russia, Estonia, Belarus and Lithuania. Two thirds of overnight Latvian travellers visited these countries.

**Table 4. The most popular destinations for overnight trips of residents of Latvia in 1998–2000, % from total**

Year	1998	1999	2000
<b>Russia</b>	<b>31.5</b>	<b>29.6</b>	<b>28.5</b>
<b>Estonia</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>14.9</b>
<b>Belarus</b>	<b>14.9</b>	<b>15.9</b>	<b>13.5</b>
<b>Lithuania</b>	<b>14.2</b>	<b>12.0</b>	<b>11.5</b>
Germany	5.6	5.6	5.0
Poland	6.9	4.9	4.9
Sweden	3.2	3.5	4.0
Finland	1.3	2.1	2.1
USA	...	1.5	1.6
Ukraine	2.8	1.9	1.4
Austria	0.8	1.5	1.3
Denmark	1.9	2.0	1.3
France	1.0	1.3	0.8

Source: table made by authors based on Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia data

The main motivation for travel was visiting friends and relatives, which can be explained by the large number of residents in Latvia originating from Russia and Belarus. Germany, Poland and Sweden were the most visited out of the other European countries.

The available information played a big role in choosing a travel destination. During the 1990s, looking up information was a complicated process. Portion of the travellers mainly relied on the recommendations from their friends or relatives, another portion looked up advertisements, more specifically adverts in newspapers, which during that time looked like small squares overfilled with text in tiny letters. Later, information was acquired through reading colourful tourism magazines, for example, “Ceļotprieks” that was started in October 1995. The first event that allowed travellers the opportunity to acquire a wide range of travel offers was “Balttour ‘94” tourism fair in January 1994, organised by Riga Cinema studio in an exhibition hall in Šmerlis. In the 1990s and later on, it was

hard work for people to take part in the tourism fair “Balttour” because they went home with large piles of travel booklets and catalogues.

In case of starting an outbound tourism agency and tour operator business in the 1990s, one needed to have knowledge about travel destinations – where to go and what is going on there. Communication and reservation of hotels was done through fax to have written confirmation, the bills could be delivered through mail or fax. Information about interesting attractions was mainly given from person to person, hence meeting in tourism exhibitions was a very important way of getting and passing on information. Data compiled by The Statistical Committee of Republic of State of Latvia<sup>4</sup> show that in Latvia in the end of 1991, 89 tourism companies provided tourism services to 278 252 people, from which 161 769 went abroad. However, these numbers need to be evaluated carefully since 1991 was the first year Latvia regained its independence, meaning that the previous practice was still in place, which only allowed travel abroad using package services provided by tourism companies. The following year, tourist count serviced by tourism companies notably decreased – 36 437 people, but by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century increased to 112 065 people.

In the last decade of the century, top 10 favourite travel destinations also changed that were visited by travellers from Latvia and provided by tourism company services (see Table 5). If in the first year of regaining independence people still chose the destinations they were used to during the Soviet times – neighbouring countries Lithuania and Estonia, former socialist block countries – Poland, Rumania, Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Hungary, as well as Germany, Finland and Sweden, then the following years Latvian residents also chose package trips to most popular worldwide travel destinations more often – France, Italy, Spain, and later – Turkey.

**Table 5. The most popular package travel destinations of Latvian residents (TOP 10) 1991–2000**

Year	1991		1995		2000	
	Country	Number of outgoing tourists	Country	Number of outgoing tourists	Country	Number of outgoing tourists
1.	Finland	63 384	Turkey	15 812	Turkey	12 516
2.	Sweden	5761	Estonia	4901	Greece	10 648
3.	Turkey	3943	Lithuania	3657	Germany	6697
4.	Germany	3080	Finland	2335	Spain	6319

<sup>4</sup> From 1998 Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia

Year	1991		1995		2000	
	Country	Number of outgoing tourists	Country	Number of outgoing tourists	Country	Number of outgoing tourists
5.	Lithuania	2117	Italy	1492	BENELUX	5555
6.	Italy	1809	Greece	1068	Lithuania	5529
7.	France	1679	In France	1027	Estonia	5225
8.	Spain	1461	United Kingdom	913	United Kingdom	4687
9.	Estonia	1298	Germany	744	Bulgaria	4527
10.	United Kingdom	939	Spain	576	Sweden	3974
	Total	161 769	Total	42 842	Total	112 065

Source: table made by authors based on Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia data

One of the first tourism companies in Latvia “Latvia Tours” was founded in 1992. Their first 3–4 tourist groups “Latvia Tours” organised for their employees and curious people to China and Manchuria. Classical outbound tourism started after that. “Latvia Tours” started more diverse outbound tourism activities after taking part in a tourism fair in Sweden (Solna, suburb of Stockholm).

When the borders of Latvia opened, residents of Latvia had the chance to visit their relatives abroad, which was used by the tourism company “Latvia Tours” in advertising opportunities for exiled Latvians to pay for their relatives’ visits. In the exile newspaper “Laiks” there was an ad in the early 1990s: “Fellow citizens in America! Give a gift to your relatives, friends, acquaintances in Latvia. A trip abroad for \$ 400.00 –450.00, Inter-Latvian travel agency “Latvia Tours”” (Newspaper “Laiks”, 1991).

When the Olympic Committee of Latvia partnered up with “Latvia Tours”, a complicated travel service experience was gained organising trips to multiple Olympic games and World sport veteran games. The beginning of one of the popular tourism companies “Impro Ceļojumi” can be found in the University of Latvia Tourist club. The tourism company Travel centre “Impro” was founded in 1994 based on University of Latvia Tourist club. In their first year they took 1500 travellers on tours and drove more than 300 thousand km (Impro travel catalogue, 2014), spent 650 days while travelling, visited 25 countries, the average travel length was 13 days, average journey 6200 km. The tourism routes organised by “Impro” were different from commercial trips organised by many other tourism companies because they included active leisure and had the chance to get to know the local culture. Shopping was not included in these routes.

“Impro” travellers did not spend their nights in a hotel, but rather in tents and campsites, and they took their food with them on the road.

“Impro” travel groups were sometimes accompanied by well known public figures, like, virtuoso flamenco guitarist Andris Kārklīņš in Spain, historian Vija Daukšte in Austria, director Arnis Ozols in France.

The first printed “Impro” travel catalogue was released in the end of 1995 offering 79 trips. The catalogue was black and white, 15 pages long, and in addition to trips offered boat trips, aerobics camps and meetup evenings with interesting people (the beginning of the club).

In September 1996, travel club “Impro” was founded, which was one of the many ways Travel centre “Impro” was expressing itself. It offered a chance to meet people interested in travelling and active lifestyle. Annual “Impro” traveller parties were legendary.

Another way how travel was organised in Latvia was not only through sport, but also other interest organisations. That is how in the early 1990s “Studentu Iniciatīvas Fonds” was founded as a non-profit officially distributing International Student Identity Cards *ISIC*. Later this organisation was changed to a tourism agency “Kolumbs”.

Travel bureau “Via Rīga” was launched in the spring of 1993 by the international tourism agency chain “Lufthansa City Centre” franchiser. Added competitiveness was ensured by a unique opportunity at the time to directly sell trips from the German mega tour operator *TUI* and “DerTour” catalogues. Everyone had the chance to enter the “Lufthansa City Centre” and simply buy an airplane ticket or a trip. Demand was huge, it was common to have queues and extra hours after work. High standards, focus on the individual customer service and selling airplane tickets became the foundation for corporate charter client and a business trip service segment to quickly develop. Their first charter clients were mostly representatives from foreign companies, to whom advantages were offered – the possibility to pay for services afterwards within a specific time period, and travel document shipment was also made available later. Demand for such services increased quickly, especially when government institutions started to make purchase deals for services to organise business trips.

## **Ups and downs in outbound trips at the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century. Influence of economic and technological environment on tourism development in Latvia**

The headline of the first decade of the new century was the fact that Latvia joined the EU on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2004, and the Schengen agreement or Schengen zone on 21<sup>st</sup> December, 2007. These both occurrences contributed

to the possibility for Latvian residents to travel abroad, as well as made travelling between countries easier, since there was no need to waste time on borders for passport control.

In this period, the number of Latvian residents travelling abroad steadily continued to increase: if the total border crossing count in the 10-year period increased roughly 17%, then overnight trip count almost doubled (see Table 6). A drop of roughly 14% was seen in border crossings and overnight trips in 2008/2009 because of the global financial crisis. However, already in 2010 travel count abroad started to rise again.

**Table 6. Outbound trips of Latvian residents in 2001–2010**

Year	Border crossings outgoing tourist number (thousands)	Trips for several days (thousands)	Expenditures abroad (mil. Euro)	Average trip length	Average expenditures per day (Euro)
2001	2651	838.8	194.9	2.8	27
2002	2310	922	195.5	3.4	26
2003	2299	1092.8	259.7	3.6	31
2004	2456	1061.7	281	2.9	38
2005	2894	1402.1	458.2	3.2	50
2006	3114	1687	575.7	3.8	48
2007	3376	1666.5	689.8	3.8	53
2008	3524	1836.5	832.5	4.0	60
2009	3058	1573.5	581.1	4.7	41
2010	3090	1650	523.9	4.9	34
Changes, %	+16.6	+96.7	+168.8	+75	+25.9

Source: table made by authors based on Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia data

If in the 1990s people chose to travel once a year, then in the 21<sup>st</sup> century it was more characteristic to travel more often. Statistical data also shows large amounts of total money spent on trips abroad. The total amount spent on trips abroad until the pre-crisis wealthy years had increased more than four times. The average travel length abroad also dramatically increased, in 2010 Latvian residents spent 4.9 days on average on their trips.

In this decade, the priorities of Latvian overnight travellers also dramatically changed – neighbouring countries Russian and Estonia were changed to Germany and Sweden (see Table 7).

**Table 7. The most popular overnight travel destinations for residents of Latvia in 2001–2010, % from total overnight travellers**

Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Germany	7.5	7.7	11.0	8.2	10.4	12.1	14.7	17.4	16.2	14.1
Lithuania	10.7	11.2	12.0	17.6	11.3	14.2	15.5	12.8	12.5	11.8
Sweden	2.4	5.1	6.8	7.0	5.7	6.6	8.5	7.9	11.0	10.9
Russia	25.3	23.8	17.0	14.4	13.2	10.6	9.6	8.4	10.3	10.6
Poland	6.4	6.1	6.7	8.2	9.4	9.1	6.2	5.6	5.5	6.4
Italy	1.4	1.2	2.8	2.0	2.8	2.9	3.6	4.4	5.1	6.4
Estonia	14.1	14.8	11.9	11.6	6.7	5.3	4.8	6.6	4.6	4.1
France	1.0	2.3	3.2	1.7	2.7	2.4	2.0	2.7	2.8	3.7
United Kingdom	...	...	...	...	2.7	4.1	3.7	1.8	2.6	3.3
Austria	1.2	1.5	2.8	2.8	4.0	2.7	2.5	2.6	2.3	3.0
Finland	2.1	2.5	2.3	2.6	2.2	1.8	1.4	1.2	2.4	2.3
USA	2.0	1.4	1.2	1.6	1.9	2.0	1.8	3.2	2.3	2.2
Belarus	10.8	5.8	4.1	3.7	3.6	3.1	1.8	1.8	2.1	1.8
Norway	0.4	1.1	1.4	1.6	0.7	1.3	1.7	1.7	2.3	1.7
Belgium	0.7	0.7	0.9	1.0	2.8	1.6	1.9	1.9	1.6	0.9

Source: table made by authors based on Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia data

Thanks to the fact that the overall economic situation in Latvia improved, low-cost airlines “Ryanair” (2004), “EasyJet” (2004) and “WizzAir” (2010) entered Latvia’s market, and the use of air transportation sharply increased in international tourism of Latvia. It can be seen in the statistical data about the transportation used by Latvian residents travelling abroad (see Table 8), as well as in the increase of served passengers in airport “Rīga”. Already in 2004 for the first time in the airport’s history the served number of passengers went over 1 million in a year’s time (1.06 million). In 2005, the airport served 1.9 million passengers, but in 2006 the number of passengers served reached 2.5 million. Moreover in 2007, the international airport “Rīga” served 3.16 million passengers, and in 2008 the passenger number reached 3.7 million. Despite the economic crisis of 2009, the airport served 4.07 million passengers (increase of 10.2%, in comparison to 2008), but in 2010 the number of passengers reached 4.66 million (increase of 14.5% in comparison to 2009).<sup>5</sup> In 2010, it was possible to directly (without

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.riga-airport.com/uploads/files/Statistika/6\\_RIX\\_Statistics%202020\\_Jun.pdf](https://www.riga-airport.com/uploads/files/Statistika/6_RIX_Statistics%202020_Jun.pdf).

changing to another flight) fly to 82 destinations from “Rīga” airport (International airport “Rīga”, 2010).

**Table 8. Share of mode of transportation used by residents of Latvia for outgoing trips 2001–2010, % from border crossings**

Year	Air transportation	Road transportation	Sea transportation	Railway transportation
2001	5	89	1	5
2002	7	86	2	5
2003	8	83	3	6
2004	10	82	3	5
2005	15	78	3	4
2006	18	76	2	4
2007	23	71	3	3
	Overnight travellers <sup>6</sup>			
2008	56	32	7	5
2009	56	30	9	5
2010	57	29	9	5

Source: table made by authors based on Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia data

When “Ryanair” entered the air transportation market as a low-cost airline with cheap ticket prices, aviation transport suddenly became an available commodity to a large part of the market. It grew the market, created new demand (even though in addition to the cheap ticket price people had extra expenses, such as, luggage fees, meals, the airport was often far away from the destination that created extra transportation expenses). It stimulated reorganisation of the existing price strategy, and later of the offered product strategy by competitive traditional airlines, because a fight for the market part in specific routes was started.

A notable contribution to traveller transportation in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was given by the airline “airBaltic”: in the first five years of the decade the number of transported passengers increased more than 4 times, in 2005 for the first time going over 1 million, but at the end of the decade in 2010, it went over 3 million or 3 206 735 passengers.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Due to changes in the methodology for compiling and presenting statistical data, the LR CSP shows the use of transport for only multi-day travellers from 2008 onwards.

<sup>7</sup> “airBaltic” unpublished information.

The eruption of *Eyja* volcano in Iceland in 2010 created challenges for Latvian travellers and air transportation providers alike. The eruption started on April 14, 2010 and lasted till the middle of June with giant ash clouds disrupting more 100 000 flights and creating chaos in the aviation transport of Europe, causing the air space to be closed, which had not happened since World War II. The ash cloud reached Latvia after 2 days causing to cancel all “airBaltic” flights and decreasing the International airport “Rīga” passenger count by 9.2% and the flight count by 5% (International airport Rīga, 2010). More than eight million travellers lived in the airports of Europe for days on end waiting for the renewal of air traffic.

Transition to digital airplane tickets created rapid change in travel possibilities, including passenger data digitalization. In the late 1990s, tickets still had to be printed on paper, data had to be manually written by hand, and people had to anticipate ticket delivery expenses and the time it takes. This system changed in the summer of 2008 when IATA (*International Air Transport Association*) decided to adopt digital airplane tickets. Digital airplane tickets could be reserved and paid for online, and since the confirmation is sent in a digital format to their e-mail, it is instant service and a comfortable way of making sure that all data is correct. Essentially, a digital airplane ticket is an entry in the airline’s computer system about the passenger and their chosen flight route.

The first airline in Latvia that changed to e-tickets was “British Airways”. It was a difficult time to be a pioneer because a lot of passengers were desperate when they did not have a paper ticket in their hand, they did not have something to report to the accounting, only the flight route or itinerary could be taken to the embassy. The online check-in was also pioneered by “British Airways”.

There was also a possibility to go abroad with a ferry. Since 2006, passenger transportation from Riga passenger port on the route Riga – Stockholm was carried out by the shipping company joint-stock company “TALLINK Group”. From Ventspils there were ferry companies “StenaLine” going to Nynäshamn in Sweden, Rostock and Travemünde in Germany. From Liepāja it was possible to go to Travemünde initially by the company “Scandlines”, later with “StenaLine” ferries.

In the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century (2001), from the 129 tourism companies that provided tourism services, 107 tourism companies serviced 137 701 travellers leaving Latvia. By the end of the decade, the total number of tourism companies increased more than two times – 284, but the number of serviced Latvian travellers going abroad using tourism company services increased to 298 645 people. Assuming that tourism company services are used by overnight travellers, in 2001 they were more



than 16% of the total Latvian travellers going abroad for multiple days. But at the end of the decade in 2010 – 18%; a slight increase can be seen, which means that in this time Latvian travellers still use tourism company services, even though more ways of organising travel themselves become available. As can be seen in Table 9, in one decade the most popular package travel destination list changed from northern countries to Turkey and Greece.

**Table 9. The most popular package travel destinations of Latvian residents (TOP 10) 2001–2010**

Year	2001		2005		2010	
	Country	Number of travellers	Country	Number of travellers	Country	Number of travellers
1.	Finland	10 597	Turkey	40 581	Turkey	41 990
2.	Sweden	10 183	Estonia	12 049	Estonia	15 599
3.	Turkey	9974	Lithuania	11 764	Lithuania	15 535
4.	Germany	8562	Finland	10 853	Finland	12 774
5.	Lithuania	7344	Italy	10 691	Italy	9542
6.	Italy	6275	Greece	10 174	Greece	9525
7.	France	5443	In France	10 031	In France	9221
8.	Spain	5430	United Kingdom	9869	United Kingdom	8279
9.	Estonia	4939	Germany	9714	Germany	7843
10.	United Kingdom	4826	Spain	9386	Spain	7681
	Total	128 369	Total	272 914	Total	298 645
	Africa	3369	Africa	27 057	Africa	34 762
	Asia	368	Asia	8261	Asia	11 225

Source: table made by authors based on Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia data

In the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century, the demand for charter flights rapidly increased – almost doubled in comparison to the previous years. The charter flights organized by tour operators did not significantly differ from one another, for example, in 2002, “Alida Tours”, “Begonija”, “Planēta”, “Novatour”, “Tez Tour” and “Juniversal” offered charter flight tours to Antalya and Marmaris (Turkey), select tour operators also organised charter flight tours to Crete (Greece), Barcelona (Spain); “Domina Travel Latvia” offered tours to Croatia, Tunis and Egypt (Dienas Bizness, 2002). This tendency explains the changes seen in the destination TOP 10 in favour of the destinations offered in the charter flights mentioned above.

With the beginning of a new century, two powerful tour operators entered the Latvian market – “Novatours” and “Tez Tour” (part of the international tourism holding “TEZ TOUR Group). In 2005, the first two online airplane ticket stores were created: *letasaviobiletes.lv* and *lidot.lv*, at first, they sold airline airplane tickets, but in time they broadened their offers with other services and the so-called dynamic packaging – the possibility to combine various necessary travel services. Later (2007), the airplane ticket reservation portal *aviokase.lv* was created.

After the first airplane ticket selling and comparing portals started to operate in Latvia, the next step was in 2007, when travel portal “Ceļojumu bode” entered the market, which offered a possibility to compare and purchase different tour operator trips. The portal had gathered over 20 tour operator and agency offers. When asked to characterise their clients, the portal emphasises that in 2010 and 10 years later not much has changed, still mostly it is being used by people aged 25–60. However, the travel experience has increased, Latvian travellers can better appreciate opportunities in one destination or the next.<sup>8</sup>

New topical tourism products and reservation platforms following the demand tendencies were created by a portion of tourism agencies, for example, *Baltijas SPA* hotel offer reservation platform “GoSpa”.

Tourism company observations indicate that 2008/2009 economic crisis brought change to traveller buying behaviour: “People chose trips one grade “lower” in this time than what they allowed themselves in the previous years. Even 30–40 EUR were of importance per person when choosing a trip. This kind of difference in prices could change a client’s choice in an instant in favour of another trip.” (Mackevičs un Veško, 2010).

## **Experienced travellers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Influence of monetary integration and sociocultural environment on tourism development in Latvia**

During the crisis period, it was observed that residents of Latvia chose travelling within Latvia rather than abroad. In the period 2010–2011, the number of local visitors in tourism housing in Latvia increased for more than 20% each year. This choice was enforced by the thin wallets so to say that limited the option of going on more expensive and longer trips, as well as the desire to “warm up” the Latvian economy by increasing income of local tourism housing and other leisure service providers. In 2011, as the income of households increased the flow of travellers going abroad started to renew (Rutkovska, 2013).

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<sup>8</sup> <http://m.travelnews.lv/?pid=108456>.

The spread of the Schengen zone continued to increase travel options abroad for Latvian residents. Now there are 26 Schengen zone member states with full rights: 22 EU member states and Norway, Iceland, Switzerland and Lichtenstein. Ireland has not signed the convention; however, it fulfils select convention conditions and manages the total travel space with United Kingdom. Bulgaria, Rumania and Cyprus are ready to join, but for various reasons the joining of these countries has been postponed. Croatia started their joining process in 2015. After the migration crisis and the increase of terrorist threats, multiple Schengen zone countries reintroduced control measures on their borders. These control measures were prolonged multiple times, the last one till April 30, 2018 in regards to France, and till May 12, 2018 in regards to Austria, Denmark, Germany, Sweden and Norway. In the middle of March 2020, almost all of the EU member states closed off their borders with other European countries due to the global *Covid-19* pandemic. Causing the Schengen zone, which had just celebrated its 35 anniversary, to practically stop functioning. However, there were a few countries that did not close off their inner borders, among them were Luxemburg, The Netherlands, Ireland, United Kingdom. After the European Commission asked to open the inner borders starting from June 15, 2020, many EU member states reopened their inner borders. *Covid-19* pandemic had a devastating impact on the flow of international tourism in general, as well as on Latvian travellers in their options to travel to other countries of the world.

Starting from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014 Latvia joined the Eurozone and became the 18<sup>th</sup> country to implement the Euro. Joining the Europe's joint currency made it easier to make financial transactions while travelling abroad, tourists did not lose money in commission fees while converting money in currency exchange points and while purchasing travel services on the internet. Euro also gave the possibility to exchange currency on the spot in the destination even when travelling outside the Eurozone countries.

The Latvian tourist travel flow is characterised by small wavelike fluctuations in the first half of the second decade of this century, minimum was reached in 2015. In the next four years a steady increase was seen in the number of travels abroad, reaching the maximum across all types in 2019 (see Table 10).

**Table 10. Outbound trips of residents of Latvia in 2011–2019**

Year	Border crossings outgoing tourist number (thousands)	Trips for several days (thousands)	Expenditures abroad (mil. Euro)	Average trip length	Average expenditures per day (Euro)	Average expenditures per day (Euro)
2011	1530	11987	7.8	446.8	292	37.3
2012	1397.5	8233.2	5.9	480.3	343.7	58.3
2013	1246.1	7951.1	6.4	481.3	386.2	60.5
2014	1362.1	8661.1	6.4	472.9	347.2	54.6
2015	1241.7	6702.9	5.4	447.0	360	66.7
2016	1249.8	7406.6	5.9	430.0	344	58
2017	1265.4	6837.4	5.4	522.1	412.6	76.4
2018	1368.4	7311.6	5.3	521.4	381	71.3
2019	1479.8	8927.5	6	741.8	501.3	83.1
Changes, %	-3.3	-25.6	-23.1	+66	+71.7	+122.8

Source: table made by authors based on Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia data

Small changes in this decade can also be seen in the destinations Latvian residents chose for overnight trips (see Table 11). In 2011, at the top of the list of the most popular countries were Germany, Lithuania, Sweden and Russia, attracting approximately 45% of the total Latvian travellers. In 2019, the most popular destinations Latvian residents travelled to were Lithuania, Estonia, Russia and Sweden, attracting slightly more than 35% of Latvian overnight travellers.

**Table 11. The most popular package travel destinations of Latvian residents (TOP 10) 2011–2019, % from total overnight travellers**

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Lithuania	11.4	10.9	9.9	11.4	13.8	17.0	12.1	11.5	11.2
Estonia	5.0	10.1	12.7	7.0	13.6	16.8	13.7	15.1	10.9
Russia	10.5	9.4	13.0	10.1	9.7	9.8	6.7	8.6	6.9
Sweden	10.5	8.3	7.8	6.3	6.0	5.2	6.3	7.3	6.8
Germany	13.0	9.6	7.6	7.0	5.8	6.7	11.7	5.8	6.6
United Kingdom	3.1	5.5	6.4	6.8	5.5	4.1	4.2	5.2	4.7
Belarus	1.4	5.6	4.4	4.9	3.4	3.1	6.0	...	5.3

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Italy	6.2	4.6	2.4	4.4	5.1	5.8	...	...	...
France	4.3	2.3	2.4	2.7	4.5	...	...	...	3.8
Poland	5.9	5.0	3.2	3.5	4.1	3.7	...	...	...

Source: table made by authors based on Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia data

Without doubt, air transportation remained the leader as a means of transport for overnight trips abroad, at the same time travelling by bus or ship decreased (see Table 12).

This tendency can be also seen in the data collected by the national airline “airBaltic” – in the time frame 2011–2019, the airline’s flight number grew from 55 319 to 62 748, but the number of serviced people grew from 3.35 million. to 5.05 million. Furthermore, the total number of passengers of the International airport “Rīga” went over 7.06 million at the end of 2018, in a year’s time increasing by 15.7%. In 2018, 19 airlines worked in airport “Rīga”. Almost 55% or 3.8 million passengers from the total passenger number was managed by the national airline “airBaltic”, 15% – Irish low-cost airline “Ryanair”, and 8.4% – Hungarian low-cost airline “Wizz Air”. In the summer flight season of 2018, “Rīga” offered their passengers the most extensive route net in the history of the airport – 100 destinations, but in winter season it was possible to go to 77 destinations from Riga. TOP 10 destinations of International airport “Rīga” in 2018 were London, Moscow, Helsinki, Oslo, Stockholm, Frankfurt, Berlin, Tallinn, Kiev and Copenhagen (Riga International Airport, 2018).

**Table 12.** Share of mode of transport used by residents of Latvia for outgoing trips 2011–2019, % from border crossings

Year	Airplane	Passenger car	Bus	Ship	Other
2011	57	29		9	5 (train)
2012	36	36.4	17.7	8.1	1.8 (train)
2013	38.1	34	17.8	7.5	2.4 (train)/ 0.2 (bicycle)
2014	51.6	25	12.3	5.7	3.6(train)/ 1.8 (bicycle)
2015	39	36	15.4	6.4	3.2
2016	36.8	35.5	17.6	6.8	3.3
2017	43.2	34.9	12.8	7	2.1
2018	46.1	34	11	7.2	1.7
2019	51	32.3	9.3	5.1	2.3

Source: table made by authors based on Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia data

In the first half of 2020, due to *Covid-19* pandemic international passenger transport dramatically decreased: 1.3 million people flew in and out of airport “Rīga”, which is 62.9% less compared to the first half of 2019. In the first 6 months of 2020, 206.9 thousand passengers came in and out of ports of Latvia with ferries, which is 57.2% less than the first half a year of 2019. Riga Passenger port’s turnover of passengers was 121.1 thousand, which is a 66.5% reduction (ferry transport in the route Riga – Stockholm was stopped, only allowing specific repatriation trips), Ventspils port – 72.2 thousand passengers, 31.7% reduction, but Liepāja port – 13.6 thousand passengers, 17.5% less than the previous year.

Despite the *Covid-19* pandemic, starting from June 26 until August 16 of 2020, for a time regular ferry transport was restarted in the route Riga – Helsinki because during that time Finland was in the so-called “green list” that could be visited without the 14 day self-isolation that was mandatory after returning from many other countries.

In the period from 2012 till 2019, Latvian resident one day trip number notably increased (see Table 13), from which almost 80% in 2012 and 95% in 2018 were trips to neighbouring countries Lithuania and Estonia.<sup>9</sup>

**Table 13. One day outgoing trips of residents of Latvia in 2012–2019**

Year	Trips, (thousands)	Expenses, (mill. Euro)	Average spending per day, (Euro)
2012	431.9	29.2	67.5
2013	530.5	45.9	86.6
2014	484.3	25.7	53.2
2015	477.5	23.7	49.7
2016	688.7	31.2	45.3
2017	790.2	43.7	55.3
2018	807.3	42.4	52.5
2019	904.3	57.7	63.8

Source: table made by authors based on Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia data

In contrast to overnight Latvian travellers, one day travellers more often chose to travel by motor vehicles: in 2019, 88% drove a car, but only 5.7% Latvian travellers took the bus.

In 2011, 275 tourism companies offered travel organisation services and served 302 845 Latvian travellers who went abroad. Starting from

<sup>9</sup> CSB unpublished data.

2014, only those tourism companies were counted in the official statistics that offered tourism operator services, hence in that year there were only 169 and they served 439 560 Latvian residents. In 2019, Latvia had 125 tourism operators that organised travel abroad for 335 651 Latvian travellers, which makes up almost 23% of all the trips made in that year.

Turkey was the most popular package travel destination in the last decade, in 2019 attracting one fifth of all the organised Latvian travellers.

**Table 14. The most popular package travel destinations for residents of Latvian (TOP 10) in 2011 –2019**

Year	2011		2015		2019	
	Country	Number of travellers	Country	Number of travellers	Country	Number of travellers
1.	Turkey	51 919	Turkey	50 929	Turkey	72 180
2.	Germany	18 404	Greece	28 149	Greece	33 533
3.	Spain	18 307	Estonia	22 039	Spain	21 414
4.	Greece	17 227	Spain	19 453	Lithuania	20 320
5.	Estonia	14 184	Lithuania	18 452	Estonia	18 924
6.	BENELUX	12 772	Italy	16 598	Bulgaria	16 172
7.	Italy	11 880	Bulgaria	15 088	Italy	14 978
8.	Sweden	10 356	Germany	14 715	Poland	6655
9.	Lithuania	9740	Czech Republic	12 200	Croatia	6528
10.	Finland	8736	Poland	10 313	Germany	5776
	<b>Total</b>	<b>302 845</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>348 159</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>335 651</b>
	Africa	16 045	Africa	26 637	Africa	38 881
	Asia	11 326	Asia	18 326	Asia	16 418

Source: table made by authors based on Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia data

The Institute of Finances of “Swedbank” did a study in 2018, which shows that in 2013 at least half of Latvian residents could afford at least one week long annual travel vacation, but in 2018 that proportion reached 67%.<sup>10</sup> Still, information about the pending travel is acquired from relatives, friends and acquaintances; however social media is gaining importance since it is used by every third traveller, as well as travel service provider websites. Latvian residents, who have travelled abroad in the last three years, as the most important factors that impacted their travel purchases

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.tvnet.lv/6763798/piecu-gadu-laika-latvija-strauji-audzis-iedzivotaju-skaitas-var-atlauties-celot>.

indicate price (71%) and reviews (61%) (PTAC research, 2018). Trips are being planned more in advance, and special pre-sales with reduced prices of tourism agencies and tour operators are used more often.<sup>11</sup>

21<sup>st</sup> century travellers increasingly expect more personal treatment and understanding of their needs from tourism agencies. Travellers want quality leisure filled with new experiences, and there is a growing tendency to travel in small interest groups.

Now that Latvian travellers have gained more travel experience, they are more ready to be surprised while travelling; every third person says<sup>12</sup> that they expect unplanned adventures and enjoy discovering attractions that have not been planned in advance. The trips of 21<sup>st</sup> century are becoming more topical, for example, travelling to film sets of specific movies.

Even though occasionally, a travel agency experiences bankruptcy, for example, "Prieks tūrē" and "Balta"; starting from 2019, travellers have better security because tourism agencies are licenced. Following tourism market development tendencies, travellers, who purchase package trips on the internet, are given the same level of security as those who buy package trips from travel agencies, furthermore, expanding traveller rights.

## Conclusion

Outbound tourism of Latvia in the last three decades of the post-Soviet period clearly show travel transformation in destination choices, travel length, transportation choices, as well as rapid change in the amount of acquired traveller experience. Latvian residents go into the 21<sup>st</sup> century as experienced tourists that can no longer be easily differentiated from tourists of other European countries.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://sputniknews.lv/Latvia/20170116/3660349/celosana-akcijas-turisma-agenturas.html>.

<sup>12</sup> [http://travelnews.lv/?pub\\_id=78683](http://travelnews.lv/?pub_id=78683).



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