

10 things you didn't know about Latvia

- 1 Latvia's National Day, 18 November, marks the date that the country declared itself independent from Soviet Russia in 1918.
- 2 In the space of just four weeks in 2004, Latvia became a member of both NATO and the European Union.
- 3 "Hello!" in Latvian is "Labdien!"
- 4 In the Latvian language, the stress is always on the first syllable.
- 5 According to the international media watchdog Reporters Without Borders, Latvia was ranked 16th out of 167 countries in the 2005 World Press Freedom Index. (Britain was ranked 24th.)
- 6 Latvia's national sports are basketball and ice hockey.
- 7 The philosopher and political thinker Sir Isaiah Berlin - one of the greatest scholars of the 20th century - was born in Riga, the capital of Latvia, in 1909.
- 8 Marian Pahars, the 'Latvian Michael Owen' who plays for Southampton FC, has had his name 'internationalised' by the English media: his real name is Marians.
- 9 Marija Naumova - popularly known as Marie N - won the 2002 Eurovision Song Contest for Latvia with *I Wanna*.
- 10 The Minox, a miniature camera that became one of the world's most widely used espionage tools, was invented by the Latvian engineer Walter Zapp in 1936.



Above: The flag of Latvia.

Below: Marie N, winner of the 2002 Eurovision Song Contest for Latvia.

