

Vilnius – European Capital of Culture 2009

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I have received an invitation to the Premiere of Shakespeare's Hamlet as a part of activities for the Vilnius – European Capital of Culture 2009.



Vilnius, the largest city and the capital of Lithuania, is geographically at the center of continental Europe according to the National Geographical Institute of France. The city is situated 300 km East of the Baltic seashore at the confluence of the Neris and Vilnelė rivers surrounded by beautiful forested hills. The highest point of Vilnius is about 230,7 m.

Vilnius was first mentioned as the capital of Lithuania in 1323, the letters of the Grand Duke Gediminas, the first famous Vilnius ruler, to the Roman Pope. According to a legend Grand Duke Gediminas got tired after hunting fell asleep and had a dream. The Iron Wolf was standing on the hill and howling loudly. In the

morning Gediminas asked the priest what the dream meant. The priest said: "You will build a city at the place where the wolf was howling and the fame of the city will spread as the howling of the wolf. So this was the beginning of Vilnius.

However, archaeologists state that people were living here as early as the 5th century. Gediminas, invited craftsmen and educated people from all over Europe to come and enjoy the city and as well as to stay here. Vilnius became one of the largest trade, industrial and cultural centers of Europe in the 16th century. Throughout the ages it used to be one of the major Polish townships.



Famous for its lock-chained railings the bridge stands symbol to all vows of those married and have had their keys to the locks thrown away into river.



St Anne's church and behind the Bernardine Church



Amber Museum



Though invaded, destroyed and burnt down many times, the town always recovered. Before World War II, over 90% of the population was Polish and Jewish. Today it is about 25% only, but the remains of the old Vilnius culture are visible throughout the town. The historical centre of Vilnius, its 360-hectare old city, is among the largest in Eastern Europe. In 1994, the old city, one of the largest ones in Europe, was included on the UNESCO list of World Heritage Cities.

Between 1503 and 1522 the walls were built to protect the city, and at the time it had nine city gates and three towers. Old Town contains almost two thousand medieval, gothic, renaissance, and baroque buildings, all centered on the neo-classical cathedral and town hall. The city has over 40 beautiful churches. The main sights of the city are Gediminas Castle and Cathedral Square, symbols of the capital.

The KGB Museum, located in a former Soviet prison, and the 13th century Higher Castle, which affords a glorious view of the city center are other must see places in Vilnius.

One of the most popular souvenirs for visitors of Vilnius is the Baltic Amber with a luster that will dazzle you. Walking around in old town is a magnificent feeling in cobble-stoned alleys. Here you will see small shops offering handicrafts and local souvenirs. The shops embedded in pleasant surroundings mixed with cozy cafes and restaurants are very

pleasant.



Cathedral Square



The gates of Dawn



Vilnius – European Capital of Culture 2009 National commission organized a fam-trip to European Press.

You will also find stalls on the street with folk artists selling their amber jewelry, woodcarvings, hand-painted ceramic paintings, pottery and other handicraft.

Even I have seen an Amber spa, which might be an interesting experience and relaxation during your visit. Also visiting Amber Museum will help you to find out real and good quality ambers during your shopping tours. Don't forget to learn how you can understand if the amber is real or not.

In 2009 Vilnius will become the European Capital of Culture together with Linz.

The national program Vilnius – European Capital of Culture 2009 is to be implemented in 2008-2010. The aim of the national program Vilnius – European Capital of Culture 2009 is to promote dialogue and tolerance in Europe and other parts of the world, as well as to elevate culture as a virtue in modern society and as the driving force in city development, which will distinguish Vilnius as one of the most modern and dynamic cities in Central and Eastern Europe, known in the world as a contemporary cultural centre of attraction, and one with a unique and apparent identity that is open to new ideas and investments. The budget for the Vilnius – European Capital of Culture 2009 is

set as €54 million.

Within this perspective, the Shakespeare's Hamlet has started to perform in the Old Town. Vilnius – European Capital of Culture 2009 Program will attract at least three million people will for the program events. About 300 cultural, artistic and social, as well as marketing and communications Program projects will be implemented.

For detailed program of events that will take place during Vilnius – European Capital of Culture 2009, please visit <http://www.culturelive09.lt/en/2009/EAP/>

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