

Europe, July to September 2026

August 10, Liepaja, Latvia

Yesterday, the 9th, was a day at sea. There was a great lecture on board from someone who used to be an ambassador from India to NATO, the EU, and other countries over his career. Quite a good speaker who gave an extensive history of the Baltic states. For example, I never knew that, at one time, Lithuania was one of the biggest powers in Europe.

The speaker was great, but not the highlight of the day (for me). As there were no interesting bridge hands, there is nothing more to write about for this day.

August 10th, however, was a stop in Latvia. Perhaps we did not choose the most intriguing of many possible land tours. A trip to the capital, Riga, might have proved more interesting. We opted for Liepaja because that tour included a short organ concert. Liepaja has an organ that is effectively unmodified from the 1700s.



Here is the control panel, keyboard, or whatever name you want to give it. There are also two rows of pedals that duplicate one of the keyboard rows. It has 131 stops and over 7,000 pipes. I know what a pipe is. The stops are those buttons on the left and right that can be pushed in to stop. What do they stop? Good question. Something to do with the pipes, I bet.

Anyway, the organ was built in 1779 and expanded in 1885 to become (at that time) the largest organ in the world.

We were given a 15-minute concert playing 5 different pieces, mostly classical. Vicki recognized all of those. I recognized the final one which was from Phantom of the Opera. I did say “mostly” classical.

The city is small, but there were a few interesting points. One was around a circular rose garden. After Latvia, along with Lithuania and Estonia, gained independence from the USSR in 1991, many cities from around the world picked sister cities in the Baltic countries. Several selected

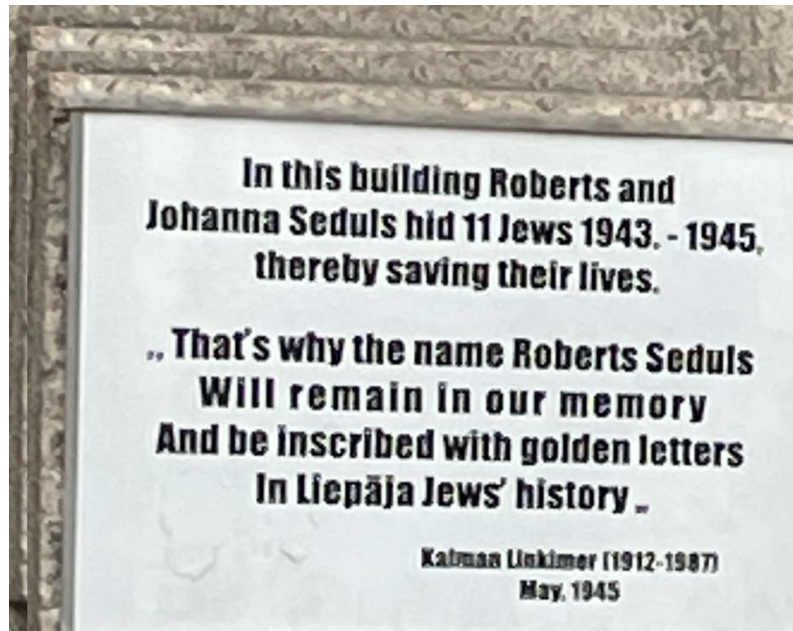


Liepaja, and those are represented by plaques around the garden. This one caught my eye. I hope you can read it; it's Bellevue Washington.

I'd like to digress a bit and mention something about the guide. He had the clearest pronunciation and most complete understanding of English of any of the guides. He is now an English teacher. But the formative years of his English education were spent watching Hollywood movies. I was told that many people in continental Europe speak English with an American accent, not British, because they learned to speak this way.

He had one story about a nickname for Liepaja. It is called "the city where the wind starts" because of breezes that flow between the sea and a local inland lake. It's also called the Windy City but, he said, not like Chicago which has a different reason. I am surprised he knew that. For those who don't, "Chicago is called the "Windy City" due to a 19th-century political insult. Rival journalists—especially in New York—used the term to mock local politicians as 'full of hot air' for boasting and aggressively lobbying to host the 1893 World's Fair."

Many cities in this part of Europe, and Liepaja is no exception, have a deep history covering the events during World War II. This is located in Liepaja.



The story here is about an event that very closely resembled the events around Anne Frank.

A book was written about this case called "Nineteen Months in a Cellar."



The downtown market in Liepaja is called “The Market Between Three Religions”. What three? There was, and still is, a Catholic church and a Lutheran church nearby. Before the war, there was also a synagogue. The locals erected this statue at the site.

The Jewish population at the time (about 7,000) were forced to dismantle the synagogue. There is still a Jewish population of slightly under 1,000 people.



It was raining the day we were on this tour, but the guide still took us to one of the main attractions, a very long beach on the Baltic Sea.

This is it. Do you notice any difference between it and a beach on the Pacific Ocean?

That's it for this town. Be sure to visit Liepaja in 2027 when the city will be one of two in Europe to be designated the "Capital of Culture". Information can be found [here](#).

I am writing this on August 11th when we were supposed to visit Visby. Visby is a Swedish island with a less protected harbor than other places we have stopped. The sea was too rough to secure the ship, so this port was skipped. The next is Helsinki on the 12th.

And, finally, as most of you probably and almost immediately figured out, there is no visible difference between a beach on the Baltic Sea and one on the Pacific.