VILNIUS, WHERE CHANGE ACCOMPANIES THE HISTORY, IS AN IDEAL DESTINATION FOR THOSE WHO'D LIKE TO GET AWAY FROM THE CONFUSION OF THE CITY AND HAVE A TRANQUIL WEEKEND.

I spent the morning meandering along the narrow, cobbled streets of Old Town Vilnius with a sort of anticipation that comes from my deep-seated need for hopeful adventure – when traveling to somewhere off the beaten path. Lithuania certainly fit the bill.

I had just arrived in Vilnius the night before with little more understanding about Lithuania than a distant memory of its enthusiastic Olympic basketball team in tie-dyed shirts and a former past somewhere in the back of my mind. I climbed aboard a bus to my hotel in the center of Old Town Vilnius in the dark.

The gloom from the night before disappeared with the morning sun, which lit up the Gothic, Baroque and Renaissance architecture and revealed a city that begged exploration. That’s when I got close. Pastel-colored buildings, churches, and crown topped cathedrals were found at every turn, perfectly blending Eastern and Western Europe – most were dripping with history.

While many of Vilnius attractions are hundreds of years old, the city is young. Not just in time, but people. I walked with camera dangling around my neck and witnessed schoolgirls with matching sweaters chase each other. I walked past the new art shops and packed sidewalk cafés, which teemed of youthful people with an easy contemporary style. There were very few of the old world, babushka wearing people I expected.

My favorite site was the Gates of Dawn area, which leads from Old Town to the larger city of Vilnius. I stood just outside the main gates as shoppers with old wire carts wandered from stand to stand along with a few tourists like me. The kiosks sold homemade food, tchotchkes (small souvenirs), and traditional stacking figures called Matryoshka dolls. I bought an antique naval captain’s hat, which had incomprehensible Cyrillic writing, from a local peddler. Then I wandered out of Old Town and into modern Vilnius. Beyond Old Town, I found the photogenic Cathedral Square and took a spin on the “miracle stone.” Legend has it that those who spin around the tile will have their wish granted. Vilnius has magic for everyone, even romance. I saw a couple get married on the “Lovers Lock Bridge” that celebrates love for couples who confirm their affections by locking a padlock on the bridge and throwing the key into the Vilnia River.

Vilnius is truly a city of old and new, a walkable place with nooks and crannies worth discovering. Wear comfortable shoes and have a good camera; the city will make you wander a lot.

MUST DO
The Gates of Dawn is a must-see. Built in the early 16th century, it is the only remaining gate of the original nine that guarded the city.

Just beyond the Gates of Dawn are flea market-style kiosks selling souvenirs and perhaps a piece of Lithuanian history.

Finally, Cathedral Square may be Vilnius’ most beautiful tourist spot. Also the tile that reads, “Stebuklas,” attracts the interest of the visitors.

GETTING THERE
Turkish Airlines has round-trip flights on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays from Istanbul to Vilnius. For information: turkishairlines.com (http://www.turkishairlines.com)