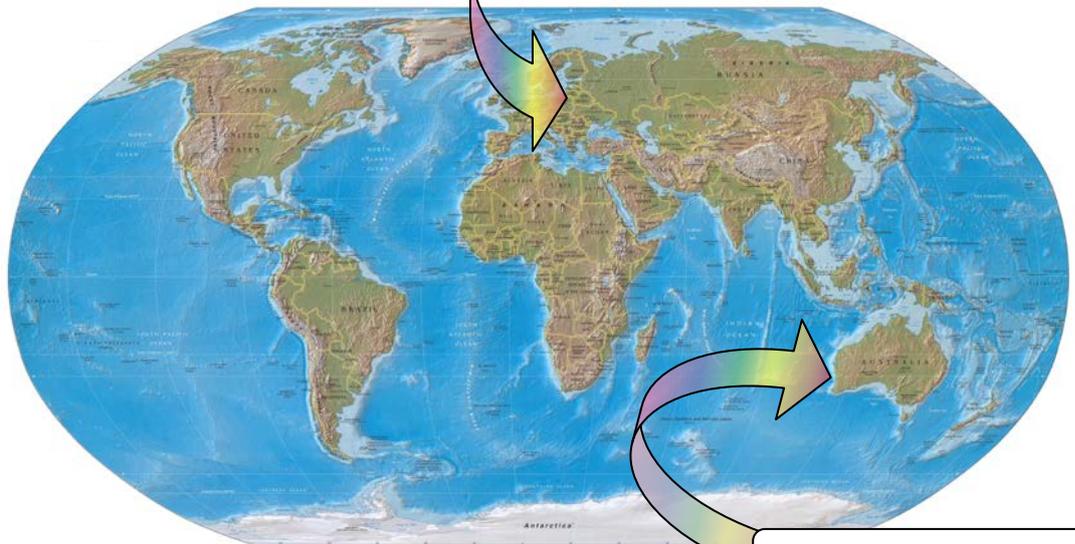


LITHUANIA



We were there



Now we are here

FACTS:

- **Full name:** Republic of Lithuania
- **Population:** 3.4 million (UN, 2005)
- **Capital:** Vilnius
- **Area:** 65,300 sq km (25,212 sq miles)
- **Major languages** Lithuanian, Russian
- **Major religion:** Christianity
- **Life expectancy:** 66 years (men), 78 years (women) (UN)
- **Monetary unit:** 1 Lithuanian litas = 100 centas
- **Main exports:** Textiles, clothing, fertilisers, industrial machinery
- **GNI per capita:** US \$7,050 (World Bank, 2006)
- **Internet domain:** .lt
- **International dialing code:** +370

Lithuanian Community in WA

Australian Lithuanian Community of WA 258 Mill Point Road, South Perth WA 6151

Australian Lithuanian Community 56 Tweeddale Road, Applecross WA 6153

Lithuanian Sports and Social Club, Tauras

6 Dupont Avenue, City Beach WA 6015 phl: 9385 7196 fax: 9285 0378

Overview of cultural groups

The population of Lithuania stands at 3.575 million 83.6% of whom are ethnic Lithuanians. Several sizable minorities exist, such as Poles 6.3%, Russians 5.1%, and Belarusians 1.1%.

Poles are the largest minority, concentrated in southeast Lithuania (the Vilnius region). Russians are the second largest minority, concentrated mostly in two cities. They constitute sizeable minorities in Vilnius (14%) and Klaipėda (28%) and a majority in the town of Visaginas (52%). About 3,000 Roma live in Lithuania, mostly in Vilnius, Kaunas, and Panevėžys. Their organizations are supported by the National Minority and Emigration Department.

Language/dialects spoken

The Lithuanian language (one of the two surviving members of the Baltic language group) is the official language of the Country.

Most Lithuanian schools teach English as a first foreign language. Students may also study German or, in some schools, French. Schools where Russian and Polish are the primary languages of education exist in the areas populated by these minorities.

Dietary preferences

Lithuanian cuisine features the products suited to its cool and moist northern climate: barley, potatoes, rye, beets, greens, berries, and mushrooms are locally grown, and dairy products are one of its specialities. Since it shares its climate and agricultural practices with Eastern Europe, Lithuanian cuisine has much in common with other Eastern European and Ashkenazi cuisines. Nevertheless, it has its own distinguishing features, which were formed by a variety of influences during the country's long and difficult history.

Because of their common heritage, Lithuanians, Poles, and Ashkenazi Jews share many dishes and beverages. Thus there are similar Polish, Lithuanian, and Litvak versions of dumplings (*koldūnai*, kreplach or pierogi), doughnuts *spurgos* or (paćzki), and *blynai* crepes, (bliny or blintzes). German traditions also influenced Lithuanian cuisine, introducing pork and potato dishes, such as potato pudding (*kugelis* or kugel) and potato sausages (*vėdarai*), as well as the baroque tree cake known as *Sakotis*. The most exotic of all the influences is Eastern (Karaite) cuisine, and the dishes *kibinai* and *čeburekai* are popular in Lithuania. "Torte Napoleon" was introduced during Napoleon's passage through Lithuania in the 19th century.

Kreplach are small dumplings filled with ground meat, mashed potatoes or another filling, usually boiled and served in chicken soup. They are similar to Italian ravioli or often referred to as *Jewish wonton* (a Jewish version of the Chinese wonton).

A **paćzek** is a deep-fried piece of dough shaped into a flattened sphere and filled with plums or other sweet filling. A traditional filling is marmalade made from fried rose buds. Fresh paćzki are usually covered with powdered sugar, icing or bits of fried orange zest.

Blins may be prepared and served in three basic ways:

- they may be eaten "as is", in this case the batter may contain various add-ins, from grated potato or apple to raisins
- they may be smeared with butter, bacon fat, sour cream, jam, honey or caviar and possibly folded or rolled into a tube

- a filling such as jam, fruit, potato, cottage cheese or other cheese, cooked ground meat, cooked chicken and even chopped mushrooms, bean sprouts, cabbage and onions (for a Chinese eggroll-type blintz) is rolled or enveloped into a pre-fried blintz and then the blintz is lightly re-fried, sautéed or baked

Despite the apparent richness of the cuisine, Lithuanians are among the thinnest people in the developed countries of the world.

Religion/spirituality/observances

In 2005 79% of Lithuanians belonged to the Roman Catholic Church. The Church has been the majority denomination since the Christianisation of Lithuania in the end of fourteenth century and beginning of fifteenth century. Some priests actively led the resistance against the Communist regime (symbolised by the Hill of Crosses) and, after independence was regained, against socialism and liberalism, especially in ethical questions. Church attendance has increased since the end of the Soviet occupation and the country has so far maintained a fairly high level of religious practice, despite the osmotic progress of secularisation through EU enlargement.

In the 16th century, Lutheranism started to spread from neighbouring Livonia and East Prussia. In the first half of 20th century Lutheran Protestant church had around 200,000 members, 9% of total population, although Lutheranism has declined since 1945. Small Protestant communities are dispersed throughout the northern and western parts of the country. Various Protestant churches have established missions in Lithuania since 1990.

4.9% are Eastern Orthodox mainly among the Russian minority, 1.9% are Protestant and 9.5% have no religion. The country also has minority communities of Judaism, Islam, and Karaism which make up another 1.6% of the population.

Public Holidays:

Date	English Name	Local Name
February 16	Day of Re-establishment of the State of Lithuania (1918)	Lietuvos valstybės atkūrimo diena
March 11	Day of Restitution of Independence of Lithuania (from the Soviet Union, 1990)	Lietuvos nepriklausomybės atkūrimo diena
First Sunday in May	Mothers' Day	Motinos diena
June 24	St. John's Day [Christian name], Day of Dew [original pagan name]	Joninės, Rasos
July 6	Statehood Day	Valstybės (Lietuvos karaliaus Mindaugo karūnavimo) diena
August 15	Assumption Day	Žolinė (Švč. Mergelės Marijos ėmimo į dangų diena)
November 1	All Saints' Day	Visų šventųjų diena

Customs/traditions

Every family celebrates occasions that are unique to that particular family but not society as a whole: various anniversaries, birthdays, etc. Certain family occasions spill outside the closed family circle and touch a larger group of individuals for instance, christenings, funerals or weddings. Funerals in particular are attended by uninvited guests, distant acquaintances, seldom seen friends. They gather to pay their respects to a deceased member of a family. These days, uninvited guests do not attend weddings. When weddings were held in ancient Lithuania (especially in the country) uninvited guests sometimes made an appearance. Because

wedding feasts and rituals lasted such a long time (up to a week: or more) and were an occasion to invite not only blood and marriage relatives and

acquaintances but all the local inhabitants as well, the men of neighboring villages were determined to attend even if uninvited. They were called kriukininkai and came leaning on sticks as if demanding entry into the wedding banquet lest they cause trouble for all the wedding guests. Of course such threats were made in jest (it was a custom of that time), and the uninvited guests were warmly welcomed to the wedding: the more the merrier.

Mother's Day is also included among family occasions, though it is also a community holiday created to honour mothers. The mother's role is so important in society that her day is celebrated outside the confines of the family as well.

Recreational activities

Lithuania has well-known professional symphonic and chamber orchestras, choirs, opera singers and ballet dancers. Cultural events happening all year round include marvelous annual festivals of classical music, theatre, cinema and poetry readings presented by many eminent Lithuanian and foreign artists. Lithuania has been widely known as a jazz country, famous for its several international jazz festivals organized by highly-professional jazz performers and supported by numerous fans in Kaunas, Birštonas and Vilnius.

Following independence in 1990, the Lithuanian government set up the Physical Education and Sports Department to manage physical education in the schools as well as sports administration in the country. Over the next few years, Lithuanian sports organizations established or re-established membership in various international bodies, including the International Olympic Committee. Lithuania participated in the Winter Olympics in Albertville and every winter and Summer Olympics since.

There are nearly 80 Olympic and non-Olympic sports federations in Lithuania and the Lithuanian Union of Sports Federations was founded in 1993 to unite them. The *Sports for All* organization was established to promote physical education and a healthy lifestyle for all Lithuanians.

Among the most popular sports in Lithuania are basketball, soccer, athletics and cycling. Professional sportsmen and trainers are educated in the Lithuanian Academy of Physical Education

Environment

Lithuania is situated in northern Europe. It has around 99 kilometers of sandy coastline, of which only about 38 kilometers face the open Baltic Sea and which is the shortest among the Baltic Sea countries; the rest of the coast is sheltered by the Curonian sand peninsula. Lithuania's major warm-water port, Klaipėda, lies at the narrow mouth of the Curonian Lagoon (Lithuanian: *Kuršių marios*), a shallow lagoon extending south to Kaliningrad. The main river, the Neman River, and some of its tributaries carry international shipping vessels.

The Lithuanian landscape has been smoothed by glaciers. The highest areas are the moraines in the western uplands and eastern highlands, none of which are taller than 300 meters above sea level, with the maximum elevation being Aukštojas Hill at 294 meters. The terrain features numerous lakes, Lake Vištytis for example, and wetlands; a mixed forest zone covers 30% of the country. The climate lies between maritime and continental, with wet, moderate winters and summers. According to one geographical computation method, Lithuania's capital, Vilnius, lies only a few kilometers south of the geographical centre of Europe.

Your Notes and Comments: