

Tuesday the 21<sup>st</sup> of July 2009

Today we went on from Riga to Vilnius.



Coat of arms of Vilnius

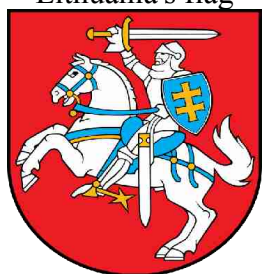
Vilnius goes back to the 9<sup>th</sup> century and became in 1323 Lithuania's capital under the grand duke Gediminas. After the union with Poland in 1569 the town became very Polonised. In 1795 it came under Russia. In 1915 Vilnius was taken by the Germans and it changed owner many times during 1919–20. The Russians occupied the city in July 1920 and ceded it to Lithuania. The League of Nations gave its approval with reservations of the general election, but before that, the Polish Army under General Lucjan Żeligowski seized Vilnius. The city and its surroundings were designated as a separate state, called the Republic of Central Lithuania. On February 20, 1922 after the highly contested election in Central Lithuania, the entire area was annexed by Poland, with the city becoming the capital of the Wilno Voivodship (Wilno being the name of Vilnius in Polish). The predominant languages of the city were still Polish and, to a lesser extent Yiddish. Lithuania maintained Vilnius as the county's capital and kept the border closed until Poland in 1938 forced the border open. It was taken by Soviet troops in 1939.

Before the second world war the city was characterized by its Jewish population. For over 150 years the city had a function as an east European center for Jewish culture. The Jewish community was destroyed during the war; the Jewish population was reduced from 80 000 in 1941 to 6000 in 1945.

The old town center in Vilnius is today on UNESCO's world heritage list.



Lithuania's flag



Lithuania's coat of arms

The present Lithuania has been populated by Baltic speaking tribes since prehistoric times. They were farmers and had trading connection with Scandinavia and with the Slavonic people in the east. Lithuania was first mentioned in the story about the *Quedlinburg-annals* 14. february 1009. About 1230 *Ringold* appears as grand duke. His son, Mindaugas, united the country in 1236. He converted to Christianity and was baptised by the archbishop of Riga in 1251 and was crowned king of Lithuania 6. July 1253. As Lithuania's first and only king (before 1918) he ceded territories to The Teutonic Knights and promised to let the Order take over the country after his death. But in 1261 he renounced Christianity, beat the Knights in the battle of Durbe, and encouraged the the heathen Prussian neighbouring tribes to revolt against the Germans. After his death in 1263 both the kings title and the Christianity disappeared.

In the 13 hundreds Lithuania was the largest country in Europe, and present Belarus, Ukraine plus parts of Poland and Russia were areas, which were placed under The Grand Duchy of Lithuania. With the Lublin union of 1569, Poland and Lithuania created a new state, The Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth. The commonwealth lasted for over two hundred years, until the neighbouring countries started to pull territories out of the union from 1772 to 1795. The Russian Empire took now over most of Lithuania's territories. After the first world war, Lithuania's declaration of independence was signed 16. februar 1918, and the country was again created as a sovereign state. From 1940 Lithuania was first occupied by The Soviet Union and then by Germany. When the second world war went to an end in 1944 the Nazis withdraw and the Soviet Union occupied Lithuania once more. The 11<sup>th</sup> of March 1990 Lithuania was the first Soviet republic that declared its independence from the Union.

The present Lithuania is one of the fastest growing economies in the European Union. Lithuania became an adequate member of the Schengen agreement the 21<sup>th</sup> of Desember 2007.



Lithuania's position in Europe

We had booked at Hotel Ambassador, which was in the middle of the towns centre.

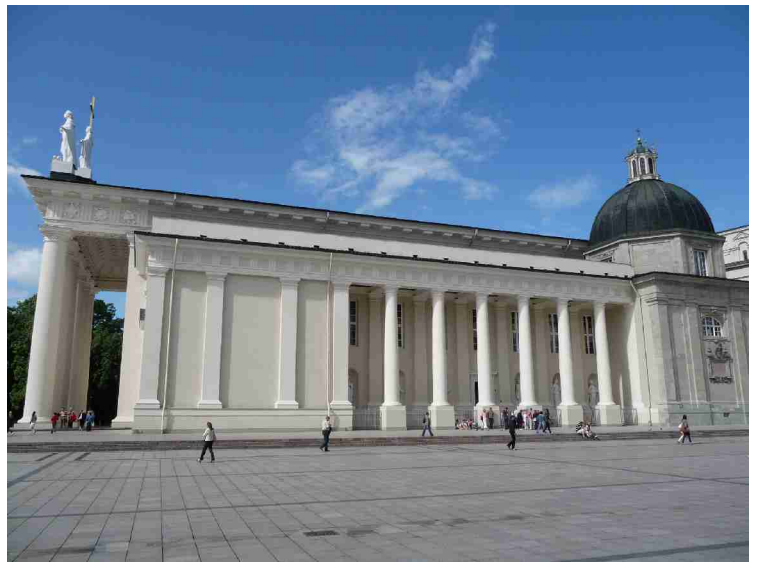


The first time we wanted hot water, we found out that what should have been hot was barely lukewarm. When we complained, they tried to fix it, but it was not better.

Then we got another room, much bigger. There everything worked as it should.



This is the cathedral in Vilnius with bell tower



Here seen from another angle



The cathedral square



At the cathedral square is this statue of Gediminas, the founder of The Duchy of Lithuania.



From the cathedral we took the foot path up to the Gedimino hill where the Vilnius castle once towered majestically over the city. Today there is not much left of the castle, but this 20 meter high stone tower with Lithuania's flag waving on top has become a national symbol.



Right below lies the St. Anne church.





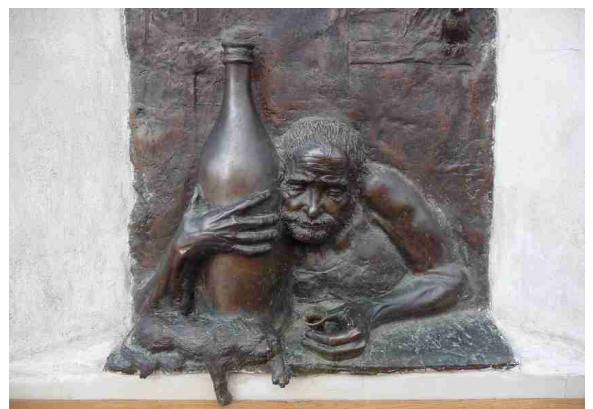
Inside it looked like this



Right beside the church stands a statue of the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz



Here we have arrived at the angel of Użupis. It was erected 4. april 2001. It symbolizes the artistic freedom for the Użupis district.



This is a relief, which is placed on a wall in Użupis.

In 1997 the inhabitants of Użupis pronounced its independence and stated the area as the Republic of Użupis, with its own flag, currency, president, constitution, and army (counting 12 men). They celebrates their independence with the Użupis day, which is on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April every year.





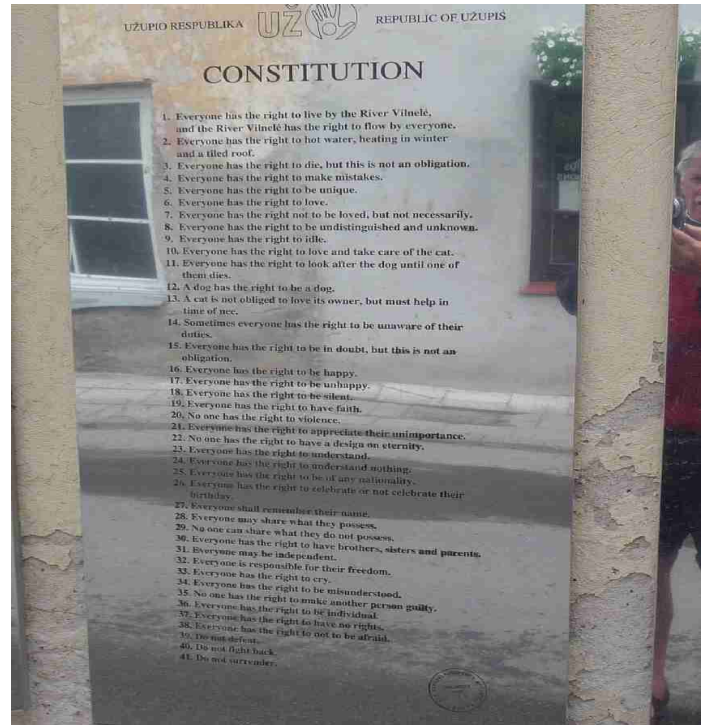
Here we are in the main building of the republic. Kjell buys postcards.



This is the post office department. They have their own stamps.



This is the constitution in many languages. It is put on a wall outside the main building. To the right is the english version.



The church St. Paraskeva.



Typical street picture

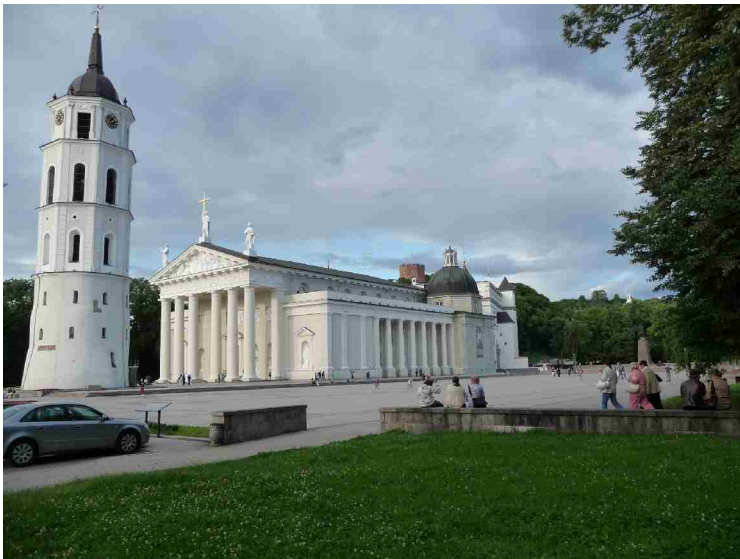




Now we are almost back into the centre. We can see the remains of Vilnius castle in the background.



The president palace. It was built in the 1400s and became official seat for the president in 1997.



On the way back to the hotel we went past the cathedral again.



Over the entrance to the theater are these three Muses

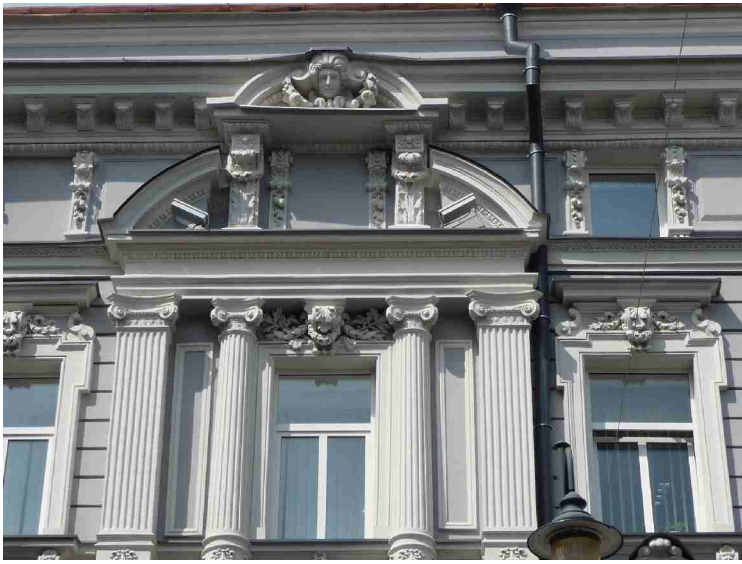


In the evening we had a meal at this China restaurant



There were a lot of nice buildings with lots of decorations in this city





Here are a few pictures showing facades of some buildings



Kjell beside the car







In 1995 was the only known sculpture of Frank Zappa, an american composer, guitarist, singer and recordproducer, unveiled in the center of Vilnius with the government's permission.



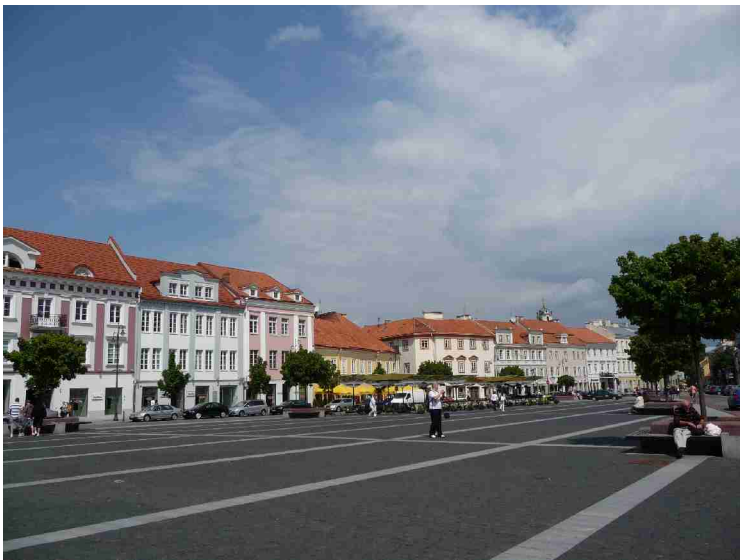
Original fountain



There are tourist buses in this city too



The city hall



The city hall square



Here we are approaching Ausros Vartai (Gates of Dawn). This is the only of 9 gates in the city wall left from about 1500.





There is built a small chapel right over the arch. The chapel has become a travel destination for Catholic pilgrims, among them even Pope Johannes Paul II, thanks to a renaissance painting of Virgin Mary that shall have curing force.



The gate looks like this on the other side



This is the artillery bastion from the 1700s.



From the artillery bastion we can look across to the Three Crosses. It is a big white monument with three crosses, which are in memory of 14 Franciscan monks, who according to legend shall have been murdered by local heathens in the 1300s.





After having walked so far, we needed a beer.



The cathedral in the evening



This is a nice building, which lies straight across the street from the hotel.