

Vilnius the capital of Lithuania

Vilnius the capital of Lithuania, is the largest and one of the oldest cities of the country.

Vilnius boasts the most wonderful architectural styles of Southern and Western Europe, Gothic and Renaissance, as well as the original "Lithuanian" Baroque, also called the last vivid flash of Baroque in Europe. During these periods, the dynamic silhouettes of the majority of very elegant churches and belfry towers emerged above the city panorama. The end of the 18th century enriched the capital with beautiful buildings in the Classicist style.

The capital of Lithuania is the biggest northernmost and easternmost city of Europe with especially evident influence of Western cultures in its architectural harmony. In 1994 the Old Town of Vilnius was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.



History of Vilnius



Its name was first mentioned in 1323 in the letters of the Lithuanian Grand Duke Gediminas inviting craftsmen, merchants and monks from Western Europe to come and stay here. In 1387, after Lithuania adopted Christianity, the city was awarded the Magdeburg Rights, i.e. self-governing.



The legend of the founding of Vilnius

Grand Duke, Gediminas, was on a hunting trip in the forests of Šventaragis valley around the mouth of the River Vilnia. When night fell, the party, feeling tired after a long and successful hunt, decided to set up camp and spend the night there. While he was asleep, Gediminas had an unusual dream in which he saw an iron wolf at the top of the mountain where he had killed an European bison that day. The iron wolf was standing on the top of a hill with its head raised proudly towards the moon, howling as loud as a hundred wolves.

Awakened by the rays of the rising sun, the Duke remembered his strange dream and consulted the pagan priest Lizdeika about it. The latter interpreted the dream as follows: 'Let that happen to the Ruler and the Lithuanian State what was fated to happen!' He told the Duke that the dream was a direction to found a city among these hills.

The howling of the wolf, explained the priest, represented the fame of the future city: that city will be the capital of Lithuanian lands, and its reputation would spread far and wide, as far as the howling of the mysterious wolf...

So the Grand Duke of Lithuania, obeying the will of gods, immediately started to build the future capital, and took it the name - Vilnius - from the stream of the rapid Vilnia.

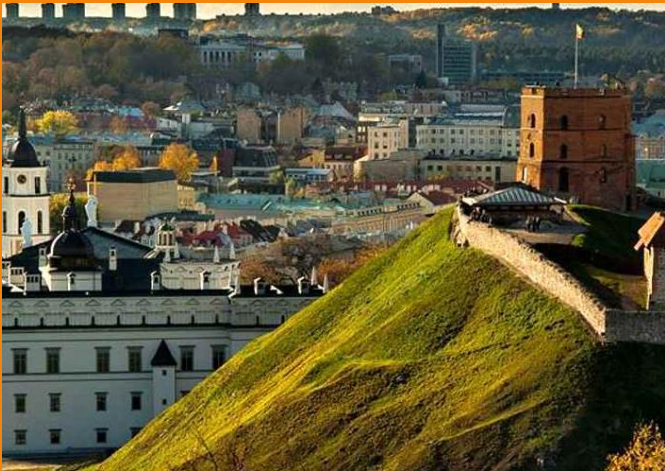
History of Lithuania capital Vilnius

Gediminas grand duke of Lithuania

Besides being the founder of Vilnius and Trakai, *Gediminas* was also one of the most famous rulers of Lithuania. His fame can only be compared to the fame of his grandson *Vytautas the Great*.

Gediminas lived between 1275 and 1341 and ruled the Grand Duchy of Lithuania for 25 years. He moved the capital of Lithuania from Trakai to Vilnius. He was better known as a diplomat who attracted the attention of Europe to Lithuania than as a military chief.

It was in the letters of *Gediminas* to Western Europe that the name of Vilnius was mentioned for the first time in 1323. This year is considered to be the year of the founding of Vilnius.



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Gediminas succeeded in expanding the state borders and the sphere of influence of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania far to the east and south. Under the rule of *Gediminas*, Vitebsk and Volyn were annexed while the lands of Kievan Rus fell into a vassal dependence of the Duchy. On their trip west, the army of *Gediminas* even approached Berlin. The area of the Lithuanian state doubled during the times of *Gediminas*.



