

Lithuania – people, culture, language

A guide for businesses



The country

History: located on the direct route that connects Germany to Russia, Lithuania has, for much of its 1,000 years of recorded history, been occupied by one or other of its neighbours. It was not always so; in the 14th century, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was a major power, holding sway over lands from the Baltic to the Black Sea and, in subsequent centuries, part of the Lithuanian – Polish State.



*Pilies Street in Vilnius Old Town
Source: European Commission*

The mix of central European and Slavic, Orthodox and Catholic Christianity and the contributions of tradesmen, craftsmen, monks and scholars attracted by Lithuania's tolerance has left a diverse heritage.

Vilnius's Old Town, extending over almost 360 hectares, reflects this diversity in its network of wide streets lined with graceful mansions and ancient lanes where older buildings huddle together. Today's Vilnius is a centre of knowledge with eight universities, several research institutions and an outward-looking population with several languages spoken daily.

Lithuania today: with a population of 3.6 million people, Lithuania is the largest of the Baltic states and has become a leading location for foreign investors and a competitive centre for product sourcing in the region. Its success has been due to a number of factors: its strategic location and proximity to big markets, a well-developed transport infrastructure, a well-trained labour force, plus a stable currency and attractive operating and living costs. Lithuania's Free Economic Zones at Klapeda and Kaunas, and Industrial Parks set up at Utena and Kaišiadorys, offer added incentives to foreign investors.

Key sectors: textiles and apparel, automotive components, plastic and rubber, chemicals, wood-based products and furniture, metal processing and machinery, fish, electronics, telecoms, tourism.
The UK is the largest supplier to Lithuania of food, IT, textiles and electronics.

Business culture and etiquette

- **Initial contact:** appointments should be made in advance. It may take some time to fix a meeting. Remember that frequently, senior executives acquired their experience in the former Communist regime. In advance of any meeting, confirm by fax or letter that it will take place.
- **Meeting and greeting:** in general, business behaviour in Lithuania is similar to that in the rest of Europe: a handshake before and after a meeting is customary and acceptable. Immediately after shaking hands at the start of the meeting, it is customary to exchange business cards. See that you have a sufficient quantity of business cards.
- **Building and maintaining a successful relationship:** it is important to meet local requirements and deadlines. Western-style marketing techniques are developing in Lithuania. Sales promotion is becoming increasingly popular as companies realise the benefits it can bring. Companies are advised to visit the market on a regular basis.
- **Dress code:** business is conducted in a fairly formal manner and smart appearance is important. The acceptable dress for a business meeting is a business suit for men. Women are recommended to dress fashionably, but not loudly.
- **New technologies:** there are 2.1 million mobile phone users in Lithuania today. Internet and email are also very popular. Most companies have access to the Internet and the number of companies with their own website is rapidly increasing.
- **Gifts:** acceptable gifts for business meetings are items for the office, pens (including pens with your company logo) or selected wines.
- **Holidays:** you are recommended to avoid business meetings in the months of July and August or around the times of national holidays.

Language

Official language: Lithuanian, which is part of the Indo-European group of languages. The Lithuanian alphabet has 32 letters and the language is closely related to Sanskrit.

Other languages: English is widely spoken. German and French are also popular and knowledge of Russian is widespread.

Finding translators/interpreters: in the UK, you can search for local, quality-assured providers on **BLIS Professionals** (www.blis.org.uk/professionals). In Lithuania translators and interpreters are readily available – the best place to enquire is at the British Embassy.

Basic Lithuanian phrases

The positive impression you will make by learning to speak a few basic Lithuanian phrases cannot be overestimated. Below are some commonly-used phrases – if you are interested in learning the Lithuanian language, you can search for quality-assured trainers and courses at www.blis.org.uk.

	Lituanian	Pronunciation
Hello	Sveiki	Svay-ki
Good day/ morning	Labas rytas	Lah-bahs ree-tahs
Good evening	Labas vakaras	Lah-bahs vah-kah-rahhs
Goodbye	Sudie	Su-deah
Yes / no	Taip / Ne	Tayp / na
Please/Thank you	Prašau / Dekoju	Prah-show / Deh-kaw-yu
You're welcome	Prašau	Prah-show
Excuse me	Atisprašau	Aht-si-prah-show
My name is...	Mano vardas yra	Mah-naw vahrdahs ee rah
What's your name?	Kaip jusu vardas?	Kaip yoo-soo vahrdas?

The people

Ethnic mix: Lithuania is made up of the following ethnic mix: 80% Lithuanian, 9.4% Russian, 7% Polish, 3.6% other.

Friendly: Lithuanians are very hospitable and welcome guests to all they do or have.

Opinionated: Lithuanians talk a lot about politics. People have very strong opinions and usually are not happy with how things are done by Government.

Catholic: Most Lithuanians are Roman Catholic. Other religions include Lutheran, Russian Orthodox, Protestant, Evangelical Christian Baptist, Muslim and Jewish.



The Hill of Crosses near Siauliai, the fourth largest city in Lithuania. For many centuries, the Hill of Crosses has been the centre of pilgrimage. When Soviet authorities took power in Lithuania after World War II they tried to remove the crosses on many occasions, but the crosses were always secretly replaced by people overnight. Today, more than 50,000 crosses are testimony to the spirit of the Lithuanian people. The hill was visited by Pope John Paul II during his 1993 trip to Lithuania. Source: European Commission

Did you know..?

- The geographical centre of Europe (54°51' north and 25°19' east) lies in Lithuania, 20 kilometres north of Vilnius.
- Women in Lithuania achieved full political rights as soon as independence was proclaimed in 1918, and women and men have had equal voting and legal rights ever since. The chair of the first Lithuanian parliament in 1920 was a woman and women have played an active role in parliament and local governments.
- Vilnius's green uniformed police are nicknamed cucumbers!
- Lithuanians mark St John's Day (24 June), the longest day of the year, by gathering around giant bonfires to celebrate the country's pagan heritage, and creating floral flotillas to float along local rivers such as the River Neris in Vilnius.

Signposting and resources

- **BLIS Professionals** www.blis.org.uk/professionals – an on-line, quality-assured database of translators, interpreters, language trainers and cultural consultants in your area. You can search for BLIS providers offering Lithuanian language services in the East Midlands.
- **Resources** and organisations for more information:
 - Euro Information Centre www.euro-info.org.uk
 - Lithuanian Development Agency – www.lda.lt
 - Confederation of Lithuanian Industrialists – www.lpk.lt
 - Lithuanian Chamber of Commerce – www.chambers.lt

Sources

Research and text: Central European Development Agency (CEDA) 01302 367662
Regional Language Network East Midlands www.rln-eastmidlands.com
Euro Information Centre www.euro-info.org.uk
Millennium in the Centre of Europe – Lithuania Tourism Board
Lithuania – the smart move – Lithuanian Development Agency www.uktradeinvest.gov.uk
British Embassy Vilnius fact sheets
International House – www.ihworld.com
Photographs: European Commission www.europa.eu.int

Information correct on 8 December 2004

RLN East Midlands: promoting a greater capability in language and cultural skills for business and employment.
Tel: 0115 854 1399
Fax: 0115 854 1617
www.rln-eastmidlands.com