Find your way to 

Lithuania

On the 1,000 Places to See Before You Die list
From the Old Town of Vilnius to the Curonian Spit

Wonders of wanders in the world of Art & Culture
From UNESCO Creative City of Design Kaunas to NYC-style graffiti in the regions

Balanced for your Instagram
Selfie at the Devil’s Museum or Selfie in a hot-air balloon over a medieval castle
Lithuania in brief

Official name: Republic of Lithuania  
Area: 65,200 km²  
Population: 2.8 million  
Currency: Euro  
Capital: Vilnius (population: 540,900)  
Official language: Lithuanian  
Form of government: Parliamentary democracy  
The majority of Lithuanians are Roman Catholics.  
The Republic of Lithuania is a member of the European Union, the Schengen Area, NATO and the OECD.  
Lithuania is in the Eastern European Time Zone.  
Average temperature: in July +20°C, in January -5°C  
Lithuania country code +370

Practical information

Transport
You can fly into Lithuania at three different cities: Vilnius (the capital), Kaunas and coastal Palanga.  
You can explore Lithuania on foot, by cycling, by driving, and by train or bus. You can find car rentals at the airports and in all the bigger cities.  
You can easily drive through Lithuania in one day. Whenever driving, turn on your headlights and fasten seat belts, including passengers in front and rear seats.  
Permitted blood alcohol level for drivers: 0.4%.  
Speed limits are 50 km/h in urban areas; 90 km/h on main roads; 110 km/h in winter and 130 km/h in summer on highways.

Wi-Fi
Lithuania is a country of fast internet and reliable mobile phone connections. We have some of the fastest public Wi-Fi connection speeds in the world. Wi-Fi access is widely available and free in shopping malls, restaurants, hotels, libraries, parks and Wi-Fi zones in the bigger cities.

Paying
Most shops, restaurants, hotels and other services accept international credit cards. There are plenty of ATMs (cash machines) in the cities, but take cash with you when travelling to the countryside.

Emergency services: 112

Tourist information

There are official Tourist Information Centres in all the bigger cities and district centres: www.lithuania.travel/en/offices
10 reasons: why Lithuania?

1. Want to hear one of the oldest Indo-European languages still in use today? We speak it, right here in Lithuania! Linguists continue to argue about which language is older, Lithuanian or Sanskrit. Really, decide for yourself. Ugnis – in Lithuanian, agnis – in Sanskrit, vėjas – in Lithuanian, vajus – in Sanskrit.

2. Never met a real live pagan? Plan a trip to Lithuania in summer, when there are Days of Living Archaeology and other festivals with pagan traditions such as Midsummer Night and Autumnal Equinox. The last Lithuanians for whom trees, fire and forest spirits had been important entities were finally baptised only in 1413, but the belief system of the Balts remains alive today, and mysterious rites continue to be held atop hill-forts, of which there are at least 850 in Lithuania.

3. Never made a snowman? Don’t know what a snow angel looks like? Come and see us in winter, when the forests are blanketed with snow and they look like a Christmas card. We have 4 seasons in Lithuania. And each season makes even us pause in wonder.

4. Can’t imagine a holiday without some time in a kayak or canoe? Or maybe you’ve never even sat in one? Lithuania is the right place to give it a try. There are 30,000 rivers and more than 5,000 lakes here. Pick up an oar and let’s go!

5. Know what it feels like to hold in your hands a bit of amber that had been on the bottom of the sea for thousands of years? The Baltic Sea is the home to 80 per cent of the world’s amber. And after a windy night along the seashore, you can pick up handfuls of amber. Or delight in an amber SPA procedure.

6. Want to hear the legend about how a young woman poured out a long band of sand from her apron to make the UNESCO World Heritage Site we call the Curonian Spit? A place of remarkable beauty, the Sahara of the Baltic has been included on the list of 1,000 places you have to see at some time during your life. Now would be a good time.

7. Ever taste bright pink cold soup? Yes, yes, Lithuanians make this. And 57 per cent of us cannot imagine a summer without chilled beet soup. Carlo Petrini, the founder of the International Slow Food Movement, has called chilled beet soup the most aesthetic cold soup in the world.

8. We are the undisputed champions of black rye bread. Nobody eats more black rye bread than we do; each of us eats 110 kilograms per year. You cannot imagine how many kinds of black rye bread you can find here! You’re invited not just to taste our bread, but to learn how to bake it (and while you’re at it, make some cheese or gather herbs in a meadow).

9. Want to meet real live NBA legends? Lithuania is the right place! It’s not so hard at a basketball game to ask for an autograph from Arvydas Sabonis, Šarūnas Jasikevičius, Linas Kleiza or Jonas Valančiūnas. Of course, only when they’re actually in Lithuania! And one more thing: about 100,000 Lithuanians play basketball from time to time.

10. To take a hot-air balloon ride is not such a big thing for us. Lithuania leads the world in the number of hot-air balloons per capita. In addition, Vilnius is one of just a small number of European capitals over which hot-air balloon flights are allowed. The view is simply enchanting. What are we waiting for?
First route

Far from the hustle and bustle of the city:
a castle straight out of your dreams, Cohen’s bus stop, the spring of beauty and the mushroom champion

Vilnius • Trakai • Birštonas • Marijampolė • Lazdijai • Druskininkai • Varėna • Vilnius

VILNIUS

A city living in the here and now. A city with fashion sense: moving away from Gothic, it put on Renaissance columns, Baroque ornamentation, flawless Classicism and then modernism, and now dares to try on a bit of postmodernism. All the while remaining friendly, open and creative, these days it sets out on a contemporary adventure and invites guests to come along together.

1. Ready to count the steps? You’ll have to climb 163 of them to reach the observation deck of the Church of Saint John the Baptist and Saint John the Apostle and Evangelist. Rising four centuries ago, the bell tower belonging to the architectural ensemble of Vilnius University is the tallest building in Old Town. A breath-taking view of the city’s hills and parks as well as the rooftops and landmarks of Old Town opens up, including Gediminas Castle Tower and the Hill of Three Crosses, seen on just about any postcard of Vilnius.

INTERESTING: In 2018, Vilnius was added to UNESCO’s World Heritage Journey

Romantic Europe. The spirit of romance as well as Romanticism in the city flows freely from an unexpected cocktail of architectural styles and a matrix of alleys and backstreets criss-crossed with cozy cafes, little restaurants and one-of-a-kind hotels in centuries-old buildings.

2. The historical capital of Lithuania is Trakai. And now shut your eyes tight. Because what you’re about to see is going to be hard to believe: the reflection of Trakai Island Castle in the calm waters of Lake Galvė. The former residence of Lithuania’s rulers, today the castle has become an extraordinary setting for the time-honoured crafts as well as concerts of modern music.

ROUTE: From Vilnius through the forests of Džukija to Marijampolė and back, 412 km (3 days)

TO TRY: soup made from Bolstus mushrooms, grated-potato dumplings (cepeliniai), buckwheat pastry

TO SEE: Mushroom Festival (September, Varėna)

EXPERIENCE: go up in a hot-air balloon over Vilnius, Kaunas, Birštonas
3. Taking the road through the rolling hills leading out of Trakai, the first thing to do when you get to Birštonas is to breathe in the refreshing pine-forest air. Tucked into the valley of the largest river in Lithuania, the old-growth forests surrounding Birštonas were once a hunting ground for the Grand Dukes of Lithuania and the Kings of Poland. Today the city is very much part of the movement toward quieter and greener cities. Relax in the only mineral-water evaporation tower in Lithuania, climb up Vytautas Hill, climb to the top of the Birštonas observation tower and take in a view that hasn’t changed for thousands of years, the panorama of the Nemunas loops. And only after that come all the other pleasures: mineral baths, massages and spa procedures using milk, honey and meadow herbs.

ADVICE: It’s best to get around Birštonas on a bicycle. You’ll see all the sights in a short time.

4. An artistic adventure lurks behind every corner in Marijampolė city. Set out on a fun quest: count the buildings on which celebrity artists have left their mark. Lithuanian artist Ray Moon Bartkus brings them together in the art symposium Malonny (Marijampolė – New York – London: migration of ideas). Sit down at a bus stop where Leonard Cohen awaits his trip, and tread softly at the Cat Courtyard; among the sculptures you sometimes meet their adorable feline counterparts.

5. Forests, fields and wildflower meadows roll across the Lazdijai landscape. You can take them in from the 24 hill-forts scattered across the area, or from the 15-m-tall observation tower, shaped like a reed bundle, located in the Metelis Regional Park. Look for information about the most interesting paths and lakeshores, and the European pond turtles who make this area their home, at the Metelis Regional Park Visitors Centre.

6. Take Lithuania as it is sometimes its most valuable jewels are hidden away in the furthest corners of the country. One of these is the exquisite beauty of the 17th century architectural ensemble of Liškiava Monastery, a destination for pilgrims and the devout as well as hand-holding romantics.

7. We can only guess where you might spend your weekends, but we definitely head for Druskininkai, especially when we’re feeling tired, or when we want a romantic weekend for two, or when we feel the need for some poetry or to hear the works of the world-famous composer and painter Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis. The town is charming in autumn. And warm in the mineral baths in winter. And enticing in the surrounding forests in summer. And alluring in spring, when half a million daffodils bloom during the Daffodil Blossom Festival.

8. Everything here is a bit different from what it should be. Sometimes, it seems like the dunes and pine forests of western Lithuania have travelled from the coast to the banks of our rivers, Nemunas and Merkys. A long time ago, the ice age in this area shaped a unique landscape, which is now preserved by Dzūkija National Park. And don’t be at all surprised to discover, in the middle of the forest on the Zackagiris nature trail, dunes overgrown with sedges, and next to the Uola River, so loved by kayak-born tourists, the spring called Uola’s Eye, bubbling with legendary powers.

9. Have you ever tried to walk across a spongy, springy moss-covered land? Have you ever looked across the green carpet of a forest strewn with bead-like cranberries? Have you ever heard what the birds say when people stay quiet? The Ėčpelės wetlands, consisting of bogs and swamps, are one of our greatest and best-protected treasures. Go to the top of the observation tower and see for yourself. Just one thing: register in advance for the walk, because the number of visitors is restricted.

10. There’s no reason to hide it: sometimes, we Lithuanians with our mushroom-hunting hobby look a little strange. “And just how do you recognise those mushrooms?”, they ask us. And we answer, it’s in our blood. Mushroom-hunters from all over Lithuania gather at the Varena Mushroom Festival every year at the end of September. And each one of them dreams of becoming the Mushroom-Hunting Champion. Want to give it a try?
Following your dreams:
a walk among the clouds, romantic star-gazing and
a nuclear power plant worth several Emmys

Vilnius • Rumšiškės • Kaunas • Ukmergė • Anykščiai • Rokiškis •
Zarasai • Ignalina • Vilnius

VILNIUS
The time-worn walls of Vilnius hide the most varied stories. Behind those walls, you can find a howling iron wolf, and a basilisk, half-snake, half-toad, living in a lair and killing with a mere glance, and the passionate love of Sigismund II Augustus, King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania, for Barbara Radziwiłł. The stories that have come down to us contribute to the special aura surrounding Vilnius, and to its spirit as a proud, ever-modern city hospitable to wanderers. A city which the artists Chaim Soutine and Jacques Lipchitz, the writer Romain Gary and Nobel laureate Czesław Miłosz all called home at one time or another could not be otherwise.

1. After you’ve listened to as many stories and legends about Vilnius as you can handle, after you’ve visited the charming Church of Saint Anne, after you’ve passed through all the courtyards of Old Town, you simply must drop in to see the old craft workshops. There you can relax as you put your fingers to work trying to create that which Vilnius has been proud of for a long time: a ceramic dish, a leather or amber accessory, a carved wooden distaff.

2. You have to visit Rumšiškės, the open-air museum of Lithuanian ethnic everyday life. If in just a few hours you want to get an idea not only of how Lithuanians lived, but also of how they had a good time. And believe us, they knew how to have a good time, singing, dancing, and driving winter out of the yard by wearing frightful Užgavėnės (Mardi Gras) masks. Go ahead, try it yourself!

ROUTE: From Vilnius to the nuclear power plant in Ignalina, 525 km
(5 days with a break in Anykščiai)

TO TRY: apple cheese, honey or fresh cucumber, white curd cheese

TO SEE: Saint Casimir’s Fair (March, Vilnius)

EXPERIENCE: Baking bread at Rumšiškės or Anykščiai

Perfect Instagram picture.
The nuclear power plant in which the miniseries Chernobyl was filmed.

#ignalina nuclearpowerplant
#visaginas #museum
#nuclearpowerplant
ADVICE: On Sundays in summer, leave your car at Patoalis and travel to Rumšiškės by motorboat.

3. Kaunas is a city in which there is a lot of everything. But let’s start with the musical steps at the Folk Music Branch of the Kaunas City Museum. The entire museum can make music. Pick up the kanklės (a plucked string instrument), a birbinytė (aerophone), a whistle or pan flute, and start playing. Or try your voice at multipart song karaoke (a polyphonic song based on a main text and a refrain). Not doing very well? Then just listen as Lithuanian performers blend folklore and contemporary music.

4. When Lithuanians love you, they really love you! They pooled their money and gave Užugiris Manor as a gift to the first President of the newly-independent Republic of Lithuania, Antanas Smetona. Aren’t you curious to see how a president lived in a manor of that time? And maybe you’d like to try his favourite dish: kugel, similar to potato casserole? If you’d like, the manor’s hostesses can teach you how to bake an extraordinary grated potato pie.

5. Anykščiai – a city of apples and apple-pickers, celebrating an apple festival each year. But while the apples in the city are still ripening, take a look at our largest boulder: Punktukas, or take a walk through the treetops. The winding treetop walking path in the Anykščiai pine-forest is the only such path in the Baltics. It gradually rises from the ground to a height of 21 metres, meandering 300 metres through the treetops. The pine forest scent is so refreshing that many would like to stay longer. So stay. You can refresh your tired legs at the nearby Horse Museum.

6. This is a city which awaits visitors with open window shutters. 252 have been painted in the most vivid of colours, given by artists as gifts to the city of Rokiškis. Having photographed the most picturesque, head toward the park and take in one of the most beautiful neo-Gothic churches in Lithuania along the way. Among the trees of the park, the extraordinarily graceful Rokiškis Manor simply dazzles.

DEGUSTATION: The surrounding area has long been known for cheese-making, so a short course will teach you the basics of fermenting milk and churning butter, and will show you how cheese was pressed and butter was churned, and of course include taste-testing.

7. Zarasai is our Switzerland, a land of forests and lakes. There are 296 lakes in the vicinity of Zarasai, and one of them is in the middle of the city itself. The first thing you have to do upon arrival is climb up to the 17-m-high circular observation deck. You won’t escape this area so easily: if water recreation isn’t your thing, there are many residents in and around the city who are devoted to their craft and will gladly teach you to carve wooden spoons, weave cloth, acquaint you with bees.

8. To kayak or raft from one lake to another and compete to see who can visit more lakes is almost a national sport. If you don’t have a lot of time, at least go fishing for a short while from a rowboat, try the local fish soup, climb to the top of Ledakalnis for the fantastic view of six lakes and drop in to see the Beekeeping Museum. The beekeepers have prepared as many as seven kinds of honey for you to try.

INTERESTING: The European Commission has decided that the happiest bees on the Old Continent live (where else?) in Lithuania.

9. When you have seen natural wonders to your heart’s content, head up to the Ignalina nuclear power plant. The station no longer performs its direct function of generating electricity, but it does receive visitors and reminds us all that nuclear energy is no laughing matter.

INTERESTING: The miniseries Chernobyl, winner of several Emmys and setter of digital viewership records, was filmed at the now-closed Ignalina nuclear power plant.

10. Since you’ve already touched the topic of science a bit, go further. The object in the village of Kūlionys, it appears, has just come down from the sky and landed. The structure resembling an alien spaceship houses the Lithuanian Museum of Ethno-cosmology. And it’s a good place for a romantic night of star-gazing.
Third route

Around Vilnius in a weekend:
the Devil's Pit: a castle from a real-life game of thrones and a sunrise atop five hill-forts

Vilnius - Kernavė - Trakai - Aukštadvaris - Medininkai - Vilnius

Varnikai Nature Trail

VILNIUS

If you want to get to know the hidden side of Vilnius, look for guides who can show you its lesser-known stories: a walk through the courtyards tucked around the city, a glance at its time-worn cemeteries, the sites where world-renowned artists created their works or the streets and lanes where Hollywood has made some of its biggest movies in recent years.

1. Meet the shortest night of the summer in the park surrounding the extraordinarily beautiful Verkiai Palace, which marks a sort of boundary between the city and the unspoiled nature surrounding it. Just a few steps and you escape the din and commotion of the city, heading into the forest of a landscape reserve. Walk among the oak trees, take in the architectural ensemble of the palace with its superb Classicist architecture and do everything that we do during the Midsummer Day festival: weave wreaths, search for the fern flower, jump over bonfires and, as the sun rises, roll around in the fresh dew.

INTERESTING: The ancient Lithuanian festival of the summer solstice, Rasa, has been celebrated since time immemorial. After the arrival of Christianity, the tradition of the Balts was equated with St John’s Day and renamed Joninės.

2. Vilnius is a green city. Right in the middle of the city, you can easily find yourself not only in the well-groomed Bernardine Park along the Vilnė River, but also in a genuine forest with one of the most striking views in Lithuania, Pukšioriai Outcrop. Follow the nature trail and you’ll find all kinds of unexpected things, including the remains of a cannon foundry, an old watermill and Pukšioriai hill-fort.

3. Just 25 kilometres from Vilnius, and you’ll find yourself in one of the oldest oak forests in Lithuania. Dūkštos oak forest has grown for centuries in an area of more than 300 hectares. Pick out the thickest oak tree you can find and give it a hug; even today, Lithuanians still believe in an oak tree’s miraculous powers. If you’re ready to stay up late into the night, head out on a night hike to see owls or bats.

4. An enormous wooden castle once stood atop Bradeiliškės hill-fort. A stand at the foot of the hill-fort gives you an idea of what the defensive complex looked like; take a deep breath and climb to the top of the 16-metre hill-fort. Take the Dūkšta trail to see the hill-fort’s enchanting surroundings.

ADVICE: it’s worth visiting the nearby Buivydių and Karnažnai hill-forts. They’re even better if you reach them on horseback.

5. Kernavė, an important seat of Baltic culture, has been listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Archaeologists consider it an especially rich site for understanding the Balts, and it is sometimes called the Troy of Lithuania. You won’t find another such complex of five hill-forts anywhere in the entire Baltic Sea region. Step back in time into a different world; visit during the International Festival of Experimental Archaeology or the Days of Live Archaeology festival.

6. Varnikai Nature Trail, located between Vilnius and Trakai, will take you through the Ilgėlis bog and meadows strewn with
small lakes, the depressions left behind as the last ice age ended. The Varnikai Botanical–Zoological Reserve opens up an incredible treasure trove for nature lovers: endangered or threatened plants, animals and mushrooms found in few other places in Lithuania.

7. Trakai Island Castle could certainly get a starring role in any prequel or sequel to Game of Thrones. If you haven’t seen Trakai castle, well, that means you haven’t seen Lithuania. When you return to the lakeshore from the island, visit the Museum of the Karaites. And when you get hungry, grab a kibinas or two, the traditional pastry of the Karaites, who have lived in Trakai for centuries, and have a picnic on a sailboat in the middle of the lake.

8. DEGUSTATION: In Trakai, you don’t just eat the kibinas; you can also learn to make the half-moon-shaped pastry with a filling of meat or curd cheese and bake it yourself.

Some say that a meteorite fell in the forest near Aukštaitvarkas, while others speak of an enormous dinosaur who, running to escape the advancing ice, left his footprint here. The 50-metre-deep funnel-shaped Devil’s Pit is one of the 100 most visited natural monuments in Europe. A path takes you around the site, and steps let you descend to the very bottom.

The oldest commercial routes in Lithuania went across the Medininkai Heights, in which the well-preserved Medininkai Castle stands today. It is one of the last walled castles not only in Lithuania, but also in Central and Eastern Europe. If you want to see how and with what Lithuanians fought, go inside the castle.

9. You’ve probably noticed that Lithuania doesn’t have any mountains. The highest hills you’ll find are near Medininkai. We call one of them Juozapins Hill, and the other is named for an ancient Lithuanian deity, Aukščias. We won’t bother saying how many metres above sea level they are; you’ll just laugh. Still, it’s worth visiting the area, even if it’s just to see the boulder at the top of Juozapins Hill bearing a monument to King Mindaugas and to take in the view from the observation tower atop Aukščias Hill, from which you can reassure yourself that Lithuania in fact doesn’t have any mountains.

ROUTE: The most noteworthy places around Vilnius, 223 km (2 days)

TO TRY: cabbage rolls (pazelandžiai), Karaites pastries (kibinas) and poppy-seed pastries (kūčiukai)

TO SEE: Days of Liv Archaeology in Kernave (June)

EXPERIENCE: jumping over Midsummer Night bonfires
Fourth route

Three capitals:
Art Deco, devils, a republic in the capital and a manor with a view of a castle on a lake

Kaunas • Vilnius • Trakai • Kaunas

KAUNAS

The green city dear to our heart. The two largest Lithuanian rivers, Nemunas and Neris, always brought to Kaunas, the temporary interwar capital of Lithuania, the refreshing wave of a new idea or an inspiring story. No matter what that new thing might have been: the 14th-century Kaunas Castle, the reflections of modern Europe in the city’s architecture, a square dedicated to the godfather of Fluxus art or the cultural and art festivals following one after another in the city.

1. We say that Kaunas is forever young. It’s the city where the dreams of young artists and architects came true after the First World War. Recognising the value of their creative work, UNESCO designated Kaunas a Creative City of Design in 2015, and it seemed to the British newspaper The Guardian that among European cities with distinctive Art Deco architecture, Kaunas is surpassed only by Paris. So it’s fitting that the city will become the 2022 European Capital of Culture.

2. The rope tram. That was what the city’s residents called the funicular, connecting the city’s centre and the surrounding neighbourhoods in the rapidly-developing interwar Kaunas. Today the funicular comes not only residents back and forth, but also romantically-inclined tourists. As well as those who resolve to enter one of the strangest museums in Europe, and the only such museum in the world, the Devils Museum.

3. Imagine that, if not for Kaunas, it’s doubtful the world would have the Fluxus movement. A founding member of the movement, Jurgis Maciulis, spent his childhood in Kaunas. And now his city is the first in the world to have a square into which, it is impossible to enter.

4. We insist you count up all the works of street art scattered across the city. Beginning with the Pink Elephant and ending with the Dadaistic Mona Lisa. The shared post of the residents of one courtyard comes to life in the exceptional Courtyard Gallery.

5. When you’ve had your fill of street art, you’ll find something a bit different at the M.K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art, which exhibits the works of our greatest artistic treasure, the composer and artist Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis. The great artist, it is said, painted music. And maybe that’s why today the world knows his works.
6. From Kaunas, it’ll take barely an hour by train to reach Vilnius. A city with an intoxicating cocktail of romantic Baroque, modest Classicism, modern art and the hipster way of life. From the seemingly-crocheted vaults of the Church of St Peter and St Paul, from the courtyards of one of the oldest universities in Eastern Europe, Vilnius University, to the hipster Vilnius station neighbourhood. As you make your way deeper into the Old Town, listen attentively to what the statues say. To be more precise: the talking statues can simply call you!

7. In springtime, on the third Sunday in May, music fills the air in the streets of Old Town in Vilnius. Classical and jazz, reggae and folk melodies, ballads, rock, rap, rave: everyone finds their own style. Street Music Day proclaims: music is a language spoken by all.

8. The Užupis neighbourhood is a republic of artists with its own constitution, president and traditions. The title of Montmartre of Vilnius fits, because you can never know who you’ll encounter here: a mermaid, an angel or a Baltic shaman. Pass through the border post, Tibet Square, read the Constitution in your own language and walk along the river; the place is always full of artists.

9. A half-hour, and you’re in Trakai. Go up in a hot-air balloon, see the impressive Trakai Island Castle and the 32 lakes in the vicinity.

HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE: After you come back to earth, immerse yourself in the meditation of handwork. Make some Baltic accessories to remind yourself of your trip to a land of extraordinary beauty.

10. Taking an even smaller train than you took from Vilnius, straight from the lakeshore you can reach a nearby architectural jewel, Užutrakis Manor, adorned in winter by romantic pines and in summer by rose blossoms. The view of Lake Galvė and the castle on the island from the manor’s terrace is simply enchanting.

ROUTE: A two-day trip by train from the temporary capital, Kaunas, to the present-day capital, Vilnius, and to the historical capital, Trakai.

TO TRY: Pink soup (saltibartisčiai), baked curd cheese (kėptas varikšės sūris), a dessert dish, “antvil” (skruzdžiukynas).

TO SEE: Christmas in Vilnius (End of November to January)

EXPERIENCE: Culture Night (June, Vilnius)
Lithuania’s resorts:
peace and quiet for the soul, views and landscapes for the eyes, rest and relaxation for the body and tubs full of mineral water.

Kaunas - Kačerginė - Kiliautuva - Zapyškis - Birštonas - Alytus - Druskininkai - Liškiava - Marcinkonys - Merkinė - Kaunas

KAUNAS
In Kaunas, city and nature merge. The confluence of the two largest Lithuanian rivers, the parks and the oak grove in the middle of the city, from which you can see the roofs of Old Town, and the nearby Juniper Valley invite you to start your trip here, where you can calm your spirit and refresh your body.

ROUTE: Along the Wellness Way from Kaunas to Druskininkai, 389 km (6 relaxing days)
TO TRY: dzūkūšos bandas (made of potatoes, baked on dried cabbage leaves in a brick oven), buckwheat pancakes, tree cake (sakotis)
TO SEE: the hot-air balloon championship in Brittonas (June)
EXPERIENCE: a mineral water bath at one of the sanatoria in Druskininkai

Find your way to Lithuania | 12
1. A long time ago, many wondered why build one of the most beautiful 17th-century Baroque ensembles not in the city, but in the forest, next to a river? The ensemble of the Pažaislis Monastery (originally built for the Camaldolese Order) is a masterpiece of Baroque architecture. Having refreshed your soul, continue on to Juniper Valley. The trail winding through the juniper trees will lead you to the shore of the Kaunas Reservoir.

2. After passing through the former summer-resorts of Kacerginė and Kulaiviuva, pause in Zapyskis, at the Church of St John the Baptist. Standing in the middle of an empty field, right next to the Nemunas River, the church is one of the country’s oldest, sometimes called the mother of Lithuania’s churches.

3. Birštonas became known in the middle of the 18th century as a special kind of resort. The fresh air, mineral water and therapeutic mud helped visitors regain their strength. You can try all of that today, too, as a therapeutic mud bath, in the “sea effect” air at the only mineral water evaporation tower in Lithuania. Boost your health with the mineral water at the Yellow Spring House. And don’t leave the city until you have gone to the top of the Birštonas observation tower, the tallest such tower in Lithuania, from which the twists and turns of the Nemunas loops can be seen.

4. The White Rose. Isn’t this a lovely name for a bridge? But the pedestrian and cyclist bridge in Alytus is listed in the book of Lithuanian records for something other than its name. Built over the Nemunas River on the remains of an old railway bridge, 260 metres long and 38.1 metres above the water, it is the tallest such pedestrian and cyclist bridge in the country.

5. To see a tremendous variety of birds and hear their polyphonic chorus, head for Žuvinčias. In spring, birds gather at Žuvinčias Lake to nest, and in autumn you can see a breath-taking sight: cranes assembling before beginning their migration to warmer lands. Even in winter, you can see wintering birds and discover animal tracks along the Žuvinčias Reserve nature trails. Žuvinčias is a wonderful nature school. Climb to the top of the observation tower or the bird-watching hide (tower) and feast your eyes on the surroundings. If your eyes aren’t so sharp, use the telescope.

6. Stay in Druskininkai a bit longer. Established in 1794, it is the oldest and largest resort in Lithuania. If the mineral springs and pools, therapeutic mud baths, salt and amber rooms, massages and walks in the fresh air among authentic wooden villas decorated with wood-carvings or in the Wellness Park are too sedate for you, marvel at the green panorama of the resort and riverbends.

7. Very near Druskininkai, yet another Baroque masterpiece awaits visitors, tucked away in the forest: the architectural ensemble of Liskiauva Monastery.

8. If you want to see how present-day Lithuanians get away from it all, or how the region’s residents, dzūkai, really lived, you absolutely must see the ethnographic villages in Dzūkija National Park, which don’t look very different from how they might have looked by the time of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Entering Marcinkonys, Zervynas or Musteika, you’ll feel like you’ve stepped back in time a few centuries. Ethnocultural traditions are preserved here like nowhere else.

9. In the village of Musteika, don’t miss the impressive tree-beekeeping museum and traditional beekeeping path. And it is utterly essential for you to figure out why the local dzūkai, tie crocheted aprons onto crosses in the area.

10. Even we Lithuanians consider the town of Merkinė to be a bit out of the ordinary. There’s a reason the visitors of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania liked to hunt in this area. The panorama that opens up from Merkinė hill-fort and the Merkinė observation tower will make you gasp away.

**ADVICE:** There are opportunities not just to taste Lithuanian tree-cake (šakotis), but also to help make it, rotating a split over a fire.

**HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE:** Several families of artists preserve and cultivate the tradition of black ceramics in Merkinė. Drop in and see one of them, and with your own hands make a nice memory to take with you when you go home.
Sixth route

On winding roads along the Nemunas River:
an underground printing press, a cable ferry
across the Nemunas and the Venice of Lithuania

Kaunas - Raudondvaris - Seredžius - Raudonė - Panemunė - Jurbarkas - Gelgaudiškis - Šilutė - Rusnė - Minija - Klaipėda - Kaunas

KAUNAS

If from Kaunas we follow the largest and longest river in Lithuania, the Nemunas, we reach the sea. In summer, when you want to move a little more slowly and enjoy the flowering meadows, the little beaches, the church steeples poking above the treetops and the walls of old castles, and wave to the boats passing by, choose one of the oldest roads in Lithuania, the road along the Nemunas. On one side, the picturesque Nemunas valley; on the other, hill-forts. The hardest part is looking around in time to catch the passing views!

1. **Kaunas Castle**, the oldest Lithuanian castle, tells the remarkable 14th century story of the conflict between the Lithuanians and the Teutonic Knights. It is even said that the city name **Kaunas** comes from the word **kausis**, “to fight”. Just a few steps from Kaunas Castle is the **Town Hall of Kaunas**, sometimes called the white swan. Its 53-metre-tall tower is the highest in Old Town.

2. For many years, nobody noticed that under a greenhouse filled with ripening tomatoes, the **secret printing house “ab”** had been set up, publishing patriotic and religious books during the late Soviet period, when such activity was prohibited. Today, the **Underground Museum** in Kaunas District lets you see the (literally and figuratively) underground printing house. It is on an international list of historically valuable Cold War equipment and sites.

3. Shaking off the Soviet-era dust, you’ll breathe easier at **Raudondvaris**. The architectural ensemble of the castle-man-

---

**ROUTE:** From Kaunas along the Nemunas River, 504 km (4 days)

**TO TRY:** vimba bream roasted on twigs over an open fire, mead, fish soup made with smoked fish.

**TO SEE:** Zobrinas (vimba bream festival) in Jurbarkas (May)

**EXPERIENCE:** sailing in a traditional flat-bottomed boat (kurunas)
or was once the stately count’s residence with enormous collections of paintings, works of art, rare books and exotic plants and animals. Today the Kaunas District Tourism Information Centre is located at the manor, along with an arts incubator. The Christmas celebrations will amaze you, when the manor’s Christmas tree lights up with glass mandarin oranges (the counts’ passion was citrus fruit, and soup made from oranges is prepared here even today), and music accompanies skaters at the outdoor ice skating rink.

**HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE:** At Christmas, you can see not just an exhibition of Christmas ornaments at Raudondvaris, but you can also make them yourself and decorate them with amber.

4. **Like we said before, just try to keep up with the passing views!** Stop in at Raudonė Castle and you’ll hear a most inspiring love story, beginning on the island of Madeira and continuing right here, next to the Nemunas. After burying his beautiful wife Sofija, her Portuguese husband José stayed in Lithuania, a land foreign yet so dear to him. Climb to the top of the 33.5-metre-tall observation tower of the castle and see the riverbanks and the distant horizons upon which the impassioned lovers also gazed.

5. **On the upper terrace of the right bank of the Nemunas,** you’ll see another marvel, a witness to important events in the history of our country: Panemunė Castle. Not built for defence, but for the life of high society, it conceals a story about a tunnel dug under the Nemunas, through which it was said to be able to cross over to Gelgaudiškis Manor on the left bank of the river. Locals say that Napoleon Bonaparte had even sent French troops to search for the tunnel.

6. **Nowadays, the Emperor of the French wouldn’t have to search for an underground crossing beneath the Nemunas,** he would just board a cable ferry and, having crossed the river, he would take a look at Gelgaudiškis Manor.

7. **As many as 11 buildings make up the Zypilai Manor ensemble.** The manor house, the former manor stables, barn and servants’ residence form one enormous cultural space, in which works of art, ceramics, music, folklore festivals and, of course, culinary heritage all find a place. Don’t even think about leaving here without having tried any ethnic dishes or beverages. Have you ever tasted acorn flour, carrot sweets or beer soup?

8. **We don’t doubt that when you enter the Šilutė area, it will seem to you that you’ve left Lithuania.** We call Šilutė the capital of Lithuania Minor. And what is Lithuania Minor, you ask? The Germans gave the name to this unique area. Even today, you can see the remaining traces of German culture in the area. Start to get to know the area at the Šilutė Museum, and continue your trip at the small-ship port, with a history dating back to before the First World War.

9. **These days, nobody uses the Uostadvaris Lighthouse for navigation, but it’s interesting to see this monument of the history of technology.** It’s even more fun to climb to the top and see with your own eyes from a height of 18 metres just how beautiful this land surrounded by water is, including Rusnė, the largest island in Lithuania, and the village of Minija.

10. **DEGUSTATION:** You won’t easily find tastier fish soup elsewhere in Lithuania than you will here. Because only here do you get fish straight from the river, from the Curonian Lagoon, and from the Baltic Sea, all mixed together in one pot, along with a smoldering tree branch and a drop or two of something a little stronger. Try it, you’ll see!

11. **The locals here need boats more than they need cars.** A boat lots you bring back groceries from the shop during the spring flood, visit your neighbours or cross the Curonian Lagoon to Nida. In the village of Minija, the river serves as the main street, and that’s why it’s called the Venice of Lithuania.
Northern Lithuania: manor culture, a hill with thousands of crosses, sinkhole ponds and the Lithuanian Mars

Šiauliai • Akmenė • Žagarė • Likėnai • Biržai • Kėdainiai • Radviliškis • Šiauliai

Šiauliai

If you go far into northern Lithuania, make sure to mark Šiauliai on your itinerary. We have long called it the City of the Sun, and we proudly tell the story of how the Samogitians and the Semigallians in this area crushed the Livonian Brothers of the Sword in the 13th century. A lot of years have passed since then, but the dignity and honour remained; today we admire the city’s exceptional architecture, the tallest sundial in Lithuania, the sculptures dotted across the city, the unexpected museums and an especially sacred place to which pilgrims travel from around the world. If you’d prefer not to go on foot, grab a bike and start pedalling. While you’re moving along, you’ll take the opportunity to remind you that bicycles have been manufactured in Šiauliai since 1948. Nowadays, they find buyers in 14 countries.

1. We already hinted at the Bicycle Museum in Šiauliai, but go ahead and keep gripping your bicycle’s handlebars as you proceed to visit other museums that you are unlikely to find elsewhere in your travels. There are 22 such museums in Šiauliai. Look up to see the city’s symbol, a sculpture of a golden archer atop a 17-metre-tall column. The column supporting the archer also serves as the axis of a sundial.

2. But the most important site that in this century has made Šiauliai famous is the Hill of Crosses. Pilgrims, including the Pope, come to the hill, covered with larger and smaller crosses, many come to say a prayer, others to express their gratitude for a request fulfilled, while still others come to see one of the stranger places in the world. The hill with more than 200,000 crosses has been called one of the most sacred as well as creepiest places in the world.

HANDBS-ON EXPERIENCE: In Lithuania, candles, like crosses, are a sacred thing. At the Šiauliai Aušros Museum, you can learn to make candles yourself. From yellow, purely natural, fragrant wax.

3. The Lithuanian version of the Martian Chronicles and a landscape absolutely alien to Lithuania, which, unintended by the terrain’s makers, was completely formed by them. In the vicinity of Akmenė, the 50-metre-deep Šaltiškiai clay pit resembles the wilderness of Mars, while the Menčiai limestone quarry looks like an enormous canyon.

ADVICE: join a hike which is held at the pit or the quarry from time to time.

4. From the Lithuanian version of a Martian wilderness, the road through Lithuania’s north will lead you to an unspoiled natural area, the Mūša Wetlands Reserve. Don’t be afraid that you’ll get your foot wet, the Mūša nature trail boardwalk is there for you. It is listed in the Lithuanian book of records as the longest such wetlands boardwalk in the country; if you want to go its entire length, you’ll have to go more than 10 kilometres.

5. The House of Pots and Pans is, as you might suspect, nearly covered with pots, pans and other kitchen utensils, and the town of Žagarė takes great pride in it. Having travelled through the town, the Lithuanian cherry capital, you’ll find Žagarė Manor in an enormous park. The traditional annual Žagarė Cherry Festival takes place here.

6. The pride of northern Lithuania is Biržai Castle, located on the shore of Širvėna Lake. The castle is so majestic that the postage stamp on which the castle was featured was submitted as a competitor in the European contest to select the most beautiful postage stamps. Built in the 18th...
century, this castle is one of the most striking examples of a bastion castle not just in Lithuania, but in all of Northern Europe. If you decide to stay a bit longer, take care with the Biržai beer. It is said that one mug is too little, yet two mugs is too much. You have been warned.

7. You would not even begin to suspect that Šivina Lake, on the shores of which stands the Biržai Castle, is not a product of nature, but rather manmade. It came into existence in the 16th century, when it was decided to dam two rivers. The bridge across Šivina Lake is the longest wooden footbridge in Lithuania. After you cross it, you’ll find yourself at one of the most beautiful structures of the Romantic era in Lithuania, Astravas Manor.

8. If you sometimes wish, even jokingly, that somebody would just disappear into the bowels of the earth, then be careful in and around Biržai, because your wish might suddenly come true. The groundwater here sometimes washes away the layers of gypsum, dolomite or chalk, and the land collapses, forming sinkholes. In the Biržai area, you can find about 9,000 of them. Sometimes the sinkholes become filled with water; in that case, they become small lakes, which are best seen along the trail through Kirkilai Landscape Reserve. The Kirkilai lakeland is the only such area in the Baltic countries. The view from above is as breathtaking as the architecture of the Kirkilai observation tower.

9. Without getting far off the road, you’ll reach the geographic centre of Lithuania. A boulder marks the spot in the village of Ruočiai in Kėdainiai District. And Kėdainiai itself, long known for its multiculturalism, is an essential stop on your trip. Stroll around Market Square, and see the gymnasium founded by enlightened Lithuanian nobles, the Radžilai family, and admire the Evangelical Lutheran and Evangelical Reformed churches as well as the synagogue and 16th-century minaret. And if you’d like to learn a traditional Lithuanian craft or two, stop into Arnet House, the legacy left behind by Scots in Lithuania.

10. On your way from Kėdainiai to Šiauliai, pass through Radaviškis and stop in at Burbiškis Manor. The manor is beautiful year-round, but in springtime, when the flowers begin to bloom, this place is special. The 17th-century landscape park adorned with ponds connected by canals spanned by bridges and foot-bridges, blossoms with hundreds of varieties of tulips.

ROUTE: From Šiauliai through northern Lithuania, 460 km (3 days)

TO TRY: barley malt pancakes, pheasant rolls, sweets with beer

TO SEE: Žagarė Cherry Festival (July)

EXPERIENCE: in winter, after your sauna session, jump into a hole cut into the ice of a frozen lake.
Eighth route

Cycling along the Baltic Sea:
Memel Nord bunkers, a palace resplendent in amber, dead dunes and a sound catcher

Palanga · Giruliai · Karklė · Klaipėda · Smiltynė · Juodkrantė · Pervalka · Pollipop · Nida

PALANGA

The most fashionable Lithuanian resort in every historical period. Shrouded in legends, and still inspiring new ones even today. Luring visitors with its beaches of white sand, seaside cafés, spas and rehabilitation centres, guest houses, a park of enchanting beauty, summer concerts, theatre performances, exhibitions and festivals. In summer, it would seem, much of Lithuania relocates here. In autumn and winter, the sea air is for those whose greatest recreation is nature itself.

1. You probably already know that we head to the most beautiful Lithuanian resort along the Baltic Sea, Palanga, to roll around in the white sand, to jump through the rolling surf, to absorb culture of various kinds and to deeply inhale the fresh pine-forest air enriched with sea salt. You can do all of that, too, of course, but if you follow the local residents’ advice, you’ll find your way to the most beautiful place in the resort, Birutė’s Park and the palace that once belonged to the counts Tiškovičius. The Amber Museum now makes its home there, displaying more than 30,000 exhibits. Among them you’ll find a collection of 16,000 inclusions, considered to be one of the largest in the world. If you need more action, come in summer to the Amber-Collecting Championship held in Palanga.

EDUCATION: Did you know that amber protects the wearer from the evil eye? Have you ever run your hands through hundreds of thousands of specks of amber? Do you know what the scent of Baltic gold is and what you can do with it? The answers to these questions, and more, await you behind the doors of the Amber Museum.

2. Further along the seaside path, you go through Seaside Regional Park, which continues on to Giruliai, Stop to have a bite in Karklė, long ago one of the largest seaside settlements. Refreshed, turn toward the Dutchman’s Cap, a 24-metre-high bluff. The view from the observation points at the top of the bluff are wonderful.

ROUTE: by bicycle path from Palanga to Nida, 90 km (2 days)

TO TRY: smoked common bream, zander cutlets, eel soup

TO SEE: the autumnal equinox in Juodkrantė (September)

EXPERIENCE: fishing for amber
3. The Memel Nord military fortifications are easy to find, although this site remains a mystery to many Lithuanians even today. The history of the batteries of guns hidden among the sand dunes goes back to 1939, when the Klaipėda region was annexed to Germany and the port of Klaipėda was militarised. The batteries were to protect the city from assault by air and by sea.

4. Klaipėda is our great port. Ships wave to each other with their sails, meet and part, and demonstrate their beauty and originality in maritime parades. But you can count more than just ships in this city. Sculptures, too. A jar full of coins — one, a cat with the face of a gentleman — two, a magical wish-granting mouse — three. A hooded black ghost — four, a dragon climbing down the wall — five. So, can anybody count more?

5. From Klaipėda, take the old ferry with all your bicycles across the Curonian Lagoon to Smiltynė. Where the dunes end and the mouth of the port of Klaipėda opens out to the sea, in the former defensive seaside fort, you’ll find the Lithuanian Sea Museum, telling the story of our country’s maritime history. Here you’ll find out that a ship under the command of Captain Ludwig Stulpin, later to become the first captain of the port of Klaipėda in independent Lithuania, was among the first to receive the SOS signals sent by the legendary Titanic on that fateful night in 1912. Hundreds of Lithuanian fresh-water fish and residents of the Baltic, North and tropical seas swim in the 24 aquariums of the Museum, and penguins and sea lions also make their home at the Museum. Go inside the Dolphinarium and absolutely don’t miss an appearance by the dolphins.

6. The cycling path that starts in Smiltynė connects all of the settlements in the Curonian Spit. The total length is 52 kilometres. Winding through the forests of the Curonian Spit National Park, this path is listed in the EuroVelo network of long-distance cycling routes.

7. The first stop along this route is the enchanting little village of Juodkrantė on the shore of the Curonian Lagoon. Filled with wooden villas adorned with wood-carvings, and called the Lithuanian Riviera during the interwar period, it always was and still remains a haven for those seeking peace and quiet. Take a walk in the old-growth forest, the horseshoe-shaped dunes overgrown with centuries-old spruce and pine trees, and on its dendrological path you’ll find an impressively-sized megaphone-like device, a sound catcher, as well as Witches Hill.

8. Just shortly after you’ve left Juodkrantė, keep an eye out for signs so you don’t miss Heron Hill. Near it, you’ll find a colony of grey herons and cormorants. It is one of the largest in Europe.

9. From Juodkrantė to Pervalka, you’ll have to go a bit further than 16 kilometres. The cycling path along the sea turns toward the Grey Dunes, which we call the Dead Dunes. As you walk through the dunes, try to imagine that people once lived here, but the sand smothered their homes, covered over the plant life, and strong winds formed ravines. The Nagliai Nature Reserve protects this special place.

**ADVICE:** Next to the Dead Dunes, it’s worth setting out not just on a hike, but also a boat or kayak trip. The view of the sandy hills from the water is something else entirely.

10. From Pervalka, you’ll reach Nida by travelling along the Curonian Lagoon. You’ll cover the 15 kilometres easily, looking from side to side as you go. You’ll pass by the Večerkugnas Dune, Bulvikis Cape and bird-watching lookout points. The cycling path ends in a unique place, Nida, next to Parnidis Dune, with its sundial. The 52-metre-high dune makes the very best observation point from which to drink in the sight of wind-blown dunes, the town of Nida, forests and the Baltic Sea.

**LOCAL EXPERIENCE:** Weather vanes were not just a decoration for fishing boats, the flat-bottomed wooden kūrūni in the Curonian Lagoon. The symbols and colours revealed information almost like maps, which fishermen needed to know about each other, so nowadays we have started to call them “the wooden Facebook.” At the Curonian Spit History Museum, try to properly write your name on a weather vane.
From the Baltic Sea to the Nemunas Delta and along the Curonian Lagoon:
the Lithuanian Venice, fish soup cooked over an open fire, Mahatma Gandhi and an early-morning concert of birdsong in a meadow

Klaipėda - Šilutė - Rusnė - Ventė Cape - Minija village - Svente - Dreverna - Klaipėda

KLAIPĖDA
It’s best to begin your trip around the Lithuania Minor region from Klaipėda. From the city bathed by the sea and the Curonian Lagoon, and through which the Dangė River flows. Klaipėda has kept the scent and feel of its old fishing tradition along with the modern spirit of its architecture and culture. It all leads down an old route along the Curonian Lagoon, a land where water and people meet. Go ahead, follow it.

1. Congratulations, you’re in the oldest city of Lithuania! The castle along the Dangė River was built in 1252, and that’s how Memelburg came into being. Although the castle has long since disappeared, you can still see sections of it in the remaining bastions, and in the museum located under them learn about the history of the city of Klaipėda. Walk the streets of Old Town, enjoy Theatre Square, which is one of the venues for the traditional Sea Festival, find out for yourself if the famous composer Richard Wagner really worked at the Klaipėda Drama Theatre, keep an eye out for the many surviving examples of interwar Bauhaus architecture, spend some time at the Clock and Watch Museum and or along the Dangė River Quay.

ADVICE: Board a motorboat and see the Old Town of Klaipėda from the water. The trip under six bridges is sure to give you a different impression of the city.

2. Look for East Prussian heritage in Šilutė. The capital of Lithuania Minor has no lack of stately buildings. Start your walk through the town at Hugo Schou’s manor, have some minibrai (the local version of waffles) with kafija (a traditional beverage made from barley and chicory), then cross the Yellow Bridge and inspect the fire station.

TO TRY: fish soup, doughnuts (pucele), amber too
TO SEE: Sea Festival in Klaipėda (July)
EXPERIENCE: A trip on paddleboards during the spring flood
The narrow-gauge railway station and the old market square next to the Sylia River. And don’t forget: a pair of boots. If you come here in springtime, you can count on there being some water. After all, this area is known for its spring flood.

3. Back in the old days, there was a secret path of stones laid under the surface of the water in bogs, called kūlgrinda. The path was a shortcut allowing Lithuanians to escape from invaders, connecting villages located in the Aukštamala raised bog. Today the path has become a route for visitors to access the bog, to see the rare species of plants and animals that make the bog their home. The Aukštamala educational trail winds 2,400 metres (round-trip) through the bog. It stands inform you about the bog’s endangered or threatened flora and fauna.

4. "People of the flood": that’s what we often call the old-timers living on Rusné Island. And we never fail to be amazed at how they live surrounded by water and take boats when they need to go shopping. But the spring flood happens only once a year. That is a rare sight to see, but you’ll get a good taste of what it must be like if you visit the island in the other seasons, too. Great the Mahatma Gandhi sculpture and get ready for some activity: there are plenty of opportunities for tastings and hands-on recreation. If you just have the will, you can harvest reeds, carve a dugout, go fishing, smoke the fish you catch or cook traditional Curonian fish soup.

5. The Uostadivaris Lighthouse once showed river traffic the way home. The lighthouse built in the 19th century next to the manor today serves as a splendid observation tower from which to admire the view of the Rusne and Minija environs as well as a photogenic subject. Isn’t this a wonderful combination of colours: red bricks, green meadows, white clouds and blue water?

6. Don’t sleep in, Rise and shine. Just when the fog starts to rise from the flood-meadows, birdsong concerts begin in the Nemunas Delta. It’s probably not so easy for you to recognise the birds by sight or by their song, but in this area it’s quite easy to find a guide who knows the local birdlife. And a guide can show you the white-tailed sea eagle, the greater white-fronted goose, various sandpipers, cranes, the sedge warbler, great egrets and other beauties. You won’t soon forget a walk or a boat ride with the birds!

7. The autumn bird migration is best seen at Ventė Cape, which sits along a major bird migration route, the Eastern Baltic flyway. In autumn, there are days when up to 3 million birds fly through the area. The ornithological station established on the peninsula in 1929 continues to operate to the present day, and the staff welcome all who take an interest in birdlife; they will gladly teach you how to put a ring on a bird’s leg, to help track the bird’s later movements. Consider staying longer in the Nemunas Delta Regional Park to see especially rare birds which feed in, fly through or nest in the park’s flood-meadows; plan a bird-watching holiday. About 300 species of birds are found in the bird paradise that is the Nemunas Delta.

8. Don’t even think about arguing, we too have our very own Venice. What else can you call the village of Minija in the Nemunas Delta Regional Park, in which the river serves as the main street, and people take boats to visit their neighbours? The village is known for its fishermen and traditional fish soup, which you simply must try.

9. Degustation: Don’t worry if you see the cook put a smouldering tree branch into the pot boiling over an open fire. It’s a necessary ingredient for the fish soup.

10. In the village of Dreverna, climb the steps to the top of the observation tower. From a height of 15 metres, the dunes of the Nagliai Nature Reserve and the Curonian Lagoon stretch out before you. From above, you can also get a good view of a nearby former fishing village, Sventečiai. Today, it’s a paradise for windsurfing and kiteboarding. They say that the winds in this location are the very best.

In this trip, there has been no lack of boats. Wouldn’t you be interested in seeing how Lithuanians built them? Head for the homestead of Johann Gisas, a well-known builder of boats used on the Curonian Lagoon. You can find out all there is to know about the Curonian boats and how they were built, and maybe you’ll go out on the Lagoon in an old-fashioned wooden flat-bottomed boat, a kūrėnas.
Samogitia:
the last pagans in Europe, a rocket base, the Lithuanian Versailles and a secret stone path through a bog

Klaipėda - Palanga - Kretinė - Mosėdė - Plunge - Telšiai - Šiluva - Klaipėda

KLAIPĖDA
A lot of stubborn Samogitians live in Klaipėda, although the city doesn’t consider itself part of Samogitia. Nevertheless, right here is the best place from which to move deeper into a region full of nature, architecture, quirky museums, authentic heritage, delicious food and story-telling people. So wave a temporary goodbye to the sea, and off you go.

1. Plan your holiday so that you find yourself in Klaipėda in July during the Sea Festival. It is the high point of our summer, summoning to the port not only people, but also ships. Tall ships from the most distant lands sail to Klaipėda to help the city celebrate. They open their decks to the curious and even take them out on excursions to the Baltic Sea or the Curonian Lagoon. Concerts at the Cruise Ship Terminal and Theatre Square, performances in public spaces dotted around Old Town, a parade along the main street of the city, dancing fountains and creative workshops: all of this says that the sea is for everybody.

2. If music, boisterous evenings and crowds are not your thing, accompany the sun as it sets in Palanga, on the pier extending into the sea, which was built in the 18th century by the English and then rebuilt in the 19th century by Count Tīškevičius. It’s hard to imagine that trams once travelled on the pier; today it’s a romantic place for taking a stroll, declaring one’s love or meditating.

3. Believe it or not, but there is a place in Lithuania where bananas grow. So it was in the 19th century, when Count Juozapas Tīškevičius purchased Kretinė Manor and built an enormous Winter Garden. At that time, it was the largest privately-built orangery in Europe and was remarkable for the variety of its plant life. Today 580 species

ROUTE: Klaipėda through Samogitia, 421 km (3 days)

TO TRY: Samogitian kastynys (made with dairy products and flavoured with garlic, salt and herbs), cibulyne (cold herring and onion soup), šupinys (a stew made with greats, beans, peas, potatoes and pork)

TO SEE: Užgavėnės (Shrove Tuesday) in Palanga

EXPERIENCE: a hike across the kūgrindas

Perfect Instagram picture. With a mask at the Užgavenės (Shrove Tuesday) Mask Museum.

#lithuaniantraditions #goawaywinter #uzgavenes #mardiggrass #pancakes

Find your way to Lithuania | 24
of plants grow in the Winter Garden in an area of almost 700 square metres, among them the banana trees that are entirely alien to our climate.

4. You already know that the Samogitians were the last of the Balts to be baptised. Even after being baptised, they long believed in the powers of nature and maintained a special relationship with sacred trees. You can experience this history in an exceptional site in Samogitia, at the Baltic Mythology Park. More than 40 wooden sculptures portraying Baltic deities have taken up residence in the park. Follow the educational trail as instructed: from the beginning of life, the circle of the Earth, to the Moon’s path, the afterlife.

5. Nowhere in our country will you find so many stones as in Salantai Regional Park. Legend has it that in this area there had once been people turned to stone. So the tradition of stones here is very old, and Mosėdis is called the stone capital of Lithuania. A unique museum of stones has been established here, with thousands of stones of various sizes, even boulders.

6. We like to tell stories, so lots of them await you at Žemaitija National Park on the shore of Lake Platelis. You’ll certainly hear the legend about the enchanted queen of Castle Island, about the sunken and still-ringing bell, about the sacred mare and about the secret passwords of the clouds. Arguments go on and on not only regarding which legend is more real, but also about the depth of the lake. It is said that at its deepest point, it is as much as 63 metres deep. Whatever the truth is, this lake is a fantastic place for recreation. Try putting on diving equipment and dive to the depths of the lake during the Christmas season. Under the ice, at the bottom of the lake you’ll see a festively decorated Christmas tree.

ADVICE: One of the most remarkable cycling routes of Žemaičių National Park winds its way around Lake Platelis. Not to cycle on it would be a mistake.

7. The cycling route will lead you to Plokštinė forest. Here you’ll find the Cold War Museum, the first Soviet underground nuclear missile base. This is the only such museum in Europe. The shiver that runs up your spine at the base is easy to get rid of at the elegant Italian Neo-Renaissance Oginski manor in Plungė. Like a swan, it arises out of the enormous park, and the manor house invites visitors to experience international music festivals, equestrian sports and tastings of Samogitian cuisine.

HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE: At the Plungė Manor, do not pass by the one and only Užgavėnės (Shrove Tuesday) Mask Museum in Europe. The tradition of the masks is very old; without them, Lithuanians simply cannot drive winter out of their yards. Try not just to put on a mask, but try making one for yourself, too.

8. They say that bears attacked Telsiai. But for as long as anyone can remember, the bear has been the symbol of the capital of Samogitia. Just try to count how many sculptures of bears have curled up or otherwise found a home on the handrails along the shore of Mastis Lake. The little bears have a sense of humour as well as their own names. And throughout the city of Telšiai, there’s no shortage of art. From unique architectural masterpieces to museums and miniature sculptures.

9. The most convenient way to get around Varniai Regional Park is by taking the nature trails and educational paths, which open up all kinds of natural and cultural treasures, including hill-forts, a fen, burial grounds, Lükas Lake (in which amber is found) and Biržuvėnai Manor. If you go on foot, choose the shorter route, and if you go by bicycle, take advantage of the 23-kilometre-long route.

ADVICE: In Varniai Regional Park, try something you’ve never tried before: cross a wetland without seeing the ground under the surface of the water, following a secret Samogitian route paved with stones, the kūginė.

10. The Catholic Church in Lithuania proclaims that in Šiluva in 1608 the Most Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to shepherds. It is recognised as the oldest Marian apparition in Europe. Each September, one of the largest religious celebrations in Lithuania takes place here: Šilinės, or the Feast of the Birth of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary. The special procession with candles is something worth seeing, and not only for believers.
10 things in Lithuania which you should not miss

1. Wade across the sand dunes on the Curonian Spit, the Sahara of the Baltic

2. Feel the shiver up your spine, remembering the Cold War; find the courage to descend into a ballistic missile silo at the Cold War Museum

3. Count the migrating birds at the Ventė Cape Ornithological Station’s funnel traps, the largest in the world

4. Join the holiday-makers in the summer capital, Palanga. Search for amber on its white-sand beaches

5. Visit the Hill of Crosses near Šiauliai, the only such site in the world

6. Dive into art in Kaunas, a UNESCO-designated Creative City of Design. See everything, ranging from Art Deco architecture to the walls sporting street art

7. Experience the pagan history of Lithuania in the ancient settlements and hill-forts of Kernavė

8. Go up in a hot-air balloon over Vilnius to get a bird’s-eye view of Old Town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site

9. Sail around the Trakai Island Castle on a yacht, a boat or a paddleboard

10. Ease into a therapeutic mud bath or mineral-water pool in the resort of Druskininkai
Lithuania was photographed for us by:

LITHUANIA TRAVEL

The publication was initiated by:
Lithuania Travel (VŠĮ „Keliauj Lietuvoje“),
the national tourism development agency.
Gedimino pr. 38, LT-01104 Vilnius, Lithuania
www.lithuania.travel

Text and overall idea: Laisvė Rodzveičienė MB „Laisvės žodžiai”
English-language translation: Jeffrey Clarke
Printed by: UAB BALTO print

The publication is distributed free of charge.

Information for the publication was carefully gathered in the summer and autumn of 2019. The authors of the publication assume no responsibility for changes made later at the listed tourism sites. Always search for the latest information at www.lithuania.travel