

# 10 Latvian design companies to join EXPO 2020 as part of a trade mission

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From 24 to 29 November, 10 companies from Latvia are participating in the EXPO 2020 design trade mission in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The companies will be given a chance to meet potential business partners, visit other national exhibitions, participate in the Business Forum, and join the events of the Latvian National Day on 27 November.

The companies taking part in the trade mission are as follows: 'Ouzel Studio', 'Vaskala', 'Smubic', 'Nord Mood', 'Rīgas Krēslu fabrika', 'Studija Naturals', 'Isona', 'Yes', 'Ābols SUP' and 'Kasmo'.

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“The companies represented here are very diverse in terms of the field they are working in, their experience, and their revenue. Some of them have some business experience with the Middle East, as we have been present in Dubai during design fairs. We are reaching out to various potential partners and customers. For some companies, the main focus is on retail chains and design concept shops, but some have their eyes on hotels and spa facilities – business clients who demand textile products and furniture. The construction and interior design industries are growing rapidly in the Middle East, and for Latvian companies it is a good opportunity to find the right niche. Our companies can offer such products as developmental toys, footwear and accessories made out of a vegan leather alternative, as well as exclusive products like wooden SUP boards, a luxury item that is a bold move for the region,” said Zane Biteniece, Senior Project Manager at the Export Promotion Division of the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia (LIAA).

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In order to provide the companies with the best-targeted meetings with potential partners and not to rely on random luck, LIAA uses the services of a consultant that has offered each of the companies 20 contacts based on their interests and profiles, and each one has chosen six to continue their negotiations with.

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Aldis Circenis, Chairman of the Board of 'Rīgas Krēslu fabrika' admitted to not having too much experience in the Middle East, even though the company has seen good results during fairs in the previous years. It's remarkable that the furniture of 'Rīgas Krēslu fabrika' is part of the Latvian Pavilion at EXPO. “One of our main conclusions is that in this market, you have to be present. This is why this trade mission is so important in enabling us to meet potential business partners. We are not aiming at the consumer market, and what we will bring to the table will be interior design and comprehensive equipment solutions for public spaces, which is something we have been doing for many years. These are not individual design objects, but essentially full service. The most important part for us is to understand what to offer in this market. Arab countries span the entire Persian Gulf region, and each of them has its own differences that must be taken into account. The fact that the Latvian government has signed a cooperation agreement with Saudi Arabia doesn't mean that we have a key to all these markets. We must understand the way these people think what their taste is, and there is no point working in all directions at the same time,” said Aldis Circenis.

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The sustainable footwear fashion brand 'Tooche', which operates under 'Yes' SIA, has made a number of bold moves, expanding into distant markets, such as the US and Japan. The company sees the affluent Middle East as another attractive market, because the demand for sustainable products there is rising. “Sustainable fashion is our niche: we work with innovative materials, such as the Pinatex vegan leather alternative made out of pineapple leaves. In Dubai, interest in such a solution could be immense. However, our experience with non-European markets indicates the challenge of overcoming the difference in cultures and temperaments often make communication difficult. We must keep in mind that the business environment in the Middle East is very masculine, so it remains to be seen if our brand, represented by women, sees any success. Another well-known problem is logistics: it's always difficult to be working outside Europe, but nothing is impossible. EXPO is the biggest fair in the world, and even if we do not immediately find business partners, our company having an entry

about it on our resume will certainly open up other opportunities in the future,” said Mišela Šehurina, Designer at 'Tooche'.

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Meanwhile, the 'Family-scl' brand by 'Kasmo' SIA offers multifunctional furniture/a developmental toy for children. 'We want to use the trade mission as a means to promote our brand and find business partners in the Middle East, a market that we find interesting for its rapidly growing economy and technological progress. The biggest challenge will be to get potential partners interested and to convince them that we are reliable partners. What is important: we have a few advantages – the design of our furniture allows for very different uses, it is suitable for a variety of interior styles, and does not cut back on the play element the children love so much,' said Kaspars Naglis, Board Member of 'Family-scl'.

The EXPO 2020 world fair takes place from 1 October 2021 to 31 March 2022. Additional information about Latvia's participation in EXPO 2020 is available here: <https://www.expo2020.lv/>.

<https://www.liaa.gov.lv/en/article/10-latvian-design-companies-join-expo-2020-part-trade-mission>