

# LITHUANIA - Introduction

Hello? Labas!  
(LAH-buss)

Vardas \_\_\_\_\_



Coat of Arms:  
the Pillars of Gediminas  
(white on red)



The Flag  
(yellow, like the sun;  
green, like the forests;  
red, like the blood of its people)



Coat of Arms:  
Vytautas, the Knight  
(white and blue on red)



Lithuania is in Eastern Europe, across the Baltic Sea from Sweden. Large and powerful in the Middle Ages, it is now a quaint and charming country, a little bit larger than West Virginia, and home to 3 million people. Primarily **Roman Catholic**, its citizens are **creative, nature-loving**, and fiercely **independent**.

Because of Lithuania's location, various powers have tried, over and over, to lay claim to its lands. Access to the sea, rivers, lakes, and rich farmland made it very desirable. The last country to occupy Lithuania was the Soviet Union (now Russia) after World War II. The Soviet government (led by Josef Stalin) tried, in all kinds of nasty ways, to make people forget their national identity. It is estimated that during 50 years of occupation, 1/3 of the population was lost as a result of deportations to frozen Siberia, political and religious repression, and denial of human rights. After a long struggle, Lithuania was the first republic to declare its independence from the USSR in 1990. **This year marks the 20th anniversary of that event!**

Lithuania is a parliamentary republic, which means it has a President and a Prime Minister. Lithuanian presidents are a colorful bunch: since independence in 1990, one president was a composer (Vytautas Landsbergis); one was an environmentalist (Valdas Adamkus, who once lived in Hinsdale!); and currently Dalia Grybauskaitė, the country's first female president, is an economist *and* a black belt in karate! Lithuania joined NATO and the EU in 2004.

Lithuanians speak (what else?) Lithuanian. It is the oldest Indo-European language still spoken today. Believe it or not, it has many words in common with Sanskrit! And where is Sanskrit spoken? India!

This country is a little-known gem, but well worth a look. We hope you enjoy your journey to Lithuania this week, and trust you will leave with nice memories from your visit.