

Lithuania (*Lietuva*)



QUICK FACTS

Population: 3.5 million

Area: slightly larger than West Virginia

Capital: Vilnius (549,000)

Languages: Lithuanian (official)

EDUCATION

Lithuania's education system has undergone a number of reforms since 1991. Pre-school is free and universal, but is not mandatory. Basic education is compulsory through age 16, typically 10th grade. Students may then continue to secondary education (11-12th grades) or 2-3 years of vocational training. Grading is on a 10-point scale (10 = excellent; 8 = good; 7 = average; 4 and below = unsatisfactory). The literacy rate for individuals age 15 and over is 99.8%. Lithuanians are among the most educated people in the European Union. Approximately 93% of 25 to 64 year-olds have at least secondary education and 34% of Lithuanians hold a higher education degree. Ninety percent of Lithuanians can converse in a second language and 50% speak two foreign languages.



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Lithuanian girls in traditional dress

Once a medieval kingdom, Lithuania is now a parliamentary democracy and a member of both the European Union and NATO. President Dalia Grybauskaitė, the first woman president in Lithuania, was elected for a second term in 2014. Lithuania will adopt the Euro as its official currency on January 2, 2015. The country features rolling hills, rivers and sandy beaches on the Baltic Sea coast. The Curonian Spit, a sand dune peninsula 98 km long and 0.4-4 km wide, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

RELIGION

Lithuania does not have a state religion and the majority of the population rarely attends church. However, 77% of the population identified as Roman Catholic in the 2011 census and Roman Catholicism has strong historical and cultural roots in Lithuania. Approximately 4% of the population is Orthodox Christian; additional religious affiliations include Old Believer Orthodox, Lutheran, Baptist, Pentecostal, Judaism and Muslim. Lithuanians were the last Europeans to Christianize at the end of the 14th century.

ETHNICITY

"Lithuanian" can designate citizenship or ethnicity. Per the 2011 census, the ethnic composition of the Republic of Lithuania is 84.1% Lithuanian, 6.6% Polish, 5.8% Russian, 1.2% Belarusian, and 2.3% other (including Jewish, Latvian, Tartar and Ukrainian). Ethnic Lithuanians often identify with a local region, such as Žemaitija or Suvalkija. Ethnic Poles primarily live in the Vilnius region in communities going back several centuries. Prior to World War II, Lithuania had a large and dynamic Jewish community, 98% of which perished in the Holocaust.

FAMILY, RELATIONSHIPS & CUSTOMS

Lithuania's population is largely urban (67%) and primarily lives in apartments. In the past, 3 generations lived together, but today more young people are living independently. Many Lithuanians retain a connection to the countryside and spend weekends and holidays "in the village," especially during mushroom-gathering season. Joninės, which combines St. John's Day and the summer solstice, is celebrated with folk dances and bonfires. Lithuanians honor their relatives by visiting cemeteries on All Soul's Day (Nov. 2). Other holidays include Statehood Day (July 6, recognizing the medieval Grand Duchy), Independence Day (Feb. 16, recognizing the 1918 declaration of independence), and Restoration of Independence (March 11, recognizing the 1991 declaration). Basketball is the most popular sport – Lithuania won the bronze medal in the 1992 Olympics and a number of Lithuanians play for teams abroad.



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CONTEMPORARY LITHUANIA

Located in northeastern Europe on the Baltic Sea, Lithuania was first mentioned in a chronicle in 1009. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania, a medieval kingdom, stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. Lithuania later joined a commonwealth with Poland and eventually became part of the Russian Empire. In 1918, Lithuania declared independence; however, it was annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940. It was occupied by Nazi Germany during World War II and re-occupied by the Soviet Union in 1944. In the late 1980s, political protests were transformed into an independence movement demanding freedom from the Soviet Union. The first free elections in 1990 led to a declaration of restoration of independence on March 11. Despite attempts by Moscow to impose control, including using tanks to seize the Vilnius television tower on January 13, 1991, the Lithuanian independence movement – along with their neighbors in Latvia and Estonia – remained nonviolent.

In 2004, Lithuania joined the EU and NATO. It has led the NATO Provincial Reconstruction Team in the Ghawr province of Afghanistan since 2005. Lithuania is ranked 35th in the United Nations (UN) Human Development Report 2014. The economy of Lithuania was one of the fastest growing in the world from 1998 to 2008. Like many countries, Lithuania was hit hard by the recent economic crisis. In mid-2014, the total unemployment rate was 10.5%, with 17.7% of young adults under age 25 unemployed. Indeed, many young people now go abroad at least temporarily to find employment, mostly in other EU countries. Food processing and chemical products represent the two largest manufacturing sectors of the Lithuanian economy. Lithuania has over 50% of the world's market for high-energy picosecond lasers and is a leader in global production of ultra-fast parametric light generators.



LITHUANIANS IN THE USA

Lithuanians came to the US in 3 waves. The first arrived at the end of the 19th century, settling in the East and in Chicago, working primarily in coal mining and heavy industries. After WW II, approximately 40,000 Lithuanians came to the US as displaced persons. A third wave began immigrating in the 1990s after Lithuania regained its independence. Over 700,000 Americans have Lithuanian heritage, with 80,000 Lithuanian Americans in the Chicago metropolitan area. Lithuanian communities in the US offer Saturday schools, cultural activities such as folk dancing, and church services.



Yellow symbolizes golden fields, as the sun, light, and goodness; green represents the forests of the countryside, in addition to nature, freedom, and hope; red stands for courage and the blood spilled in defense of the homeland.



NAMES

Surnames have both masculine (-ius, -as, -is) and feminine versions, which are distinguished between maiden (-ytė) and married (-ienė) names. As a result, members of the same family typically have different endings on their surnames. EX: Father and son Bertulis, mother Bertulienė and daughter Bertulytė.

FAMOUS LITHUANIANS

Famous Lithuanians include basketball players Šarūnas Marčiulionis (Seattle Sonics) and Arvydas Sabonis (Portland Trailblazers). Famous Lithuanian Americans include football players Jonny Unitas and Dick Butkus, tennis player Vitas Gerulaitis, actress Ruta Lee, film director Robert Zemeckis, and Anthony Keidis, lead singer for the Red Hot Chile Peppers.

LITHUANIAN WORDS

Hi	Sveikas/Labas
Bye	Viso gero
Good morning	Labas rytas
Yes	Taip (Type)
No	Ne (Neh)
Please.....	Prašom (PRA-shum)
Thank you	Madloba
You're Welcome.....	Nera už ką (NEH-rah uzh ka)
How are you?	Kaip sekasi?
I do not understand	Aš ne suprantu
Do you understand?	Ar jūs suprantote?
What is your name?.....	Koks jūsų vardas?
My name is	Mano vardas yra

USEFUL LINKS

- [CIA World Factbook: Lithuania](#)
- [BBC Country Page: Lithuania](#)
- [National Geographic: Lithuania](#)
- [English language News](#)

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