

ABOUT THE AIRLINE

The airBaltic Corporation, originally created as an airline for business people flying to and from the Baltic region, was founded in 1995, owned by stock holders (present: 52.6% Latvian state, and Baltijas aviācijas sistēmas SIA, 47.2%).

In 2002, the carrier was restructured to ensure a low-cost structure and offer affordable point-to-point flights.

In June 2004, airBaltic opened a hub in Vilnius to start direct flights to a number of European destinations. airBaltic is the first airline in the Baltic states to take advantage of the opening of the aviation market following EU – accession and start operation from another state.

In 2008, airBaltic reinvented its business again to focus on connection flights for passengers transiting North Hub Riga to reach 80 destinations in Europe, Middle East and the CIS.

Now, October 1st, 2010 saw the 15th birthday of airBaltic. Fifteen years after the first flight with one of the two aircraft the airline then owned, the airline is now one of the largest in the region, and expects to close the year 2010 with 3 million passengers, 34 aircraft and 80 destinations.

“airBaltic’s achievements have earned global recognition and awards. airBaltic has previously received the title of Airline of the Year 2009/2010 (Gold Award) from the European Regions Airline Association. airBaltic is also the winner of Air Transport World Phoenix Award 2010 – a global recognition of excellence in restructuring business, an award that has the same meaning for airlines as the Oscar award for filmmakers. This week, airBaltic was acknowledged in the top league of LCCs as a trendsetter and was handed a special award by the Jury of the Budgies World Low Cost Airline Awards, recognising achievements of airBaltic as a hybrid airline,” airBaltic informs.

FLIGHT / AIR BALTIC AMS>RIX

AIRPORT

CHECK-IN

At Schiphol airport (AMS), AirBaltic is represented by Servisair. Unfortunately this doesn’t do justice to AirBaltic’s goals in terms of service, as we had the idea the ground crew was quite impatient and not interested. Not only towards passengers, but also towards colleagues.

At our moment of check-in, two desks were open, both for Economy Class. Once boarded we noticed there were only two people in business class, so it actually makes some sort of sense :-)

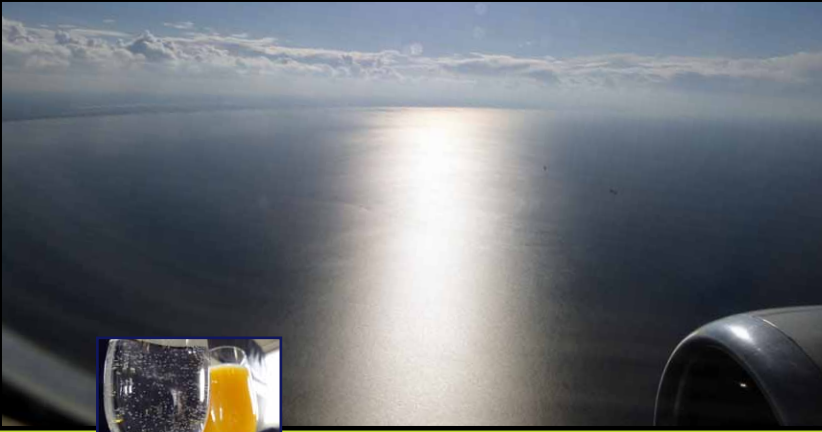
LOUNGE

At AMS, flying AirBaltic business class grants access to the Servisair lounge. A nice quiet spot amidst the heftics of an airport. Three areas not too close to one another, with your basic selection of newspapers, internet access, sodas, coffee and some alcohol, instant soups and crisps.

BOARDING

After a short wait in line at the gate, business class travelers were called to the front, being the first to go through the final checks - and be the first to wait in the next line (for actual boarding).





FLIGHT



IN-FLIGHT SERVICE: WELCOME DRINK

Not too long after boarding we got our welcome drinks - water and orange juice - from a choice of juice, water and bubbles.



IN-FLIGHT SERVICE: HOT MEAL

Not too long after departure we got another drink, we opted for beer and white wine. Both drinks came with cashews.

The F/A closed the curtain that separates the three business class rows from economy, and patiently asked us whether we would already like to have our lunches. After our "not yet, thank you" she quietly went to the front again. We had our hot lunch approx 1 hour into the flight.

A very tasty meal experience, made from fresh ingredients provided by local Latvian farmers. Starter: Rusona Martinelli cheese with cherry tomatoes and basil. Main course: Confit of duck with redcurrant sauce. Dessert: Bread and butter pudding with vanilla bean sauce. Choice of tea or coffee afterwards.

Service 9/10, Meals 8.5/10

Starter: Rusona Martinelli cheese with cherry tomatoes and basil

Main course: Confit of duck with redcurrant sauce.

Dessert: Bread and butter pudding with vanilla bean sauce.

Choice of tea or coffee afterwards.

EXTRAS

It's possible to extend your flight with a ride on government operated *BalticTaxi*. You can get a ride at a flat fee of €12, which grants you and a maximum of three other people a ride from anywhere in Riga to anywhere in Riga, including the airport. This service stands for high quality (we've never been in a taxi this clean) and is more reliable than the other taxi companies in Riga, which reportedly try to get some extra pocket money from tourists.

Second option is to use *BalticBike* (www.balticbike.lv). Throughout the city you will find dock stations from which you can use a bicycle for 0.70 Lat/hour (approx €1.00), or 6Lat (€9) for 24 hours.

Tickets (vouchers) for *BalticTaxi* can be purchased on the *AirBaltic* website, or go to www.baltictaxi.lv/en

To use the bikes you will need a phone and a credit card, on the spot. A computer voice will then ask you for a number you will find on the bike. After entering that number into your phone, you are given a code that will unlock the bicycle.



FLIGHT / AIR BALTIC RIX>AMS

AIRPORT

CHECK-IN

We experienced Riga airport as a quite small, noisy, hectic place. Eventhough this may sound familiar to those used to smaller airports, this felt different.

Our check-in at the airBaltic BusinessClass counter though was as smooth as it could be, and within 4-5 minutes everything was arranged. We were shown our way to the fast lane, avoiding the big groups we saw ahead of us.

LOUNGE

Almost hidden in a quiet corner right at the end of the tax free shopping area is the entrance to airBaltic's business lounge. An oasis of silence, once you step inside you will easily forget the noisy world outside.

An all but modest selection of pastry, cookies, bread, coffee, tea, sodas and alcoholic beverages makes your stay comfortable. Meanwhile it's your choice to do nothing, use one of the iMac computers or have something to read from the wide selection of international magazines and books provided.

BOARDING

The advantage of a smaller airport is the short distance to the gates. Transportation from the gates to the aircraft was done by bus, stuffed with all passengers from both flight classes.



Starter: Eggplant carpaccio

Hot entree: Slow roast lamb with curry chickpeas, cauliflowers and spinach

Dessert: Meringue with strawberry sauce

Service 7/10, Meals 7.5/10

FLIGHT

IN-FLIGHT SERVICE: WELCOME DRINK

Only minutes after we had taken our places, we got the welcome drinks. Approx 40 minutes into the flight we got the second round of drinks (juice).

IN-FLIGHT SERVICE: HOT MEAL

Not too long after the second round of drinks came the hot meal. As airBaltic changes the menu every four days, we now got the choice of lamb.

CONCLUSION

The flight AMS-RIX is relatively short (2 hours), and one *might* wonder if flying business class on such a short distance pays off anyway. But when you like the silence of the lounge, the easy check-in, the extra onboard services, and having your meals designed by Latvian top chef Mārtiņš Rītiņš, this has to be your choice - especially when you are flying one of AirBaltic's longhaul flights.

Overall airBaltic experience: 8.5/10



MĀRTIŅŠ RĪTIŅŠ / VINCENT'S

CATERING

MĀRTIŅŠ RĪTIŅŠ, VINCENT'S RESTAURANT

For the second consecutive year now, airBaltic's business class menus are designed by Mārtiņš Rītiņš, a flamboyant and charismatic chef who has been running his restaurant "Vincent's" in the heart of Riga, for already twenty years. Among his guests are Britain's Queen Elizabeth, the Emperor of Japan, George Bush, Joe Cocker, Elton John and BB King. He promotes the philosophy of *slow food*, an international movement striving to preserve traditional and regional cuisine, and promoting farming of plants, seeds and livestock characteristic of the local ecosystem.

Rītiņš has been asked to create airline meals for the airline before, but he then refused to do so, because of the bad reputation of airline food.

For each newly designed meal now, airBaltic's president will come over to the restaurant for a brainstorming session first. Afterwards, the design and photographs are sent to the airline. After the airline's approval, the meals are taken into production, and eventually there's a tasting.

It is not possible to make a great dish with inferior ingredients, so all ingredients have to be fresh. With the new winter season come new menus, with lots of seasonal ingredients: root vegetables, paprika, field tomatoes, pumpkins.

So even though most travels and airlines are "faster faster", Rītiņš "slower slower" food cooking philosophies prove that speed doesn't have to mean anything.



DOME HOTEL & SPA

HOTEL / DOME HOTEL & SPA, RIGA

ABOUT THE HOTEL

Ideally located in Riga's historic city centre, Dome Hotel is built inside a 400-year old architectural monument, renovated by Latvian designers, artists and masters in 2009, who preserved the 18th century wooden beams, stoves and staircase inside the building, and carefully renovated the original wall paintings. During the renovations, artefacts from 13th and 14th century have been found.

These items will be on display shortly, in the hotel's basement.

Dome Hotel opened in June 2009.

Inside the luxury boutique hotel you will find a well-balanced mix of historic heritage, modern interior design, and state-of-the-art technology - free wi-fi, for example.

The name of the hotel refers to the dome of the nearby cathedral, which was built 1211, boasting 124 registers and 6828 pipes.

Additional info from Wikipedia: It is often known in English as the Dome Cathedral, although it has no dome. The nickname comes from the Latvian and German words Dom(s) meaning "cathedral".

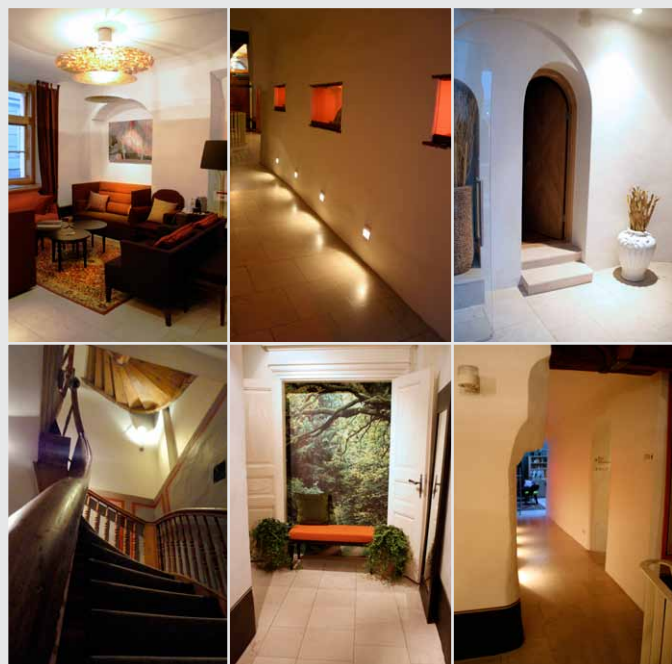
ROOMS

The hotel has 15 rooms, on 5 floors.

1. Dome room (€220)
2. Deluxe room (€250)
3. Deluxe spa (includes special spa treatment) (€270)
4. Suites (€290)
5. Deluxe suites (€360)

and with two Deluxe suites combined, there is the Grand Suite.

Room 402 / DELUXE ROOM



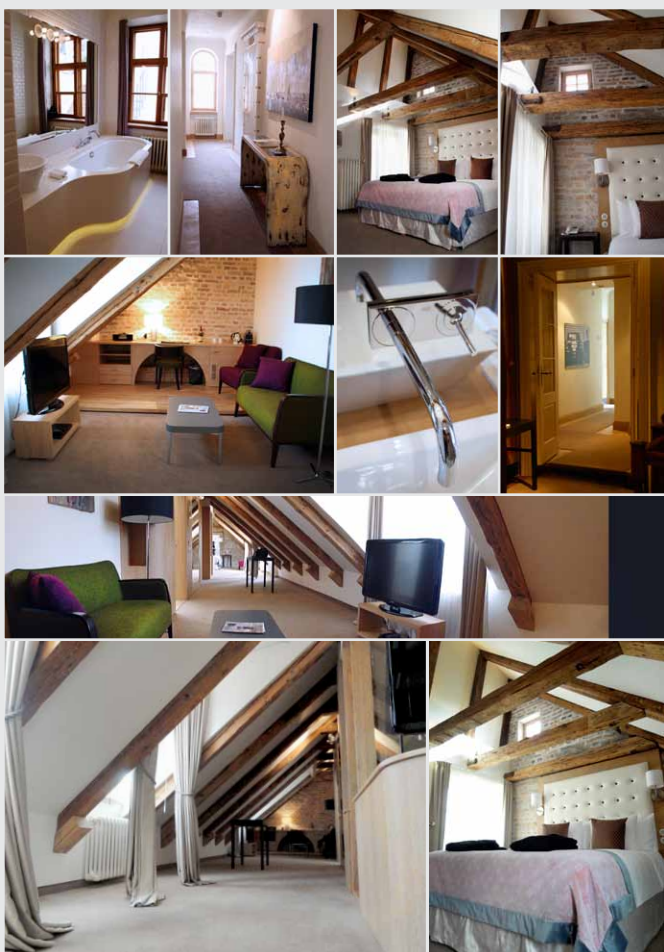
So the hotel is relatively "young" - as are its staff (average age 22-37). Though it's not the hotel's explicit policy to hire only young staff, they feel this is the best, given the facts that young staff means a lot of energy, creativity, efficiency, and the ability to feel customer's need.

Service and personal attention is one of the hotel's many qualities. The concierge service is available 24/7, which means you can have your flowers, souvenirs, event or theatre tickets arranged any time.

Room 304 / SUITE



Room 501 / DELUXE SUITE



SERVICES

Room Service, Meeting/Banquet Facilities, Airport Shuttle, Business Centre, Babysitting/Child Services, Laundry, Dry Cleaning, Barber/Beauty Shop, VIP Room Facilities, Breakfast in the Room, Ironing Ser-



vice, Bridal Suite, Currency Exchange, Souvenirs/Gift Shop, Shoe Shine, Packed Lunches, Car Hire, Tour Desk, Fax/Photocopying, Ticket Service.

SPA

Turkish steam bath Hammam, Finnish sauna, tropical rain shower... The hotel offers these spa services to all guests who want to 'recharge'. After the spa and massage it's your choice to either go up to your room and dress up for Riga's nightlife, or enjoy a perfect dinner in the hotel's restaurant, which is what we did.

RESTAURANT

Chef of the restaurant is Alexander Ziluk, formerly employed with *Vincent's restaurant*, run by Latvian top chef Mārtiņš Rītiņš. Ziluk has cooked dinners for NATO, Queen Elizabeth II, Boris Yeltsin. The restaurant's à la carte menus offers seasonal food, with a touch of Mediterranean accent and classical specials of the Baltic region.

Master chef Aleksander Ziluk uses bioproducts that are delivered by Latvian farmers especially for this restaurant.





DINNER

Starter: Carpaccio, smoked eel, fried cheese and berry sauce, with olives, tapenade and bread.

Main [1] Pastinac purée, asparagus, eggplant and sea bass. Wine - white: pouilly-fuissé

Main [2] Piglet, glazed with honey; carrots, pastinac purée, mushrooms. Wine - red: pinot noir

Dessert: layered wheatbread, mascarpone, blackberries, strawberries, sorbet and raspberry, with green nuts (pistachio?)

BREAKFAST

Besides a breakfast buffet (don't be misled by the word buffet - it's a *Dome Hotel style* buffet!) the restaurant offers a great choice of a la carte breakfasts. Whether you want eggs cooked, an omelette, tomato confit pie, bruschetta with fried egg, smoked salmon fillet or even oatmeal porridge, it's all there.

TERRACE

Overlooking the Riga Cathedral and Old Riga's roofs, you can enjoy dinner or drinks in a silent and wind-free environment, which is definitely not the case with many terraces in the surroundings.

SUMMARY

There is a new way to spell "great", and it's "d-o-m-e-h-o-t-e-l".

TARGET GROUP(S):

Business travelers, national and international, age range 40-50.

Russian 60%, Scandinavian 20%, and Baltics, NorthWestern Europeans and "the rest" for the remaining 20%.

Comments, positive: Everything!

Comments, negative: Zero !!

Would we visit again?:

Definitely

TSR rating:

5.5 out of 5

Pictures and report by Marco 't Hart, Conny Buying,

August/September 2010

DOMÉ HOTEL & SPA • 4 Miesnieku Street, Riga, LV-1050, Latvia • TEL: +371 67 509 010 • FAX: +371 67 509 009 • www.domehotel.lv

