



TRAKAI AND VILNIUS DISTRICTS

MULTICULTURALISM AND PILGRIMAGE





THE HILL OF ANGELS

GPS: *54°40'37"N 24°55'39"E*

Address: Angelių kalvos str., Būda village, Trakai eldership, Trakai district municipality

ABOUT

The Hill of Angels rises up near Būda village, which is surrounded by the Galvė lakes. It has been decorated with wooden angels, people's prayers and folk songs. This is a place for fostering human devotion and spirituality. It is spotted with plenty of finely crafted wooden angel sculptures, wrought sun-like crosses and life trees decorated with traditional national symbols.

In 2009, Dominyka Dubauskaitė-Semionovė and Lolita Piličiauskaitė-Navickienė decided to honour the celebration of Lithuania's 1000th anniversary and the 600th anniversary of the Basilica of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Trakai. Plans were made to place ten angels on the Hill where each of them would represent a different century. The kindness and generosity of people interested in the idea surpassed all possible expectations of the initiators. As a result, 18 angel sculptures found a new home on the Hill!

Today, the area of 4.3 hectares hosts over 40 magnificent sky-greeting wooden angels of all sizes, roadside poles. The angels embody one of the human truths, fundamental human or Christian values: Life, Truth, Peace, Empathy, Sacrifice, Love, Health, Joy, Gratitude, Hope, Kindness, etc. The angels include those that are the patrons of families, science, spiritual tranquilli-

ty, the Baltic road, etc. Your angel is on the Hill too, and you must pay him a visit.

The oak angel sculptures were created by Lithuanian and foreign artists and reflect traditional wood carving. Angels created from other materials appear on the Hill, too. In 2015, the Angel of Orphans, whose head is made of granite, came here. In 2017, the Angel of Librarians, made out of metal, also joined the collection. Sculptures give meaning to the ideas embraced by their donors and reflect the message carried by the angels. It is an ongoing project that aims to fulfil the spiritual needs of people. Everyone is invited to participate in its development by providing special meaning to his/her thoughts, prayers or important moral values. The Hill of Angels is an open space for visitors. It offers a magnificent view of a landscape. Forests, lakes, the castle, the church and the Orthodox church are visible in the distance.

What else makes the Hill of Angels so special? If you take a bird's eye view of the territory, you may see an angel with its wings spread. The Angel's legs and body are shaped by lakes Galvė, Totoriškės and Luka (or Bernardinai), the spread wings – by lakes Skaistis and Akmena, and the Hill of Angels is the Angel's head!



THE LEGEND

When God was creating the region of Trakai, he was assisted by the Angel of Compassion. When water filled the imprints of God's fingers in the ground, many lakes of different shapes appeared. The Angel was mesmerised by the beauty of the crystal-clear waters, the abundance of fish and breathtakingly colourful birds diving in the waves. Thinking that the Angel of Compassion had lost his head because of these lakes, brothers turned to God. The Creator calmed them with a wave of his hand and said: in the spot where one is able to see three places where God is worshipped, he will regain his head! With that, the earth started trembling, the heavens started shaking, and a hill appeared. All the surrounding lakes joined it forming the Angel's body and wide-spread wings.

The Angel of Compassion woke up and after having realised that the Hill of Angels was his lost head from God's prophecy he said: *"There will be more and more angels on the hill. They will protect Trakai and all of Lithuania, and Trakai will become a path to spread kindness and love!"*

THE VISION

This place brings together and unites local people, families, professional and other communities. As the number of the angels on the Hill continues to grow, each visitor may undoubtedly find his/her spirit at ease here while praying or enjoying time in a unique place of unity of art and soul.

A sacred music festival 'Chants Resound on the Hill of Angels' and other community celebrations are organised here each year.

NEARBY:



WWW.ANGELUKALVA.LT



TRAKAI CENTRE OF REGIONAL TRADITIONAL CRAFTS

GPS: 54°38'56"N 24°55'56"E

Address: Karaimų str. 41, Trakai town, Trakai eldership, Trakai district municipality

ABOUT

The history of Trakai Region is characterised by the diversity of people of various nationalities who have been living peacefully together for many centuries. Since the times of the Grand Duke of Lithuania Vytautas (14th-15th centuries), people of many nationalities (Karaites, Georgians, Tatars and others) moved to Trakai following the Duke's invitation. As a result, a variety of traditional houses of prayer for every minority appeared there. The town blossomed in new cultural traditions, customs and useful crafts emerging together with the Tatar mosque, the Karaites kenesa, Orthodox churches, Ukrainian Greek Catholic and Catholic churches.

In 2015, the Trakai Centre of Regional Traditional Crafts started its activity introducing the colourful national cultural heritage and providing an excellent opportunity to learn a wide range of crafts. Its main objective is to preserve traditions and holiday making them interesting to both Trakai residents and visitors to the town. It is important to emphasise the cultural heritage of all nations that live in Trakai (Lithuanians, Karaites, Georgians and Tatars).

Trakai Centre of Regional Traditional Craft brings together craftsmen from Trakai District, provides consultancy about their crafts and craftsmanship certification, displays their creations by organising educational programmes, celebrations and fairs, and

professional craftsmen help participants enhance their skills in a variety of areas. A variety of products can be purchased at the souvenir shop.

One of the ways to ensure the continuity of traditional crafts is through educational programmes. These are practical classes and their length varies between one and a few hours. They give an opportunity to learn or excel in a wide range of skills. These include bread or kibinai baking, wool felting, shaping soap, producing straw decorations, creating various sorts of tea or weaving bands or carpets. During classes participants can make decorative creations such as ornaments and toys made of straw, angels carved from wood or plant-decorated wooden articles. During the Stone Incantation class one can learn more about the meaning of the signs and colours used by the Balts in ancient times, while the Dream-Reading Doll class participants explore the history of puppet making, traditions surrounding Lithuanian national costumes and the secrets of the dream-reading world. There is a charge for these educational programmes and they are held in the Lithuanian, Russian, Polish and English languages. Each participant of the educational programme is provided with a certificate of a beginner craftsman.



COOKING TREASURES

The list of traditional crafts of Trakai District would never be complete without the local cuisine heritage, thus, the centre offers a variety of culinary lessons. Visitors will be given the opportunity to learn the secrets of making the Karaite *kibins* or *chamur dolma*, a homemade dumpling soup. Also, you will find out more about famous dishes including Tatar *chak-chak*, Georgian *khachapuri* or *khinkali*. Guests will master cooking traditions of the Dzūkija Region by baking rye bread, the buckwheat cake *babka*, home-made honey cakes or ring-shaped rolls in an ancient oven. In winter, visitors are invited to learn more about Christmas Eve dishes, customs and games and bake *kūčiukai*, traditional Lithuanian pastries served on Christmas Eve. In preparation for Easter, you could attend a lesson on the art of Easter egg painting and learn more about the meaning of colours, symbols and other aspects of this craft. Before the shortest night of the year, which occurs on Saint John's Eve, the Tea Lab educational class will capture your senses with a variety of flavours and exclusive ancient tea-making recipes.

EDUCATIONAL TRIPS AND CAMPS

A variety of walking, biking and boat trips are organised. During the winter months, the centre invites everyone to take a walk on the frozen Lake Galvė and to the legends told about the lake itself and its islands. Those wishing to learn one of the oldest crafts, which is bee keeping, should take the quiet forest path to the ethnographic village of Tiltai. The Centre also organises bike trips to visit the manor of the Count Tyszkiewicz family. Passing through the hills, gravel roads and meadows Trakų Vokė, Lentvaris and Užutrakis can be reached. In summertime, creative children's camp programmes are organised. Small groups provide new opportunities for communication and self-expression. Camp activities encourage children's creativity and independence, form national self-awareness and strengthen ethno-cultural values. The camp children are introduced to traditional crafts, their history and the significance of fostering them.

NEARBY:



WWW.TRUKRASTAS.LT



ST. JOHN OF NEPOMUK ROADSITE POLE

GPS: *54°38'39"N 24°56'08"E*

Address: The crossing of Vytauto and Karaimų streets, Trakai town, Trakai eldership, Trakai district municipality

ABOUT

The town of Trakai is surrounded by many lakes, and for centuries St. John of Nepomuk has been its patron Saint; he is said to protect the town from flooding and other water-related calamities. The roadside pole of a classical style with a statue of St. John of Nepomuk is 14 metres in height and it is located at the heart of Trakai, i. e. at the crossing of two main streets, Karaimų and Vytauto, in the centre of the former Townhall square. It is one of the most important highlights of the town of Trakai.

Written sources testify that a brick column was there as early as the middle of the 17th century. After the uprising of 1863, the tsarist government ordered that the saint's sculpture be removed and offered a substantial remuneration for the job. The local residents refused to comply. However, a rogue grabbed a knife and was ready to destroy the sculpture, but he fell off the ladder and broke his leg. Trakai chief of police had to invite the Cossacks to tear down the sculpture of the Saint.

In 1935, a new sculpture of St. John of Nepomuk was installed on the roadside pole. It was created by Vilnius sculptor, Stanislaw Horn-Poplawski. However, diligent atheists took the wooden Nepomuk off the roadside pole and threw it into the lake! When the employees of Trakai museum found out about this, they found the sculpture deep in the lake's waters, brought it to the

surface and stored it safely in the museum storage facility. Four clocks were installed on the pillar as replacements for the statue, but they broke down shortly after: they all showed different time. Today, we can see a restored sculpture of the patron of Trakai which was proudly returned to its original location in 1990.

Many legends are told about the roadside pole of St. John of Nepomuk. It is said that in the 18th century, when the owner of Užutrakis Manor, Laurynas Odinec, was sailing on the lake, there was a sudden storm and the boat started sinking. The landlord recalled St. Nepomuk and started praying to him wholeheartedly asking for support. The storm calmed down then as quickly as it had started. Odinec was saved, and he was very grateful to the Saint for his narrow escape. To express his gratitude, he erected the sculpture of the Saint in the middle of the Market Square.

Another story tells about the grief of the local residents when the tsarist government took the statue off the roadside pole. The people started to believe that each spring the waters of Lake Galvė would claim one human life if St. Nepomuk was not returned back to the pillar. In time, the story was somewhat modified: it was said that the lake was ice-free in winter and the ice did not melt in spring unless the lake received its victim.



ST. JOHN OF NEPOMUK

John of Nepomuk was born around 1340 in Czechia, in the small town of Pomuk. When he turned 40, Nepomuk was ordained a priest and was later appointed to serve as a Canon of St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague, a member of the Capitula. Joan, wife of Czech King Waclaw IV of Luxemburg, used to confess her sins only to this priest. The story goes that the King, being suspicious about his wife's fidelity, tried to make Nepomuk reveal the secret of the confession. The priest, however, did not obey the King and fell into disgrace.

When a debate erupted in the Kingdom about the influence of the Church on the State, John of Nepomuk defended the seniority of the Archbishop of Prague against the King, which angered the King more than ever. The King ordered the arrest of the priest, his interrogation, torture and murder. He is believed to have been dropped with his hands tied from Charles bridge into the Vltava River on 19 March 1393. Later, people started to worship him as a martyr, the defender of the seal of the confession. In 1721, Pope Innocent XIII declared John Nepomuk as Blessed, and in 1729, Pope Benedict XIII proclaimed him a saint.

It was the Jesuits who brought the cult of St. John of Nepomuk from Czechia to the Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth of the 18th

century. The Brotherhood carrying his name was established in Vilnius, and several churches were named after him. Utena area is known not only for its numerous lakes, but also for the number of roadside poles with his statue. St. John of Nepomuk is considered the patron of all Czechs, priests, river sailors, rafters, fishermen, sailors and bridges, the protector from floods and other water-related calamities, the saviour of the drowning man, and of the unfairly accused. In 1935, he was proclaimed the patron of the town of Trakai and 16 May is the Day of St. John of Nepomuk.

NEARBY:



WWW.TRAKAI-VISIT.LT/EN



TRAKAI BASILICA OF THE VISITATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

GPS: 54°38'34"N 24°56'03"E

Address: Birutės str. 5, Trakai town, Trakai eldership, Trakai district municipality

ABOUT

The Basilica of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary stands in Trakai peninsula surrounded by lakes. This church that equals Trakai Island Castle in terms of size and grandeur, was consecrated as a basilica in 2017 (there are 8 basilicas in Lithuania altogether).

Special criteria of *Domus Ecclesiae*, a decree of Divine Worship and Liturgy, were used in the process of granting the very honourable title of basilica. The criteria are applied both for the building itself and the living Church – for those who pray there. The exclusive historical importance of the church for the region and the country were acknowledged, as was the solemnity of the building and religious community's dissemination of faith and love.

The title of basilica also underlines the church's special ties with the Pope, since Trakai Basilica, which was given the title of Basilica by Pope Francis, has had the Mother of God Image in the main altar for 600 years and 300 years ago Pope Clemence XI bestowed the image with the crowns. Thus, 2018 is the anniversary year of the coronation of the image and the year of the Mother of God, patron saint of Lithuania as well.

The church founded by Grand Duke Vytautas in the 15th century

has an irregular shaped form with harmoniously intertwined gothic and baroque features. Fresco fragments in the walls of the church recall the Byzantine-era style.

The Basilica is a treasure trove of sacred and fine art – there are easel paintings, memorial monuments, various relics, wine glasses, 18th-century candlesticks, a sanctuary lamp and more. A painting, depicting Mary, Mother of God is especially important since it is widely known for its miracles and graces. This first gold crowned painting officially blessed by the Pope during the period of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was given the title Protector of the Sick. Interestingly, the painting is revered by Catholic, Orthodox, and Muslim communities alike.



MOTHER OF GOD IMAGE

The image of Blessed Virgin Mary with the Infant in her arms was widely known throughout the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. From the beginning of the 17th century people began applying votives to the image as thanks for graces received. It is estimated that today there are over 400 votives!

This original 15th-century image in the main altar, holds a special historical meaning. The underside of the image has an inscription denoting that it is a gift from the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos to the ruler of Lithuania Grand Duke Vytautas to commemorate his baptism. The image, crowned 300 years ago by Pope Clemence XI, was repainted several times throughout the centuries.

After examination by restorers it became clear that an earlier image of Mary was in the gothic style, she was standing, without a scarf, and possibly with a crown of roses on her head. Later the figure was repainted in the Byzantine style. The luxurious crown that once adorned the image itself, now hangs above the picture and the finely etched golden background that dates back to the juncture of the 15th and 16th centuries was also etched anew.

THE BELLS

In 2017, when the main altar of the Basilica was consecrated and new bells, cast in the famous foundry run by the Kruševski brothers in the Polish town of Węgrów, were solemnly blessed. The main bell, which weighs an astounding 700 kilograms, is dedicated to Trakai Mother of God. The second one, a little bit smaller, marks the centenary of the restoration of Lithuania's independence. The Lithuanian bishops and the Lithuanian Parliament declared 2018 the year of the Mother of God, patron saint of Lithuania. The new bells of the Basilica of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary solemnly proclaim the pronouncement.

NEARBY:   

WWW.TRAKUBAZNYCIA.LT



TRAKAI OLD TOWN

GPS: 54°38'35"N 24°55'59"E

Address: Karaimų Str. 41, Trakai town, Trakai eldership, Trakai district municipality

ABOUT

Historically Trakai town is famous as a place where many national and religious communities get along harmoniously. This is reflected in the different and unique architectural traditions that collide here. Visitors to Trakai are invited to familiarise themselves with how peacefully Karaite Tatar, Orthodox, and Catholic traditions coexist.

Karaites have the smallest number of peoples of Turkic decent living in Lithuania. Nearly 300 families of Karaites who call Vyatutas the Great *Vatat Bij*, which means 'King, destroyer of enemies', were relocated to Trakai after the Crimea battle in the 14th century. The first Karaites served as the Duke's bodyguards. They took up residence close to the castle on the northern side of the peninsula and which is now called the Karaite side or the Small Town.

A kenesa in the Karaite side is the oldest in Lithuania and one of the three oldest Karaite temples in the world still in use! You can also see here several archaic window facades, each with three windows, on the street side. According to legend Karaites used to build their houses dedicating one window to God, a second to Vytautas (the ruler), and the third one for the owner himself. In

reality it was all about money – windows could only be installed after a tribute was paid to the duke. Therefore, less wealthy residents had one or two windows on the street side.

Karaimų Street claims to be the only place in the European Union that has an exposition dedicated to Karaite culture – Seraya Shapshal museum of the Karaite nation. Another building worthy of attention is the old Russian Empire postal building nearby.

The widest peninsula section was historically inhabited by Catholics and is also rich in architectural variety: different building sizes, shapes of the roofs and so on. One of the main accents of this part of the old town is an example of traditional Orthodox architecture – Orthodox Church of the Nativity of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary.

The western side of Trakai peninsula, called Dūdkaļnis, was traditionally inhabited by Tatars. Several centuries back there were a wooden mosque and several living houses. Brave Tatar soldiers of Crimean Golden Horde descent served in the army of Duke Vytautas and guarded the southern entrance to the town.



TRAKAI KENESA

The Karaites house of prayer is located in the northwestern part of Trakai old town. Karaites architectural and interior design features can be seen in this unique one-storey wooden structure. It consists of two spaces: main part (for men) and a balcony (for women) supported by four columns. As in other temples of Eastern religions women and men pray separately in the kenesa and everyone is required to wear a head covering.

The kenesa has an impressive blue dome shaped ceiling made with eight arches. Geometrical and plant components beautify the interior of the house of prayer. Interestingly, the altar is in the southern part and all burial ceremonies are held with the deceased person's head pointing southward.

The wooden Trakai kenesa was built back in the latter part of the 14th century and endured numerous wars and fires. Today you can see another Karaites temple in Vilnius, in the part of the city called Žvėrynas. Also, a commemorative stone marks the place of a kenesa that once stood in Panevėžys.

Address: Karaimų str. 30, Trakai town

GPS: 54°38'51"N 24°55'57"E

THE KARAITES

Lithuania's religious community of Karaites is one of nine state recognised traditional religious communities. The Karaites faith formed in 8th-century Mesopotamia (currently Iraq). The name derives from the word *kara*, which means 'to read, to study Holy Scriptures'. The foundation of the Karaites faith is based on the Old Testament only without later additions and commentaries. The main principles of explaining and studying Holy Scripture are based on individual and independent interpretation without the guidance of any higher authority.

When the first Karaites arrived in Lithuania 600 years ago they were considered an elite group of Vytautas' army. Everyone who wanted to enter Trakai Castle had to pass through Karaimų street and afterwards the bridge thus protecting Vytautas from enemies and other ill-wishers.

Today about 60 Karaites people reside in Trakai and only a few of them speak their native tongue, which belongs to the Turkic group of languages.



S. SHAPSHAL KARAITES NATION MUSEUM

Visitors to the museum, which opened in 1967, can learn about this exclusive nation's history, unique language and religion. It is the only place representing the Karaite culture in Lithuania.

The Museum's exposition consists of more than 300 items. There are variety of expositions, including an Egyptian Karaite marital agreement and a collection of Eastern weapons. Pictures, handicrafts, clothing and accessories allow visitors to dig deeper into the history, everyday life, and customs of the Karaite nation.

Hajji Seraya Khan Shapshal – the famous 19th–20th century scientist, collector, widely recognised Karaite society activist, who researched the cultures of Eastern nations and especially Karaite culture. In the Karaite congress held in 1927 he was elected Karaite community leader and was given the name *hachan*, the highest title for Karaite clergyman.

In 2011, the 50th anniversary of the death of Seraya Shapshal, the museum was named after him.

Address: Karaimų str. 22, Trakai town
GPS: *54°38'50"N 24°56'00"E*

THE OLD POST OFFICE BUILDING

At the intersection of Karaimų and Kęstučio street, near the former Turgus Square stands the deep blue coloured building of the old post office. It was built in the first half of the 19th century by Dominicans who resided in the nearby Peninsula Castle. The symmetrical one-storey log house with vertical boards nailed around was common to this period.

Nearly 50 years later the Dominican monastery was closed and the building they owned was converted into Trakai county police offices. Soon afterwards the Russian Empire post office began functioning in its place. Lastly, for nearly 100 years (up until 1960) it served as the Vilnius county post office and telegraph, was used to safeguard the archives, and to accommodate postal workers who lived in five of its rooms.

Currently the building belongs to Trakai Historical National Park Management. Interested visitors are welcomed to enjoy the old building from the outside.

Address: Karaimų str. 5, Trakai town
GPS: *54°38'43"N 24°56'10"E*



ORTHODOX CHURCH OF THE NATIVITY OF THE MOST BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Following the 1831 uprising the number of Orthodox residents increased and the need for a new church became apparent. It was decided to build one in 1861.

The construction was funded by residents themselves and Russian Empress Maria Alexandrovna who donated 6000 tsarist roubles. The construction was successfully finished by an engineer named Polozov who was awarded a golden ring with gemstones by the empress.

Blessed in 1863 The Orthodox Church of the Nativity of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary was a traditional building in terms of form and structure.

Address: Vytauto str. 32, Trakai town

GPS: *54°38'27"N 24°55'59"E*

NEARBY:



WWW.TRAKAI-VISIT.LT/EN

WWW.TRAKAIMUZIEJUS.LT/EN



THE LITURGICAL ART EXHIBITION

GPS: 54°38'44"N 24°56'10"E

Address: Kęstučio str. 4, Trakai, Trakai eldership, Trakai district municipality

ABOUT

The exhibition of Liturgical Arts welcomes visitors to the territory of the Peninsula Castle of Trakai, in the former Dominican monastery. The art works of the exhibition represent an important part of the ecclesiastic heritage of Lithuanian culture and are filled with religious spirit. Visitors are invited to take a closer look at various attributes that represent sacral and cultural value, religious paintings, etc. The exhibition comprises more than 200 liturgical works, valuable visual art works and various sacral objects representing the life of the church. Take a closer look at the monstrance decorated with the picture of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Trakai with the Infant, a unique 1709 stamp of the Trakai Dominican Monastery, and a communion cup produced by Vilnius goldsmiths in the second half of the 16th century. Here you can also find albarels, dishes used in herbal and medical practice for holding medicinal ointments. A fragment of the monastery kitchen has been recreated in the restored cellar under the chapel, where pieces of the monastery's everyday life and various objects used by the order's monks are on display.

The Liturgical Art Works Exhibition gives visitors an opportunity to have a closer look at the priests' ceremonial clothing and special accessories. A *cope*, the most adorned and significant liturgical garment symbolises the Lord's boundless love, purity of the

clergyman, their righteousness as well as the grace of the Holy Spirit. You can also take a closer look at a pair of bishop's sandals, previously called *campagi*, the *mitre* (traditional, ceremonial headdress of bishops made from the most expensive materials and worn during important ceremonies), different parts of the monstrance as well as a *chalice*, a goblet used to sanctify the Eucharistic wine and bread during Mass.

The Liturgical Art Works Exhibition has many valuable paintings and sculptures. *The Dominicans Worshipping the Risen Christ* painting should be mentioned among the most notable paintings. According to historians, it portrays the founder of the Dominican Order, Saint Dominic himself. Other important works include the portrait of St. Casimir and the portrait of Vytautas the Great. The highlight of the exposition is the sculptural composition titled *The Last Supper*, one of the rarest found in Lithuanian folk art.

Today, the Liturgical Art Works Exhibition provides an opportunity to see several 18-19th century church bells cast in Vilnius, Prussia, Riga and in Western Europe. Since ancient times the ringing of church bells has symbolised the scaring away of evil spirits. Bells at the top of high towers invite people to come together and celebrate holidays, pray and unite in times of misfortune.



In Lithuania, the craft of bellfounding dates back to the 14th century. Bells cast by Jonas Delamarsas, a distinguished 17th century bell founder, spread their heavenly sounds from the towers of Vilnius Cathedral, St. Peter and St. Paul's Church, Pažaislis Monastery and many other belfries until this day.

HISTORY OF THE MONASTERY

Trakai Peninsula Castle was built by Grand Duke Kęstutis of Lithuania at the end of the 14th century and was one of the largest castles in Lithuania. Perhaps that was the reason why it was called the Great Castle. First, it was the Grand Duke's residence, and then it was converted into a prison for high-ranking foreign captives and enemies of the state. At the end of the 17th century, the Peninsula Castle was given to the Dominican Order. The friars began building a classic style church with two towers. Unfortunately, they did not finish the construction. At the beginning of the 19th century, the unfinished building was reconstructed into a monastery and a chapel, which was consecrated in the name of the Archangel Michael in 1882. The monastery's complex consisted of 11 cells, a sacristy, a school, a

bell tower, a dining room with a kitchen, stables, gardens and flower beds looked after by the friars.

Shortly after the uprising of 1863-1864, the tsar's government closed the monastery and handed it over to the police detention centre. In the period between the two wars, the premises were used as the court archive and police offices. When Vilnius District was occupied by Poland, the building was taken over by the Polish Border Police. After the Soviet occupation it was handed over to the KGB and police: a number of political prisoners were jailed there.

In the 1960s efforts to preserve Trakai cultural heritage objects were initiated, which in turn sparked interest in the Dominican structures. In 1990, Trakai History Museum Administration moved into the partially renovated premises. The Sacral Art Works Exhibition was opened in the former monastery's chapel in the summer of 2005. The permanent exhibition revitalised the space and filled it again with the religious Spirit.

NEARBY:



WWW.TRAKAIMUZIEJUS.LT/EN



LENTVARIS CHURCH OF THE ANNUNCIATION

GPS: 54°38'29"N 25°02'55"E

Address: Mokyklos str. 17, Lentvaris town, Lentvaris eldership, Trakai district municipality

ABOUT

Lentvaris, located half way between Vilnius and Trakai, is famous for its unique natural beauty, a magnificent English-style castle-like manor standing on the peninsula of an artificial lake and the massive red-brick church of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Church is unique in Lithuania due to its rare painting technique of decoration. It is also well known for its monumental architecture, which links it to Leonardo da Vinci.

The manor belonged to Count Tyszkiewicz in the 19th century. He together with residents of Lentvaris County asked the authorities for a permit to build a church as local practicing Catholics often had to travel to other churches located in settlements at least 10 km away. Unfortunately, at the time the requests were denied. Thus, it was not surprising that in 1905, when the permit was finally granted, Lentvaris residents built a wooden barrack in a record 10 days, in which to celebrate masses temporarily.

Even though construction of the real church was funded mainly by the Tyszkiewicz family, donations were accepted in other ways as well. The Golden Book of Donations details the input of various private individuals and institutions. Interestingly, the Catholic Society in the US organised special lotteries, sales and events aimed at collecting more funds.

Italian culture and art were very close to the heart of Count Tyszkiewicz as he had lived in Milan. Therefore, Lentvaris Church architecture was inspired by the 15th century Santa Maria delle Grazie (St. Mary the Gracious) Church in Milan and Leonardo da Vinci's famous mural painting *The Last Supper*. Count Tyszkiewicz believed that *The Last Supper* was the key to understanding the life philosophy of this genius artist.

Lentvaris Church was designed in the Neo-Romanesque style, which was especially popular in Europe at the time. It was to be built on land donated by Countess Tyszkiewicz. Lentvaris Church is characterised by its massiveness, half-circle arches and windows. The red brick basilica-type church was consecrated in 1926.

The name of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary was selected for it, and during the consecration ceremony, the 17th century sculpture of the *Crucifixion* was placed at the main church altar. The gift came from Pope Pius XI, whom Count Tyszkiewicz had met in Vilnius a few years earlier, when he visited Lithuania as a nuncio and an apostolic visitor in 1920.



CHURCH DÉCOR

Lentvaris Church of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary is one of the biggest and most impressive examples of monumental painting found in Lithuania. Its murals and *sgraffito* (lt. *sgraffito* – inscribed) decorations reflect religious motifs and cover the walls of the church almost entirely. *Sgraffito* is a special painting technique reminiscent of antique vases and Romantic or Byzantine mosaics. Initially a few layers of different colours of paint are applied. The painting is engraved on the top layer, and then the plaster is scraped off to reveal lower layers of contrasting colours. This type of painting is a long-lasting work of art.

Notably, the church's decoration works took place in the midst of World War II, when all the required décor materials were of strategic importance and could only be used for military purposes. The archives of the Artists' Union confirm that at the time each tube of paint was distributed according to a list.

Trying to avoid the tsarist oppression, Count J. Tyszkiewicz spent a few years in Milan, where he came to admire the Santa Maria delle Grazie Church, famous for its impressive interior décor, and mural by Leonardo da Vinci painted in 1497. The Count believed that such décor perfectly matched the prominent and magnificent

architecture of the Church of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Lentvaris Church is a testament of respect to genius Leonardo da Vinci. Notably, the *sgraffito* technique was used in only one other place in Lithuania, i. e. Perloja Church located close to Varėna.

NEARBY:



WWW.LENTVARIOPARAPIJA.LT



SENIJEJI TRAKAI CASTLE SITE AND VYTAUTAS THE GREAT ROAD

GPS: *54°36'20"N 24°59'05"E*

Address: Pilies str. 1, Senieji Trakai village, Senieji Trakai eldership, Trakai district municipality

ABOUT

...Once upon a time Grand Duke Gediminas of Lithuania, who lived in his native Kernavė at the time, was hunting on the other side of the River Neris and saw a beautiful hill in the plains. The duke was mesmerised by the magnificent place and decided to build a castle here. This is how a castle came to be built and a new town, which we now call Senieji Trakai, quickly began to form around it. Beginning in 1316 Senieji Trakai served as the capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania for seven years. After the prophetic dream of Gediminas about an iron wolf and when Vilnius became the new capital, this place served as the capital of Trakai duchy and the Samogitian elderate.

Trakai derives its name from the word 'trakas' (track), meaning 'a raised place in the forest'. The woods have disappeared, but the memory of the old landscape has remained engrossed in the name of the area. Today's archaeologists tell us that these surrounding areas were inhabited a very long time ago. Close to a small lake (now marsh) a large settlement was functioning in the first millennia BC. Some interesting artefacts from various periods, such as animal remains, knives, keys, tips of crossbow arrows, manicure scissors and others were found.

Senieji Trakai Castle is one of Lithuania's oldest masonry castles and was very conveniently situated in a strategic area. It was surrounded by a trench up to 35-40 m wide and up to 8 m deep

and protected by a 10-m high defensive wall. The year 1350 marked the birth of one of the most prominent future Lithuanian historical personalities who was born into the family of Duke Kęstutis and Priestess Birutė. At the time when the Duke Vytautas was the ruler, Lithuania expanded from the Baltic sea to the Black sea! When the country was fighting with the Teutonic Order, the Castle suffered numerous attacks and attempts to destroy it. A fatal battle occurred with the order in 1391 when the castle was almost completely destroyed and has never been rebuilt since. About 1401 when he moved to Naujieji Trakai Vytautas the Great assigned Benedictine monks from Tyneco (near Krakow) to his birthplace. The duke built them a wooden church and allocated them some land along with two lakes. So, one of the first monasteries in Lithuania was established here. It operated until the mid-19th century when it was closed by the administration of the Russian empire. Today the top of the old castle site is occupied by a monastery and neo-gothic style church ensemble rebuilt at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. Senieji Trakai street village is nestled around the old castle site and has the status of an architectural sanctuary. 18th and 19th centuries. Senieji Trakai street village is nestled around the old castle site and has the status of an architectural sanctuary.



VYTAUTAS THE GREAT ROAD

Commemorating the 570th anniversary of the death of the duke, the symbolic Vytautas the Great road revived. The Trakai-Senieji Trakai route includes nine stops, roadside poles that symbolise important events and achievements in the life of Vytautas. Travellers first encounter a roadside pole dedicated to Saint Jurgis built at the earliest, in 1998. This reflects the Great Duke's militant character, the fierceness of his battles and victories. The place marks the beginning of the road to the historical capital of Lithuania – Senieji Trakai.

Saint Casimir's wayside shrine tells the story of Vytautas the Great as a builder of castles and churches. And the arrival of Benedictine monks to Senieji Trakai is commemorated with the roadside pole of Saint Benedict. 'The escape to Egypt' serves to remind about the arrival of Karaites in Lithuania. The woman holds a basket with cucumbers and tells us that it was the Karaites who introduced cucumber and how to grow it into Lithuania.

Saint Catherine of Alexandria, the patron saint of students reminds us about Vytautas' campaign to send youth to study in western Europe and the first Lithuanian student at Krakow University was Mykolas who came from Senieji Trakai!

Near the entrance of Senieji Trakai stands a sculpture honouring Kęstutis and Birutė. They hold a crown from Vytautas which never

reached them. 'A Suffering Pieta' recalls a painful time when Kęstutis was killed in Krėva castle. This roadside pole is held in special esteem by locals who frequently pray here.

There is a sculpture of Blessed Virgin Mary with Baby Jesus in the old castle place which symbolises the purity of motherhood and love of the homeland.

Finally, the last sculpture built depicts a sitting Duke Vytautas with a sword in one hand and Lithuania's statehood symbol Vytis – in another.

NEARBY:



WWW.SENIEJITRAKAI.LT/NEWS



SENIEJI TRAKAI CHURCH OF THE ANNUNCIATION AND ST. BENEDICT

GPS: *54°36'19"N 24°59'02"E*

Address: *Pilies str. 1, Senieji Trakai village, Senieji Trakai eldership, Trakai district municipality*

ABOUT

One can visit Senieji Trakai monastery founded in the Duke's native castle and built back in the era of Vytautas the Great, that is, at the beginning of the 15th century!

The construction of the castle was started by his grandfather, Lithuania's Grand Duke Gediminas. As the story goes, Gediminas, who lived in Kernavė at the time was on a hunting expedition in Senieji Trakai area and became so enamoured with it, that he decided at that moment to build a castle there and to make it the country's capital.

Therefore, it served as the residence for the dukes. Gediminas, Kęstutis with his wife Birutė and their son Vytautas, who was born in this castle lived there. When Kęstutis built the Castle on the island of Lake Galvė, the defensive and representative role of Senieji Trakai diminished. Duke Vytautas wanted his native castle to be preserved and looked after, therefore soon after he secured Pope Innocent VII's blessing, he invited Benedictine monks from Tyniec (a town not far from Krakow) here in 1405.

The Benedictines were founded in the 6th century, and it is the oldest Catholic monk order. The Regula (set of conduct rules for Christian monks) of St. Benedict of Nursia was the start not only of

the Benedictines, but also of the monastic tradition of the whole Western Church.

Vytautas gifted the monks a tenth of his manor's lands, a plot of land with gardens, even two lakes and began construction of a wooden church nearby. Soon after Senieji Trakai parish was established. The monastery was rebuilt numerous times, because its wooden construction began to decay and was once even destroyed by fire. A new masonry monastery building was erected in its place in the 18th century. But after some time, the monastery was closed, and Benedictine brothers relocated to Nesvizh.

At the end of the 19th century, the current Church of the Annunciation and St. Benedict was built on the site of the old monastery. The church with its magnificent architecture has four front façade towers and delights with the solemnity of its neo-gothic style. The interior of the Church is lovely but simple and has Benedictine iconography. Visitors can examine the treasure that is kept in the church – gorgeous altars, easel paintings, liturgical utensils and other art works. Visitors can enjoy unique sculptures in three chapels and even nine altars.



SENIEJI TRAKAI CHURCH

In the place of the former Benedictine monastery, a neo-gothic style church designed by Apolinaras Mikulskis was built at the end of the 19th century.

The main façade towers reflect its special elegance and grandeur. Several things are especially noteworthy: the St. Augustine and St. Benedict sculptures along with side altars dedicated to St. Benedict and his twin sister St. Scholastica.

One of the notable art works is the 18th-century painting by Simonas Čehavičius, also depicting St. Benedict.

Another valuable piece is the 17th-century painting depicting Blessed Virgin Mary with the Infant in her arms. In the church's courtyard stands a roadside pole dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary with the Infant in her arms. It symbolises the purity of motherhood and love for the motherland and is one of the nine roadside poles, created along the symbolic Vytautas the Great road. Some people point to the parallel between priestess Birutė, holding her son Vytautas in her arms.

MONASTERY IN SENIEJI TRAKAI CASTLE SITE

The monks, who arrived at the invitation of Vytautas, practiced a contemplative way of life, dedicated a lot of time to prayer and meditation and taught in the estates they were assigned to. Alongside the abbey, they founded a parish elementary school. At the end of the 18th century there were even 769 books in the monastery's library (a book cost 8 gold coins, while some of them cost as much as 30 gold coins).

Senieji Trakai monastery that was given the name of Annunciation is now occupied by the congregation of the Sisters of Saint John. The nuns opened a retreat house in the restored medieval castle and invite believers to participate in Catholic religious recollection and meditation practices. Mondays are 'desert' (retreat) days for the Apostolic Sisters of Saint John. It is a day of total solitude and prayer.

NEARBY:



WWW.VILNENSIS.LT/?LANG=EN



GOJUS MOTHER OF GOD CHAPEL OF PATIENT HEALTH

GPS: 54°32'35"N 24°57'28"E

Address: Gojaus str. 5, Gojus village, Rūdiškės eldership, Trakai district municipality

ABOUT

Gojus village with its community of 30 people can be found by the northern side of Ropėjai forests in Rūdiškės eldership. The Blessed Virgin Mary Chapel of Patient Health is the heart of Gojus village. The Chapel is distinguished by its special relics and the Lord's grace which emanates from them.

The construction of the chapel began in 1936. Chapel valuables signify a special meaning to the chapel. One of the chapel's treasures is the *Mother of God Patient Health* image. It is a copy of a 1936 image that was painted by Romualdas Varachovskis and is kept in Vilnius Bonifratrai Holy Cross monastery (now Mary Immaculate Sisters of the Poor monastery), famous for its miraculous powers. A monstrance made of bullets and a 200-page manuscript of Gojus village and chapel history are special as well.

The history of Gojus village began in 1865, when the owner of Apatiškiiai manor, Russian General Reklieckis decided to sell his forests, a total of about 100 hectares. Most of the lands were bought by the Andževskiai brothers and other families. That was how the village community started to develop.

In 1881 the son Aleksandras was born into the family of one of the Andževskiai brothers. When he was 19-years old, Aleksandras

lost his parents. Soon after he left for Senieji Trakai, where he began learning the basics of the faith. Later he arrived at Bonifratrai (Brothers Hospitallers of Saint John of God) monastery in Krakow. Although often out of the country, Aleksandras Andževskis, who later became a monk and received the name of Vlodimiežas, regularly visited his homeland.

In 1936, in his father's native Gojus village Vlodimiežas began construction of the Josephine-style chapel that he had designed. The construction of a small chapel 2-metres wide and 3-metres long and high took one year to complete. However, soon after a project to expand the chapel commenced. In 1939, the foundation of the chapel was consecrated and a plaque commemorating this is inlaid in the wall of the main altar of the chapel. At the time Gojus chapel had a choir, young people were taught the basics of the faith and educational activities took place here. Children planted 22 linden trees around the chapel and promised to care for them. The trees grow here to this day.



CHAPEL WEALTH

Gojus chapel has an exclusive reliquary – a monstrance, made of bullets taken from the bodies of Austrian, Prussian, and Russian soldiers! During WW I Fr. Vlodymiežas was working in Bonifratrai monastery hospital, which was then a war hospital. Injured soldiers from Austrian, Prussian, French, and Russian regiments were being brought in. The clergyman began collecting bullets taken out during treatment. Later a special 36-centimetre high monstrance was made of 88 bullets.

The chapel is also famous for a 200-page manuscript 'Mother of God Patient Health Chapel Chronicle' (*Kronika Kaplicy Matki Boskiej Uzdrawienia Chorych w Gaju*) kept in the chapel. It details the genesis of Gojus village, circumstances concerning the building of the chapel, and has valuable information about liturgical utensils and so on.

The other interesting valuable of the chapel is the 17th-century clock. It has his father's words written on it: 'Any of these hours could be your last'.

A MIRACULOUS PICTURE

The Mother of God Patient Health picture attracts visitors because of its miraculous powers and God's graces. The first vote (Latin word *votum* means a wish, gift, promise) was attached to it three years after it was brought to the chapel – this was how a woman gave thanks for the miraculous cure that was confirmed by a special Church commission. Beginning the same year, 1940, and on the last Sunday of August ever since Gojus chapel hosts an annual Mother of God Patient Health celebration where many pilgrims come.

NEARBY:



WWW.VILNENSIS.LT/?LANG=EN



THE VILLAGE OF FORTY TATARS AND THE MOSQUE OF THE CEMETERY COMPLEX

GPS: 54°33'44"N 25°10'13"E

Address: Vytauto str. 9, Keturiasdešimt Totorių village, Pagiriai eldership, Vilnius district

ABOUT

A village with an unusual name, Forty Tatars, southwest of Vilnius, on the edge of the district, is one of the oldest Tatar villages in the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Existence of the settlement is affirmed by the nearby barrow cemetery – a centuries-old cemetery where round and oval shaped mounds of soil and stones were used in place of burial monuments.

The first Tatars arrived here during the rule of Vytautas the Great or, to be more exact, in 1397 when the duke returned victorious from battle and had brought some prisoners of war. It is said that Vytautas gave lodgings to 40 Tatar prisoners, hence the name of the village – *Oiria Tatar*.

It is worth noting, however, that there are other theories and legends about the origin of the name. One of them tells us about 42 Tatar houses at the time, while another says the word 'forty' derives not from the number, but from the Turkic word, meaning 'plenty'.

The legend that is popular with many locals tells us that the Grand Duke in those days gifted the lands to the Tatars and allowed them the privilege of practicing their own faith traditions. In order to increase their number rapidly, he permitted polygamy which

was their common practice. One Tatar quickly married four wives and each of them bore him ten sons! The brothers decided to found a village that is known today as the village of Forty Tatars.

A house of prayer – a mosque – stands in the very centre of village. It is the oldest and one of four operating Muslim temples in Lithuania. It is interesting that Lithuania is the only Baltic country where a Muslim house of prayer is open to the public. In 1996 the Forty Tatars village mosque was designated a state-protected sacred historical and architectural monument.

Visitors to the Muslim cemetery enter through metal gates adorned with decorations of the sun and grapevines, called mizaru; the cemetery is surrounded by deciduous trees. Some of the tombstones are barrows – mounds of soil reinforced with stones around it that narrow at the top. There are several cemeteries in Forty Tatar village that date back to the 14th century.

Not far from the mosque, the Tatar community built a stone monument dedicated to Vytautas the Great. The year of 1997 marked the 600th anniversary of the arrival of the Tatars in Lithuania and this was their way to honour their patron.



FORTY TATARS MOSQUE

The Islamic faith-professing Tatar community originally built around 60 mosques, 24 of them within the current territory of Lithuania. Today only four of them have survived. The Forty Tatars village mosque is the oldest one. It is widely accepted this was the place where the first building was constructed during the reign of Vytautas the Great.

The Forty Tatars village mosque is a square building with a four-sided hip roof. The small light tower on the roof has eight corners, is shaped like an onion and has small windows and a crescent on the top that replaces the traditional minaret (minaret – a tall tower with an open platform where the clergyman calls believers to prayer). Interestingly, minaret, *manarah* in Arabic means 'švyturyš' ('lighthouse').

This mosque is the only one in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania that lacks *mihrab*. *Mihrab* in ancient Arabic culture serves as the throne of the emir, while in architecture it is a special part of a mosque – a niche covered in marble or ceramic tiles that points in the direction of Mecca. Every believer in every corner of the world is required to pray facing Mecca, the native city of the Prophet Muhammad.

The walls of the mosque are adorned with traditional *muhirai*, these are framed passages of the Quran in Arabic, written in calligraphy. Candle lights rising from wooden or silver candlesticks illuminate Mecca and Medina decorations thus creating a cosy atmosphere. The floor of the Mosque is covered with green and multi-coloured carpeting where believers kneel and pray.

As is usual in other Eastern prayer houses, men and women usually pray separately. The mosque is divided in two and has two separate entrances. For acoustic reasons, the separating wall has a window and is covered in light fabric.

Visitors who wish to visit the inside of the mosque are advised to arrange it with the community leader.



TATARS IN LITHUANIA


The Tatar national diaspora started to call Lithuania its home at the end of the 14th century when Vytautas the Great returned home with prisoners of war of Tatar descent from Crimea, Kazan, and Golden Horde following a successful military expedition.

The biggest clusters of Tatar communities appeared in the areas of Vilnius, Trakai, Minsk, and Naugardukas (currently Belarus).

Mandatory military service was the way Tatars had to repay for the gifted lands and depending upon the size of the lands, were also required to send a horse along with an armed horseman. Tatars often accompanied rulers on excursions, hunting expeditions, helped in capturing criminals, and repairing roads. Most of the residents were craftsmen and traders, especially leather traders. Nevertheless, the most popular Tatar occupation remained military service.

Interestingly, many Tatars were able to prove to Russian empire officials that they were of noble descent and began using privileges that were available to the caste. They became exempt from state taxes and military service and were also allowed to seek higher education and a career in military or civil service.

Eventually a Tatar intelligentsia emerged. In 1925 the Tatar cultural and educational society was established which took on distributing local press and science publications, recording and reviving their national cultural heritage.

NEARBY: 

WWW.TURISTOPASAULIS.LT



JUODŠILIAI BLESSED MICHAEL SOPOČKO CHURCH

GPS: *54°34'57"N 25°15'35"E*

Address: *Šv. Uršulės str. 25, Juodšiliai village, Juodšiliai eldership. Vilnius district municipality*

ABOUT

Juodšiliai Michael Sopočko Church is the only church in the world that has been consecrated with the name of this apostle of the Lord's grace. Fr. Michael Sopočko belongs to the circle of prominent personalities related to the history of Vilnius and is also among those beatified and canonised by the Church (like St. Casimir, St. Andrew Bobola, St. Juozapasas Kuncevičius, St. Rapolas Kalinauskas, Blessed Jurgis Matulaitis and St. Faustina). He was a priest of the Archdiocese of Vilnius, professor of the then Steponas Batoras University, chaplain of the army, and confessor for Sister Maria Faustyna Kowalska, who was canonised (declared as saint) in 2000.

The priest of the Archdiocese of Vilnius, Michael Sopočko, hid in Juodšiliai to escape the persecution of the occupying German forces during World War II. It was here that the priest found sanctuary and support from the Sisters of the Society of St. Ursula. It was here that he carried on with his pastoral activity and prepared a number of scientific writings about God's Mercy. In 1944 he settled down in Vilnius, in the parsonage of St. John's church. As he was in danger due to Soviet repressions, he left Vilnius and moved to Balstogė in 1947. Even today the old residents of Juodšiliai remember Fr. Sopočko (the carpenter Vaclovas), who lived in a cabin close to the forest. He called

himself Vaclovas Rodzevičius and produced many wooden household utility items for his neighbours during two years in hiding. In 2012, a memorial plaque was officially unveiled on the wall of the house, called the Devine, on Sodų street, where the priest used to hide. In 2012, a palliative care home (a hospice) was established in Vilnius city bearing the name of Blessed Michael Sopočko.

Juodšiliai church had been waiting 80 years to be consecrated. It was the Sisters of the Society of St. Ursula who were responsible for the construction of the church, which started in 1936. However, it was not completed due to the outbreak of the war. Soon after that, the building was used as a child foster home, then a hospital and a clinic. After the restoration of Lithuania's independence, the idea of an active church was revived. Although the future church was severely damaged in a fire in 1991, the believers of Juodšiliai and neighbouring villages raised the necessary funds for the construction works and returned the building to its original purpose. Thus, 80 years after the Sisters of the Society of St. Ursula had initiated the construction, a solemn consecration of the church took place in 2016. It is symbolic that this was also the year which Pope Francis declared as an Extraordinary Jubilee, the Holy Year of Mercy.



MICHAEL SOPOĆKO

He was born in 1888, into a noble and pious family in Naujasėdis, in Vilnius District near Ašmena (now Belarus). He had felt the desire to become a priest and serve God since his childhood. Michael Sopoćko graduated from Vilnius Priest Seminary and later studied pedagogy at Warsaw University and received Master and Doctor degrees in theology. It was in Vilnius that Fr. Sopoćko spent his most important and fruitful years. He was educated there, ordained to the priesthood and organised catholic youth societies of the diocese.


When he received his doctoral degree, he was appointed the spiritual father of Vilnius Seminary and Assistant Professor of the Faculty of Theology at Steponas Batoras University.

When Fr. Michael Sopoćko was beatified in 2008, several books written by him were published: *The Road of Love and Mercy, In Your Mercy I Trust. Thoughts for Every Day* and *His Mercy is Eternal: Thought of God's Mercy.*

ST. FAUSTYNA KOWALSKA

In 1933, Fr. Sopoćko met Sister Faustyna. At the time, he was the confessor of the congregation of Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy. Sister Faustyna revealed her visions of the Merciful Saviour and his commandments. The most important of these were to declare the first Sunday after Easter to be Divine Mercy Sunday, to establish a new community of nuns and to produce the painting. These tasks bestowed by the Supreme Will became Fr. Michael Sopoćko's mission in life.

He helped the nun to comprehend the visions and became involved in spreading the cult of the Divine Mercy, was one of the founders of the congregation of the Sisters of Merciful Jesus and inspired the painting of the *Merciful Jesus* that became famous throughout the Catholic world.

NEARBY: 

MICHAEL SOPOCKO CHURCH



WŁADYSŁAW SYROKOMLA MUSEUM

GPS: 54°36'58"N 25°27'47"E

Address: Sirokomlės str. 5, Bareikiškės village, Rukainiai eldership, Vilnius district

ABOUT

The museum named after Władysław Syrokomla, the father of modern rural tourism, invites everyone to visit a wooden manor just 14 kilometres from Vilnius in Bareikiškės village. Władysław Syrokomla rented the manor from its owner, Count Benedykt Tyszkiewicz, and lived there with his family; he spent a very prolific eight years at the estate. Syrokomla's friends from Vilnius, including S. Moniuszko, the composer, writers, editors and publishers, archaeologist E. Tyszkiewicz, and the painter V. Dmochowski, visited him at the estate.

The estate was a typical Lithuanian rural style homestead surrounded by grass and outdoor flowers. For the first half of the 20th century, before the start of World War II, it was a school named after Władysław Syrokomla. Later, a library was relocated to these premises. The year of 1973 marked the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the poet's birth, so his office was turned into the memorial Museum. It gives visitors an opportunity to see the poet's furniture, portraits, books and other personal belongings. In the courtyard there is a desk made from millstone. Syrokomla used it for writing many of his poems and also welcomed his guests there. Nearby, there is a black granite memorial table placed there in honour of the poet in 1897. A lyra is carved on the surface of the table accompanied by specially composed words of

Atoni Edward Odyniec. The most creative years of Syrokomla's life were spent in Bareikiškės. While living here he wrote some of his most famous poems including a historical poem *Margiris* that describes heroic battles of Lithuanians against the crusaders, and the comedy *Cabin in the Forest*, which was described by the poet himself as a 'curiosity drama'. Publishers have competed for the right to publish his new poems, willing to pay as much as two zloty or even half a rouble per piece. The poet's literary work helped him to support his estate and his large family. The renowned and widely quoted poet wrote poems, satires, and comedies in Polish and Belorussian and made translations of Lithuanian and Polish Renaissance poetry from the Latin language. The staff members of the Syrokomla museum organise various educational and cultural activities. Ceramics lessons are held in the specifically equipped antique cellar. Visitors are also invited to have a closer look at the art of calligraphy. An open-air amphitheatre brings together poets, literature and poetry lovers who participate in the annual poetry and music festival named 'Syrokomla's Lyra'. The Tourist Information Centre offers guided tours to neighbouring suburbs to find out more about the history of south-east Lithuania and the cultural monuments of Vilnius Region.



LIFE OF W. SYROKOMLA

Ludwik Władysław Franciszek Kondratowicz was born in 1823, in Smolhava (Mohilliv Region, Belarus). His professional pseudonym was born by using his middle name and the name of the family's coats of arms.

He was raised by his impoverished noble family and took a liking to books from his early days. At the age of 21, Syrokomla married and had four children. The family then lived in the village of Zalužai. In 1852, three of his children died in an epidemic. Following this tragedy, the family moved to Vilnius and half a year later, to Bareikiškės.


Syrokomla stayed mainly at his estate, but also visited Vilnius on many occasions. He mentions the city very often in his poetry, and several of his verses are dedicated to Vilnius, including his poem Marcin Studzieński. Thanks to his famous trip descriptions 'Trips from Vilnius Across Lithuania' and 'Nemunas: from Springs to the Mouth of the River', Syrokomla is known as the father of modern rural tourism. His detailed poetic descriptions of travels across the Vilnius Region inspire readers to get to know their country in a multidimensional way.

Syrokomla's creative work is dominated by the history of Lithuania, nature and its people, and his love for his Motherland

and its importance was revealed in a number of his creations. These creations are valuable sources of 19th-century history.

V. Syrokomla died before turning 40. Still, during this lifetime he touched the hearts of many. The last sanctuary of the tuberculosis-stricken poet was the house of A. Bobiatinski on the former Botanikos street in Vilnius.

Most of the residents of Vilnius came to say their last goodbyes when he was buried on the Hill of the Literati in Rasos Cemetery. A modest monument, which contains a famous quote 'He died while playing the lyre' from Syrokomla's poem, stands here.

NEARBY: 

TIC.VRSA.LT



MEDININKAI CHURCH

GPS: 54°32'21"N 25°38'48"E

Address: Šv. Kazimiero str. 4, Medininkai village, Medininkai eldership, Vilnius district

ABOUT

Medininkai settlement is famous thanks to a number of impressive historic-cultural sites. Not only is the famous Medininkai Castle worth visiting, but one of the first seven parishes in Lithuania as well. Władysław II Jagiełło (Lith. Jogaila), Grand Duke of Lithuania and King of Poland, the son of Algirdas, established the Medininkai Parish immediately after the Christianisation of Lithuania at the end of the 14th century. Although the current Church of The Holy Trinity and St. Casimir was built almost half a millennium later, several churches and chapels had been already built. In 1391, at the invitation of Jogaila the representatives of the Order of Saint Augustine arrived in Medininkai. They built a church and a monastery and administered this parish for more than 400 years. In 1780, the church was destroyed by the fire, which was probably started by the enemy army marching through Medininkai. At the time, its parish priest held services at a temporary structure made of wood logs. The rebuilt Church was consecrated in the name of the Holy Trinity in 1791. Historical records show that the Church had three altars, the greatest of which was almost fully gilded, decorated with carvings and four gold-plated statues.

In 1812, during Napoleon's invasion of Russia, Medininkai settlement was robbed and burned down. The parsonage,

monastery, library and church archives were all lost in the fire. From 1830, the tsarist government of the Russian Empire, which decided to destroy the communities of Catholic monks, decided the fate of the church. Both the Medininkai Church and Monastery were closed, Medininkai Parish was abolished, and its territory was divided between the neighbouring parishes. In 1831, the Augustinians were forced to leave Medininkai.

It was only in 1917 that the German occupation administration provided an opportunity to build a church, and Medininkai Parish was reinstated by a decision of the Vilnius Archdiocese. The new Church of The Holy Trinity and St. Casimir was only fully built in 1931, thanks to the joint efforts of local parishioners. The Church, whose architect was Anton Filipovič-Dubovnik, is a wooden rectangular-style structure. Today, the Church of The Holy Trinity and St. Casimir is serviced by different monks, Franciscan brothers (Conventual Franciscans or the Minorites), whose institution in Lithuania has been functioning since 1209. The first Franciscan brother, Fr. Kamil Wielemanski, settled here in 1961, when he returned from Soviet exile. Right after the re-establishment of Lithuania's independence, more Franciscan friars from Lithuania and abroad came to reside in the monastery next to the church.



VALUABLE ART WORKS

The Medininkai Church invites visitors to admire the organ, monumental crosses and a canvas painting of St. Casimir. The largest cross is positioned above the western façade tower and closely resembles the proportions of the Latin cross. It is decorated with a variety of floral and geometric openwork ornaments. The smaller cross hangs above the porch of the Church and has the form of the Cross of Malta.

The design on the front of the late Baroque-style organ was created in 1788. The décor of the organ is impressive: decorated with intricate ornament garlands and flaming acanthus carvings, with wings attached to its sides.

The painting of St. Casimir is a replica of Vincas Slendzinskis' (1838-1909) work. The painter L. Balzukevičiūtė perfectly embodied peace and spirituality in this painting. The kneeling St. Casimir holds his hands in prayer, and his figure is emphasised by the contrasting lighting. The colours of the painting's background are mostly dark, while St. Casimir is portrayed in a decorated red vestment.

Interestingly, St. Casimir is always depicted wearing red vestments. In the iconography, the colour red symbolises the suffering associated with the earthly sufferings of Christ and the

blood he spilt for humankind. However, the patron saint of Lithuania St. Casimir was not a martyr, and the right to wear red garments is granted to him by his royal ancestry.

NEARBY:



WWW.VILNENSIS.LT/?LANG=EN



MEDININKAI MEMORIAL

GPS: *54°32'53"N 25°41'00"E*

Address: Pasieneičių str., Medininkai village, Medininkai eldership, Vilnius district

ABOUT

The Vilnius–Minsk highway of today has for centuries been one of the largest and oldest trading and military action routes and was established in the first millennium AD. It stretches in the direction of the Medininkai Customs Post.

Establishing state border control is a significant element of the country's independence. When the country regained its independence on 11 March 1990, Lithuania began establishing state customs posts at its borders. This was a very tense period, as the Soviet Union did not recognise Lithuania's independence, the Soviet military together with the special military forces attacked and wrecked Lithuanian border checkpoints and customs posts: unarmed customs officers were attacked and wounded, buildings and documents burnt and Lithuanian flags ripped apart, etc. Altogether 18 attacks were conducted during which 35 employees of the National Defence Department and 27 customs officers were injured.

Tragic events also touched Medininkai. On 31 July 1991, tragic news spread across the country from the eastern customs post of Lithuania – the protectors of the state were mercilessly shot and killed. In the early hours of that day, a Soviet Special Purpose Police Unit OMON ambushed the customs post officers in the line

of duty. Seven Lithuanian officers were mercilessly shot and killed, including officers of the Special Division ARAS, the road police and customs officers. One of them, Tomas Šernas, survived having sustained severe injuries. The guardians of the border post that were killed are the following: Mindaugas Balavakas, Algimantas Juozakas, Juozas Janonis, Algirdas Kazlauskas, Antanas Musteikis, Stanislovas Orlovicius, Ričardas Rabavičius.

According to a decree of the President of Lithuania, the victims were awarded the Cross of Vytis (now the Grand Cross of the Order of the Cross of Vytis). Those killed were buried in Antakalnis Cemetery next to the victims of the 13th of January attack.

The memory of the victims is honoured during an annual Medininkai-Vilnius run. In 1993, in honour of this tragic event, a black granite monument with seven white marble crosses was erected near the old Medininkai customs trailer (architects-authors are A. Šarauskas and R. Buivydas). In 2001, a memorial museum was opened here. Close to the Medininkai border post, protected by a glass shell, the trailer where the attack took place is on display. Medininkai border post trailer still contains the preserved objects that were there when the massacre happened



and a registration book. Although the wagon was renovated, blood marks on the floor remain untouched...

The 31st of July is the commemorative day of sacrifice for the freedom of the people of Lithuania. The old Medininkai border trailer and the monument of the seven crosses serve as a symbol of the struggle for independence.

31ST OF JULY 1991, 4 AM

Eight men were on duty at the Medininkai Customs Post. Four were positioned in the trailer, two outside it and two more about 50 metres away. Suddenly a number of armed attackers who were part of the Special Purpose Police Unit OMON from the regiments from Riga and Vilnius appeared. The Russian-speaking assailants took all the officers into the trailer. They ordered everyone to lie down on the floor and at least 13 shots followed. They were shot in the head... Six of them died at the scene and two more were taken to the hospital with severe injuries. Only T. Šernas managed to survive.

The Medininkai Customs Post was attacked on at least four other occasions earlier that year. That is why the officers of the Special

Division ARAS were sent to the customs post. Notably, on the 29th of July, Vytautas Landsbergis, the President of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania and the Head of the Reconstituent Seimas, and Boris Yeltsin, the President of the Russian Federation, met in Moscow where they formally signed agreements establishing relations between the states that concerned cooperation and development of the Kaliningrad Region as well as the opening of diplomatic missions. The Russian Federation recognised Lithuania's independence. Unfortunately, the official documents did not prevent the aggression...

In 2011, Konstantin Michailov, a Latvian citizen and a former OMON officer, was given a life sentence for crimes against humanity. In addition, default judgments against Andrej Laktionov, Česlav Mlinyk and Aleksandr Ryžov entered into force. They were not imprisoned because, according to the Constitution of the Russian Federation and its Criminal Code, Russian citizens who have committed a crime in another country are protected by the state.

NEARBY:



WWW.VILNENSIS.LT



ŠUMSKAS CHURCH OF SAINT MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL

GPS: 54°36'31"N 25°43'27"E

Address: Vilniaus str. 8, Šumskas town, Kalveliai eldership, Vilnius district

ABOUT

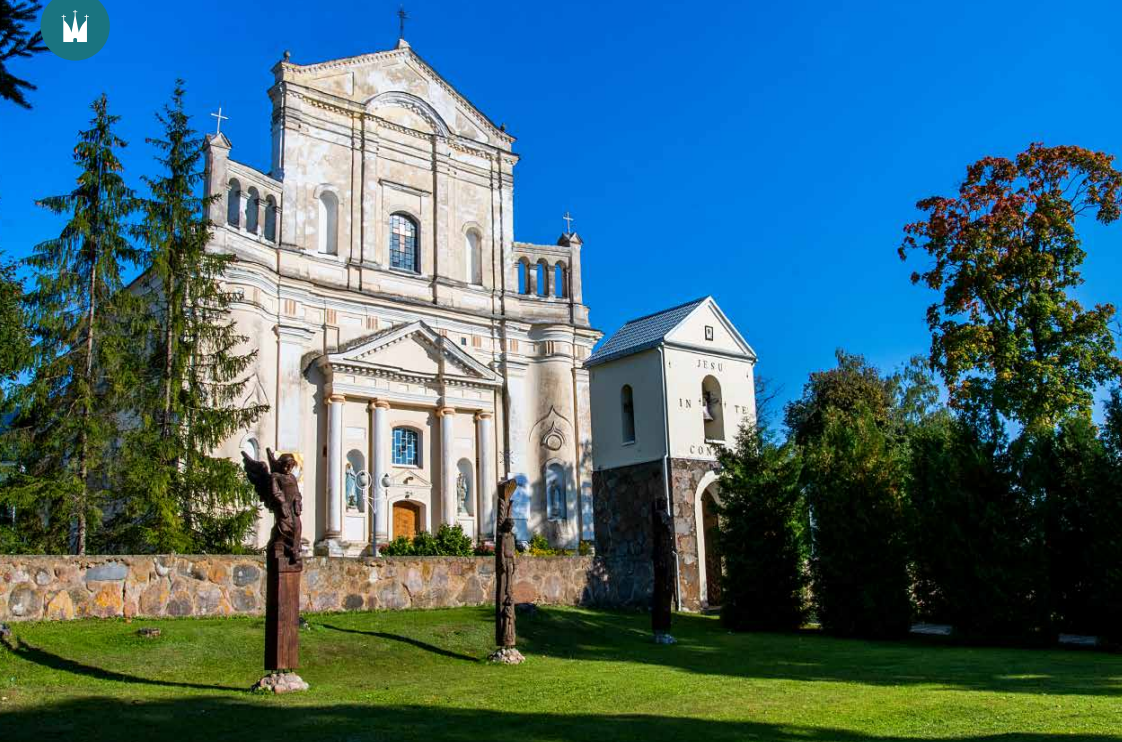
The small town is located about 32 km east of Vilnius, where lies an original architectural ensemble. Šumskas Church of Saint Michael the Archangel and the Dominican Monastery complex sit on a small hill surrounded by abundant greenery, are filled with peace, and invite visitors to concentrate and connect with the divine.

Gates of the belfry lead visitors to the churchyard. A light-coloured brick church is reminiscent of the late Baroque and early Classicism styles. It is a massive, symmetrical, tower-less church with an original main façade décor and arched windows positioned in deep niches. The interior has several stylistic features typical of the Dominican tradition: there are many crucifix sculptures on the altars. The church walls are largely decorated with murals and dominated by illusory paintings of the Baroque-style. Three chapel altars and the surrounding paintings were decorated using this particular technique. The main altar of Šumskas Church is decorated with an expressive 18th century easel painting *St. Michael the Archangel*. This painting portrays the victory of Archangel Michael in his battle against the devil.

At the end of the 17th century, the construction of the church and the monastery was initiated and fully funded by the landed gentry

Mihal and Halina Szumsk. The Dominican Order friars settled there at the behest of the noble family. Almost a 100 years later in the 18th century the construction of the current Church of Saint Michael the Archangel was started. The two-storey wooden square-shaped monastery was joined with the church that was consecrated in the name of Michael the Archangel in 1789. Interestingly, the Dominican friars ran a parish school and a care house.

The church and monastery complex went through its own hardships. At the beginning of the 19th century, French troops caused great damage to the buildings, especially damaging the library. Shortly after, Russia's tsarist government became very aggressive towards the Catholic Church. It went as far as closing the monastery, converting the Catholic Church into an Orthodox Church and forcibly converting people to the Orthodox religion. Architectural features of the church and its interior were severely damaged, and baroque volutes (décor features) at the top of the main façade of the church were torn down. The fate of the painting of the Virgin Mary remains a mystery. At the time, the painting had beautiful silver-plated fittings and was said to have special powers.



The buildings were only returned to the Catholic community during the First World War. Unfortunately, later they belonged to the Soviet collective farm of Šumskas. During this period, the structures suffered the greatest damage: all the Dutch-tile stoves and wooden staircases were broken, the steps taken apart and completely destroyed...

BELFRY AND CHAPELS

Jesu in te confide is the Latin phrase that translates as 'Jesus, I trust you', and it is inscribed in the wall of the belfry. This is the first thing that visitors to the Church of Saint Michael the Archangel see, and it encourages everyone to contemplate. The belfry and its gates are incorporated into the stone fence surrounding the churchyard – and are located directly in front of the main entrance to the church. Visitors to the Šumskas Church ensemble are invited to take a look at its roadside poles in the churchyard. The 19th-century monument bears memorial boards honouring the Kamienskiiai family and Felicija Sventickienė. When guests take a stroll through the pristine monastery garden, they find a chapel decorated with St. Fatima and St. Anthony's majolica (majolica is a

special type of ceramic décor that came from the island of Majorca).

DOMINICAN ORDER

The Dominican Order, also known as the Order of Preachers, was established in the 13th century by the Spanish priest Dominic of Guzmán. '*Domini canis*' in Latin means the '*The Hounds of the Lord*'. So, one of the main symbols of the Order is a white dog with black spots carrying a torch in its mouth as a symbol of acquisition and transmission of knowledge. Since ancient times, Dominican brothers have been known to lead a contemplative lifestyle. They used to set up schools and universities, and they would teach there, too. Their main goal is to study, preach and spread the Gospel. Other common symbols of the Dominican Order are a book, bread, a star, a rosary and a lily. In the Christian tradition, a lily is associated with purity, beauty, resurrection from death and the Virgin Mary.

NEARBY:



WWW.VILNENSIS.LT



ST. GEORGE'S CHURCH AND CHAPEL OF BUIVYDŽIAI

GPS: *54°50'09"N 25°43'55"E*

Address: Bažnyčios str. 1, Buivydžiai village, Buivydžiai eldership, Vilnius district

ABOUT

A rivulet called Buivyda trickles down a forested highland close to the Lithuanian-Belarus border. It gave its name to a village. It is the largest settlement of the area and the centre of the parish and has two adornments of the village – St. George's church and St. Florian's chapel. A bright brick church of a regular octagonal shape fascinates by its exclusive architecture. Its central dome and the porch with columns and sculptures of saints lend an air of solemnity to the church. St. Florian's chapel, formerly carrying the name of St. Michael the Archangel, is situated in the churchyard. The chapel architecture reminds us of a high, but not large quadrangle pyramid. This special ensemble of the two structures is recognised as cultural heritage and is protected by the state.

At the end of the 18th century, the Marshal of Vilnius Michal Radziszewski, rebuilt the chapel that had been constructed near his elaborate brick manor by the monks a century previously and which was considerably neglected at the time. St. George's parish was established at the same time. A sharp-pointed, high pyramid-shaped chapel is situated in the churchyard of St. George's church. The top of the chapel is decorated with the figure of a trumpet-blowing angel. The chapel was meant as a family mausoleum, which contained the Radziszewski family coffins in

those days. St. George, the son of Christian noblemen of Cappadocia, was a courageous soldier who was tortured to death in Palestine for refusing to recant his Christian faith. Once he rescued a princess who had been captured by a dragon, so he is depicted in arts as a warrior on horseback slaying the dragon with his spear. St. George is proclaimed the second protector of Lithuania (the first is St. Casimir). St. George's Day is celebrated on 23 April, and it is related to the beginning of the summer season. It is said that the day unlocks and awakens the soil providing dew for the grass to grow. It is not recommended to work in the fields with horses on that day as this Saint is also the protector of horses and other animals against all diseases. You can also visit other exclusive sites of archaeological importance around the village of Buivydžiai. Rėva hill fort is located on a hill on the left bank of the River Neris in a mixed-tree forest. The hill fort was inhabited at the end of the 1st century. The Pašulniškiai hill fort of the same historic period has clearly visible old mounds, ditches and a square. It is worth visiting the hill forts of Pakalniiai, Papunžė, Santaka and Pilviškiai, and St. Ignatius chapel located in the nearby village of Pričiūnai, which is famous for its yearly celebrations of the saint's feast day at the end of July.



ST. GEORGE'S CHURCH


Mikališkiai Regular Canons of Penitence erected a wooden chapel at the end of the 17th century. In time, it started falling into decay. The Marshal of Vilnius, Michal Radziszewski, who had married a noble girl from Buivydžiai village, built there a splendid manor for himself. He also started the construction of a new wooden church to replace the old chapel. At the same time, a new chapel was built to serve as a mausoleum.

The wooden 18th century church was destroyed by fire in 1982. Funding from the devout local community helped construct a new brick St. George's church, which is almost an exact copy of the old church, in just a few years.

The church is octagonal in shape with a dome and a porch. It is decorated with an oil painting of St. George, 19th-century sculptures of St. Casimir and St. Stanislaus as well as other pieces of sacral art.

ST. FLORIAN'S CHAPEL

Initially, the chapel, situated in the churchyard, was given the name of St. Archangel Michael, related to its builder, Michal Radziszewski's first name. Later, in around 1820, it was consecrated in honour of St. Florian as it kept the reliquary of the Saint received from Pope Pius VI. The chapel honours a nun of the congregation of the Sisters of Angels, the stigmatist Vanda Boniševska. St. Florian was a Roman soldier who converted to Christianity and was tortured to death for that in about 304 AD. He became famous for miraculously extinguishing a fire-engulfed house with a single bucket of water, thus he is usually depicted with a bucket of water in one hand and is considered the protector from fires and natural disasters. St. Florian's Day is celebrated on 4 May and is the official professional day of firefighters and rescuers.

NEARBY: 

WWW.VILNENSIS.LT/?LANG=EN



ST. IGNATIUS CHAPEL OF PRIČIŪNAI

GPS: 54°50'31"N 25°38'33"E

Address: Pričiūnai, Buivydžiai eldership, Vilnius district

ABOUT

The brightly coloured brick chapel is located on the outskirts of the forested Vilnius region, in Pričiūnai, close to the Belarus border. It dates back to 1837 and is famous for its yearly celebrations to mark the feast day of St. Ignatius, the patron saint of the area. The feast day is attended by crowds of believers not only from the parish of Buivydžiai, but also from more remote corners of Lithuania. St. Ignatius of Loyola is famous as the founder of the religious order of Jesuits, called the Society of Jesus. The chapel of Pričiūnai is decorated with the motto of the Jesuits: *Ad maiorem Dei gloriam*, ('for the greater glory of God'). Two memorial boards over the entrance to the chapel remind us of important historical facts. One of them honours the founder of the chapel, Antonas Lazarevičius, and the other one mentions Vanda Boniševska, a nun of the congregation of the Sisters of Angels who lived in Pričiūnai for nearly 20 years and was highly respected among the parishioners due to her tireless apostolic activity, her support for the persecuted and her stigmata.

St. Ignatius day is 31 July. It has become a tradition to bless the cars of the guests during the celebrations of the feast day as the last week of July is also the feast of St. Christopher, the patron saint of all drivers. It is said that the surrounding area of Pričiūnai

is a magical one, and those who visit this part of the country usually experience willingness to become better people and get even closer to God.

Ignacio Lopez de Loyola was born in the Basque Country (northern Spain) in 1491. He is often referred to as a soldier-saint, but in reality, he fought for just a few months in his life. He was severely injured by a cannon shell in the battle of Pamplona and had a limp for the rest of his life. While he was recovering from the injury after the unfortunate battle he converted to Christianity and lived a pastoral life ever after. Ignatius of Loyola understood that continuously functioning institutions are needed in order to convert people to faith and excite their desire to spread God's will. With this in mind, he started creating Jesuit schools and taught in them. The Jesuits established Vilnius College in the 16th century, which received the status of the first university in Lithuania.

His study 'Spiritual Exercises' is worth consideration. Its formulations had been developed for 20 years until it became the manual for each Jesuit. The book reveals the key secret of spirituality and a very simple main truth in life: to love and serve God 'with all of your heart, all of your soul and all of your will'. Much of Ignatius de



Loyola's correspondence comprises 12 bulky volumes. Loyola was canonised in 1622. He is the protector of the Jesuit order, of soldiers, nuns, monks and spiritual education. St. Ignatius of Loyola is proclaimed the patron of the east part of Vilnius region. The Church of the Military Ordinariate of Lithuania was named for him.


SISTERS BONIŠEVSKA AND MAJEVSKA

Every year, the parish of Buivydžiai organises a remembrance week in honour of Sisters Vanda Boniševska and Helena Majevska. Traditionally, the pilgrimage goes from Buivydžiai to the chapel of St. Ignatius, and takes about 4 hours. The celebrations that honour the memory of the Sisters of Angels congregation, where visitors seek to get a deeper understanding of the sisters' teachings, to acquire spiritual strength and grace are held yearly in the chapel at the end of July or beginning of August.

Born in 1907, Vanda Boniševska was a modest, sensitive girl, who had dreamed of the religious life since her childhood. When she turned 18, she entered the congregation of the Sisters of Angels in

Vilnius. When she took her religious vows, she moved to Pričiūnai and was engaged in apostolic activity, and provided assistance to persecuted young people, priests and teachers. In 1933, on Maundy Thursday Vanda's first stigmata appeared. According to witnesses, Sister Vanda usually experienced it on Thursdays and Fridays in the afternoon, and especially during Holy Week. The nun was said to experience prophecy.

Helena was raised in a pious family. In faith, she found the meaning of life and the basis for human existence. She joined the congregation of the Sisters of Angels, lived the apostolic way of life and was arrested and exiled for 5 years for helping a Jesuit priest. During World War II, Helena Majevska experienced probably the most significant revelation of her life, i.e. the visitation of Jesus. Because of this she turned to the blessed Michael Sopočko, who was a devoted preacher of the message of God's Grace. They cooperated in the establishment of a new congregation of the Sisters of Merciful Jesus.

NEARBY: 

WWW.VILNENSIS.LT



OLD JEWISH CEMETERY IN NEMENČINĖ

GPS: 54°51'17"N 25°28'21"E

Address: Piliakalnio str., Nemenčinė, Nemenčinė eldership, Vilnius district

ABOUT

The village of Nemenčinė is nestled approximately 20 kilometres northeast of Vilnius, at the junction of the Nemenčia creek and the River Neris. The village named after the creek used to be called the slavic way – 'Nemenčinās'. Spectacular views of the Neris valley open up from the main square of the cultural centre.

Archaeological findings, discovered at the foot of a hill fort near the village, reveal that the territory was inhabited back in the first century AD. The 13th-century hill fort was known for its impressive defensive castle of Lithuania's King Mindaugas. It is known that Nemenčinė area residents fought against the army of the tsar army and many men perished in the battles.

WW II was an especially painful time for Nemenčinė. The old Jewish community that lived in Nemenčinė and their surroundings could not escape its tragic fate. During the brutal year of 1941, many local people suffered. Hundreds of Lithuanians, Poles and people of other nationalities were killed or deported to Siberia. Probably the most gruesome wound inflicted during the war was the Holocaust. Almost all of the Jewish community was killed off by Nazis with the assistance of locals and the synagogue and the school were burned down. Three kilometres west of Nemenčinė village in a pine tree forest stands a monument with an inscription

in the Lithuanian and Yiddish languages. It says: 'Here in 1941, on the 20th of September, Nazis and their accomplices executed 403 Jewish people'. It marks the place where practically the whole Nemenčinė Jewish community was wiped out. Every year a commemorative event is held near this monument with visitors from area villages and guests from Israel and other foreign countries (especially the United States and Great Britain among others).

There is another important place for this nation with its tragic fate – The Old Jewish Cemetery. The sizable Jewish community in Nemenčinė district dates back to the 17th century. In the 19th century they comprised about three quarters of the village's population. The cemetery is designated a historical Jewish heritage object, a reflection of everyday life in the Jewish community and an integral part of their cultural identity. A diverse variety of tombstone monuments from different periods of time can be found here – many sizes, forms, and materials. Monuments are inscribed with Hebrew characters. And while the old Jewish cemetery is a part of the immovable Jewish cultural heritage registry, today most of the monuments have collapsed, are broken or overturned.



HOLOCAUST

The word Holocaust is a two-part Greek word: *olos* means 'whole', while *kaustós* means 'burned'. In Hebrew language holocaust is called HaShoah, or a catastrophe. The term shoah is also used regularly.

Genocide in Lithuania commenced during the first month of the war. Nazis were often helped by local police, especially to execute tasks such as arresting Jewish people or assembling the community for supposed relocation to work camps. They used to hoard people into the centre of a market and then confiscate their belongings and separate men from their women, children and the elderly. Mass murders of Jews were usually carried out in the closest forest. After the condemned themselves dug deep ditches, the shots followed...

Fearing an uprising, men were usually shot first. After Nazi SS groups and their local collaborators finished the execution, they divided up the valuables collected from the victims.

Methodical annihilation of Jewish communities was occurring throughout Europe during WW II. It is estimated that during that period a total of 6 million Jews perished. In Lithuania close to 200,000 Jews were murdered and that means the majority of

them were victims of these actions. Thousands of Lithuanian Jews accumulated some very valuable cultural heritage. We lost many artists, scientists and other talented personalities. Every year on the 23rd of September, during Holocaust Remembrance Day in Lithuania, people visit Jewish mass murder sites, victims and their works are remembered.

NEARBY:  

TIC.VRSA.LT



VILNIUS AREA ETHNOGRAPHY MUSEUM IN NEMENČINĖ

GPS: *54°50'48"N 25°27'54"E*

Address: Švenčionių str. 14, Nemenčinė town, Vilnius district

ABOUT

Historically Vilnius region is known for the fact that people of various cultural, language, and religious backgrounds coexisted here. Lithuanian, Russian, Polish, Belorussian and other national traditions, customs, and trades make up this rich and colourful heritage.

Pine tree and lakes surround one of the oldest settlements in Lithuania, Nemenčinė, which is known for its multinational character. Nemenčinė, situated around the estuary of the River Nemenčia invites travellers to visit Vilnius Area Ethnography Museum, which has the task to preserve and spread the beauty of the blended national cultural heritage.

The Museum opened its doors in 2000 and, in addition to the permanent exposition travellers are also invited to visit temporary commemorative folk art, fine art, photography, and old craft expositions. Vilnius Area Ethnography Museum's society of photographers was founded in 2012 and is an active organiser of artistic workshops in nature.

The museum is responsible for the organisation of various cultural activities. As a result, concerts, conferences, various educational activities for children and adults are frequently held here. Along with the expositions that introduce us to old wood

carving, pattern cutting and other crafts, there are also ceramic and weaving workshops. Everyone can make a unique household utensil using clay or ancient weaving looms with the help of a professional.

Nemenčinė is nestled in a picturesque forest and is managed and maintained by Nemenčinė Forest Directorate. Visitors enjoy conveniences such as rest areas, children's playgrounds, restored bicycle paths. The territories abound with exclusive landscape objects. At the foot of the hill fort, which stands on the right side of the River Nemenčia, some evidence was found about the settlement from the first century AD. There is Skališkių, or Crying rock, next to it and a suspension bridge spans the River Neris and invites travellers to test their courage.

One unique object in Bezdony's forest that must be mentioned and that is well worth a visit is the half-kilometre long text 'Žalgiris 600' made out of 7,000 spruce tree seedlings. This monument in Bezdony's forest commemorates the 600th anniversary of the battle of Grunwald (Žalgiris). It can be seen from the window of a plane. Today it is the biggest inscription made out of trees!



MUSEUM EXPOSITION AND ACTIVITIES

There are nearly 1,000 exhibits in the ethnographic museum, founded by Vilnius District Municipality society. The exhibits were gathered by people living in Vilnius region: a wide variety of Vilnius region home utensils, furniture, tools, and everyday items used in traditional crafts. The number of exhibits continues to grow as interesting artefacts from throughout Vilnius region are regularly added.


The heritage that tells the story about Lithuanian, Russian, Polish, Belorussian and other national traditions and life is being introduced to the visitors. Local lore studies are very important, and every effort is made to get local people involved in ethnographic research. Lithuanian and Polish youth happily participate in specially organised scientific expeditions.

Vilnius Area Ethnography Museum unites four branches. A large ethnographic exposition is at Sužionys village. Another branch is near Paberžė village, located in the impressive Glitiškiai estate palace, which traces its roots back to the latter half of the 15th century.

In Čekoniškės village, guests can look around the decorative palm and household house. Maišiagala town museum of Monsignor

Juzefas Obremskis introduces notable Catholic personalities and a variety of exhibits that tell the story of the Church.

There are regular nature and scientific events in the museum. In addition to expositions, concerts, and conferences, the museum gives the opportunity to participate in educational workshops. Specially equipped ceramic and weaving workshops invite you to learn these ancient craft techniques. Workshop teachers constantly refine their skills at international traditional craft classes organised by the Polish Vegnožėvas (Węgorzewo) National Cultural Centre.

NEARBY: 

TIC.VRSA.LT



ORTHODOX CHURCH OF THE NATIVITY IN BUKIŠKIS

GPS: *54°45'39"N 25°12'27"E*

Address: Jaunimo str., 2a, Bukiškis village, Avižieniai eldership, Vilnius district

ABOUT

The village of Bukiškis lies between Maišiagala and Vilnius, about 10 kilometres northwest of Vilnius. On the hill abundant with deciduous trees, next to the shore of a nameless lake stands the village's gem – The Russian Orthodox Church of the Nativity (Russian name 'Chram Roždества Christova').

Many dukes who had lands in Slavic territories converted to Orthodox Christianity even before Lithuania's Christianisation in 1387. Bukiškis Manor belonged to the Radziwiłł family for a long time. After the 1863 uprising, the tsar government confiscated lands from famous Lithuanian noblemen, and the manor got a new owner, General Božeranas. Božeranas, an Orthodox Christian, decided to construct a new masonry Orthodox church. It is speculated that the Božeranas family is buried in the cellar of this church.

The Orthodox Church of the Nativity which was once called Mary Mother of God the Protector Church is noted for its traditional architecture, common to Orthodox temples and the light-yellow building although small has an aura of splendour and solemnity. The architecture of the Orthodox Church of the Nativity has architectural features common to the style of Historicism (in a way it is a blend of art styles of the past, based on scientific art history

studies with modern technologies added later). Exclusive details, and grandeur are dominant. The rectangular shaped temple is constructed with an apse, a semi-circular part of the building with a semi-dome on top. In addition to the main dome, the church has side towers with four beautiful blue octagonal helmet domes. In Orthodox church architecture the number of domes has a special significance: the five domes symbolise the Saviour and his four evangelists – Saints Matthew, Mark, John and Luke. One dome is dedicated to the honour of God, three domes refer to the Holy Trinity, and seven domes denote the seven sacraments...

After World War I Vilnius district was assigned to Catholic Poland. The local faithful conferred and decided to reclaim the Orthodox church and use it as a parish chapel – filial. Filia in Latin means 'a daughter', filius – 'a son'. In church structure it means a separate branch which is not designated a parish and sometimes does not have an altar. The court forbade the transfer of the Orthodox church to the Catholics, and Vilnius Orthodox faithful also expressed their disagreement.

The building of the Orthodox church suffered major damage during WW II. The Orthodox Church of the Nativity was rebuilt and renovated about a decade ago.



ORTHODOXY IN LITHUANIA

The first Orthodox community in Lithuania appeared in the 13th century. But Lithuania first encountered the Orthodox church before it was Christianised. It was usual practice that pagan dukes who controlled Orthodox Slavic lands converted to this faith. In Lithuania up until the middle of the 15th century more than 50 dukes were of the Orthodox faith.

There are six known Lithuanian saints that held Orthodox beliefs. These Lithuanians were declared saints: Daumantas, who was named Timothy, Charitina, who was a relative of Mindaugas, monk Eliziejus and Vilnius martyrs Antanas, Jonas, and Eustachius. The remains of the three martyrs are kept in the monastery of the Holy Spirit in Vilnius.

Lithuania's Orthodox church belongs to Moscow and the whole patriarchate of Russia. There are 57 registered Orthodox communities in Lithuania totalling about 140,000 (around 4% of the population) people. There are Orthodox churches in every major city and smaller towns. An Orthodox bishop resides in Vilnius and the spiritual Orthodox centre of Lithuania – the monastery of the Holy Spirit and Cathedral of the Theotokos call the city their home.

THE ORTHODOX BELIEVERS

The word Orthodoxy, or Christian Orthodoxy in Greek language means 'tikratikystė' ('true faith'). In terms of number it is one of the three main branches of Christianity and the second (after Catholicism) largest branch of Christianity in Lithuania. This branch of Christianity traces its roots to the ancient Greek culture and is often called the Eastern, or Greek Orthodox church. The Eastern and Western churches separated in 1054 and differ in their rituals, liturgy, and language.

NEARBY:



WWW.BUKISKI-HRAM.LT



MAIŠIAGALA CENTRE OF TRADITIONAL CRAFTS AT THE HOUVALT MANOR

GPS: 54°52'01"N 25°03'44"E

Address: Algirdo str. 4, Maišiagala town, Maišiagala eldership, Vilnius district

ABOUT

The Centre of Traditional Crafts is situated in a former Manor in the town of Maišiagala, located about 25 km north-west of Vilnius, in the direction of Panevėžys. The centre serves as the main attraction of Maišiagala, bringing together local communities as well as anyone searching for unique experiences. The Houvalt Manor, a classic-style estate located at the foot of the Maišiagala Hill Fort, is recognised as a cultural monument of local significance.

The Centre of Traditional Crafts aims to preserve the traditions, customs and old practices of Vilnius Region. The goal is to ensure that crafts are kept alive by constantly reviving them, making presentations to the visitors to the centre and holding special lessons. Educational activities are aimed at both children and adults. Those who want to get to know the folk art and local culture more closely, can attend special meetings with craftsmen and cultural activists as well as exhibitions and craft fairs selling traditional handicrafts and delicacies.

Houvalt Manor houses not only the Centre of Traditional Crafts, but also Maišiagala Cultural Centre, City Library, Community House, a local concert hall and a souvenir shop for visitors. Additionally, a modern conference room is available for rent.

ANCIENT CRAFTS

The Centre of Traditional Crafts offers its premises to local traditional craftsmen enabling them to create, showcase and sell their creations as well as provide open lessons of their craft. The centre has a developed technical craft base and specifically equipped workshop facilities. Hopefully, it will help unite local craftsmen and establish collaborations with various craftsmen abroad. The centre provides assistance in obtaining a craftsman's certificate.

In the Centre of Traditional Crafts, folk artists and local folklore scholars offer visitors various educational activities. More than ten different crafts professionals help children and adults get to know various useful crafts and discover their intricacies. A team of experts consisting of a woodcarver, a paper cutting expert, a soap maker and a carpenter willingly share their knowledge in the field of their crafts.

You are also invited to learn about candle making, straw weaving, wool felting and ceramic craftsmanship. Everyone is welcome to learn the art of Lithuanian palm weaving, practised exclusively in the Vilnius Region, or learn more about traditional holiday dishes or regional customs.



MAIŠIAGALA COMMUNITY

Maišiagala was first mentioned in written sources in 1254. From the 14th century, this territory belonged to the rulers of Lithuania, and a few centuries later its ownership was passed to the Lithuanian nobility.

Today, the Maišiagala community consists of about 1,800 people, and it actively fosters ancient traditions and regional culture. In order to preserve and pass on the historical-cultural heritage of the land to future generations, joint efforts of the Maišiagala community and the Vilnius District Municipality have received support from the European Union Structural Funds. This enabled them to restore the Houvalt Manor and adapt it for public needs.

The refurbishment of Houvalt Manor was completed in 2016, and today it is the cultural centrepiece of Maišiagala.

The place is full of various activities and entertainment. Locals can enjoy different events and celebrations. Maišiagala art groups now have a new space for rehearsals and concerts, which is available all year long. During national holiday celebrations, vocal and traditional Lithuanian dance groups foster local folklore heritage. Every summer the annual celebration of the Day of

Maišiagala is held and this has become a unique tradition.

Maišiagala community implements many interesting projects. One of them is the establishment of Maišiagala's Housewives Club.

Local housewives have documented their culinary experience and secrets by publishing a paper and ebook version of their cookbook.



HISTORY OF HOUVALT MANOR

Historical sources indicate that people settled in the surroundings of Maišiagala at the times of the Lithuanian Grand Duke Algirdas, about a hundred years prior to the first settlements in the capital of Lithuania, Vilnius. It was there that Algirdas died in 1377. For a long time the territory belonged to the rulers of Lithuania. Later the territory was in the ownership of the noble Sapiega family, and later the Tyzenhauz family became the landowners. The Noble Houvalt family owned the estate from the end of the 18th century until the start of World War II.

In about 1806, Count Onufry Houvalt initiated the construction of a classical-style manor. It was designed by Mychal Angel Shulz, a famous architect of the time and professor at Vilnius University. Unfortunately, following his death, his idea was only partially implemented. The construction of the manor was completed by Onufry's grandson, Vitold Houvalt, at the end of the 19th century.

Following World War II, Houvalt Manor was used for many purposes. During the war, locals found shelter there, and later, when the political system was changed, Houvalt Manor hired hands had to become collective farmers and resided at the

Manor. It then became a collective farm office and following the restoration of Lithuania's independence it served as a secondary school named after Grand Duke Algirdas.

When the school was relocated, Houvalt Manor took on a socio-cultural role. Part of the premises were given to the city library, and this is the place for local amateur music companies and local community meetings. Today, Houvalt Manor (more than 200-years old) proudly cultivates cultural, artistic and national heritage.

NEARBY:  

WWW.TRUKUKRASTAS.LT



M

JUZEF OBREMSKI MUSEUM AND THE CHURCH OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY OF THE ASSUMPTION IN MAIŠIAGALA

GPS: 54°52'09"N 25°03'57"E ; 54°52'07"N 25°03'55"E

Addresses: Šv. Antano str. 5, Maišiagala town, Vilnius district; Vilniaus str. 20, Maišiagala town, Maišiagala eldership, Vilnius district

ABOUT

In Maišiagala one can learn much about the history of the Lithuanian state and of the Catholic church. People lived here a thousand years ago and one of the very first churches in Lithuania was built here! People settled here back in the beginning of the 1st century AD., which is witnessed by the Maišiagala Hill Fort. The castle was mentioned in the Prussian Annals (Bona Castle), and it is well known due to the fact that the Great Duke of Lithuania, Algirdas, resided there for some time. Today the Centre of Traditional Crafts is in Houvalt Manor and there is a museum in the parsonage. In 1989, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Vilnius district, a 3-metre high stone monument was erected as it was the first town to be entered by the Lithuanian Army troops on 27 October 1939. A long-awaited process of the restoration of Vilnius as an integral part of Lithuania began.

The history of Maišiagala settlement was significantly enriched by Monsignor Juzef Obrebski, who served at the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary for about 50 years. The priest himself jokingly called the parsonage his little manor. Since 2013, the building houses the museum of Monsignor Juzef Obrebski. Visitors can see his own exhibition as well as learn more about other prominent figures of the Catholic Church. The

backyard of the parsonage has been turned into a relaxation area that includes the monument to the priest opened in 2013 (cast by Stefan Dousa). The Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary deserves special attention. It was erected at the initiative of Vladislav Jogaila after the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was baptised in 1387. Today, the brightly coloured brick church invites tourists to admire its architecture characterised by neo-renaissance and neo-gothic features. It also houses a collection of valuable art works and relics.

Monsignor Obrebski is highly revered by his followers. He was born in Poland and spent about 50 years of his 80 years of priesthood in Maišiagala. He was awarded the title of Honorary Citizen of Vilnius District. Monsignor Obrebski was called the Patriarch of Vilnius district as he was one of the oldest Catholic priests in Lithuania and Europe. He lived a long 105 years!

Fr. Obrebski helped other priests and his parishioners wholeheartedly, supported priests who were taking refuge from the Bolsheviks or who were returning from exile in Siberia, and also saved people from exile. During the Nazi occupation, he even saved several villages from total destruction.



CHURCH

After the Great Dutchy of Lithuania was baptised in 1387, the parish of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary was established in Maišiagala, and one of the seven earliest Catholic churches was erected there. The church was rebuilt on numerous occasions as it was looted and destroyed by the Russian army and the fire of 1798 destroyed the church completely. The bright brick church as we see it today was built in 1865. Two side towers are marked by their pyramid-shaped roofs, while the larger middle tower houses a bell, the ringing of which invites residents for services.

There are three monument crosses decorated with lily compositions on the towers, and three easel paintings of the 18th and 19th century are located inside the church to be admired by visitors: *Mary with the Rosary*, *The Holy Trinity* and *St. Isidore*. There are 12 sculptures - art pieces with 18th-century local baroque style features, which depict saints. Special attention should be drawn to the harmonious sculptural composition *The Baptism of Christ* which was created in 1579: one part depicts Hell, and the other shows the baptism of God's Son.

MUSEUM

The last wish of Monsignor Obrebski was to establish a place of memory at the parsonage to commemorate all the priests and nuns who were persecuted and even sacrificed their lives for their belief. The museum was opened in 2013 with the presentation of prominent Church personalities, an exhibition of various artefacts, documents and important archives that witness the hard times of the Church. Part of the parsonage is devoted to an exhibition in memory of the Monsignor. His own private belongings are displayed here. The 19th of March is his name day. On this day, a celebratory meeting is held to honour the life of the priest.

NEARBY:



WWW.VILNENSIS.LT

TEXT COMPILED BY

Rūta Paulionytė

TRANSLATOR

Aleksandras Federas

LANGUAGE EDITOR

Siobhán Denham

WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE FOLLOWING
FOR THEIR HELP IN PREPARING THIS PUBLICATION

PHOTOGRAPHERS:

Lukas Jonaitis

Donatas Petkevičius

Žilvinas Petkus

Paulius Gvildžius

THIS PUBLICATION IS FREE



www.exploretrakaivilnius.lt/en

www.trakai-visit.lt/en

www.tic.vrsa.lt

DOWNLOAD THE FREE
APP

