



# DIENVIDKURZEME

AIZPUTE DURBE GROBIŅA PĀVILOSTA PRIEKULE RUCAVA VAIŅODE





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Dace Gallite

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## Dienvidkurzeme municipality

Area: 3 591 km<sup>2</sup>

Density (2025): 9,5 iedz./km<sup>2</sup>

Center: Grobīna

Population (2025): 32 822

Total Area: 3 591,1 km<sup>2</sup>



## Dienvidkurzeme municipality coat of arms



# Dienvidkūrzeme

## SOMEWHAT HARSH, SOMEWHAT WILD, YET ENDLESSLY PRECIOUS AND BEAUTIFUL!

Dienvidkūrzeme is the largest municipality in Latvia, uniting the surrounding areas of Aizpute, Durbe, Grobina, Nīca, Pāvilosta, Priekule, Rucava, and Vaiņode. These are all great and proud historic regions, each with their own values in nature, culture, and people. Dienvidkūrzeme is where Latvia starts, it is where the winds take off along the 96-kilometer Baltic coast, parting the foamy waves of the sea. It is where trails, large

ancestors did, women baking fresh bread and serving rich butter. This might be where you discover why people from Kurzeme are so crazy that they would 'fly' out into the world from church rooftops and dig underground passages between the church and the pub. Both in towns and farmsteads, the slightly harsh, yet warm people of Dienvidkūrzeme will tell you their stories, their traditions, and proudly show all we have. And we have a lot indeed!

- The largest municipality of Latvia – Dienvidkūrzeme! The area of Dienvidkūrzeme is 3591 km<sup>2</sup>. After the Latvian municipal reform of 2021, a large, diverse, and remarkable municipality was formed from eight former municipalities.
- The longest Baltic Sea coastline of all Latvian municipalities – 96 km;
- We have the largest archeological ensemble in Latvia, the Grobiņa archeological ensemble;
- The oldest recorded settlement on the territory of Latvia – Seeburg, now Grobiņa – was mentioned in an annual chronicle in 654;
- The tallest dune in Latvia – the Pūsēni Hill (Dune) – 37 meters above sea level;
- The largest grey dune in Latvia – the Grey Dune of Pāvilosta – 42 ha;
- The farthest West point of Latvia – the Green Ray, located in Bernāti. It is marked by one of four stone symbols created in 1998 by sculptor Vilnis Titāns for the four farthest geographical points of the Republic of Latvia.
- The shortest river in Latvia – the Saka. It runs across the Piemare Plain for 6 km and enters the Baltic Sea next to Pāvilosta;
- The highest coastal bluff, the Strante-Ulmale Seashore Bluffs, reaches the height of 20 m and is eroded by the sea;
- The smallest town in Latvia, Durbe, with a little over 498 residents currently living here. Durbe was granted its town status in 1893;

and small, lead you across groves, forests, dunes, and hills. It is where rivers make turns to reveal secrets about the ways of the Vikings and Curonians, about dyeing folk costumes in devils' pots, of why the devil has scattered stones all around, all here, in Dienvidkūrzeme! What else can you find out here? The proud and loud singing across the hills, men smoking fish as our



• The only hornbeam stand in Latvia, the Lukne hornbeam stand, is located in the southern part of the Dunika Bog. It is the only area in Latvia where the hornbeam grows across an unmixed 11 ha plantation;

- One of the longest bog trails in the Baltics, the Dunika Bog Trail, was created by Latvijas Valsts Meži and crosses the Dunika Bog for 5 km, with several recreational spots;
- The tallest hill in Kurzeme, the Krievukalns (also called Krīv Kalns, Radiņkalns).

The highest point of the West Kursa Upland, located in the Embūte rural territory. The hill stands 190 meters above sea level;

- The largest Latvian clear spring, the Lielbāta spring, is the largest natural clear spring in Latvia and one among few springs in Northern Europe that carry biologically active and properly structured water to the surface. The largest man-made waterfall is next to the spring, in Embūte.

• The first airship launch site in Latvia, the Vaiņode Air Base. During the first period of state independence, this was one of the cradles of Latvian aviation, as in 1916 this was the place two hangars, Valter and Valhalla, were built as a base for giant airships that would cross Latvia. At the time,



Sandis Zuzāns

the Vaiņode Air Base became of the most prominent airship bases in Europe. In 1924, after the War of Independence, the airship hangars were taken down and their structures were used for constructing the Riga Central Market pavilions;

- The first attempt at flight in the Baltic region, the Icarus of Priekule. In 1670, the blacksmith of the Priekule Castle became determined to travel to the village of Skuodas by air. He departed from the globe on top of the church tower;
- The oldest church in Kurzeme, or the Kurzeme Dome Church in Aizpute, St. John's Church;
- One of the castles with the longest history of residency, the Livonian Order Castle in Aizpute, had residents until the 1980s.
- The Dienvidkūrzeme Municipality has the largest number of cup-marked stones. According to nature explorer and historian Andris Grīnbergs, 39 cup-marked stones have been discovered in the Dienvidkūrzeme municipality.
- European Union (EU)-protected local product, the white butter of Rucava;
- The bog closest to the sea along the Baltic coast, the Nida Bog. Between the villages of Nida and Pape, you will find a unique meeting point of the bog and the sea. This beach reveals the full beauty of its peat layer.



# Aizpute

## AND SURROUNDINGS

We're sure we'll see you again!

One of the oldest Latvian towns, Aizpute, stands in the Valley of the River Tebra, at the very top of a hill. Its streets go up and down past ancient buildings, through welcoming backyards, where each resident has a story to tell about their home and their yard. It is artistically fierce,

has its own distinct character and creative freedom. Even the passing of time here is different – a little slower, a little calmer.

The first records on the construction of the town were made in the fourteenth century. Most of the buildings in the historical center of Aizpute, its wooden architecture, the Aizpute Castle Manor building, synagogues, the Livonian Order Castle, St. John's Church, were built from the mid-13th century to the late 18th century. Even though Aizpute is ancient, its spirit is forever young, thanks to the enterprising people who live here and every historical house that tells an important story. Climb the Aizpute Water Tower and see everything from above, look where you want to get to, and go explore this charming little town. Cross the Stone Bridge, the oldest bridge across the Tebra River, and find Baron von Manteuffel's family coat of arms and the year in which the bridge was built in the central part of the parapet.

There are dozens of tales and legends about the town, but so far neither the underground passageways nor the crown of King Charles XII of Sweden buried on Church Hill have been found. Tales and legends

AIZPUTE



The town of Aizpute



Cirava Forest Park



Misiņkalns Nature Park



Apriķi Manor

surround the name of the town as well. In old times, the word 'Aizpute' was written as 'Asimputte', 'Āspute', 'Acciputten', 'Asenputt'. According to legend, the origin of the word is associated with blizzards ('putenis' in Latvian). Blizzards have protected the town from both soldiers and an unexpected estate manager. A more scientific explanation is that the name of the town is based on the ancient Curonian word 'pūte', which means 'dune'. That would make Aizpute the place behind the dune, behind the West Kursa Upland. Which version do you choose to believe?

Not only does Aizpute stand out among other towns of Kurzeme with its historical charm, but there are some gems of antiquity in its vicinity – the Kazdanga Palace and Manor complex, the Apriķi Manor, Cirava Palace with its beautiful Forest Park. These places invite you to take shorter and longer walks, feeling the breath of ancient times. The diversity of nature is rather inviting as well – extensive forests, abundant bodies of water fit for both fishing and boating, as well as manor parks with trails and a wide variety of plants.

Visit the charming and cozy Aizpute and enjoy the traditions, history and beautiful natural landscapes of the area.



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The Kazdanga Palace and Manor Complex

We are small, but strong!

# Durbe AND SURROUNDINGS

The town of Durbe and the surrounding area is the southern gem of the South Kurzeme Municipality. Durbe is the smallest town in Latvia with an ancient history and active people, surrounded by Tadaiķi, Dunalka, Vecpils, and Durbe rural territories. Nearby is

the Durbe Lake, beloved by anglers, the little River Trumpe, and scenic valleys in the Durbe-Vārtāja basin, Vecpils rural territory. To truly enjoy the beauty of antiquity and nature here, we invite you to take a walk around the historical center of Durbe, visit the castle ruins and the museum, where you will be welcomed with a thrilling story.

The beautiful landscapes around Durbe are best enjoyed from the Vecpils Castle Hill and the banks of Lake Durbe. The lake can provide peaceful relaxation on its banks, and fans of active recreation are welcome to enjoy fishing, boating, and swimming.

A major page in the history of thirteenth-century battles for the freedom of the Baltic tribes is linked to Durbe. One of the most legendary battles between the Samogitians, Curonians, and crusaders in Latvia – the Battle of Durbe – took place here on July 13, 1260. In 1919, the crossing of this river became fatal to General Rudiger von der Goltz, who was defeated by the Liepāja Latvian formation. In fact, anyone passing from Riga to Liepāja through Durbe has to cross the



Durbe Evangelical  
Lutheran Church



The ruins of the  
medieval castle of Durbe



The Durbe  
Nature Trail



The Durbe  
Antiquities Collection



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The Dižlāni Manor

Trumpe River across perhaps the oldest bridge in South Kurzeme. It was first mentioned in the chronicles of the thirteenth century.

The name of Vecpils is familiar to every rally fan as well as people interested in ancient places and their energy. The roads of Vecpils rural territory are popular with motorsports enthusiasts, and fans have enjoyed watching cars leap off various trampolines attempting to make thrilling turns, or failing and ending up in a nearby ditch. The symbolic rally cherry tree, planted in 2009, grows at the foot of Vecpils Castle Hill, where one of the most picturesque views of the area can be accessed. The Vecpils rural territory was home to the Palace of Mārkaiši (Merke), one of the strongest Curonian castles which was burned down by the Livonian Order in 1263 to retaliate for their loss in the Durbe Battle. The Vecpils St. Laurentius Roman Catholic Church is located nearby.

There are many mysteries here

# Grobiņa AND SURROUNDINGS

A curtain of fog rises across the Dzirnavas Pond, enveloping the Grobiņa Castle Hill in a veil of mystery. In the distance, one hears the sound of the sea, the voices of Vikings, and the whinnies of horses. The Tāsi Manor and the great stones in

Medze reveal their secrets. The voices of Bārta women resonate proudly through the fog. The mistletoe of Gavieze selects a particular tree as its home, for reasons known only to itself.

The surroundings of Grobiņa, full of mysticism and mysteries, are formed by the regions of Grobiņa, Bārta, Medze, and Gavieze. Each of them has its own secret, conceals its peculiar enigma. These parts are rich in historical and cultural evidence of different periods: ancient burial sites, hillforts, manors, great stones, and even Duke Jacob's temporary residence.

Friedrich, the Duke of Courland, granted Liepāja its city rights during his stay in the Grobiņa medieval castle. We have been the first at many things – the first school in Kurzeme was founded in Grobiņa, and the first Latvian witch was burned here too. The town is currently the administrative center of the South Kurzeme Municipality.

The Medze rural territory borders with the Baltic Sea and contains the Tāsi Lake; the Bārta rural territory is crossed by the Bārta River, as Grobiņa is crossed by the Ālānde. By the sea



The Grobiņa Town Promenade



The Memorial Rooms of Zenta Mauriņa



The Bārta Museum



Grobiņa Castle Hill and medieval castle



The stones of Medze rural territory

Zinta Dambe

in Medze rural territory, the recreation site Liegadi has been created, where you will find sea-washed pebbles and nature-made art. You can take a boat ride in the rivers and the lake to observe the most peculiar things. You can also hear the sound of the narrow-gauge train over the Bārta River where it once ran. Curonian Vikings once sailed the Ālānde River, Scandinavian settlements were formed here, with ancient tombs on its banks remaining in the ground to this day. If you cross the Dzirnavu Pond at midnight, you can hear Viking maidens crying as they wait for their beloved to return.

There are many mysteries here: those of Vikings, of Curonians, and the Devil who used to throw stones around!



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# Nīca AND SURROUNDINGS

Wherever you go, wonders and history are around every corner!

The great, proud and loud Nīca welcomes with leisurely relaxation on the Baltic coast, with a special cultural space, traditional heritage and the traditions of ancestors adapted to the present day – especially in fish smoking. The magnificent

Nīca folk costume is prominent and known in every region of Latvia, and its colorful skirt and dazzling crown never fail to make an impression.

This is a destination for any time of year for both romance seekers and family and friends' groups to enjoy the wilderness, traditions, and delicious dishes. The 24 km stretch of Baltic beach changes with each meter. Some have ancient posts for fishermen's boats, others are covered in pebbles, some with bright white seashells, but there is something unifying about them – the finest and most delicate sand in the world. A breathtaking view can be seen from the highest dune in Latvia, the Pūsēni Hill.

Not only is the seaside broad and untouched, but also the nature parks in Bernāti and Pape, both very different from each other. Cape Bernāti, surrounded by dunes and pines, can lead you closest to the sun at sunset, because this is the farthest western point of Latvia, marked by the Green Beam stone symbol. On the shore of Pape Lake in the village of Brušvīti, you



Bernāti  
Nature Park

Bārta  
River



Pūsēni  
Hill



Nīca Antiquities  
Collection



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will be watched by wild horses and taurus grazing on the natural floodplain meadows, which are very rare in Latvia.

History enthusiasts will be excited in Otānki as they listen to the stories of millers at the Dutch mill, the Prenclavu Windmill. This was the largest six-wing mill in Latvia and, until recently, it was powered by an electric motor. Jūrmalciems will provide a taste of a real fishermen's village – not only to smell it, but to actually taste it. In the Nīca Antiquities Collection, you must hear the story of the colorful local folk costume, which, according to tales, has its bright colors because people from all neighboring parishes each left a brushstroke. With this pride, they join the special Nīca long call, which is unique to this region alone.



Jūrmalciems

Summer capital of Latvia!

# Pāvilosta AND SURROUNDINGS

Pāvilosta and its surroundings are a magical place where time moves differently – it encourages full breaths, stopping and letting in the sun, the sea, and the surging winds. The small streets in this coastal town of the Baltic Sea lead along peaceful walks at all times of the year. The locals

are shaped by harsh winds, yet they are very welcoming. They will tell stories and treat you with delicious smoked fish, herbal tea, freshly baked bread, and perhaps a stiffer amber-infused drink.

The origins of Pāvilosta date back to 1879, when German Baron Otto Friedrich von Lilienfeld founded the port and town here, naming it after his brother, the governor of Kurzeme, Paul von Lilienfeld, as Pāvilosta (Paulshafen).

From a typical small town of a fishing port, it has grown into a favored destination for holidaymakers, as well as a stopping place for yachts and boats. The crashing of waves on the beach and the Saka River have created a place to enjoy all sorts of water activities – canoeing, sailing, boat trips, surfing, windsurfing. This truly is a paradise of untamed waves! Walking across the surrounding area or one of the sections of the Baltic Coastal Hiking Route trail will allow you to experience the charm and natural beauty of the town.

The adjacent Saka rural territory was first mentioned in 1230. Where two small rivers, the Durbe and the Tebra, meet, where the Saka River starts its journey, is the historic and legendary Saka center with hillforts of Curonians and knights, and the Sakasleja Lutheran Church.



Museum, promenade, and breakwaters in Pāvilosta



The story depository of Ziemupe - "Jūras māja"



The Saka River once had a port used by traders from Aizpute. The Saka rural territory is also crossed by the Riva River, the border river of the South Kurzeme Municipality, whose wild and pristine banks attract nature lovers and anglers alike.

The Saka rural territory is embellished by the Akmenrags Lighthouse, located in one of the most dangerous shipping spots of the entire Baltic Sea, and the Stante-Ulmale seashore bluffs, reaching the height of 16 meters.

Meanwhile, the untouched seashore of the Vērgale rural territory, much of which is included in the Ziemupe nature reserve, borders extensive forests and a peat bog in Ploce. A manor complex has been preserved and restored in the center of the Vērgale.

The village of Ziemupe formed in a place where the sea floor used to be. The sea retreated, providing the locals with a place to live. The seashore has remained primitive and untouched here, with picturesque landscapes, steep shores and small rivers flowing into the sea. Stubborn, yet endlessly warm-hearted people live here – no wonder even Santa Claus himself has chosen to make his home in Ziemupe – in Rūķupe!

Untamed nature, a raging sea, deep forests and sunny relaxation – this is what awaits everyone in this part of the country!



The Vērgale  
Manor Complex



Nature trail  
Rivas Loki



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Priekule - a place for joy!

# Priekule AND SURROUNDINGS

**P**riekule is a small town in the south-western part of Latvia, on the crossroads of seven major roads. The first impression of Priekule is related to the Icarus of Priekule, a courageous and locally respected blacksmith who made his own wings and flew off the tower of the Priekule Church.

The Swedish Gate has become the symbol of the town. It was built in the first half of the seventeenth century, and this state-recognized

architectural monument is still standing strong and bringing joy to locals and visitors alike.

The Priekule Manor Castle is also noteworthy, mostly due to its impressive architecture. It was, after all, created by the famous Paul Max Bertschy himself. The Castle currently hosts the Priekule Secondary School.

The surroundings of Priekule are rich with nature and nature parks. The Ruņupe Valley nature reserve is especially welcoming during the blooming season of hepaticas, and the Ruņa River is one of the fastest rivers in Latvia. Section No. 88 (Gramzda to Priekule) of the Forest Trail crosses the territory.

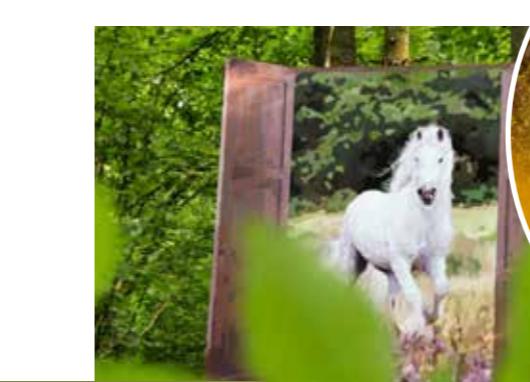
The Gramzda Forest Park was created as an easy walking trail with exciting sights – a nature cinema and large-format paintings, which means that you can enjoy not only the walk itself but also art along the trail. An important object, the Gate to Latvia, is located nearby, as Gramzda



Priekule manor complex



Gramzda  
Church



Gramzda  
Forest Park



The Kalēti Priediens  
Nature Park



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Priekule Lutheran  
Church and Icarus

is the first border town if you are entering Latvia from Lithuania. Along the road through Gramzda, the eye is drawn to the peculiarly-looking Gramzda Church, which is one of the few churches in modern Latvia that have been renovated, as if risen from the ashes.

Those who enjoy walking are especially welcome to explore the Aizvīki Nature Park and the Kalēti Priediens Nature Park. The park in Aizvīki is remarkable with its wood-carved fairytale characters, and the one in Kalēti provides several thematic trails and tests one's agility on an obstacle course.

Various collections of antiquities invite to discover fragments of history in Virga, Purmsāti, and other surrounding areas. Many archeological artifacts from the Curonians have been found here, and many historical facts significant to the Priekule region can be learned.

Excursions and horse-drawn carriage rides, clay workshops, daring adventures on the motorway, boating, and many other activities await you in Priekule and its surroundings!

# Rucava AND SURROUNDINGS

Visit, discover, and fall in love with the place where Latvia starts!

**R**ucava and the Dunika region are located in the south-west of Latvia, between the Baltic Sea and the Lithuanian border, marked by the bordering river – the Sventāja/Šventoji. Right here, at the sea-shore of the village Nida, we start the counting of border signs, so we can definitely call this the place where Latvia starts!

Rucava is famous for its rich heritage of traditional culture – the elaborate folk costume, the tradition of intricately

ornamented mittens, the special language of the locals, and the seaside fishing customs. The traditions live on, and many of them can still be observed and experienced nowadays, thanks to active locals who honor their roots. Here, one can always smell bread baked in a wood-fired oven and sometimes even hold a fresh loaf. Spread some white butter onto the bread and feel the taste of Rucava. Local craftsmen honor beekeeping traditions and produce various natural sweets from fruit, as well as make jewelry.

The village of Pape hides one of the gems of Latvian natural landscapes, the Pape Kōnu village, which, thanks to the tireless efforts of locals, continue historical customs in farmstead construction. Like a chest of treasures full of history artifacts, the region has one of the farmsteads of the Latvian Open-Air Museum, Vītolnieki farmstead, which protects a fragment of a thousand-year-old boat.

The beauty and serenity of the nature in these parts is equal to its traditional cultural heritage, and it welcomes guests in the Pape Nature Park with a large variety of migrating birds and wild herbivores in pastures. Here, along the shore, you can enjoy a variety of landscapes,

Dunika  
Bog Trail



The Rucava  
Arboretum



House of  
traditions "Zvanītāji"



The Rucava Evangelical  
Lutheran Church



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surprising with a short section of pebble beach, a diverse shoreline, varying heights of dunes, and the unique encounter of the Nida Bog and the sea on its shore that reveals an impressive layer of the bog, the trunks of century-old trees.

Early mornings in the Dunika Bog are breathtaking, with droplets of dew disappearing into spiderwebs and fog covering the bog lakes. Evenings here arrive with mysterious silence and a sense of serenity. This is where one of the longest Latvian and Baltic bog walking trails is located, which, on the end closest to Lithuania, crosses the Lukne hornbeam stand.

You can also enjoy the beauty of the River Bārta. Its part from the Lithuanian border, past the Bārtas Krasts glamping site and recreational complex Ods, is splendid with its pristine landscapes. Here lies an unforgettable remnant of the historic railroad from Rucava to Liepāja, the Vile Bridge.

Pape  
Kōnu village

This is where it all happens!

# Vaiņode AND SURROUNDINGS

Historical sources state that the village of Vaiņode started developing at the same time as the railroad between Liepāja and Romny was built, and it is true indeed! The train station is still there, just like the tracks from Vaiņode to Priekule,

even though no train has been in sight for over 20 years. We know of future plans to revive this railroad as a hiking trail. Another important place is the Vaiņode Air Base, which to this day has over 10 airplane hangars and over a kilometer of runway, which is highly appreciated by motorsports enthusiasts. In its time, this air base was one of the cradles of Latvian aviation – the first self-made gliders started their journeys right here.

Nearby, still in Vaiņode, the Lielbāta spring flows out of the ground. It is the largest clear spring in Latvia. It is worth visiting, as people have been praising its healing properties since ancient times! If you happen to be in Vaiņode in winter, you simply must go to the Volzbach Hill, where you will experience perhaps the most impressive ride off a hill in South Kurzeme.

A true gem of this region is Embūte – as one of the most beautiful places in Latvia, it has been chronicled by many travelers. Rugged regions are in perpetual contrast with deep ravines. The tree-covered hillforts tell no tales, unlike folk stories. One of the greatest minds of Latvian literature, the poet Rainis, was so inspired by this place that he wrote his masterpiece 'Indulis and Ārija'. In the Embūte Nature



The Embūte  
Nature Park

The Vaiņode  
Air Base

The natural clear  
spring of Lielbāta

Volzbach  
Hill

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The gate marks of the  
Embūte Old Valley –  
two Curonian swords

Park, you will find not only Indulis and Ārija themselves, but also the tallest hillfort in Kurzeme, Curonian swords, a hillfort spring, ruins of a church, and many other surprises. This area is excellent for enjoying walks, the beauty and calm of nature!

The people of the region are great craftsmen and entertainers, as there are many places for accommodation and recreation, and locals will be more than happy to show off their private collections of porcelain and sewing machines. Berries, fruit, and vegetables are grown here, and real country bread is baked. This is where it all happens!



## How to get?

### Airports:

- Airport "Liepāja" LPX (Latvia)
- Airport "Riga" RIX (Latvia)
- Airport "Palanga" PLQ (Lithuania)
- Airport "Vilnius" VNO (Lithuania)



### Bus Stations:

- Liepāja Bus Station
- Riga International Bus Station
- Ventspils Bus Station



### Ports:

- Yacht port in Pāvilosta (Latvia)
- Liepāja (Latvia)
- Ventspils (Latvia)
- Riga (Latvia)
- Klaipēda (Lithuania)



### Railway stations:

- Liepāja (Latvia)
- Riga (Latvia)
- Klaipēda (Lithuania)



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