



Lithuania

A green, lake-filled land on the Baltic Sea with a baroque capital, island castles, tall sand dunes and one of the oldest-sounding languages in Europe.

Lithuania is one of the three Baltic states, on the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea. It is a low country of fields, forests and more than 3,000 lakes, smoothed by the glaciers of the last ice age. Its short coast includes half of the Curonian Spit, a thin strip of sand dunes that runs south towards Kaliningrad.

AT A GLANCE

Facts to know

CAPITAL

Vilnius

POPULATION

About 2.9 million

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

Lithuanian

CURRENCY

Euro, since 1 January 2015

AREA

About 65,300 km²

GOVERNMENT

Semi-presidential republic

HIGHEST POINT

Aukštojas Hill, 293.84 m, about 24 km south-east of Vilnius

LONGEST RIVER

The Nemunas, 937 km in total, of which 359 km flow through Lithuania

NEIGHBOURS

Latvia, Belarus, Poland and Russia's Kaliningrad region by land. Across the Baltic Sea it shares a sea border with Sweden

DRIVES ON THE

Right

CALLING CODE

+370

A 45-minute trip to Lithuania

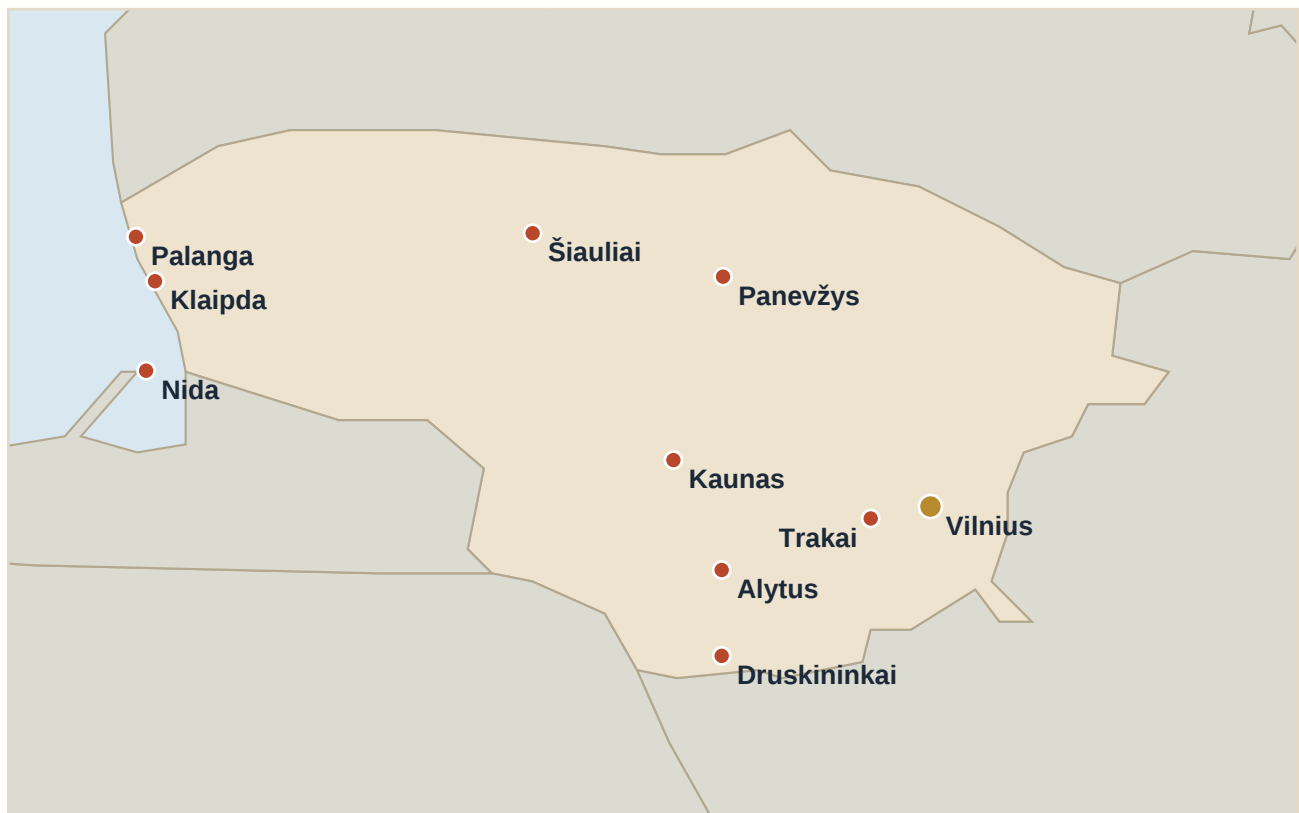
Everything you need is in this pack. No preparation beyond printing. Adapt the timing to your group.

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 0 to 5 min | Welcome. Show the map page and find Lithuania together. Ask: who has been there, or knows someone from there? |
| 5 to 15 min | Read the facts at a glance, then three moments from the story: 1009: Lithuania first named; 1795: Commonwealth partitioned; 2004: Lithuania joins NATO and the EU. |
| 15 to 25 min | At the table: talk about Cepelinai (potato zeppelins) and Šaltibaršiai (cold pink beet soup). Idea: bring a small taste (bread, cheese, fruit, tea) if your kitchen can help. |
| 25 to 30 min | Say it like a local: practise "Labas" (Hi), "Laba diena" (Good day, good afternoon), "Labas rytas" (Good morning). Everyone says them together. |
| 30 to 40 min | Quiz: read the questions aloud, or play the big-screen version at https://preview.worldstroll.com/countries/lithuania/group . No scores needed. |
| 40 to 45 min | Talk about it (questions page), then stamp or sign everyone's passport page. |

You will need

- This printed pack (one per table, or one each)
- Pens for the quiz
- Optional: a world map or globe, a small tasting, music from the country

Lithuania and its cities



- Vilnius (Vilnius County): Gediminas's Tower on Castle Hill, The Gate of Dawn chapel, Užupis, the self-declared artists' republic, Vilnius University, founded in 1579
- Kaunas (Kaunas County): Interwar modernist architecture, Žalgiris basketball club, The Devils' Museum, Kaunas Castle
- Klaipda (Klaipda County): Its usually ice-free port, The Curonian Spit, just across the strait, Its German past as Memel
- Šiauliai (Šiauliai County): The Hill of Crosses nearby, Its history of leather making, A NATO air base
- Panevžys (Panevžys County): The Juozas Miltinis Drama Theatre, Its gateway to Aukštaitija
- Alytus (Alytus County): The Nemunas river, Forests full of mushrooms and berries
- Trakai (Vilnius County): Trakai Island Castle on Lake Galv, Kibinai pastries of the Karaite community, About 200 lakes in the area
- Palanga (Klaipda County): The Palanga Amber Museum, Its botanical park, The long pier
- Nida (Klaipda County): The Parnidis Dune and its giant sundial, Thomas Mann's summer house, The Nida Jazz Festival, held since 2001
- Druskininkai (Alytus County): Mineral spas, The Snow Arena indoor ski slope, Grutas Park of Soviet statues nearby

A short history of Lithuania

Lithuania's story runs from pagan Baltic tribes and a crowned king, through a grand duchy that stretched towards the Black Sea and a long union with Poland, to more than a century under Russian rule, two declarations of independence and a peaceful chain of two million people.

1009 Lithuania first named

The name of Lithuania appears in writing for the first time, as 'Litua', in the Annals of Quedlinburg. The entry tells the story of the missionary Saint Bruno.

1236 Battle of Saule

On 22 September Samogitian and Semigallian warriors crushed the crusading Livonian Brothers of the Sword in the land of Saule, traditionally placed near today's Šiauliai. The city counts this day as its founding date, and 22 September is now Baltic Unity Day.

1253 Mindaugas crowned king

Mindaugas, who had united most of the Lithuanian lands, was crowned the Catholic King of Lithuania. He is the only king Lithuania ever had, and 6 July, the traditional coronation date, is Statehood Day.

1323 Vilnius named as capital

Grand Duke Gediminas wrote letters from 'our royal city called Vilna', the first written mention of Vilnius. Legend says he founded the city after dreaming of an iron wolf howling on a hill.

1387 Lithuania adopts Christianity

Grand Duke Jogaila, now also King of Poland, began the official conversion of Lithuania to Catholic Christianity. Lithuania is often described as the last pagan country in Europe.

1410 Battle of Grunwald

On 15 July the armies of Poland and Lithuania, led by Jogaila and his cousin Vytautas, decisively defeated the Teutonic Order. Lithuanians call it the Battle of Žalgiris, and it was one of the largest battles of medieval Europe.

- 1569** **Union of Lublin**
Poland and Lithuania joined into one Commonwealth with a single elected monarch and a common parliament. It was one of the largest countries in Europe at the time.
- 1795** **Commonwealth partitioned**
In the third partition, Russia, Prussia and Austria divided what remained of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Most of Lithuania became part of the Russian Empire.
- 1904** **Press ban lifted**
For about 40 years the Russian Empire had banned Lithuanian books printed in the Latin alphabet. Book smugglers carried them in from abroad, and on 24 April 1904 the ban was finally lifted.
- 1918** **Act of Independence**
On 16 February the 20 members of the Council of Lithuania, chaired by Jonas Basanavičius, signed the act that restored an independent, democratic Lithuania with Vilnius as its capital.
- 1940** **Soviet occupation**
Lithuania accepted a Soviet ultimatum and was occupied and turned into a Soviet republic. After German occupation from 1941, Soviet rule returned in 1944, with deportations and years of armed resistance.
- 1989** **The Baltic Way**
On 23 August about two million people joined hands in a human chain of 675 km through Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, to demand freedom for the three Baltic states.
- 1990** **Independence restored**
On 11 March the Supreme Council declared Lithuania's independence restored. It was the first of the 15 Soviet republics to do so, and it survived a Soviet economic blockade that lasted 74 days.
- 1991** **The January Events**
On 13 January Soviet troops attacked the Radio and Television Building and the TV Tower in Vilnius. Fourteen civilians were killed, but crowds kept guarding parliament, and 13 January is now the Day of the Defenders of Freedom.

2004

Lithuania joins NATO and the EU

Lithuania became a member of NATO in March and a full member of the European Union on 1 May 2004. It later joined the Schengen area in 2007 and the eurozone in 2015.

What people eat in Lithuania

Lithuanian food grew from a cool, damp northern climate: rye, barley, potatoes, beets, mushrooms, berries and plenty of dairy, with sour cream served with almost everything. Dark rye bread is the centre of the table. A festive meal starts with a cold table of smoked meats, herring and salads, then soup, a hot main dish and, after a pause, cake with coffee or tea. Everyday breakfasts are filling and evening meals light.

Cepelinai (potato zeppelins) (cepelinai)

All of Lithuania, made bigger in the west than in the east

Large dumplings of grated raw potato, stuffed with minced meat, curd cheese or mushrooms, boiled and served with a sauce of sour cream and fried bacon bits. Often called the national dish.

Šaltibaršiai (cold pink beet soup) (šaltibaršiai)

All of Lithuania, with cousins across the lands of the old Grand Duchy

A cold summer soup of cooked beetroot, cucumber, dill and spring onion in kefir or soured milk, bright pink in the bowl. Hot boiled potatoes are served on the side.

Kugelis (potato bake) (kugelis, or bulvi plokštainis)

All of Lithuania; called banda in the Dzūkija region

Grated potatoes mixed with eggs, milk, onion and bacon, seasoned with bay leaf or marjoram and baked in a flat dish until golden. It is cut into squares and eaten with sour cream.

Kepta duona (fried garlic bread) (kepta duona)

All of Lithuania, a favourite in bars

Sticks of dark rye bread fried in oil until crisp and rubbed with garlic. It is the classic snack to share with a glass of beer.

Tinginys (lazy man's cake) (tinginys)

All of Lithuania

A no-bake chocolate log of broken biscuits bound with cocoa, butter and sweetened condensed milk, chilled and cut into slices. Its name means 'lazy man', because it is so quick to make.

Kibinai (Karaite meat pasties) (kibinai)

Trakai, from the Karaite community

Pastries filled with mutton and onion. Travel guides compare them to Cornish pasties.

Šakotis (tree cake) (šakotis)

All of Lithuania, especially at weddings

A tall, spiky cake baked on a rotating spit over heat, with batter of butter, eggs, flour, sugar and cream painted on layer by layer. Sliced, it shows rings like a tree trunk.

Skilandis (smoked sausage) (skilandis, or kindziukas)

All of Lithuania, known since at least the 16th century

Minced meat and fat seasoned with salt, pepper and garlic, traditionally pressed into a pig's stomach, then dried and cold-smoked. It is sliced thinly for the cold table.

Balandliai (cabbage rolls) (balandliai)

All of Lithuania

Cabbage leaves wrapped around a filling of minced meat and braised until soft. The name means 'little doves'.

Žemaii blynai (Samogitian potato pancakes) (žemaii blynai)

Samogitia (Žemaitija), in the west

Pancakes made from boiled potatoes and filled with chopped cooked meat. Like most Lithuanian dishes, they are often eaten with sour cream.

Kuiukai (Christmas Eve poppy seed biscuits) (kuiukai)

All of Lithuania, for Christmas Eve

Small, slightly sweet bites of yeast dough with poppy seeds, baked until crunchy. They are eaten on Kuios, Christmas Eve, often soaked in poppy seed milk.

Šimtalapis (hundred-sheet pastry) (šimtalapis)

Brought by the Tatars, now made across Lithuania

A pastry of thin layers of dough separated by melted butter, like a croissant, often rolled with poppy seed filling. The name means 'one hundred sheets'.

Surelis (glazed curd snack) (varšks surelis)

All of Lithuania, and popular across the former Soviet Union

A small bar of sweetened curd cheese, often with a jam or boiled condensed milk filling, coated in chocolate glaze and sold chilled in shops.

Gira (bread kvass) (gira)

All of Lithuania

A lightly sour, almost alcohol-free drink made by fermenting black rye bread or rye malt, sometimes flavoured with caraway, berries or apples. Many restaurants brew their own.

GOOD MANNERS

At the table

- Before a meal people wish each other 'Skanaus!' (enjoy your meal).
- When glasses are raised, the toast is ' sveikat!' (to your health).
- Sour cream is served with almost everything: soups, dumplings, pancakes and even desserts.
- Dark rye bread is on the table at every meal, often eaten as an open sandwich with butter or cheese.
- At a festive dinner, dessert comes some time after the main course, so leave room and do not rush away from the table.
- On Christmas Eve (Kuios) the family sits at a table with twelve dishes and no meat or dairy.

Cepelinai (potato zeppelins)

Large dumplings of grated raw potato, stuffed with minced meat, curd cheese or mushrooms, boiled and served with a sauce of sour cream and fried bacon bits. Often called the national dish.

Ingredients

- 2 kg floury potatoes, peeled
- 300 g minced pork
- 1 small onion, very finely chopped
- Salt and black pepper
- For the sauce: 150 g smoked bacon, diced, 1 onion, chopped, and 200 g sour cream

Method

1. Boil about a quarter of the potatoes until soft and mash them. Finely grate the rest of the potatoes, put them in a clean cloth and squeeze out as much liquid as you can into a bowl.
2. Let the potato liquid stand for a few minutes, pour off the water and keep the white starch at the bottom. Mix the grated potato, mashed potato, starch and a good pinch of salt into a firm dough.
3. Mix the minced pork with the chopped onion, salt and pepper. Take a handful of potato dough, flatten it in your palm, put a spoonful of meat in the middle and close it into an oval, zeppelin shape.
4. Lower the dumplings into a large pot of gently boiling salted water and simmer for about 25 minutes, stirring now and then so they do not stick.
5. Meanwhile fry the bacon and onion until golden and stir in the sour cream. Serve the cepelinai hot with the sauce spooned over.

Šaltibaršiai (cold pink beet soup)

A cold summer soup of cooked beetroot, cucumber, dill and spring onion in kefir or soured milk, bright pink in the bowl. Hot boiled potatoes are served on the side.

Ingredients

- 3 medium beetroots, boiled, cooled and peeled (or ready-cooked beetroot)
- 2 fresh cucumbers
- 1 bunch of dill and 1 bunch of spring onions
- 1 litre kefir (or buttermilk)
- 2 hard-boiled eggs
- Salt, and boiled potatoes to serve

Method

1. Grate the cooked beetroot or cut it into thin strips. Cut the cucumbers into small cubes and finely chop the dill and spring onions.
2. Put the vegetables in a large bowl with a pinch of salt and pour in the cold kefir. Stir until the soup turns pink.
3. Chill for at least 30 minutes. If it is too thick, add a little cold water.
4. Serve in bowls topped with halved hard-boiled eggs and more dill, with hot boiled potatoes on a separate plate.

Kugelis (potato bake)

Grated potatoes mixed with eggs, milk, onion and bacon, seasoned with bay leaf or marjoram and baked in a flat dish until golden. It is cut into squares and eaten with sour cream.

Ingredients

- 2 kg floury potatoes, peeled
- 200 g smoked bacon, diced
- 2 onions, chopped
- 3 eggs
- 200 ml hot milk
- 1 teaspoon dried marjoram, salt and black pepper
- Sour cream to serve

Method

1. Heat the oven to 180°C and grease a baking dish of about 25 by 35 cm.
2. Fry the bacon until it gives up its fat, add the onions and cook until soft and golden.
3. Finely grate the potatoes, squeeze out some of the liquid and pour the hot milk over them at once, so they stay pale.
4. Stir in the eggs, the bacon and onions with their fat, the marjoram, salt and pepper. Pour into the dish.
5. Bake for about 75 minutes, until the top is deep golden and crisp. Let it rest for 10 minutes, cut into squares and serve with sour cream.

Kepta duona (fried garlic bread)

Sticks of dark rye bread fried in oil until crisp and rubbed with garlic. It is the classic snack to share with a glass of beer.

Ingredients

- 8 slices of dark rye bread, cut into fingers
- 4 cloves of garlic, peeled and halved
- Sunflower oil for frying
- Salt

Method

1. Heat about 1 cm of oil in a frying pan over a medium heat.
2. Fry the bread fingers in batches for 1 to 2 minutes on each side, until crisp but not burnt. Drain on kitchen paper.
3. While they are still hot, rub each piece with the cut side of a garlic clove and sprinkle with a little salt.
4. Serve warm, on their own or with a garlic and cheese dip.

Tinginys (lazy man's cake)

A no-bake chocolate log of broken biscuits bound with cocoa, butter and sweetened condensed milk, chilled and cut into slices. Its name means 'lazy man', because it is so quick to make.

Ingredients

- 400 g plain biscuits (such as rich tea)
- 150 g butter
- 1 tin (397 g) sweetened condensed milk
- 3 tablespoons cocoa powder

Method

1. Break the biscuits into small pieces with your hands, keeping some bigger chunks.
2. Melt the butter in a pan over a low heat, stir in the condensed milk and cocoa and warm until smooth. Do not let it boil.
3. Pour the chocolate mixture over the biscuits and stir well so that every piece is coated.
4. Spoon onto a sheet of cling film or baking paper, shape into a log or square block and wrap it tightly.
5. Chill for at least 4 hours, or overnight, then cut into slices to serve.

Useful phrases

Labas

LAH-bahs · Hi

Laba diena

LAH-bah dyeh-NAH · Good day, good afternoon

Labas rytas

LAH-bahs REE-tahs · Good morning

Labas vakaras

LAH-bahs VAH-kah-rahs · Good evening

Labanaktis

LAH-bah-nahk-tees · Good night

Iki pasimatymo

ih-KIH pah-sih-MAH-tee-moh · Goodbye, see you

Aiu

AH-choo · Thank you

Prašau

prah-SHOW · Please, and also you're welcome

Atsiprašau

aht-sih-prah-SHOW · Excuse me

Malonu

mah-LAW-noo · Pleased to meet you

Mano vardas yra ...

MAH-noh VAHR-dahs EE-rah · My name is ...

Ar kalbate angliškai?

ahr KAHL-bah-teh AHN-glish-kai · Do you speak English?

Nesuprantu

NEH-soo-prahn-too · I don't understand

Kur yra tualetas?

koor EE-rah twah-LEH-tahs · Where is the toilet?

Kiek kainuoja?

kyehk kai-NWOH-yah · How much does it cost?

Skanaus!

skah-NOWS · Enjoy your meal!

sveikat!

ee svay-KAH-tah · Cheers! (to your health)

Gelbkite!

GYAHL-beh-kih-teh · Help!

Things you might not know

- 1.** Lithuanian is believed to be the most conservative living Indo-European language. It keeps many features of Proto-Indo-European, the ancient ancestor of the whole language family, so it is important for linguists.
- 2.** In 1989 a scientist at France's National Geographic Institute calculated that the geographic centre of Europe lies in Lithuania, about 26 km north of Vilnius. Other places in Europe make similar claims.
- 3.** Basketball is the national sport. The men's team has won the European championship three times, in 1937, 1939 and 2003, and about 76% of people watched the national team's games in 2014.
- 4.** On 23 August 1989 about two million people held hands in the Baltic Way, a human chain 675 km long across Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.
- 5.** On 1 April 1997 the Vilnius district of Užupis declared itself an independent republic. Its tongue-in-cheek constitution, on a wall in many languages, says people have the right to be happy, and also the right to be unhappy.
- 6.** Cepelinai, the national potato dumplings, are named after Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin, because they look like his airships.
- 7.** The highest point in Lithuania, Aukštojas Hill, is only 293.84 metres high. It was found to be the highest by GPS measurement in 2004, and its name was chosen in a contest.
- 8.** For about 40 years, until 1904, printing Lithuanian in the Latin alphabet was banned in the Russian Empire. Book smugglers, called knygnešiai, carried Lithuanian books across the border from East Prussia.
- 9.** The national anthem, 'Tautiška giesmė', has both words and music by one man, Vincas Kudirka, who wrote it in 1898.
- 10.** The yellow, green and red flag was adopted on 25 April 1918. Under Soviet rule Soviet flags replaced it, and it returned on 18 November 1988, before independence was restored.
- 11.** Women in Lithuania gained the vote in the 1918 constitution and first used it in 1919, among the first countries in the world to allow it.
- 12.** Lithuanian cross crafting, the carving of tall wooden crosses and shrines, was recognised by UNESCO in 2001 as a Masterpiece of the Oral and

Intangible Heritage of Humanity.

- 13.** At Užgavns, the Lithuanian carnival before Lent, an effigy of winter called Mor is burned, and masked revellers dance and eat pancakes.

TALK ABOUT IT

Questions for the group

- Have you ever been to Lithuania, or has someone in your family? What do you remember?
- Have you ever tasted Cepelinai (potato zeppelins) or Šaltibaršiai (cold pink beet soup)? What is a dish you remember from a trip?
- Independence restored (1990). Do you remember hearing about it? Where were you then?
- The January Events (1991). Do you remember hearing about it? Where were you then?
- Have you seen Vilnius Old Town, in person or in pictures? Which famous place would you most like to see?
- If you could spend one day in any city of Lithuania, which would it be and why?

QUIZ

How well do you know Lithuania?

Circle the right answer. The answers are on the last page.

1. What gives šaltibaršiai, the cold summer soup, its bright pink colour?

- A) Beetroot
- B) Tomatoes
- C) Cherries
- D) Red peppers

2. What stands on top of the Parnidis Dune near Nida?

- A) A windmill
- B) A giant stone sundial
- C) A statue of Vytautas
- D) A castle tower

3. Which Soviet republic was the first to declare its independence, on 11 March 1990?

- A) Belarus
- B) Ukraine
- C) Georgia
- D) Lithuania

4. Vytautas the Great died in Trakai Island Castle in 1430.

- A) True
- B) False

5. Which sport is Lithuania's national sport?

- A) Football
- B) Handball
- C) Basketball
- D) Ice hockey

6. Who wrote both the words and the music of the Lithuanian national anthem?

- A) Adam Mickiewicz
- B) Jonas Basanavičius
- C) Vincas Kudirka
- D) Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis

7. The Hill of Crosses lies near Šiauliai in northern Lithuania.

- A) True
- B) False

8. In Lithuanian, "ne" means "yes".

- A) True
- B) False

9. In 1989 a French scientist calculated that the geographic centre of Europe lies in Lithuania.

- A) True
- B) False

10. As of September 2026, until what time may shops in Lithuania sell alcohol on a Sunday?

- A) 22:00
- B) 15:00
- C) 12:00
- D) 20:00

11. Cepelinai, the big potato dumplings, are named after what?

- A) A river in Samogitia
- B) A village near Kaunas
- C) A Lithuanian king
- D) Zeppelin airships

12. Which date do Lithuanians keep as the Day of the Defenders of Freedom?

- A) 16 February
- B) 6 July
- C) 13 January
- D) 11 March

Quiz answers

1. A) Beetroot

Cooked beetroot mixed with cold kefir turns the soup pink. It is served with hot boiled potatoes.

2. B) A giant stone sundial

A giant stone sundial, a granite pillar 13.8 metres high, stands on the dune, which rises to 52 metres above the sea.

3. D) Lithuania

Lithuania declared its independence restored on 11 March 1990, the first of the 15 Soviet republics to do so.

4. True

True. Vytautas finished the castle around 1409 and died there in 1430.

5. C) Basketball

Basketball is the national sport. The men's team won the European championship in 1937, 1939 and 2003.

6. C) Vincas Kudirka

Vincas Kudirka wrote the words and music of Tautiška giesmė in 1898.

7. True

True. It is about 12 km north of Šiauliai, and about 100,000 crosses had been placed there by 2006.

8. False

False. Ne means no. Yes is taip.

9. True

True. A scientist at France's National Geographic Institute placed it about 26 km north of Vilnius, though other places make similar claims.

10. B) 15:00

As of September 2026 shops may sell alcohol from 10:00 to 20:00, and only until 15:00 on Sundays.

11. D) Zeppelin airships

Cepelinai are named after Zeppelin airships: they were renamed after Count Zeppelin, because their shape looks like his airships.

12. C) 13 January

On 13 January 1991 Soviet troops attacked the Radio and Television Building and the TV Tower in Vilnius, and 14 civilians were killed.

Lithuania visa page

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Next stops

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