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It means Mother Nature.
And it's true.

Hanging around



Latvia's State Forests and mammadaba welcome you!

THRILLER

SAPŅU ĶĒRĀJS*



LATVIA'S STATE FORESTS -
OPEN DAILY, NO ENTRANCE FEE

HE CATCHES WHAT WE
DO NOT DARE TO THINK

PRODUCER: LATVIA'S STATE FORESTS DIRECTOR: MAMMADABA STARRING: GREAT ANTLER STAG
SOUND: NIGHT SILENCE LIGHTS: MOON & STARS DRESS DESIGN: MAMMADABA

* DREAM CATCHER


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Dzīvo Latvijas valsts mežos


LATVIJAS VALSTS MEŽI
KOKSNE • STĀDI • ATPŪTA


DABAS
STEREO



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Here we

hammock!



It means Mother Nature.
And it's true.

It's no secret that Latvia has very extensive and beautiful forests, and it's also no secret that you're invited to make the most of them. However, that invitation usually focuses on getting very active and sporty: orienteering, long-distance hiking, mountain biking and canoeing, just to give a few examples.



I've got nothing against any of those activities but I generally prefer one that requires a bit less effort and a bit less equipment. The only effort required is less than one minute that it takes to set up a hammock and the only equipment you need is, well, the aforementioned hammock. After that, it's just a matter of lying back, breathing and thinking about whatever it is you want to think about. In most cases, that's nothing at all except where you are.

Hammocks have enjoyed something of a renaissance in recent years, and you can purchase everything from a simple back-garden example to the most advanced jungle-proof expedition technical all-seasons model. Both have their place, but for the purposes of this guide we shall be concentrating on what you can do with a simple, lightweight model that can fit into your pocket and be taken along just in case you decide to use it.

The remarkable thing is that once you get into the habit of carrying such a hammock with you, you invariably DO end up using it and as a result you experience sights, sounds, smells and thoughts that you would otherwise miss as you explore Latvia's State Forests. It might be a deer just a few metres away, wondering at the strange shape suspended between two trees, it might be a dragonfly like an emerald jewel sitting on the rope that holds your hammock in place and, for the more adventurous, it might be the sound of elk calling across a misty lake as you wake first thing in the morning after a night snug and secure in your hammock cocoon.

I experienced all these things and more in compiling this brief introduction to the wonders of hanging your hammock in Latvia's State Forests and I invite you to join me among the trees during 2021!



Mike Collier, journalist, writer

Top Tip

Plan your itinerary in advance by visiting the mammadaba website: www.mammadaba.lv/en



Tweet us:  @mammadaba





How this guide

works

This is not an exhaustive guide, neither to hammock camping nor to the places where you can pitch a hammock in Latvia's State Forests (LVM).

The law says you can venture onto LVM land wherever and whenever you like, provided you respect the basic rules that apply. LVM land is usually clearly marked by the LVM logo on a yellow background, by yellow paint bands on some trees at the edge of LVM land and occasionally by older signs in different styles.

Protected nature zones are off-limits and are signposted accordingly. Similarly, avoid areas where active logging operations are in progress for your own safety! Pay attention to warning signs and information boards that are frequently provided by LVM to help you get the most from your visit, particularly with regard to the risks posed by fire, areas with ticks and the problem of littering.



Hammock habits

This is a suggested checklist when setting up a hammock, whether it's for a few minutes or a multi-day stay.

- 1) *What is the prevailing wind direction?*
- 2) *Are these trees suitable (distance apart, trunk circumference, deep rooted, easily damaged etc.)?*
- 3) *Is the ground between the trees suitable (free of obstacles, sharp roots, animal burrows, insect nests etc.)?*
- 4) *Are there any potentially dangerous branches ('widowmakers') overhead?*
- 5) *Are there any animal trails running nearby that could pose a problem?*
- 6) *If I need to leave in a hurry, which direction and how far do I need to go?*
- 7) *If this proves unsuitable for any of the reasons above, is there an alternative site in the immediate vicinity?*

With that out of the way, let's get down to business. This guide aims to give examples of various sites made available to the public by LVM for recreational purposes. It is not a list of the most beautiful sites, nor of the most popular sites, though some of them are both. You'll also discover some places that few people know about, and hopefully you will be inspired to discover many more of your own, via the LVM interactive map at www.mammadaba.lv and the many printed publications available from LVM offices, tourist information points and elsewhere.

All the sites in this guide were visited by me personally during 2020. Some I stayed at overnight, others I stayed at for a few hours. At all of them I hung my hammock! LVM is constantly upgrading facilities and creating new locations, so it is possible that some of the details given here may be out of date by the time you 'sling your hook'!

360 degrees of hammock!

Here's a useful little exercise to try next time you set up your hammock, even if it is only for a few minutes. Usually, you hang your hammock facing some interesting or beautiful thing to look at: a lake, a cliff face, a viewpoint etc. By all means take in that view. Before you leave, swing to face the other way and try to give the same amount of attention to whatever is in the less 'glamorous' direction. It might be dense forest, it might be just a path or even a car park. It's amazing how often you will see just as much of interest in this direction, whether it's some mushrooms you didn't notice, an unusual tree, or even the arrival of someone interesting. Remember, your hammock offers you a 360 degree view, not just a 180 degree view!





common

10



Simple though a hammock is in principle, there are a few things to beware of. Perhaps surprisingly, falling out of your hammock is not as much of a hazard as you might think when you first get into one. Your body and subconscious mind are remarkably good at preventing you tumbling to the ground, even when you are asleep, and after just a little experience falling out becomes a fairly remote possibility.



mistakes

1. Hammock too high

This is perhaps the most common mistake. Unless there is a very good reason to hang your hammock high, you should have it so that it is barely off the ground when you are in it. An old saying goes: “Hang it only as high as you are prepared to fall!”

There is a use for high-tied hammocks though. If you plan to just stop for a few minutes and use your hammock as a comfy chair, attach the straps at around head height on trees that are closer together than you would usually select and use the resulting ‘saggy’ hammock as an armchair.

2. Lines too tight

Another common mistake novices make is to tie their hammock’s lines too taut between trees. While you want a ridge line above your hammock to be taut for a tarp or mosquito net, the hammock itself should ideally be hung with the lines to the tree at a 30 to 40 degree angle. As well as being more comfortable this greatly reduces the risk of being catapulted to the ground!



3. Lying parallel, not across hammock

The most useful hammock advice ever is this: don't lie parallel with the hammock itself, lie slightly across it. Put your head on one side of the tree it is nearest and your feet on the other side of the tree to which they are nearest. This increases the surface area of your body in contact with the hammock fabric, creating a flatter and more comfortable profile. You'll feel more like you are on a bed, not bent over in a sack of potatoes!

4. Drinking before bedtime

It's tempting to knock back a bottle of water just before bedtime to see you through the night. The only trouble is, this tends to result in you needing to get up and answer the call of nature in the pitch blackness. While it's certainly a good idea to get hydrated before bedtime, try to do so early enough so that you can take care of the necessary relief before curling up all cosy.

5. Cold back

It is almost inevitable that on anything other than a brief use of your hammock, you will get a cold back. This can be no laughing matter, particularly on an overnight camp when it can keep you awake for hours. Preparation is the key to combatting a cold back. Even the best sleeping bags will compress due to the weight of your body, so build up the thermal protective layer by using a ground pad or sleeping mat beneath you in the hammock (many expedition hammocks have a slot specially for this). Another measure is to sling a second hammock immediately beneath you, preferably with a blanket or other insulating material inside. Hang it in such a way that there is a small air gap between the two hammocks. This can be a remarkably effective technique.

6. Insect trouble

Insect repellent is a must, but if you intend to camp in Latvia's State Forests, it is highly recommended to take at least the sort of mosquito net that covers your head, and preferably one that can attach to a ridgeline and cover the whole hammock set-up. One thing you quickly notice as you lie in your hammock is that different insects like to appear at different times of day and night and each have their own ways of investigating your presence!

7. Smoke inhalation

An awareness of prevailing winds is a basic requirement of any woodsman or woodswoman, but in the deep forest, things like topography and associated temperature variations can also create microclimates that affect where you should place a campfire, smouldering anti-insect 'smudge pot' or citronella candles. You want to have any flames or smoke moving parallel to your hammock line, not towards it. Over the course of a night, smoke inhalation can creep up on you gradually and result in serious health issues in the morning.

8. Sharp objects

We've all done it. After a great night's sleep and full of desire to get into the new day you leap from your hammock... only to land on a sharp root, stump or – worse still – a piece of camp kitchenware left lying around. Always check the ground beneath your hammock carefully BEFORE pitching. If it is not possible to clear the whole area of hazards, place a handkerchief, a smooth rock or some other marker on the ground in a safe place as your designated 'landing zone'.

9. Night terrors

One of the great myths of the peace and quiet you seek in the forest is that there is peace and quiet in the forest at night. The forest is alive around the clock and leaving the familiar surroundings of your bedroom can actually be quite scary the first few times you try it as your brain will be unfamiliar with the overload of information provided by your senses.

Rustlings in the bushes, strange cries of owls, the creaking of pine trees... all of these can get your heart pounding. Indeed, I have even been kept awake by the unaccustomed sound of my own heartbeat! The great news is that this fear quickly subsides as you start to enjoy the wonders of the forest in all their diversity. The forest at night is a far safer place than the city streets. Before long, you will find your bedroom a rather boring and sterile place. Some say the real hallmark of a woodsman or woodswoman is the ability to get a good night's sleep.

10. Choosing the wrong tree

Maybe it is the perfect spot with the perfect view, but if it doesn't have the right trees to support your hammock, resist the temptation to put your hammock up. A few minutes of your pleasure do not justify doing permanent damage to a tree that is too small, or with roots too shallow, or with blossom that is shaken to the ground, all because you couldn't be bothered to find a better spot. If in doubt, ask each tree if it minds you hanging your hammock from its trunk. Quite often you'll sense an almost-audible "Maybe not". Is it the tree talking or your own inner common sense? Who cares, it's always good advice!

Bookmark it now!

This guide is best used in combination with the Latvia's State Forests website dedicated entirely to outdoor recreation www.mammadaba.lv. There you will see a map giving the precise location of each site as well as an archive of information about every place featured in this guide and plenty more besides, much of it provided in English as well as Latvian. You will also find contact details for the various LVM offices, resorts and museums. It's always useful to ring ahead to check that your destination is open.





Hammock

hacks

Here are a few tips and tricks that experience has taught me are useful for a comfy overnight stay.

Take a second hammock

Even the cheapest nylon hammock is a really useful extra. You can use it as an under-blanket, an improvised awning or tarp, an extra layer to completely enclose you or a storage area to keep your bags and boots off the ground. If you make friends along the way you can even offer a bed for the night!



Truckers' tree-huggers

Specially designed 'tree hugger' hammock straps are an excellent and easy way of hanging your hammock without damaging the tree or needing to learn knots, but they can be expensive. Cheap and safe alternatives are the luggage straps or trucker's straps you can buy from many hardware stores and gas stations. They are designed to cope with heavy loads and their wide surface area helps spread weight across the tree bark without damage. Some even have ratchet systems you can use, but these should always be backed up by secure stopper knots or hitches.

Sensory deprivation

If you find it hard to sleep at first in the forest, earplugs and facemasks like those commonly handed out on long-haul flights can help you drift off. At a push, a lightly-tied bandana can do the same.

Back basics

The importance of a pad or mat to keep your back warm cannot be over-stressed. While thermal expedition pads and inflatable or cell-constructed sleeping pads are warmest, they can be expensive and bulky. The main thing is to provide insulation for your head, neck and torso. It is less important to worry about the back of your legs. To this end a regular foam mat or yoga mat can be cut to size or even scored in the middle so that it can fold, providing a double layer and packing down to a small size.

Roughing it vs smoothing it

- *It's a common misconception that in order to spend time camping in the forest you need to be tough, rugged and carrying your bodyweight in army surplus gear. While some people get off on such activities, as a general rule, if you are uncomfortable, weighed down, cold and not enjoying yourself, you're either camping for the wrong reasons or – more likely – you're just not getting things quite right.*
- *There is no substitute for experience, so the novice camper should start with perhaps a half-day camp, then a full day camp, before launching into an overnight camp and then a multiple night camp. At each stage you will learn what you can do and what you can't, you will learn what particular style of camping setup suits you and you will learn which pieces of equipment are worth the weight of carrying them and which are not. Kit preferences vary from person to person and from season to season. It's always a good idea to do your first few overnights in the company of someone with experience before venturing out on your own. It will make you feel more secure in all sorts of ways, and you always learn from each other.*
- *If you do wind up heading out alone always make sure to tell someone else your plan and the time you expect to return home in case something unforeseen does occur.*





Pinstripe camping

I have developed a peculiar habit of wearing pinstriped suits and various other non-sportswear items when I camp in the forest. This is not because I have power lunches planned with the squirrels but because in second-hand clothes shops it's possible to find 100% wool trousers, jackets, jumpers, socks and more for very little money. I always favour natural fibres over artificial ones, and it's comfortable as well as practical to walk through the forest in cashmere, silk and mohair (plus rather dashing)!

Wool retains a great deal of its insulating properties even when wet, and despite all the sleeping bag ratings systems telling me my hi-tech expedition sleeping bag is the warmest one I possess, for some reason I am always more comfortable in an old Swedish duck down bag I found in a junk shop. You may be completely different. Only trial and error will tell, but it's certainly not necessary to spend a fortune on gear.

Heads and toes

If you tend to get cold feet when in a sleeping bag, always take two hats: one for your head and one for your feet! Woolly hats and berets both work well, but avoid anything with a brim or stiff lining. The storage bag for your sleeping bag can also be put over your feet to provide an extra layer of warmth.

High-visibility or low profile?

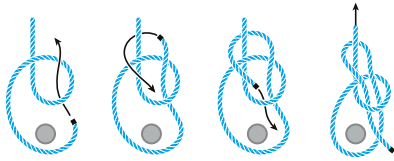
When choosing a hammock, and indeed any camping gear, it's worth considering whether your intention is to be very visible or to blend unobtrusively into the environment. Both have their pluses and minuses. High visibility gear will be easier to see from a distance and announces your presence, making it clear you are not trying to do anything covert. On the other hand, low-profile and camouflaged gear is less likely to attract attention but may give the impression you are a hunter or Rambo wannabe skulking around the woods for mysterious reasons.

If anyone does come to check up on you, a smile, an open attitude and a little hospitality is usually enough to dispel any suspicion.

Useful knots

It's possible to put a hammock securely in place without knowing a single knot if you are using a set of 'tree huggers' or a fastening system involving hooks or heavy-duty bungee cords. However, it's still useful to know a few very basic knots in case these go missing or fail you in your hour of need. With a length of rope and a knowledge of knots you can still hang a perfectly respectable hammock in minutes. The easiest way to learn these is by seeing them demonstrated in the flesh (or on YouTube) and then practising until you can tie them without thinking.

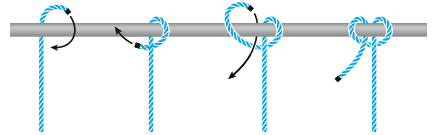
Bowline



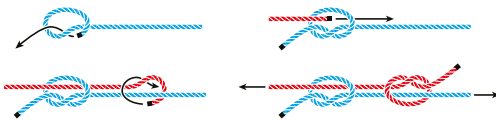
The most reliable and secure way of putting a loop in the end of a piece of rope. Innumerable uses, not least for passing the other end of the line through and around a tree. As the loop does not close on itself it's also worth learning as a rescue knot. A large loop in the end of the line can help pull someone from a lake or swamp.

Lark's head hitch

A very simple way of folding a line back on itself that is useful for numerous things such as attaching a ring or a toggle, both of which offer a dozen different applications for hanging a hammock or suspending your kit high and dry off the ground.



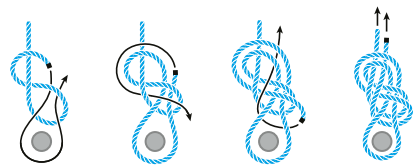
Fisherman's knot



If a line or rope snaps and you need to fix the two ends back together, or if one length of rope is not long enough and you need to attach another, this quick and secure knot (actually a 'bend' rather than a knot) will save the day.

Figure of eight knot

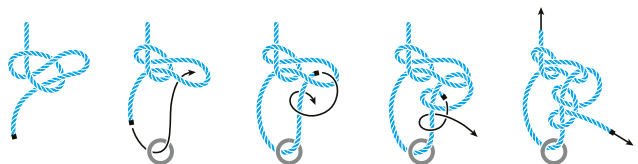
The next step up from a simple Overhand Knot, the Figure of Eight Knot looks better, is chunkier and is easier to undo. It makes a good stopper knot and can be tied in a 'bight' (a doubled length of rope) to produce a Figure of Eight Loop or can be tied in two pieces of rope together to join them (when it becomes a Figure of Eight Bend).



Trucker's hitch

This looks a lot more complicated than it actually is. There is no better way of getting a line taut than a

Trucker's Hitch. Effectively it is an instant pulley system capable of exerting great force. You will look an absolute boss on the trail when you have it in your repertoire.





Rīga – 121 km
Valmiera – 45 km
Jēkabpils – 196 km

57°40'45.5"N 24°55'39.9"E



LVM

Lake Purezers trail

Brīvēznieku pagasts, Alojas novads



Getting there

Around 90 minutes from Rīga by car. Take the A2 highway and then the P9 main road to Limbaži. Follow the signs towards Aloja on the P13. When you reach the village of Puikule, Purezers will be signposted, but it is a long, un-asphalted gravel track to get to the small car park, which is clearly signposted and has rubbish bins available.



Ratings (out of 10)

Accessibility - **5**

Facilities - **6**

Beauty - **8**

Wild food - **5**

Overnight - **4**



Stunningly beautiful, quiet, photogenic.



Difficult to reach without motor transport.

What's there

From the car park follow the signposted a boardwalk and forest path a few hundred metres to the circular lakeside trail which is about 3.5 kilometres long. There is a wooden platform at each end of the lake, and a place for a fire at the one closest to the start of the trail.

Despite the fairly short distance around the mirrored black surface of the lake, there are several varied landscapes to admire. Dwarf pines dominate one end with a swamp area further along and larger trees towards the end of the trail. A couple of small bridges are very picturesque. This is a delicate and unspoiled landscape with great diversity of flora and fauna, so please be especially careful not to leave litter or do damage to plants.

The presence of fishermen tells you some good fishing is possible here, and summer brings marvellous displays from dragonflies and damsel flies which hatch in their thousands.

Where to hammock

Avoid tying your hammock to the dwarf pines as their trunks and shallow roots could easily be damaged. In this part of the trail you will notice the lovely smell of wild rosemary (also called Labrador tea), but spending a night will likely see you wake with a nasty headache as even the smell can have psychoactive properties in large doses. The Vikings and ancient Latgalian used to add it to their beer to speed intoxication, but they too paid the price the next morning! There are good hammocking trees near the end of the trail, and Latvia's State Forests has extensive stands all around, so you might like to set up an overnight camp behind the car parking area.

What's nearby?

The city of Limbaži is well worth a visit. There's a museum of firefighting and as Limbaži is famous for its dairy products, the Limbažu Piens factory store is a good place for tasty and fresh milk, cheese and kefir. The town also boasts a large lake just a few hundred metres from the centre with a well-maintained beach and boats for hire.





2

LVM Recreation site at Spicu bridge

Valkas pagasts, Valkas novads



Rīga – 155 km
Rēzekne – 182 km
Valmiera – 45 km

57°40'22.4"N 25°59'50.1"E



Getting there

Spicu bridge is located about 13 kilometres south of the twin border towns of Valka (Latvia) and Valga (Estonia) on the P24 road from Smiltene. It's impossible to miss the large bridge over the River Gauja. The picnic site and car parking area is located on the north bank.

What's there

At first glance you might be forgiven for thinking this is private parkland, it is maintained so well by Latvia's State Forests. Don't worry, it's all at your disposal! There are three separate places to have a fire, several sets of benches and tables and a large central log cabin just in case the weather turns bad.

The main attraction is the River Gauja itself. This is a good place to fish and an excellent place to start a long-distance canoe trip. However, it's not as good a swimming spot as you might think, so this is not really advised and certainly not if you are on your own or have had any alcohol. Surrounding forests, which are vast, have a rich abundance of mushrooms and berries in season.

This place is not just about the river. A beautiful trail heading east from the bridge leads through the surrounding forest, which is typical of the northern Latvian-southern Estonian forests, dominated by birch and pine but with a fair few oaks, alders and spruce thrown in for good measure. On a 4-kilometre hike you can take in not only the Gauja but a string of lakes (Leišu, Zaju, Dzīļa, Dībeņa) several of which have their own picnic spots.

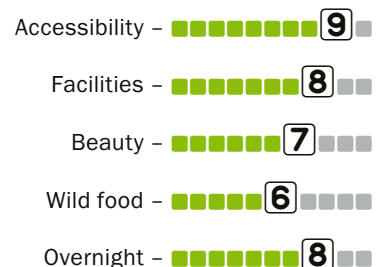
Where to hammock

The open nature of the Spicu bridge spot means you'll need to walk away from the neatly-mown grass into the trees to find a suitable spot, unless you happen to be lucky enough to have the log house to yourself. In summer (and even at other times), this can be a place for cars to congregate in the evening, so if solitude is your thing, somewhere along the lake trail might be a better bet.

What's nearby?

Valka-Valga is a good photo-opportunity as you stand with one leg in Latvia and one in Estonia, but a real must-visit location operated by Latvia's State Forests is not far away. Vijciems cone-drying kiln is just another 13 kilometres south and provides a fascinating experience showing how even now the seeds for new forest pine stands are obtained using equipment dating back more than a century.

Ratings (out of 10)



Spacious parking, easy to find, good base to explore widely



Summer barbeque parties can get noisy





Rīga – 79 km
Valmiera – 70 km
Daugavpils – 282 km

57°31'14.9"N 24°22'43.8"E



LVM Recreation site at the sea “Vasas”

Liepupe pagasts, Salacgrīvas novads



Getting there

From the main Rīga to Tallinn E67 highway, turn towards the coastal village of Tūja. Drive through the village, at which point the asphalt will give way to a gravel road. Pass a couple of campsites on the left and after about 2 kilometres turn left into LVM “Vasas” recreation area.

What's there

There is ample parking, several places for picnics with benches, tables and fire ranges, a dry toilet, waste bins and plus wooden steps leading straight down onto a magnificent beach.

Catch Vasas on the right day and you can barely believe your luck. This is without doubt one of the best camping and hammocking locations in Latvia. Mature pines gnarled and shaped by the sea wind allow you to sit looking out over the Baltic Sea from the top of sand dunes.

The water here is clean and gets deeper very gradually, making it a favourite for families with children on hot summer days, and the beach has wonderful fine sand. Rocks jutting from the waves add a bit of variety, while on windier or cooler days a bracing stroll either in the direction of Tūja or north towards an atmospheric former light beacon are a pleasant way to get some exercise.

Though this is an excellent place to hang out for most of the year, it is best avoided at midsummer when it is absolutely packed and, sadly, many of the revellers are less careful about the environment than visitors at the other times. There is a great deal of noise and trash. This does at least make you appreciate the efforts LVM makes to keep things tidy when it is all removed!



Where to hammock

If in a car you can park right by one of the picnic tables and set up your hammock on one of the dune-top pines. There are other opportunities for a beach camp too, but make sure you do not stray onto private land. If you want a few more facilities, the nearby campsites offer caravans and places to pitch a tent plus café facilities in season.

What's nearby?

Vasas would make an excellent stop on a coastal camping tour by bicycle or on foot. Tūja offers a couple of stores for groceries and a nice café/restaurant. To the north are the pretty little towns of Salacgrīva and Ainaži (with lots of beaches and sea meadows along the way) while to the south the Saulkrasti resort is regarded by many as preferable to the more famous Jūrmala.

Ratings (out of 10)

Accessibility - 7

Facilities - 7

Beauty - 9

Wild food - 4

Overnight - 8

Spacious

Avoid midsummer, can be windy and stormy





4

LVM Recreation site “Doles sala”

Salaspils pagasts, Salaspils novads



Rīga – 26 km
Ventspils – 214 km
Daugavpils – 211 km

56°51'56.5"N 24°12'05.8"E



Getting there

You can ride from central Rīga to Dole island in less than an hour by bicycle. Alternatively, take bus number 6317 and get off at the end of the line. Then you'll have a hike of about 2 kilometres to reach the "Doles sala" (Dole island) recreation spot. It's not clearly signposted and can easily be missed.

What's there

Most of the Latvia's State Forest recreation sites are a fair distance from Rīga, but this is a notable exception. Despite being able to see the spires of the Old Town from Dole island and hearing the rumble of traffic on the main routes into and out of the Latvian capital, you really do feel like you are out in the wilds.

The on-site facilities are pretty basic, amounting to a table, some benches and a fire pit. There's no dedicated parking, so while it is just about possible to squeeze a car on the side of the gravel track that leads to the site, it is not recommended, making this much better for cyclists.

It must be admitted that there is nothing particularly special about the site other than its location which makes it a good place for a single-night overnight stay after a day exploring the very odd atmosphere of Dole island, created in its present form by the building of the nearby Salaspils hydroelectric power station. LVM has extensive forests on the island and wandering through them you really do feel a thousand miles away from the bustle of city life. Again, cycling is the ideal way to explore here. There are two marked loops around the island of different lengths. You can see the details on the information board outside the museum beside the bus stop.

Some care needs to be taken to avoid private property, but the locals are not shy of erecting signs telling you to keep out whenever you might inadvertently set foot on their land.

Where to hammock

The actual recreation site is small and a little overgrown, though there are a few suitable trees around. It is probably a better bet to head into the wider LVM forest surrounding the site to find a more private and picturesque spot, but as the whole island is a nature reserve, the recreation area is the only real choice for an overnigher.

What's nearby?

The Museum of the Daugava on Dole island is well worth a visit. Located in a beautiful old building it has attractive parkland and tells the story of the people and crafts that flourished on the river from ancient times to the present day. Plant lovers will also want to pay a visit to the University of Latvia's botanical gardens close by in Salaspils.

Ratings (out of 10)



Close to central Rīga, reachable by bike



Tricky to find despite being close to road



5



Rīga – 238 km
Ventspils – 140 km
Daugavpils – 430 km

56°19'37.0"N 20°59'15.7"E



LVM Pūsēnu Hill

Nīcas pagasts, Nīcas novads



Getting there

Located in the far south-west corner of Latvia south of Liepāja and close to the Lithuanian border, these two sites lie to the north and south of the village of Jūrmalciems, respectively. Both are readily accessible from the main A11 highway and both are well signposted. Both sites have good car parking facilities. Public transport options are available using buses heading towards Nīca.

What's there

Pūsēnu Hill (dune) is a high and particularly beautiful dune of pure white sand located close to an astonishingly empty and vast stretch of beach. A well-maintained boardwalk leads to the top of the dune, which affords breath-taking views over the surrounding forest.

The large number of mushroom hunters and berry-pickers to be found in season tells you this is a particularly rich location for fans of wild food.

Ratings (out of 10)

Accessibility –  7 

Facilities –  7 

Beauty –  9 

Wild food –  8 

Overnight –  7 



Few other visitors, huge areas to explore



Changeable weather, strong winds

A few kilometres to the south is Pape Nature Park. Its most famous residents are wild ponies, but this is also a bird migration site of international importance and a wonderful view of the bird life can be had from a dedicated bird-watching tower. Binoculars are strongly recommended. The broad marsh and water meadows contrast with Pūsēnu hilly forests, giving two very different experiences even on a single day. While Pūsēnu dune has just a single table and bench right beside the car park, Pape Nature Park has several different picnic sites spread through its vast territory, complete with fire pits

Where to hammock

Both Pūsēnu Hill and Pape Nature Park are protected nature zones, so technically speaking they are not available for overnight camping. That said, no-one is likely to object if you stay close to the car parks or stay on the beach. Alternatively, there are large tracts of LVM forest linking the two nature reserves that do not fall within the nature reserves themselves, so these are certainly an option provided you don't mind heading inland a little. However, for the most part we'd recommend just using your hammock for the odd rest as you explore the area. Alternatively, for an overnighter with more facilities on hand, there are several well-equipped privately run camping sites in the area that will happily point you towards a few trees! Nīca boasts a high-class hotel/restaurant for those seeking a touch of luxury.

What's nearby?

Liepāja is Latvia's third-largest city and one that has a host of cultural and commercial attractions, including the spectacular "Lielais Dzintars" (Great Amber) concert hall. Jūrkalne offers a glimpse of a traditional fishing village, and for the actively-inclined this whole stretch of coast is popular with windsurfers and wakeboarders. If explore more sites in unspoiled nature, Latvia's State Forests has other nearby locations on the Bārta river and at Rucava pine forest that you will enjoy.





LVM

Dunika bog trail

Dunikas pagasts, Rucavas novads



Rīga – 226 km
Ventspils – 145 km
Daugavpils – 392 km

56°16'52.5"N 21°22'59.0"E



Getting there

They say the best things in life require a bit of extra effort, and that is certainly the case where Dunika bog trail is concerned. Its remote location close to the Lithuanian border makes just getting there a challenge, whichever direction you approach from. Above all, trust the LVM mammadaba map and signposts more than satellite navigation, which has a tendency to send you in an insane direction from the village of Dunika itself, which is not actually very close to the main access point and car park for this huge area of bogland.

What's there

Dunika bog has a claim to be the most beautiful place in Latvia, at least among those of us who value natural landscapes as highly as man-made architecture. From the parking lot, notable for one of very few large stands of beech trees in Latvia (this is about as far north as they grow) a long boardwalk suddenly carries you forward into a vast open space with occasional small pools, dwarf trees and an immense sky overhead.

It is difficult to communicate exactly what is so magical about Dunika. It is something to do with the distant sounds travelling over the bog, the whisper of the wind, the huge distances that play tricks with the eyes and the astonishing sense of solitude and timelessness. You just have to experience it.

At the start of the trail is a picnic area with a fire pit, and periodically along the trail are resting places. The trail is nearly five kilometres long and is not circular, so if you do the whole thing you will cover a not-inconsiderable distance. One word of warning: on no account walk off the boardwalk. As well as potentially doing damage to this fragile ecosystem, you are risking never being seen again: legend has it that there are even World War Two tanks swallowed up somewhere under the surface after they tried to cross Dunika.

The surrounding forests are very rich in wild edibles, as the large number of cars parked by the roadside with Lithuanian number plates will tell you! As long as they leave some for us, we don't mind too much.

Where to hammock

Strictly speaking you are not allowed to camp overnight on the trail itself, though people have been known to do so. The bog is a protected nature zone, but there are stands of LVM forest near the car park that are not within the protected zone so are available to use. This could be your only chance to sling your hammock between two beech trees in Latvia!

What's nearby?

About 5 kilometres north-east of Dunika bog are two separate recreation areas on the picturesque Barta river which are both maintained by Latvia's State Forests. Both are just off the V1219 road and offer good opportunities for fishing and wild food gathering, yet are little-known and little-visited. Check the mammadaba map to see their exact locations.

Ratings (out of 10)



Spectacular scenery, rare species, peace and quiet



Inaccessibility, little parking





Rīga – 164 km
 Rēzekne – 114 km
 Valmiera – 78 km

57°15'57.8"N 26°24'25.8"E



LVM Recreation site at Ādmiņu Lake

Lejasciema pagasts, Gulbenes novads



Getting there

On the P27 highway running between Smiltene and Gulbene, head north from the village of Velēna at the turning next to the impressive church. Cross a bridge over one of the least-known stretches of the River Gauja, admiring the picturesque view as you go that is reminiscent of John Constable's famous painting "The Haywain".



Stay on the dusty V411 for about 3 kilometres. It is incredibly easy to miss the very minor access trail to Ādmiņū Lake. The lake itself is not signposted at all, so look for the turning marked 'Dambakalna ceļš' then go in the opposite direction. A forest trail leads downhill to a parking area with a little wooden bridge leading the way to the lakeside less than 100 metres away.

What's there

This is a true hidden gem. There is some evidence it is known to fishermen, who might have left some foam to sit on, but very few people seem to know Ādmiņū Lake exists, let alone is so beautiful. There is an open log cabin with a table and benches to provide shelter (you can even sling your hammock quite easily between the logs) and a place for a fire, but the real star attraction is a recently-installed jetty with benches which is an idea place to fish, to relax or even a place to swim. If you have brought a boat, it can easily be launched and moored here, too.

LVM forest covers the southern edge of the lake, and while it is pleasant enough it is unexceptional and probably due for a little management. The wild food options are generally disappointing.

In contrast, Ādmiņū Lake itself has dense reed beds on many sides and covers a considerable 28 hectares despite being only slightly deeper than 2 metres at its deepest point. The mean depth is a mere 1.3 metres. Why do fishermen like it? The answer is simple: carp, perch, pike, roach, bream, rudd and tench all swim in its waters. Get the fire burning and you could go from catch to plate in a matter of minutes.

The jetty faces west, which means it also catches the evening light and if you are lucky will deliver a spectacular sunset.

Where to hammock

It is possible to suspend the hammock from the log construction or to find a place behind it in the surrounding forest, but you probably will not want to go far from the jetty and the cosy campfire.

What's nearby?

Just 1 kilometre away (this time take the 'Dambakalna ceļš' forest road) is a bench and table located next to a shady pool. The forest trails constructed by LVM all around this Dambakalna recreation site are very new and in excellent condition, making it very easy to explore them despite their relatively remote location. For true fans of solitude this is an excellent location and here the pine forest is more classically open and drier thanks to the sandy soil than around Ādmiņū Lake.

Ratings (out of 10)

Accessibility – 7

Facilities – 8

Beauty – 8

Wild food – 3

Overnight – 8



Fantastic fishing, spectacular sunsets



You might have to share the site with local fishermen!



8



LVM Recreation site at Kapu Lake &

LVM Recreation and Tourism Centre “Ezernieki”

“Ezernieki”, Indrānu pagasts
Lubānas novads, LV-4826, Latvia

☎ +371 26666090



Rīga – 193 km
Valmiera – 131 km
Daugavpils – 130 km

56°48'23.4"N 26°33'37.7"E



Getting there

Most people will approach via the city of Madona on the P84 highway before turning left onto the P82 towards Lubāna. After 5 kilometres, the Kapu Lake car park is on the left. If you go slightly too far you will see the lake itself and then immediately the signpost to the “Ezernieki” recreation centre.

What’s there

Here’s a challenge: how about spending a night in your hammock with minimal kit at LVM bare-bones Kapu Lake recreation area, and then following it up with a night at LVM “Ezernieki” recreation center... which just happens to be located a few metres away on the adjacent Salas Lake?

Kapu lake is a smallish lake of around 5.5 hectares but very picturesque and suitable for swimming and boating. LVM has provided some basic facilities including a table, bench, dry toilet, waste bins and fire pit as well as a spacious but cleverly hidden parking lot. There is a broad central area with cut grass, and trails leading off around the edge of the lake and into deep forests also managed by LVM that are good for mushrooms and even better for wild berries. These forests are also recommended for photographic nature safaris with deer and elk known to roam and frequently audible in the distance. Even when the main recreation area gets busy on a hot summer day, a few minutes’ walk is all it takes to find total solitude.

After a night in the wilderness you’ll want to freshen up. While the lake itself is one option, you’ve probably earned a bit of pampering. More than a decade ago, LVM established the “Ezernieki” recreation center right here as the gateway to Latgale region. A spacious house with two halls and a sauna in the basement, two smaller buildings for guests, sports pitches and camping places, it is a popular place for corporate events, seminars, competitions and weddings. On the adjacent Salas Lake you can fish and ride SUP boards, or paddle in boats and pedalos.

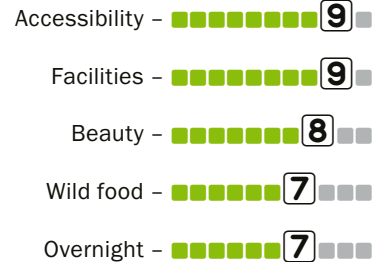
Where to hammock

It’s perfectly possible to sling your hammock right on the water’s edge to watch the mist gather over the water in the evening and then disperse in the morning sun. Alternatively, head deeper into the forest for a traditional woodsman’s type camp. If you’ve booked a room at “Ezernieki” they won’t begrudge you hanging your hammock wherever you want – though they will probably wonder why you don’t use your much more comfortable bed.

What’s nearby?

While the Gauja and Daugava rivers are well known for their beauty, the under-appreciated Aiviekste River has a very strong claim to the title of Latvia’s most picturesque waterway. At a long, sweeping bend called ‘Dzērves kakls’ (Crane’s neck) 10 kilometres further along the P82, LVM has installed benches, tables, a fire pit with cooking range and waste bins. The steep banks of the river and the many large, mature trees including some truly impressive oaks, allow you to hang your hammock literally over the waters flowing below. A little further afield is massive Lake Lubāns, Latvia’s largest lake.

Ratings (out of 10)



Shelter guaranteed if the weather turns bad



Limited parking, some users sadly leave litter behind





Rīga – 108 km
 Ventspils – 146 km
 Daugavpils – 285 km

56°31'29.7"N 22°54'06.8"E



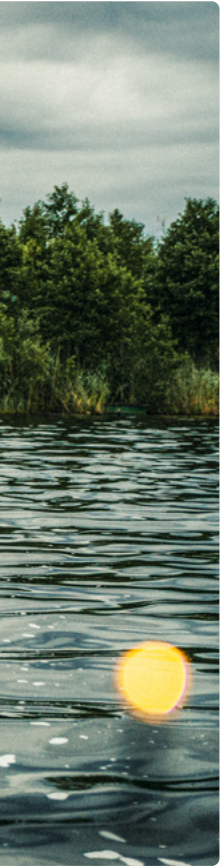
LVM

Lielaucis Lake

Lielaucis pagasts, Auces novads

 +371 26556771





Getting there

LVM unique recreation centre at Lielaucis Lake is easily accessible in the village of Lielaucis, which lies 2 kilometres east of the P104 road between Zebrene and Auce. There is ample parking in at the imposing Lielaucis Palace that overlooks this large lake, but that's not the main attraction. From the manor house, follow the straight boardwalk path directly to the lake where you'll find a surprise in the form of...

What's there

...a boat house and a series of charming floating cabins which can be rented for the night! The cabins are attached to lines which allow them to float out into the lake as far or near as required. There's even a little porch to these miniature arks, so you have the unique possibility to hang your hammock on water! There are a few trees right at the docking station which are hammock-friendly too, though it might seem a bit odd to hang a hammock there when even more comfortable accommodation is readily available.

This is another fishermen's paradise, and there are boats for hire at the docking station, too. The manor park and the tiny settlement of Lielaucis are worth a wander, too. Despite its name, Lielaucis (Great Auce or Big Auce) is much smaller than Auce itself, some 10 kilometres to the south. The 'big' moniker comes from the lake, which covers 376 hectares, though its deepest point is only 3.5 metres down and the mean depth is a modest 1.5 metres. Freshwater fish of all kinds abound but the local pike and eels are particularly prized for their delicious taste.

Where to hammock

This is a nature reserve, so only a temporary hammock hang is suitable (unless you're afloat for the night). Much of the immediate shoreline of the lake is extremely boggy and therefore not navigable on foot. However, if you are desperate for an overnighter, LVM has extensive holdings to the west and north west of the lake, just beyond the nature protection zone.

What's nearby?

Anyone with an interest in history, and particularly military history, should travel 4 kilometres north of Lake Lielaucis to Ile Partisan Bunker. A large underground bunker used by partisans from both Latvia and Lithuania resisting Soviet occupation has been carefully reconstructed thanks to support from Latvia's State Forests and is open to the public. Information boards tell the story of what unfolded here, a tale of tragic heroism. While it would not be appropriate to spend the night in the bunker itself, a night-time vigil at the adjacent area with benches and fire pit could be a respectful and thought-provoking experience.

Ratings (out of 10)

Accessibility - 8

Facilities - 8

Beauty - 8

Wild food - 8

Overnight - 4



An experience you are unlikely to get anywhere else, and for a very good price



The water can get choppy in high winds, booking ahead essential





LVM Recreation site at Pātraža Lake

Zeltiņu pagasts, Alūksnes novads



Rīga – 185 km
Rēzekne – 112 km
Valmiera – 98 km

57°20'19.0"N 26°43'23.8"E



Getting there

It's very easy to miss the turning for Pātraža lake, or to take one of the other nondescript forest tracks in the area, so keep your eyes peeled for a LVM sign saying 'Pātraža ceļš' on the P34 road between the villages of Zeltiņi and Lejasciems. It's approximately 24 kilometres west of the city of Alūksne. A gravel road leads into the forest, which has been cleared in places. When you reach a junction after, turn to the right and after a couple of hundred metres you'll suddenly find yourself right by the lake.

What's there

Pātraža Lake is a location with a real 'Wow!' factor, particularly as the approach to it does not promise anything particularly special. LVM has constructed a large, modern log structure with a roof that provides shelter, along with benches, fire pits, steps down to the lakeside and a good-sized wooden jetty suitable for fishing and mooring small boats.

The log shelter itself sits on top of a hill, giving you the feeling of being almost in a small, private fort with beautiful views down towards the lake. There's something of popular recent trend of glamour camping or 'glamping' about the place thanks to the attractive eco-design of the building, but in this case you are not paying through the nose for a fake experience of the wild, you are paying nothing at all for a genuine and authentic experience!

This is a fantastic base for all manner of outdoor activities. As well as fishing, swimming and mushrooming the surrounding gravel tracks have been very nicely laid by LVM and are excellent for mountain biking. This would be an excellent location for a weekend stay or even longer. The sunsets from the lakeside are absolutely spectacular. The lake itself is medium-sized by Latvian standards at just over 30 hectares and is rather shallow with a mean depth of little more than 1 metre. It's shaped a bit like a guitar, so as you proceed down the 'neck' it suddenly opens out and seems a lot larger than you thought. Fish here include bream, rudd, tench, pike and roach and locals say it's a relaxing place to cast a line rather than an exciting one.



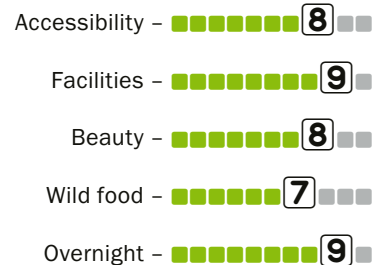
Where to hammock

There are nicely-spaced mature pines all around that are super for hammock camping, or you can sling your hammock inside the log shelter itself. LVM has extensive forests all around, but some sections are quite damp, so stick to higher ground if you feel the call of the wild.

What's nearby?

Alūksne is a pretty and interesting city with a couple of good museums, an imposing church, old castle ruins and a huge lake of its own that is famous for the quality of its fish. Closer still at Zeltiņi is an abandoned Soviet missile base that makes an interesting excursion.

Ratings (out of 10)



Shelter guaranteed if the weather turns bad



Limited parking, some users sadly leave litter behind





Latvia's State Forests Warning

DON'T LITTER!

YOU WILL TURN INTO A PIG!

