

# Lithuania

Lithuania, officially the Republic of Lithuania, is a small country in the Baltic region of Eastern Europe.



Lithuania borders with the Baltic Sea and with the countries of Latvia, Russia, Poland, and Belarus. It has 55 miles of coastline.

The country area is 65,300 sq km, and has a population of approximately 2.7 million inhabitants (2,711,566 in 2021).

The capital city of Lithuania is Vilnius. It is also the country's largest city.

# Flag

The National Flag of Lithuania consists of a horizontal tricolour of yellow, green, and red. These three colours were frequently used in folk weavings and traditional dress.

The yellow in the flag is meant to symbolize the sun and prosperity.

The green is for the forests, the countryside, liberty, and hope.



The red represents the blood and bravery of those who have died for Lithuania.

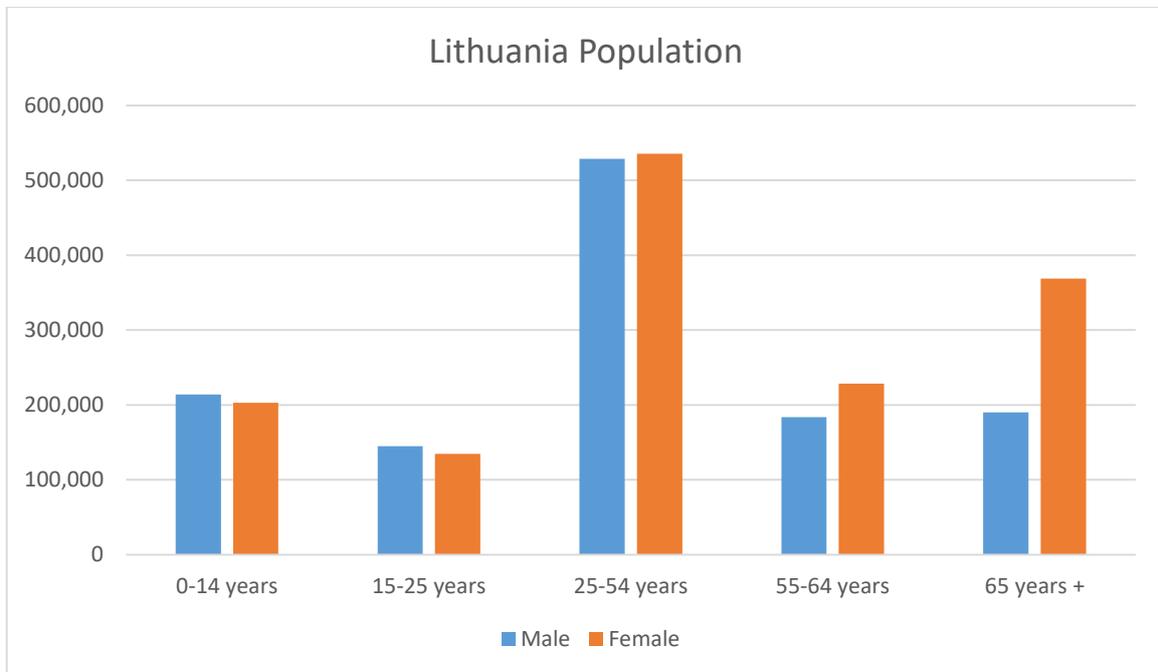
It was adopted on 25 April 1918 during Lithuania's first period of independence (in the 20th century) from 1918 to 1940. The flag was then re-adopted on 20 March 1989, almost a year before the re-establishment of Lithuania's independence and almost three years before the collapse of the Soviet Union.



The State flag was adopted in 2004. This flag displays the national coat of arms in banner form. It consists of an armour-clad knight on horseback holding a sword and shield. It is also known as Vytis.

# Population

People from Lithuania are known as Lithuanians.



15.26% of people living in Lithuania are aged 0-14 years.

10.23% of people living in Lithuania are aged 15-24 years.

38.96% of people living in Lithuania are aged 25-54 years.

15.1% of people living in Lithuania are aged 55-64 years.

20.45% of people living in Lithuania are aged 65 years and over.

# City Life

68% of the population in Lithuania live in towns and cities.

Vilnius is the capital city of Lithuania, and it is also the biggest city in the country. Vilnius is also the second largest city in the Baltic states.



Its medieval heritage plus its gorgeous Gothic and Baroque architectural styles make Vilnius one of the most picture-perfect cities in Europe.



Kaunas in central Lithuania is the second largest city in the country. It is positioned at the point where the Neris and Nemunas rivers converge. There are more than 40 museums, 7 professional and 10 amateur theatres, 20 folklore ensembles, plus various other arts and sports teams in the city. The city organizes a number of small and large festivals, celebrations and cultural events all year round.



Klaipėda, in the far west of the country, is Lithuania's main seaport town. It has a majestic harbour.



Can you find these cities on the map?

Choose one of these cities to find out more about.

# The Baltics



The Baltics region comprises the three countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, all positioned on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea.

They are also known as the Baltic countries, Baltic republics, or simply the Baltics.

After the First World War the term "Baltic states" came to refer to countries by the Baltic Sea that had gained independence from the Russian Empire. The term originally also included Finland, but they later became grouped among the Nordic countries.

The governments of the Baltic states cooperate in multiple ways, including cooperation among presidents, parliament speakers, heads of government, and foreign ministers.

# History

Lithuania was a medieval power and included parts of Poland, Russia, Belarus and Ukraine within its territory.

The next significant era of its existence saw Lithuania as part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

In WW1 Lithuania gained its independence for a short time. It lasted from 1918 until 1940.

During WW2 Lithuania was first occupied by the Soviet Union and then by Nazi Germany. In 1940 Lithuania



was declared part of the Soviet Union. They remained a part until 1990 when the country again became independent.



Lithuania has been a part of the European Union since 2004 and is also a member country of the Schengen Agreement.

Challenge: Find out what the Schengen Agreement is.

# National Symbols

Lithuania's state emblem is Vytis (the white knight). The heraldic shield features a red field with an armoured knight on a white horse holding a silver sword aloft in his right hand.



The white stork (gandras) was declared the national bird of Lithuania in 1973. Lithuanians believe that storks bring harmony to the families on whose property they nest; they have also kept up the tradition of telling their children that storks bring babies.

Stork Day is celebrated on March 25 with various rituals such as gifts for children, attributed to the storks. These gifts might include fruits, chocolates, pencils, and dyed eggs hung on tree branches and fences.

The national plant is rue (rūta).

A bride traditionally wears a little crown



made of rue, which is a symbol of maidenhood.

During the wedding the crown is burned, symbolizing the loss of careless childhood and entrance into the world of adulthood.



Challenge: Design your own personal emblem.

# Trakai Castle



Trakai Castle is an island castle. It is built on an island in Lake Galvė. It is a stone castle. Construction of it by Kęstutis began in the 14th century, and more was completed by his son Vytautas the Great, who died in this castle in 1430.

Trakai Castle is important to Lithuanian history. Associated with the Grand Duke Gediminas, a medieval Lithuanian hero, Trakai rose to importance before the Grand Duchy of Lithuania joined with Poland, forming the Poland-Lithuania Commonwealth.

Trakai Island Castle is now a major tourist attraction. There is a cultural museum attached and visitors can go boating on the lake. It also has restaurants and a gift shop.



Challenge: Design your own island castle. Think about access to your island, protection, and what you would need within your castle walls.

# Ninth Fort & Hill of Crosses



The Ninth Fort, or Devintas Fortas in Lithuanian, is a stronghold in the northern part of Šilainiai elderate, Kaunas, Lithuania. It is a part of the Kaunas Fortress,

which was constructed in the late 19th century.

During the occupation of Lithuania by the Soviet Union, the fort was used as a prison and way-station for prisoners being transported to labour camps. After the occupation of Lithuania by Nazi Germany, the fort was used as a concentration camp.

In 1958, a museum was established in the Ninth Fort. The museum contains collections of historical artifacts related both to the Soviet and Nazi crimes of war, as well as materials related to the earlier history of Kaunas and Ninth Fort. Most exhibits are labelled in English.

Over time, the Hill of Crosses has come to signify the peaceful endurance of Lithuanian people. Nobody knows exactly why or when people started leaving crosses here but it is believed that the first crosses were placed on the hill fort after the 1831 Uprising. The exact number of crosses is unknown, but estimates put it at about 55,000 in 1990 and 100,000 in 2006.



# Independence Days

Their tumultuous history, combined with a deep sense of national pride, has led to Lithuania becoming the independent country that it is today.



Each year Lithuania celebrates two independence days: Restoration of the

State Day on February 16<sup>th</sup> and Restoration of Independence Day on March 11<sup>th</sup>.

## **Restoration of the State Day - February 16<sup>th</sup>**

During WWI, German troops occupied the region while marching to Russia, and they maintained control until the Russian revolution in 1917. At this time, Germany gave Lithuanians the choice to be aligned either with Germany or Russia. Ignoring these options, the Act of Independence of Lithuania was signed, proclaiming independence on February 16, 1918.

## **Restoration of Independence Day - March 11<sup>th</sup>**

In 1990, Lithuania was allowed to hold a democratic election, and the elected Parliament declared independence from the Soviet Union on March 11<sup>th</sup>, 1990, considered the Restoration of Independence Day. The Soviet forces persecuted Lithuanians until the Soviet Union finally recognized Lithuania's independence in 1991.



Both independence days are public holidays in Lithuania. People dress in the national colours of yellow, green, and red, or wear traditional costumes. They also wave flags to show their pride.



# Religion

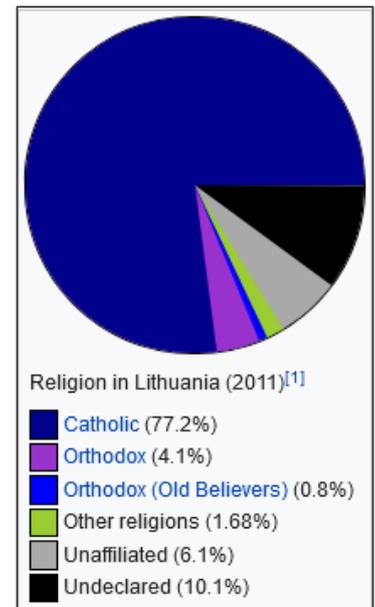
According to the 2011 census, 77.2% of residents of Lithuania were Catholics.

Catholicism has been the main religion since the official Christianisation of Lithuania in 1387.

One of Lithuania's strength has been its tolerance of various cultures and religions.

Today as well as the Catholic Church there are

Greek Catholics, Orthodox, and other Christian churches. There are also Muslims, Jews, Karaites, Romuva and Hindus in Lithuania.



Vilnius Cathedral is the heart of Catholic spiritual life in Lithuania.

# Money

Lithuania adopted the Euro on 1 January 2015.

This made it the last of the three Baltic states to adopt the euro, after Estonia (2011) and Latvia (2014). Before then, its currency, the litas, was pegged to the euro at 3.4528 litas to 1 euro.



# Traditional Costume



Lithuania folk costumes make use of linen weavings and feature a variety of colours, designs, textures, and geometric patterns. Nowadays the full costume is worn only by folk dance groups or

worn as part of celebrations on national holidays.

Women wear aprons embroidered with geometric designs covering long plaid skirts. Jewellery is a part of the dress and most often you will see women wearing jewellery with local amber.



Hats trimmed with ribbon and vests are also typical elements for Lithuanian traditional dress. Women may cover their hair with scarves or wear unique pillbox hats.

The men's clothing is decorated with woven sashes. Boots are the traditional footwear. You'll often see striped, tapered trousers with long jackets worn by men.

# Virgilijus Alekna

Olympic Gold Medalist 2000 & 2004 -  
Discus Throw

Virgilijus Alekna is a Lithuanian former discus thrower. He won medals at three summer Olympics. Gold in 2000 and 2004, and bronze in the 2008 Olympics. His personal best throw was 73.88 m which he threw in 2000.

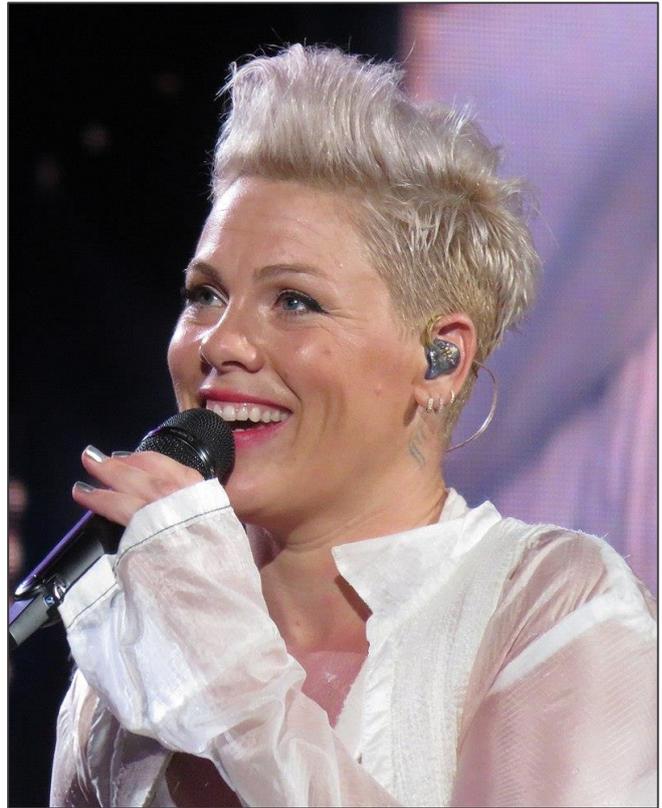


He was appointed UNESCO Champion for Sport in November 2007, in recognition of his role in promoting sport at school.

After retiring from athletics, Alekna was elected to the national parliament, the Seimas, in 2016.

# Pink

Born Alecia Beth Moore in Pennsylvania, USA, Pink has strong Lithuanian roots. Her mother is a Litvak, or Lithuanian Jew, with roots leading back to Lithuania's capital Vilnius. Pink has described her background as "Irish-German-Lithuanian-Jew".



An internationally famous singer, songwriter, dancer and actress, Pink has won three Grammy Awards, a Brit Award and six MTV Video Music Awards. In 2009, Billboard named Pink as one of the Pop Artists of the Decade and was the second most-played female solo artist in the United Kingdom during the 2000s decade, behind Madonna.