

PRESTIGE AWARDS

THE BALTICS 2021/22

EATING OUT:

THE BEST TRADITIONAL
RESTAURANTS IN LATVIA

EXPLORING THE MANY
HIGHLIGHTS OF RIGA

48 HOURS
IN TALLINN

A FOODIE'S CHECKLIST

A GUIDE TO THE MUST-TRY
FOOD STAPLES OF LITHUANIA



INTRODUCING KAUNAS

THE EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE FOR 2022

INTRODUCING KAUNAS THE EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE 2022

A seemingly under-the-radar city, Kaunas has been growing bolder by the day, proving now more than ever that it is truly worth a visit.

Strategically situated in the heart of this most southern Baltic nation, at the confluence of the Neman and Neris rivers, Kaunas was initially placed on the map when it was designated provisional capital of a reborn Lithuanian state in the wake of the First World War, although its very existence can be traced back 600 years. It has since garnered attention for its attractive interwar period architecture – that now aspires to claim the UNESCO heritage label.

From the city's unique take on Art Deco through to the ever-evolving, captivating masses of street art that adorns a large portion of the city's crumbling brick walls. One quality that rings true for the entire region is that it was built and continues to be built for the creatively curious.

As European Capital of Culture 2022, Kaunas looks to bring light to the cultural expression that has bonded its societies and encouraged a community-led future, where the (surprisingly) multi-ethnic makeup of the region is not only brought into the mainstream discussion but further celebrated.

As the Kaunas 2022 programme slogan 'From Temporary to Contemporary' suggests, this now modern city has grown and developed significantly since its inception more than 600 years ago, its unique history ready for a re-examination not just by Lithuanian nationals but by all visiting history buffs, art admirers, architecture enthusiasts, culinary masters and music lovers.



Since it was awarded the title of European Capital of Culture 2022 five years ago, Kaunas has been meticulously planning a year-long programme of events in conjunction with a number of local and international partners to celebrate the city and its newfound status. As one of the most expansive cultural projects in Lithuania's history, the somewhat intense programme promises to be an unforgettable one, with more than 1,000 events taking place from the project's launch on 22 January 2022, at precisely 20:22, up until its closing ceremony on the weekend of the 25-27 November. Over 40 festivals, 60 exhibitions and 250 performing arts events will take place alongside conferences, forums, book fairs, circus acts, light and fire shows, slam poetry nights and culinary feasts (to name a few). The programme is further divided into eight thematic sections, each of which will examine a different characteristic of the city. Kaunas additionally shares its title with two other 2022 European Capitals of Culture – Esch-sur-Alzette in Luxembourg and Novi Sad in Serbia, all three of which have collaborated on several special projects that will be presented in all three capitals throughout the coming year.



AN INTRIGUING IDENTITY

Kaunas has been moulded and remoulded time and time again according to the traditions and beliefs of the countless communities and ethnic groups that have called it home – from Tatars to Jews, Poles, Russians, Israelis and Germans. Under the 2022 Memory Office programme, visitors will be able to learn more about the city's unique DNA and discover the endless layers of its multicultural past. The project will pay particular attention to the stories that have been repeatedly omitted from official records due either to their painful details or conflicting accounts, ensuring that the narratives of those who came before modern Kaunasians and helped shape the city into what it is now are rightfully restored.



A digital archive entitled *Atminties Vietos* (Memory Maps) was launched back in 2014 to help the curators of this exciting programme collect first-hand accounts of historical events from former and current Kaunas residents. The archive, which can be accessed easily via smartphone or computer, presents the city's urban landscape as a map of collective memories that are attributed to various buildings, courtyards, squares, monuments and museums, that travellers can explore freely on their own. Each physical structure works to reveal a hidden or forgotten story, with accounts from Litvaks (Lithuanian Jews) taking centre stage. A further app that allows visitors to pick up their phone and go out into the city to explore enduring history is Kosmos. This audio-based platform invites users to make their way to three significant sites, Ramybės Park, the Ninth Fort and Aleksotas Bridge, to listen to a variety of authentic documentary recordings and musical compositions that tell the tale of the events that occurred in that particular place in a more accessible and engaging way, thus revealing a different side to the accepted narrative.

A further highly anticipated exhibition travellers should look out for is renowned animation artist William Kentridge's *That Which We Do Not Remember* (which will be showcased for the first time in any Eastern European country in late January). By assembling the shattered shards of historical events into meaningful mosaics that serve as a mirror, reflecting back the faces of those who look into them, Kentridge aims to address humanity's selective memory by calling us into a dialogue with ourselves.

The rock opera *Romas Kalanta* will also be premiering at the Kaunas State Musical Theatre on the 50th anniversary of 19-year-old high school student Romas Kalanta's public self-immolation protesting the soviet regime. Kalanta's death provoked the largest post-war riots in Lithuania, inspiring an entire season of civil resistance known as Kaunas Spring, as well as similar self-immolations around the country. The meticulously thought out, moving production looks to help audiences understand the experiences that dramatically altered the lives of several generations along with the very meanings of such concepts as 'sacrifice' and 'freedom'.

For a truly one-of-a-kind experience, visitors should further make a stop at the Maironis Museum of Lithuanian Literature, where the *Spaces / Overcome Distances* installation will be housed from May until September. Designed by the incredibly talented Vytenė Muschick, this interactive multi-media installation will use moving images, virtual reality, animation and various sounds and smells to immerse visitors into the unusual spaces and insurmountable distances described in writer Dalia Grinkevičiūtė's memoir *Lithuanians by the Laptev Sea*, which details her exile to and escape from Siberia.

Beyond the 2022 programme itself, visitors can delve deeper into particular periods of the city's rich history at a variety of museums, galleries, fortifications, squares, and religious sites. Undoubtedly, the most visited historical landmark is the Ninth Fort. It is here that the region's and Lithuania's dark 20th century past is poignantly told. Built at the beginning of the 20th century, this imposing stronghold was occupied by German troops during WWI, later becoming a labour prison for political dissidents as well as a centre for torture and mass killings during WWII.

The area marking the Holocaust memorial is where 50,000 people (30,000 of them Lithuanian Jews) were murdered by Nazi soldiers, alongside Jews from other parts of Europe and Lithuanian and Russian prisoners of war. Inside the striking stained glass-enclosed Ninth Fort Museum, heart-wrenching displays play tribute to the individual victims of the Holocaust, detail the true horrors of the Kaunas ghetto, and honour the Righteous Among the Nations – the Lithuanians who risked their lives to save their Jewish neighbours from a harrowing fate. Monthly exhibitions and workshops are additionally available, so be sure to check the website before planning your trip, as are guided tours of the different aspects of the site in various languages, including English.

Kaunas' multi-ethnic heritage continues to be upheld today by its ever-growing Erasmus and international student community, who are able to choose from a wide range of study programmes from six universities. While the region as a whole has a population of around 400,000, a mighty 40,000 are believed to be strictly students, lending the city a lively feel, with plenty of trendy bars, internationally-focused restaurants, craft beer pubs, art and jazz festivals to explore and enjoy.

At the same time, Kaunas also offers a window into the unique Baltic culture that has endured here and that can be enjoyed by all. As the last nation within Europe to be Christianised, Lithuania has long upheld its pagan roots, with traditions that can still be experienced in their raw form to this day. Festivities such as *Joninės*, which incorporates bonfire burning, wreath making and a search for a mythological blooming fern in the forest, take place within Kaunas and beyond annually.

The only museum of its kind across the world, Kaunas is also home to a rather hair-raising display devoted entirely to the fallen angel. The Museum of Devils has over 3,000 statuettes, carvings, masks and other images, collected over the years by landscape artist Antanas Žmuidzinavičius (1876-1966) depicting Lucifer and his role in various mythologies. There is also an exploration of the celebrations held to drive away darkness and evil, from Walpurgis Night and Shrovetide to Halloween.



A STREET ART LEGACY

If only walls could talk. Well, in Kaunas, they quite literally do. It's impossible to pinpoint exactly when the first word was illegally written on the walls of the city, but during the years of Soviet occupation, some bold, anonymous statements appeared as a way of breaking through the endless oppression, challenging the imposed ideologies and encouraging self-expression. After the restoration of independence, the sales of spray paint seriously shot up, and neither the police nor local government was able to curb the artifice of graffiti artists. While today only traces of that untamed freedom remain, mostly in the form of unobtrusive gang signs, Kaunas has grown to be regarded as a street art haven, with eye-catching pieces consistently updating the face of the city and promoting the exchange of ideas, ensuring no two visits ever look or feel the same.

From large-scale murals painted by professional artists to walls dedicated entirely to free and legal self-expression, there is much to marvel at as you explore Kaunas' art-deco streets, underground passageways, neighbourhood blocks, former factories and central squares. Must-sees include the 440-square-metre *Wise Old Man*, the *Star Seeder*, which gains its true meaning after dark, the love story inspired stunning *Pink Elephant*, and the 500 hours of drawing required to create *Dadaist Mona Lisa in the 21st Century*. This interactive masterpiece was made using 40 different colours and over 100 LEDs and is situated at the Kaunas University of Technology. While next to the mural, visitors are encouraged to visit www.monalisa.ktu.edu to solve the mathematical equation and change the colour of Mona Lisa's glasses. She can also take your picture from up high!

One of the best-known symbols of Kaunas' contemporary street art scene is the colourful cat tag that can be found virtually all over the city, on crumbling walls, electrical panels, payphone booths, recycling

containers and traffic lights. The randomly scattered, anonymous and not exactly legal symbol first made its appearance back in 2010. While its creator has yet to reveal their identity, a relatively recently set up Instagram account (@allcatsarebeautifultome) helps both residents and visitors alike pin down the latest appearances, as well as track all those that came before. While many theories have emerged as to who the author of the sleeping/resting cats just might be, with many claiming the tags are a collective effort, the Instagram account owner has urged that they work alone. They also have revealed that the cat concept came from the idea of using street art as a tool to express a positive message to the citizens of Kaunas, something like "everything is going to be ok", without any text. Making their way across the continent to the UK, the cats can now be found throughout London's streets, and the creator has expressed a desire to curate a sort of connect-the-dots map for all those interested in catching a glimpse of every single one, both in Kaunas and abroad.

An ever-evolving living art project, Kiemo Galerija (Yard Gallery) is the only gallery in the entire country that is open 24/7, seven days a week. Having moved into the courtyard over a decade ago, Kaunas legend Vytenis Jakas (who is responsible for a great number of the city's street art creations) began to decorate the bleak exteriors of the residential buildings with murals and portraits of the Jewish families who had lived in the area before WWII. One after the other, new sentimental objects, photographs and sketches continued to appear on the 'Stick Your Memory' wall, adding to the joyful collage. New artists leave their traces here, neighbours explore their collective past, and guests are encouraged to join in the chaotic fun. Be sure to look beyond your immediate vision; there are plenty of hidden gems located above.





A SHIFTING CULINARY LANDSCAPE

While it may not be an immediately obvious observation, the culinary landscape within Kaunas has been drastically changing over the last few years, bringing the scene to its current height of experimentation. Although traditional Lithuanian eateries remain in the majority (there's sure to be a sweet-smelling donut bakery, *spurgine*, on every street corner), tastes now range from Michelin-level Nordic cuisine to Southeast Asian-inspired dishes, tapas and fresh sushi. Local and seasonal produce continues to play a significant role on all menus, with the root vegetables that Lithuania is most famous for finding their way into a considerable number of hearty dishes. Adventurous chefs set on making a mark further continue to elevate authentic recipes, such as *varškėčiai* (quark cheese pancakes) and *cepeliniai* (potato-meat dumplings), driving them into the present day. What's more, a large percentage of these emerging eateries are located conveniently on and around Kaunas' picturesque central street: Laisvės Alėja.

An exceptional example of elevated traditional flavours can be found at the multi-award-winning Monte Pacis. Housed within an astonishingly beautiful hospitality complex right beside Lithuania's most prominent example of Baroque architecture, Pažaislis Monastery – this classically focused restaurant will leave you as satisfyingly stuffed as a member of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania's nobility.

Fusing history and traditions with nature and seasonality, head chef Raimundas Dambrauskas creates visually entrancing dishes, each with its own story to tell. Brunch, business lunches and leisurely dinners can all be enjoyed here, either with selections from the a la carte menu or the regularly changing sample menu, which features either four or six courses. Signature dishes include the yellowtail ceviche with black sturgeon fish eggs, mango, charred sweet corn and a vinaigrette, and tender duck breast accompanied by apple and cinnamon chutney, croquettes, almonds and a cherry glaze. Sustainability remains a prominent driving factor for the business and as such, much of the vegetables and herbs used are gathered from the complexes' own garden which is tended to by the very nuns that still call the monastery home.

Having claimed first place in three different categories at the International Baltic Wine List Awards 2020, Monte Pacis further boasts a tantalising list of more than 200 rare and small-batch produced wines. A large proportion of the bottles available have been sourced from other Lithuanian and European monasteries such as Abbazia di Novacella – one of the oldest monastery-based wineries in the world, established in 1177, and Tuscany's Camaldoli Eremus. Here, monks continue to use the same recipes and techniques that started their tradition of producing intense red wine varieties back in the 13th century.

Delivering modern European fare that almost looks too good to eat, DIA is an upmarket destination, where booking ahead is not only recommended but certainly a must. Inside the elegant interior, guests will find an intimate dining area complete with a cocktail bar and an adjoining private courtyard. From lemon topped oysters to foie gras served on in-house baked brioche and rye bread to creamy mushroom risotto, juicy Wagyu steak, and seafood stew, DIA's mouthwatering delights are sure to please the palate.



For colourful creations infused with fresh citrusy flavours, travellers should head to the ever-popular Nuogas, which functions as a restaurant, cocktail bar and nightclub all in one. The ultra-hip destination is a major hit amongst Kaunas' students and business professionals alike, serving up Southeast Asian favourites such as summer rolls, nori tempura, laksa, tom yam, dumplings, adobo, pad Thai, and a range of aromatic curries.



Another popular and laidback dining option is tapas-focused Holas. For a private dining experience under the stars, guests should opt for a table in the cosy conservatory. Here visitors are treated to Mexican-inspired dishes, as well as familiar favourites from all around the world. On weekends, brunch comprises of shakshuka, French toast and golden syrup topped American pancakes, and diners can also enjoy pulled pork tacos, chicken or portobello mushroom burritos, quesadillas, loaded nachos and chilli daily during either lunch or dinner service.



To get a taste of all that is on offer, visitors are invited to indulge at the Skanaus: European Cuisines Festival that will take place 7-11 September 2022. The five-day feast will include tasty presentations of various cuisines, demonstrations of the latest gastronomic trends within Lithuania and beyond, cooking lessons led by renowned restaurant chefs, and all sorts of family-friendly competitions.

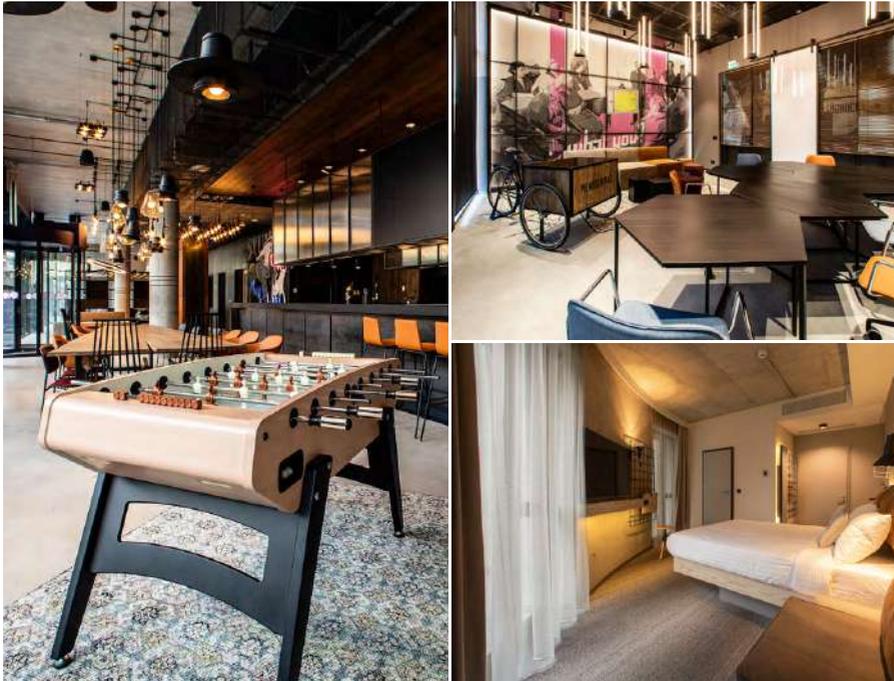


For a full list of the Kaunas 2022 programmes and events, please visit www.kaunas2022.eu/en
For more information on things to see and do in the city, please visit www.visit.kaunas.lt

CHOOSING WHERE TO STAY

OUR TOP THREE PICKS FOR HOTELS IN KAUNAS

From internationally branded hotel complexes to independent design-focused apartments and everything in between, Kaunas' wealth of accommodation options ensures visitors find the perfect fit for their weekend breaks, short getaways, and business trips. Situated conveniently around Kaunas' buzzing centre, our top three picks ensure guests are within easy reach of all major attractions, spas, restaurants, bars and theatres, while still maintaining the privacy needed for a quiet night's sleep.



MOXY KAUNAS CENTRE | www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/kunox-moxy-kaunas-center

Situated ideally in the heart of Kaunas, just steps away from the city's central street, Laisvės Alėja, Moxy Kaunas Centre is a crowning example that affordability does not require a sacrifice of style or comfort. Offering 175 chic accommodation options, each thoughtfully appointed with bright décor, spacious walk-in showers, high-speed Wi-Fi and smart TVs, Moxy ensures guests can enjoy all the modern amenities expected of a contemporary setting while relishing in premium comforts. The hotel's minimalist design elements combined with communal work and play spaces, promote interaction and fun, with popular board games and blown-up decks of cards left out conveniently for visitors to make use of. Guests can unwind at the 24/7 lobby bar, where carefully crafted cocktails and exceptional coffee seek to please the senses, or blow off some steam at the 24-hour fitness centre, equipped with free weights, cardiovascular equipment and an indoor, heated swimming pool. On-site parking is additionally available, and pets are more than welcome.



MONTE PACIS | www.montepacis.lt

A hospitality complex like no other, Monte Pacis astonishes with its breathtaking grandeur and unique location, set on the grounds the iconic Pažaislis Monastery. The only property within Lithuania to be accepted into the prestigious Heritage Hotels of Europe association, Monte Pacis prides itself on its preservation of local heritage, which can most poignantly be seen in its restored frescoes and original architecture. Enclosed by the natural beauty of Kaunas Lagoon Regional Park, Monte Pacis stands to be an ever-green oasis far removed from the bustling streets of the city centre (though still within easy reach of all main attractions). The complex itself dates back to the 17th century and is divided according to the historic personalities that once occupied its wings. Most notably, the apartments that belonged to Kristupas Žygimantas Pacas, the Grand Chancellor of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, can be found on the property's southern end and comprise separate living rooms, bathrooms and bedrooms equipped with giant four-poster beds. In total, 13 rooms make for an intimate getaway. All guests can additionally enjoy elaborate and exquisite dinners at Monte Pacis' fine-dining restaurant and partake in tasting sessions of rare and locally produced wines.



RADISSON HOTEL KAUNAS | www.radissonhotels.com/en-us/hotels/radisson-kaunas

Catering to both business and leisure travellers, Radisson Hotel Kaunas entices with its unbeatable service quality and excellent range of facilities. The largest hotel complex situated within the city centre, it features 206 Scandinavian-style rooms – ranging from individual to family suites – each equipped with ample space, bathroom amenities, high-speed Wi-Fi, TV with Chromecast, and climate control systems. Following an intense day running between meetings or trying to hit all the tourist hotspots, Radisson Kaunas invites guests to relax and rejuvenate at the on-site Saulėja Spa. Here visitors can indulge in a wide range of traditional sauna rituals and body and beauty treatments carried out by an expert team of therapists. For a further treat, guests can head to the Diverso Restaurant to sample seasonal Scandinavian cuisine made with locally sourced ingredients. If you're in town strictly on business matters, Radisson Kaunas is further proud to provide one of the most extensive conference facilities in the area, comprising eight meeting rooms that span 1,400 metres.

TOURISM COMPANY OF THE YEAR

Kaunas IN

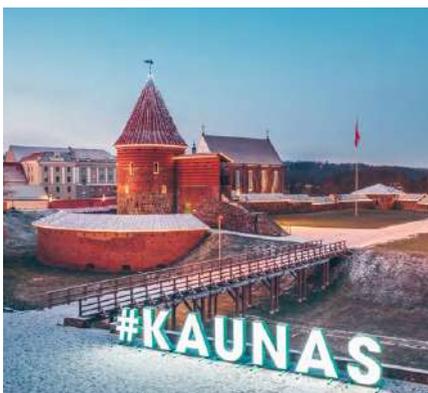
LITHUANIA

Thinking of an inspiring yet affordable weekend getaway? What about Kaunas, the future European Capital of Culture, the UNESCO City of Design, and the second biggest city of Lithuania? Conveniently located in the centre of the biggest of the Baltic countries, it charms tourists with architecture, water activities, and striking landscapes.

Kaunas is a colourful city, famous for its street art, with probably the only square in the world that you can't get into – George Maciunas Square, inspired by the FLUXUS movement. Green streets, tree-lined avenues, and wide-open squares create surroundings to match everybody's moods. Kaunas is proud of its great number of museums, theatres, universities, colleges, fine hotels, restaurants, cafes, and bars.

Crown jewel of Europe's contemporary culture

In 2022, the eyes of Lithuania and Europe will be on Kaunas as it is crowned the European Capital of Culture. The city and its district will host over 300 cultural events. Annual festivals organised by Kaunas 2022 will reach their culmination, such as the International Day of Happiness (March), the European



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DESPITE BEING LITHUANIA'S SECOND CITY, KAUNAS HAS REMAINED LARGELY UNTOUCHED BY THE RAVAGES OF MODERN TOURISM, MAKING FOR A TRULY UNIQUE AND INTRIGUING EXPERIENCE.
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Youth Festival (July), the international performing arts festival ConTempo (August), Fluxus Festival (September), the Kaunas Design Event (October), and the CityTelling Festival, which reconsiders the multi-ethnic memory of Kaunas and the people who built it.

#KAUNASgoesUNESCO

What's unique about Kaunas is that it's full of an inspiring layer of interwar modernism (it's protected by the European Heritage Label and is on its way to achieving UNESCO World Heritage status) spread all over the city. From an outsider's perspective, interwar seems like a distant period. However, at the same time, the architecture of the interwar period represents a fragile and important period in modern history. And one more thing, it is simply stunning!

City for foodies

But architecture is not the only way people explore heritage in Kaunas. The experienced chefs of Kaunas restaurants are eager to exceed the expectations of the most sophisticated diners, offering a wide array of time-tested recipes from around the world as well as a modern approach to Nordic cuisine.

Embracing the digital revolution

When lockdowns loomed and the travel sector faced extended periods of uncertainty, Kaunas did not give up hope. Instead, the talented team of the city's tourism agency, known as Kaunas IN, capitalised on the solid digital infrastructure they had built by switching up themed tours to make them relevant for the residents of Kaunas themselves. They encouraged locals to explore their backyard and seek out areas of the city they have never experienced, helping raise spirits during a truly challenging time.

A wide range of tours are now available incorporating street art, weekends with children, city's architecture, film shooting locations, green spaces, and trails of Lithuanian ethnic, Japanese, German and Jewish cultures in the city, amongst others.

This embrace of the digital and activities contributing to Kaunas' tourism sector gained Kaunas IN – a public institution helping facilitate business, tourism, and international marketing in the city of Kaunas – the tourism company of the year award.



Judges' comments:

The judges were impressed by the tourism board's holistic and inclusive approach, welcoming travellers and talent from all walks of life to foster a diverse community and tourism sector for the city. A huge variety of free tours are available to visitors, covering topics ranging from street art to architecture and film locations, with trail options specifically geared towards families. Each one is uniquely created in a distinctly 'kaunastic' way, and injected with fun and humour for a truly memorable and unique experience.



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