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# VILNIUS

## “IN YOUR SPORRAN”

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### About this guide

This series of downloadable NATA Mini “In Your Sporran” Guides has been designed specifically to save the hassle of printing out reams of NATA web pages in order to make sure you don’t miss something whilst wandering the back streets of your chosen destination.

This guide has been compiled almost exclusively by me (Paul Allison), and is based entirely on personal experiences and opinions. Please do not prejudice anything on my say so – not only am I quite warped, but many places were only visited once, and therefore may have been having a particularly good or bad day.

This guide is not intended to replace more traditional sources of information, such as the excellent Lonely Planet guide books or the indispensable “In Your Pocket” guides available local in many Eastern European cities (as well as the downloadable versions from [www.inyourpocket.com](http://www.inyourpocket.com), which have inspired this very guide). Instead, the idea is to supplement these more detailed, better researched and more balanced guides with my own ramblings.

These guides originally came about as people were forever asking for pub tips and the like for places I’ve been to – I soon grew tired of typing out the same emails every few weeks and opted instead to keep the information on the web on the NATA Online site.

All opinions expressed in this guide are those of the author, and not necessarily those of the Netley Abbey Tartan Army.

- For more information about NATA (the Netley Abbey Tartan Army), including photos and diary accounts of many trips abroad with Scotland, as well as much more travel information and guides), please visit [www.netleyabbeytartanarmy.com](http://www.netleyabbeytartanarmy.com)
- For more information on me, please visit [www.paulallison.co.uk](http://www.paulallison.co.uk)



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## Lithuania Introduction

Lithuania is the least Westernised of the Baltic states (although there are real signs of change), and shares many bonds with neighbouring Poland – not least of which a strong Catholic faith. Sometimes called the “Italians of the Baltics”, the locals have a reputation for being passionate and hot-headed – something I would have to agree with!

The local beer available in abundance is Utenos, although there are other brands. The beer is decent enough – a pils taste, although slightly heavier to digest. If you get the chance in either Vilnius or Kaunas to try Avilyš – don’t miss it! The normal stuff is top notch, the Ginseng Beer a bit too stoutish, but the Honey Beer is one of the best beers I have ever tasted.

The local spirit is mead – “midus” – and comes in a range of potencies, from a respectable 12% to a mindblowing 75% (Absinthe generally clocks in at 70%). The first time I tried mead was in 1998 – I had just under a fiver worth of Litas left at the airport, so bought a small earthenware Grolsch-style bottle at the airport (green label = 12%, blue = 25%, red = 50% - I chose red). I have never, ever known anything to get 4 grown men drunk so quickly (i.e. just a single shot, after a few beers). The second time I tried mead was in April 2003 – a gift from a drunken, aged skinhead, it was brought to me alight on a silver platter with a bicycle bell (which the waitress was ringing). I managed half the double-shot before the straw melted, and my night came to an abrupt end shortly after.

## Vilnius

Vilnius is just as unique as the other Baltic capitals, and can also boast the largest medieval Old Town in Europe – this led to some early claims of it being “the New Prague” (I first heard them in 1998 on my first visit). By 2005, the tourist infrastructure was certainly improved, even from 2 years previous.

The Old Town is very spread out, and is bestowed with wide streets and low buildings – all of this allows a lot of sunlight to hit the brightly painted buildings, making this a much more colourful city than most.



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The Old Town centres on two elongated Squares (yes, I know they make rectangles) – Didžioji and Vokiečių, joined together to form an “L”, however the most magnificent of the sights is the Cathedral. Standing at the eastern end of Gedimino Prosop, the massive white building stands in its own square, and has an unusual stand-alone bell tower around 50 metres away. Legend has it that there is a lucky slab somewhere between the tower and the cathedral’s front door.

Immediately behind the Cathedral is Gediminas Hill, topped by a small fort – climb up here and pay the admission fee for a great view over the old city and of Three Crosses hill in the other direction. Just down from here is Uzupio, an area with a bohemian reputation but I’ve never been myself. The back-streets between the old town and Uzupio are very atmospheric and well worth exploring.

### Paul’s recommendations:

- #1 Bar – Avilyš
- #1 Sight – The Cathedral and Bell Tower
- #1 Thing to do – The KGB Museum

### Vilnius: must see sights

As well as Gediminas Hill and the Cathedral (above), other sights include

- **Gates of Dawn** – beautiful gate and church on a slight hill at the southern end of Ausros Vartu, off Didžioji.
- **Cathedral Square and Cathedral** – stunning, stark white architecture.
- **KGB Museum** – not as great as everyone made it out to be (I prefer Riga’s Occupation Museum), but still well worth a visit – it’s along Gedimino Prosop opposite Lukiskes.
- **Frank Zappa statue** – the only one in the world, apparently. But its still just a statue. You’ll find it just off Pylimo on K. Kalinausko.
- **Zalgiris Stadium** – North of the Neris from the Old Town (take the Zaliasis Bridge and see the remaining Communist statues), the stadium is a small communist bowl with limited cover. There’s not much to get out there for, and certainly no club shop or such – if you do make the trek, be sure to try the Antalia Bar (below).



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### Vilnius: Top pubs

**The PUB** – the quintessential Vilnius boozier, loved by most of the visiting Tartan Army, yet hated by me for some of the worst beer in the country! Features: a cosy bar up front, an even cosier bit downstairs that I didn't get to visit, a barn-sized beer-hall out back and a criminal shortage of toilets. On the plus side, the pizza was lovely, and the steaks were recommended by the Milingavie Boys, but not the cheapest food you could get in Vilnius! An institution, so probably deserves a visit on the strength of that alone.

**Naktinis Vilkas** – More of a club than a pub. From the Lithuania Diary: “The DJ was spinning heavy house tunes from the cockpit of a MIG jet that had crashed into the dance floor, but the quieter bar area had big velvet seats with lots of soviet imagery, and there were mannequins of Lenin and “Uncle Joe” behind the bar (and the staff were more than happy to let us climb over for photos).”

**Brodvejus (aka “Broadway”)** – A complete meat-market! Down a side-street just along from the Radisson SAS, Broadway boasts a small-ish downstairs bar, a bigger and more comfortable bar, and a dance floor (with mezzanine level) that could comfortably house a small aircraft. Open until very late, but expect a small fee to get in (£1-£3).

**Avilyis** – this is a brew-pub with top-notch grub and far and away the best beer in town, and posh enough for the Lithuanian FA to wine and dine David Taylor here! Make sure you try the Honey Beer, or, if you're feeling adventurous, one of the beer cocktails. This is just down from the Cathedral Square, on the right hand side as you walk away from the Cathedral. GO HERE!

**Antalia Bar, Zalgiris Stadium** – a far out choice, but essential if you're ground-hopping. The Antalia Bar is one of a couple of bars actually built into the stadium's outside wall (at the north-west corner). Unlikely to be open for full international, but looked lived in enough to be open the rest of the time.

**Po Grin Dis**, opposite Zalgiris Stadium – a functional but very friendly local, north of the river, and just over the road from the ground.



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**Bix** – a down-to-earth rockers bar, behind the Radisson SAS hotel in the main square. Cheap, cheerful (as rockers will allow) and best seen through a haze of alcohol. Scene of the mead and bicycle bell incident.

**Busi Treacias** – a two storey pub down a dark side-street (Totoriu) off Gedimino. Downstairs was very busy, but we went upstairs to sit amongst the office parties. Another brew-pub, although think hard before ordering the cherry beer!

**The Globe Bar (Shakespeare Hotel)** – a touch of class! Wooden and velvet furniture, bookcases and a genteel atmosphere – the Globe Bar is in the Shakespeare Hotel, sort of behind Cathedral Square to the south (and opposite a youth hostel). Slightly pricier than outside options, but still cheaper than you will be used to.

**Pylimo** – Pylimo is a long street that runs along the western boundary of the Old Town, from the Station up to Gedaminas Prospektas. There are a number of local pub options as you head north – most notably the pub in the basement of the Aeroflot building (draw your own conclusions!), and around the corner in Pamenkalnio. Worth a look to see how the locals drink!

**Astoria Bar** – in the lobby (turn right as you go in) of the Radisson SAS hotel in the heart of the old town. Posh, expensive but classy, and looks out at street level so ideal for people-watching.

**Aukštaiciai** – quirky pub down a dead-end side street (Antokolskio) that does food and some more unusual beer.

**SkyBar** – on the top floor of the very shiny Lietuva Hotel (re-opened a couple of years ago, and light years from the Soviet throwback we stayed at in 1998). Very glam, cocktails are a must, dahling, but everything comes at a price. Sister of the Skyline Bar in Riga.

**Prospekto PUB** – the spiritual successor to the legendary Prie Parlmento is much better situated, a stones throw from the cathedral at Gedomino 2. Large and spacious, with a dance floor right in front of the bar and a dancing pole on the bar (we were in on a Sunday afternoon – no dancing going on, I'm afraid), and most crucially, pear cider on draught. Apparently very popular at weekend evenings when it becomes more of a club – I'd recommend it on what I saw.



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## **Kaunas**

Kaunas is Lithuania's second city, and is just over an hour's drive from Vilnius (or two hours if you're in an A-Team van with a lost Armenian driver!). The centre is pretty small, and is based on a peninsula bordered by two rivers, with the Old Town squeezed right down into the point. To be truthful, the Old Town seemed pretty quiet, although the square and cobbled streets were pleasant enough. The real action was up on the precinct, which has to be the biggest I've ever seen! It must stretch for at least 2 miles, right up to a stunning Kremlin-style church.

A student town, Kaunas does have several nightlife options, but we were only there for a day (with the match in the evening).

No bars stood out as particular favourites, and the service seemed pretty slow in all of them (doubtless caught off guard by a couple of thousand thirsty Scots!), although we met up with most people in the large Metropolis. Special mention to the Cowboy restaurant/bar where we had lunch (in the cobbled street leading down to the precinct) and to the Kaunas branch of Aviiys (no Ginseng beer, but plenty of honey!).

Was this guide useful? Please let me know:  
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