



VILNIUS! The Baroque Capital of Europe

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An interview with... Mr. Mario William Anthony

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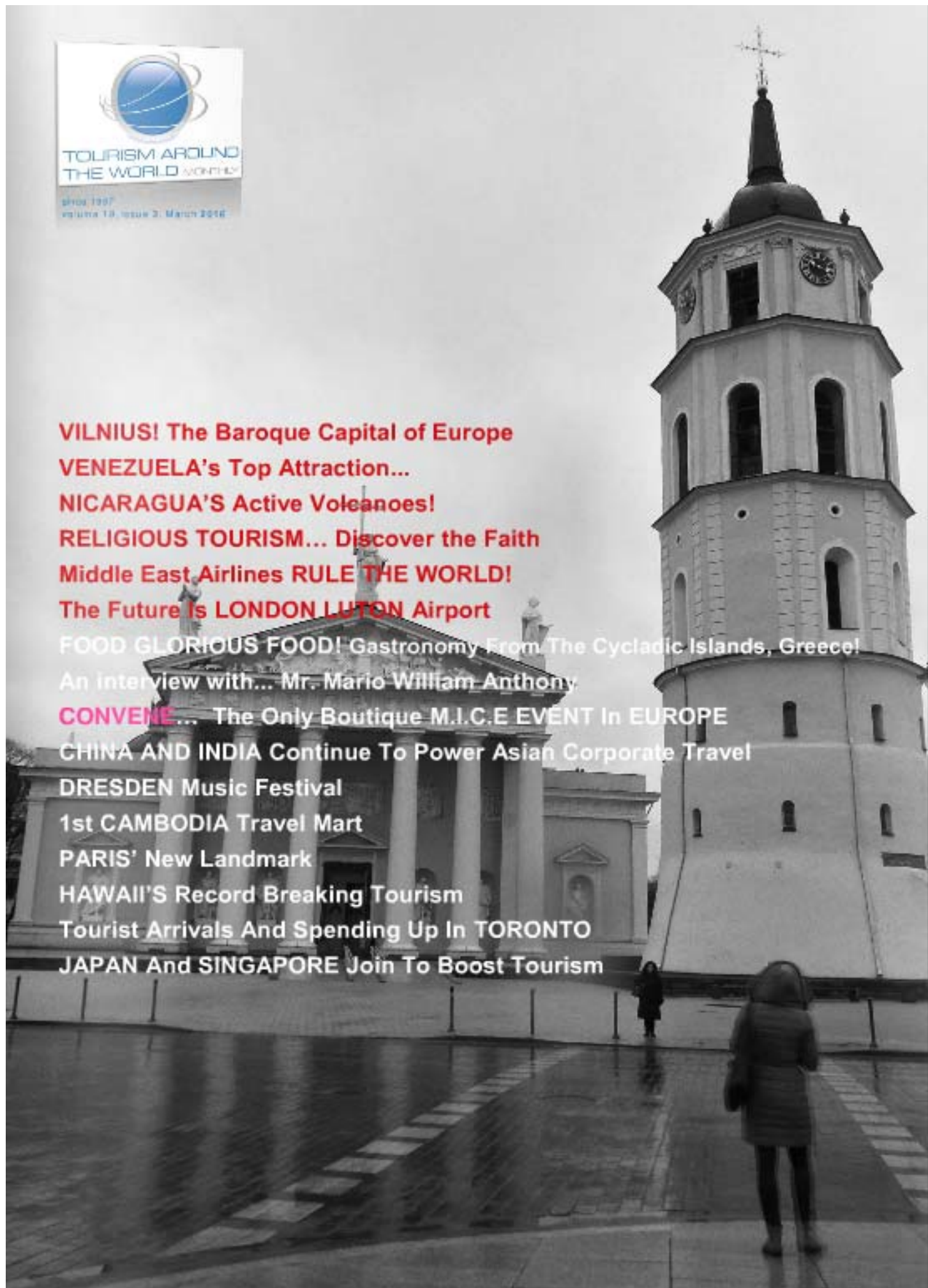
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Gediminas tower at the upper castle and the Neris River, Vilnius

VILNIUS!

The Baroque Capital of Europe

by Dimitri Laspas

It is the 2nd biggest city in the Baltic States and the most beautiful baroque capital in the European Union! With 46% of the city area covered by green open spaces, it is no surprise that Vilnius is a 'green city', with the cleanest air in Europe and high quality of drinking water. Added to that its highly developed cycles lanes and bicycle hire options, the city of Vilnius is a state of the art future city.



Dominikonu street, old town

There is also the impressive early Baroque monument of The Chapel of St Casimer, with its famous Bell Tower. Pilies Street is the oldest street in the Old Town of Vilnius and offers bars, cafes, shops and small hidden squares and court yards.

Vilnius, capital of Lithuania, is a fresh, historical and a rapidly growing destination for tourism, business and leisure. Over the past few years, it has seen its tourism rapidly grow as well as the m.i.c.e. sector, as more and more people are discovering this magical city.

Although a small nation, Lithuania is big on what it has to offer. Having gained independence from Russia just 25 years ago, today it is often compared to Barcelona or Copenhagen as a 'place to live' and it has been ranked 5th as the least expensive place in Europe to live.

Vilnius is one of the largest medieval old towns in Eastern part of Europe, and the buildings of the Baroque Old Town have been preserved along with their medieval network of cobbled streets. In 1994, Vilnius Old Town became a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Vilnius old town has a total of 28 churches. It is a rich and colourful city full of impressive Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque architecture.

The city offers architectural diversity and combines old castles, narrow streets, church spires, bell towers, red-tiled roofs, in true Gothic city style. Its mix with the Renaissance led to Baroque buildings appearing.

Vilnius city was first documented in 1323 in a letter from Grand Duke Gediminas, inviting Jewish people living in Germany to move there. The city walls were built around 1503 and included 9 gates and 3 towers. Many different nationalities came to live in the city including Polish, Russian, Latvian, Slovaks, Germans, Turkish and Jews. The Jewish influence on the city was huge resulting in Napoleon quoting 'Vilnius as the Jerusalem of the North'.

The city's history has seen many occupiers; France, Poland, Russia and Germany etc. Unfortunately due to many battles the city walls and towers have been destroyed, except 'The Gates of Dawn'. Today, above the gate is a picture of the Holy Virgin Mary, which attracts thousands of religious visitors annually.

The Old Town of Vilnius has many attractions, like the Gediminas Tower, which gives you a 360° view over the city. You can also see The Hill of Three Crosses Monument, commemorating the beheading of 7 Franciscan Friars. The Bernardine Gardens, offers a variety of flora and fauna as well as open green areas, seating and water features.

In Cathedral Square you will find the Cathedral of St Stanislav and St Vladislav, the most important place of worship for the country's Catholics.



The Town Hall Square, Vilnius

The Town Hall Square, is a must visit with its impressive Town Hall. Ausros Vartu Street has many attractions like St Casimir's Church, the National Philomonic Hall, Basilian Gates, the churches of Holy Trinity, Holy Spirit and St Teresa. Gediminas Avenue is for shopping, but there are places to stop and rest a while before you continue to shop!



The Town Hall, Vilnius

Uzupis is a Republic within the city of Vilnius itself. Formed by artists it has its own Constitution, President and Bishop, plus a guardian; the statue of the Bronze Angel of Uzupis. Here you will find bridges, bars, restaurants, art and craft shops.



The Angel of Uzupis district

With tourism steadily growing annually, more 5* hotels offering great value are appearing throughout the city. There are many options of accommodation that give visitors flexibility.

Once the sun sets, the city's night life gets going with many places to enjoy the latest movies, listen to music, or simply spend your time dancing in the modern night clubs. Vilnius nightlife is always buzzing and there is something for everybody.

Lithuanian cuisine is also a must try. National dishes include; potato, meat balls, bacon and sour cream (Cepelina), cold beetroot soup (Salibarscia) commonly served with potatoes, pickled cabbage, cranberry jelly/drink (Kisielius), herring with potatoes, pancakes (Skilandziai), black rye bread, baked potato pudding (Kugelis), beetroot salad, tree cake, among others. Lithuanian beer is also a great way to enjoy the nation's cuisine.

Lithuania is full of wonderful places to visit many easily accessible from the city, like Trakai, the resting place of the Dukes of Lithuania, with its large lake and Trakai Castle. The History Museum, Uzutrakis Manor Estate, the Hills of Angels and the town itself. The region of Panevezys, is less well known but worth visiting with an amazing Central Park, Theatre, Glass Factory/Gallery and Brewery.

The new Vilnius is a rapidly growing and expanding city and actually boasts the



Europa square, Vilnius

fastest internet in the world. Industry sectors like technology, banking, manufacturing, retail and the services are all growing. The biggest growth is in m.i.c.e. When Vilnius opened its arms to the world to come and do business, the world responded with huge success! One such example is one of the biggest annual events currently in the Baltic Sea Region; Convene, which just concluded last month. The new European looking business sector of Vilnius is a bustling area and a wonderful contrast to the Old Town.

M.I.C.E business in Lithuania means being the best and offering the best. The city offers a 1st class business environment that is becoming internationally recognised. There is a diverse choice of hotels, modern and the most up-to-date conference halls as well as unique venues, including ancient mansions, castle halls, rebuilt royal palaces, modern glass towers, big arenas and large open-air squares all on offer to accommodate any meeting or event. Venues and conference centres pride themselves on qualified and experienced staff so all events will be perfect.



Lithuanian Exhibition and Convention Centre, Vilnius

The Lithuanian Exhibition and Convention Centre - LITEXPO is the largest and most up-to-date exhibition and convention centre in the Baltic States. It offers universal and quality spaces, extensive and versatile organisational expertise, professional management and servicing, convenient access and location in Vilnius, With 5 exhibition halls and 10 well-equipped conference rooms of different sizes and layout styles. In total it can accommodate up to 3,000 conference participants.

The Lithuanian Academy of Sciences close to the city's Cathedral has recently been renovated and offers several halls containing modern equipment for most conference and business meeting needs.

Vilnius Contemporary Art Centre is the largest venue for contemporary art in the Baltic States with an exhibition space of 2400m².

Cultural bar Kablys is in the city centre between lively Old Town and charismatic Train Station district.

The former Palace of Railway Workers presents old interior details similar to ancient Roman times that have been retained and refined with contrasting urban looks.

Green Hall is a 14-storey elliptical tower and the greenest business centre in Vilnius. Located on the bank of the river Neris the architecture of the building was developed to provide a comfortable thermal environment while reducing energy consumption. On the ground floor is a 300m² foyer; a perfect space for receptions and gala dinners with picturesque views to downtown locations. Under this is a meeting room for 65 delegates.

The Lithuanian National Philharmonic Society is a concert venue. Comprising of two halls, the main auditorium seats 680 people and the Chamber Hall seats a further 150 people. Both halls are used primarily as concert and rehearsal spaces, although they can also be adapted to host other events such as conferences, seminars, meetings, presentations and receptions.



The Vilnius University

Vilnius University is one of the oldest universities in Eastern and Central Europe. Established in 1579 it is one of the few universities in Europe which has preserved its original purpose of the old buildings. The spectacular chambers and courtyards provide an original location for conferences and seminars of many kinds.



The Trakai Castle, Vilnius

Once the business day is over or for networking opportunities, Vilnius has developed a wide variety of options: Hot Air Ballooning – glide over the Old Town in a hot air balloon. Vilnius is the only European capital that allows hot air ballooning over the city centre! Canoeing River Neris & Canoe Polo. A Medieval Feast in Trakai Castle with a private view of the museum. Cepelinai Cooking Classes – a great team-building event to learn about Lithuanian cuisine and traditions, with a visit to the main vegetables and fruits market, in the heart of the old city.



The central market, Vilnius

A Beer Route – over 1,000 years of beer history, there are currently 84 local beer breweries. Tour the brewery, see production and taste the beer. A Hike through the Wetlands or try Swamp Hiking. High or Low Ropes; adrenaline lovers on the 'High Ropes' or on the 'Low Ropes' try the obstacle course. Go carting, tank driving or a Segway tour of the old town, the options are many and there is something for every meeting or event.



St. Peter's and St. Paul Church, Vilnius

During Jan-Sept 2015, 753,387 guests stayed in Vilnius with a total of 1,409,453 nights, representing a 6% and 4.5% rise respectively on 2014 figures. 83% of guests were foreigners, most coming from Belarus, Germany, Poland, Russia and Latvia – accounting for 48.3% of all foreign guests. The highest growth in tourists was from Japan up 71.7% compared to the same period in 2014. The number of tourists from other Asian countries increased too with Chinese tourists up by 28.6%, while from Israel, +26% and South Korea up 9%.



Shopping mall at Gediminas avenue, Vilnius

It is clear that Vilnius has already captured the hearts of many and is doing a very successful job of continuing to expand and develop in m.i.c.e and other sectors to bring the city to the forefront of the world's attention. •



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