

LITHUANIA UNSCRIPTED

THE COLD-SEASON EDITION

OCTOBER 2026 - MARCH 2027

Lithuania gets darker. The guide gets more useful.

Not a summer book wearing a scarf. This is the Lithuania of mushroom forests, candlelit cemeteries, serious dinners, empty dunes, wood-fired pirtis, Christmas streets, stubborn weather and March mornings when the country begins to move again.

The promise: we will tell you what is worth your time, what needs booking, what needs weather, what is better precisely because it is cold - and what should be left alone until April.

START HERE

What kind of trip are you actually trying to have?

Do not read 450 pages to discover you wanted a three-day food weekend. Start with the problem.

You are...

Start with

Then add

Here for 48 hours

Vilnius after dark

One museum, one serious dinner, one neighbourhood beyond

the postcard

Here for food

Eat Lithuania + city food chapters

Gastronomy Week, markets, smoke, rye, mushrooms, modern

Baltic cooking

Allergic to bad weather

Vilnius / Kaunas / Druskininkai

Museums, spa, pirtis, food; nature only when the sky behaves

Here with children

Family + science + spa

Kaunas science, Druskininkai water, castles without medieval

endurance tests

Looking for weird

Lithuania

Grutas + bunkers + Cold War + manors

The country is far more interesting once it stops trying to look

pretty

Looking for silence

Nida / Dzūkija / Nemunas Delta

Shoulder-season coast, forest, sodyba, birds, no motivational

playlists

Tracing family

Roots chapter

Research first; villages and cemeteries second; archive-room

holiday last

VYTAS' TAKE

The internet is extremely good at producing 37 things to do. It is less good at telling you

that 29 of them are a poor use of a wet Tuesday in November. That is the job here.

THE SEASON

Six months. Six different Lithuanias.

October and March should not share an itinerary simply because both require a coat.

OCTOBER

The last big outdoor month

Colour, mushrooms, migration, concerts. Use the daylight before Lithuania repossesses it.

NOVEMBER

Stop fighting the dark

Velines, food, film, spa. Build shorter days and better evenings.

DECEMBER

Cities take over

Lights, markets, concerts, warm interiors. Snow is optional; atmosphere is not.

JANUARY

Winter without a fairy-tale contract

Quiet cities, sauna, museums, light festivals. If snow comes, excellent. The trip must work if it does

not.

FEBRUARY

Winter with more daylight

Uzgavenes season, 16 February, easier day trips and a country becoming visibly impatient with

winter.

MARCH

The thaw

Kaziukas, 11 March, equinox, returning birds. Sell movement and longer light, not daffodils.

FUN FACT WORTH RETELLING

Lithuanian weather has a remarkable ability to make four people standing on the same

street dress as though they are visiting four different countries. Pack layers; democracy will

do the rest.

HOW THIS BOOK TALKS

Useful first. Entertaining because useful travel deserves better writing.

Facts are facts. Jokes are jokes. We will not manufacture folklore because a sentence needed a punchline.

VYTAS' TAKE

A decision, not a summary. If I would spend my own money or time here, I say so. If I would not, I say that too.

FUN FACT WORTH RETELLING

Not trivia compost. A fact good enough to steal for dinner.

THE STORY BEHIND IT

Why the place exists, why it matters, or why Lithuanians behave oddly around it.

DON'T BE THAT TOURIST

Small ways to avoid turning a perfectly good trip into a queue, a parking dispute or a cultural misunderstanding.

NOT THIS SEASON

A good place can still be the wrong place in January. Tourism brochures find this concept emotionally difficult. We do not.

ARRIVAL

The holiday begins when the cheap flight stops being cheap.

A EUR17 saving is not a saving if it buys you a midnight transfer, two sulking children and a breakfast eaten in a petrol station.

Lithuania has two useful airport doors for most visitors: Vilnius and Kaunas. Choose the one that fits the route, not the one that wins an airfare beauty contest. VNO is the obvious door for Vilnius, Trakai and the east/south. KUN can be excellent for Kaunas and a westbound trip. The wrong airport is rarely catastrophic. It is simply an irritating way to spend the first three hours of a holiday.

DON'T BE THAT TOURIST

Do not rent a car at Vilnius Airport because the word road trip appeared in your search history. If your first two days are Vilnius and Trakai, the car will spend them converting euros into parking.

VYTAS' TAKE

Use taxis like punctuation, not prose. Airport arrival, late dinner, tired child, horizontal rain: excellent. Crossing a walkable Old Town because your feet have unionised after 900 metres: perhaps not.

HOW LONG?

Count nights before sights.

Lithuania is compact. Your attention span is not infinite.

3 DAYS

Vilnius + Trakai + Kaunas works. No rental car. No coast. No attempt to prove that Google Maps is a travel philosophy.

5 DAYS

Choose a direction. South for Dzukija/Druskininkai or west for the coast. Trying both creates a moving-luggage documentary.

7 DAYS

The sweet spot. Capital, second city, one landscape that changes the mood, and enough evenings to stop behaving like an airport passenger.

10+ DAYS

Now Lithuania becomes regional rather than a highlights reel. Add the Delta, Aukstaitija, deeper Zemaitija, manors, roots or a deliberately slow coast.

VYTAS' TAKE

A first week is not a census. Missing a good place is allowed. Ruining six good places because you refused to miss anything is not.

TRANSPORT

A car should buy freedom, not a parking hobby.

Rail between Vilnius and Kaunas is not the budget compromise. It is often the grown-up option.

TRAIN

Use it between the big cities. Centre to centre, no parking archaeology, coffee possible, nobody

needs to pretend they enjoy motorway service stations.

CAR

Earns its keep for Dzukija, the Nemunas road, the Delta, manors, family luggage and awkward rural

combinations.

CAR SHARING

Excellent for surgical use if your account and licence are verified. Less excellent as a spontaneous

plan at 23:40 with 4% battery.

BUS

Often perfectly sensible. Check the actual stop and return time, especially in smaller places.

TAXI / RIDE-HAIL

Convenience tool, not transport ideology.

Do not let your entire Lithuanian food education happen inside one cepelinas.

Potatoes matter. So do rye, mushrooms, smoke, dairy, beetroot, freshwater fish, forest ingredients and a modern restaurant scene that did not freeze in 1987.

CEPELINAI

Order them once, somewhere that takes them seriously, and arrive hungry. A cepelinas is less a dumpling than a small agricultural policy: grated potato around meat or curd, sour cream, bacon, and the sudden understanding that your afternoon schedule was over-optimistic.

SALTIBARSCIAI

Cold beetroot soup, violently pink, usually with hot potatoes alongside. It looks as if Barbie opened a dairy. It tastes like summer and is therefore not the centre of this cold-season edition - but you should know what the national Rorschach test looks like.

RYE BREAD

The quiet one. Dark, sour, dense, culturally important and capable of making supermarket sliced bread feel like office stationery.

FUN FACT WORTH RETELLING

Karaite kibinai in Trakai are not generic Lithuanian medieval snacks. They belong to the Karaite community brought to Lithuania centuries ago. Eat the pastry; do not flatten the people who made it part of Trakai into a filling.

VYTAS' TAKE

Order one heavy classic, not the entire potato parliament. Then let Lithuania show you it has chefs.

PIRTIS

The room is hot. The subject is bigger.

A Lithuanian sauna can be wellness, social ritual, craft, hospitality and an extremely efficient way of discovering that birch leaves are not merely decorative.

For a first proper experience, choose a hosted pirtis rather than a hotel box with a timer and a laminated warning sign. A good pirtininkas controls heat, steam and rhythm; explains what is happening; and prevents the foreign visitor from treating endurance as a personality trait.

DON'T BE THAT TOURIST

Do not turn the temperature dial to maximum and sit grimly until you can hear colours. This is not a Scandinavian masculinity exam.

Cold water can be part of the ritual, but conditions, health and local guidance matter. This book will not convert a lake into a medical device.

VILNIUS

Do less. Notice more. Eat properly.

The city is compact enough to walk and complicated enough to reward getting the route slightly wrong.

Tourists arrive with Google Maps containing 47 stars and the expression of people beginning a military campaign. Do not. Walk out of the hotel. There will be a Baroque church, another Baroque church hiding behind it, a courtyard you were not looking for and eventually somebody will put something excellent on a plate.

Cross into Uzupis. Pick one serious museum, not six. Climb somewhere high before dark. Then eat. Vilnius gets better in the evening when the coach groups evaporate and the lanes turn gold.

FUN FACT WORTH RETELLING

When conditions allow, hot-air balloons can fly over Vilnius. There are not many European capitals where drifting over the historic centre in a wicker basket is a normal leisure activity rather than the beginning of an airspace incident.

VYTAS' TAKE

Two nights minimum. Three if you understand that lunch is an activity. A car here is mostly an expensive machine for transporting you between parking problems.

TRAKAI

Castle first. Then discover that the postcard has people in it.

The lake and island castle get you there. Karaite history is what stops the day becoming medieval wallpaper.

Arrive before the coach tide if you can. See the castle, then give Trakai enough time for the town, the lake edge and the Karaite story. Kibinai are part of that story, not merely convenient pastry engineering.

DON'T BE THAT TOURIST

Do not arrive at lunchtime with every coach group, photograph the castle, eat the first kibinas you see and announce that you have now understood Trakai.

KAUNAS

The city that had to become a capital before it had finished getting dressed.

Vilnius gives you Baroque. Kaunas gives you the twentieth century arguing with itself - and winning.

When Vilnius was outside Lithuanian control in the interwar period, Kaunas became the temporary capital. Ministries, apartments, banks, schools and culture had to appear with extraordinary speed. The result is not one famous building but an urban layer: modernism as evidence of a country improvising statehood in concrete, plaster and optimism.

FUN FACT WORTH RETELLING

Kaunas modernism is UNESCO-listed not because somebody found one photogenic facade, but because the city preserves an unusually concentrated record of that temporary-capital transformation.

VYTAS' TAKE

Do not come to Kaunas looking for a smaller Vilnius. That is like visiting Glasgow and complaining that Edinburgh Castle has gone missing. Come for modernism, Ciurlionis, food, the funiculars, the confluence and a city with less interest in performing for you.

DZUKIJA + DRUSKININKAI

The forest, the spa and Lithuania taking its shoes off.

Use Druskininkai as infrastructure. Then actually leave the infrastructure.

Drive south and watch Lithuania gradually run out of buildings. Then urgency. In autumn the forest

contains two principal species: mushrooms and Lithuanians looking for mushrooms. The latter move

with military purpose and have family patches whose coordinates are treated with approximately the

same openness as online-banking credentials.

Mushroom culture here is real, not a rustic performance laid on for visitors. Join with somebody who

knows what they are doing. A photograph and an app are not an edible-mushroom safety system.

Then there is Druskininkai: spa town, water park, art, Soviet-history detours, forest and the

dangerous temptation to spend three days inside one resort bathrobe. A good hotel is weather

insurance, not witness protection.

VYTAS' TAKE

The evening that sells Lithuania is often not a monument. It is a sodyba, a wood-fired pirtis,

cold air, food and silence. To a Lithuanian: Saturday at somebody's uncle's. To a Londoner:

apparently luxury has been hiding in a forest.

Go when the Baltic has stopped auditioning for a beach brochure.

Cold-season coast is not failed summer. It is a different product: wind, space, amber light, smoked fish and fewer people obstructing the horizon.

The Curonian Spit is a long improbable argument between sand, pine, lagoon and sea. Nida sits near the far end looking suspiciously composed: fishermen's houses, weathervanes, dunes and the kind of light that has persuaded generations of artists to postpone practical work.

Thomas Mann built a summer house here. Standing above the lagoon, you understand why a Nobel laureate looked at the view and decided the novel could wait.

FUN FACT WORTH RETELLING

The Spit is about 98 km long and shared by Lithuania and Russia's Kaliningrad region. At its narrowest it is only a sliver of sand between lagoon and Baltic - geography behaving as though somebody drew it with a ruler after two beers.

VYTAS' TAKE

Day-tripping Nida from Vilnius is legal but wrong. In cold season, give the coast time or leave it alone. Wind and emptiness are features only if you actually like wind and emptiness.

DEEPER LITHUANIA

This is where the guide stops being a capital-city accessory.

Manors, lakes, Cold War remains, village museums and small towns are not filler between Vilnius and the airport.

AUKŠTAITIJĄ

Lake country works best when the day has a purpose: a walk, sauna, manor, museum or family

story. In cold season, do not drive two hours merely to admire water being cold.

MANORS

Lithuanian manors are excellent precisely because their biographies are messy: nobility, wars,

occupation, schools, hospitals, neglect, restoration, concerts, hotels. The polished facade is usually

the least interesting part.

COLD WAR LITHUANIA

Plokštine, bunkers and Soviet remains matter because occupation is not ancient history here. Treat

the absurd engineering and the human consequences as two parts of the same story.

VILLAGE MUSEUMS

The good ones turn regional culture from paragraph into scale: house, barn, garden, tools, distance,

weather. Suddenly the word Zemaitija means more than a label on a map.