

Riga City Council: hockey events bring 30,000 tourists to the city and a big boost for the economy

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[City and Community](#)

[Riga globally](#)

[Sports](#)



Riga's event of the year, the 2023 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship, ended last weekend. The Latvian national ice hockey team won bronze, making it a historic championship for all fans of the sport. More than 40,000 people gathered at the Freedom Monument for the national team welcoming event, organised by the Latvian Ice Hockey Federation and the Riga City Council.

The championship took place with the financial assistance of the Riga municipal government, the main goal being to bring the city back to life after years of pandemic and to use the championship as a means to support local tourism and hospitality businesses.

99 'Riga City Council's decision to actively support the championship in the capital of Latvia from the very beginning has certainly proved to be correct! Over its two weeks, local and international fans created in the city a real hockey festival. More than 30,000 people from abroad attended the games that took place in Riga, and were really visible not only in the arena, but also in the cafes and bars of the Old Town. In co-financing the championship, we sought to ensure that the entire amount we provided would be returned to the Riga treasury in the form of taxes. Early estimates of the economic benefits to the city suggest that this target will be met,' Mārtiņš Staķis, head of Riga City Council, said.

The 2023 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship was covered by more than 150 international media outlets and broadcast in over 70 countries. Events of this scale should be viewed in terms of not only the financial benefit to businesses, but also their contribution to boosting the visibility of Riga and Latvia, which can be as high as tens of millions of euros.

'We concluded the 2023 Ice Hockey World Championship with incredibly positive emotions. My sincere thanks go to all participants, sponsors, partners, and the International Ice Hockey Federation. Together, we were able to organise an unforgettable period of festivities in Latvia's capital. I am certain that this world championship will remain in our hearts and

memories for a very long time. I would also like to thank our national hockey team, our 2023 Dream Team,' Edgars Buncis, head of the team that organised the 2023 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship in Riga, said.

Of the 30,000 foreign hockey fans, the biggest numbers came from Switzerland, Czech Republic, and Slovakia. Although Group A matches took place in Tampere, Finland, a few hundred Finnish fans chose to enjoy the mood of hockey in Riga.

🗨️ 'Our information shows that 8000 Swiss fans came to the championship game between Switzerland and Canada. Never before have so many Swiss people been in Latvia at the same time! The common feeling shared by Swiss fans in informal conversations at the arena and in the Fan Zone was the joy for Latvian hospitality, food, beer, and pleasant weather. Among the fans were also members of the Swiss parliament, who had come to Riga for an international event and went to the hockey match at the arena straight from a meeting at the Small Guild, wearing the Swiss national hockey team's jerseys,' Martin Michelet, Swiss Ambassador to Latvia, said.

Hockey fans enjoyed the festive mood of the championship in the arena and in the large fan zone outside it, attracting more than 20,000 fans every day. A few popular entertainment venues in the Old Town used this opportunity to set up big screens in their outdoor terraces, with a large number of local and international hockey fans gathering every day for the broadcasts of the matches. The bars and entertainment venues were the biggest winners of the championship taking place in Riga:

'During the world championship, sales increased by an average of 30 to 50%. Bars and cafes with outdoor terraces achieved record profits compared to the same period in previous years,' Oskars Ikstens, chairman of the Latvian Association of Bars, said.

With the beginning of the tourist season and the top events that took place in Riga in May—the Rimi Riga Marathon and the Ice Hockey World Championship—hotel occupancy rates have also improved significantly. Early data show that in May, Riga's largest hotels had 50% more guests than in April, reaching pre-pandemic levels. According to booking platforms, a large number of hockey fans chose to stay in short-term rental flats.

The 2023 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship in Riga and Tampere took place on 12– 28 May. Early estimates show that hosting the championship in Riga raised extra 44 million euros for the economy.



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<https://www.riga.lv/en/article/riga-city-council-hockey-events-bring-30000-tourists-city-and-big-boost-economy>