

# CHAPTER 7

## **Cultural Tourism in Lithuania – Experiencing Culinary Heritage in Regional Feasts**

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**Keywords: Cultural Tourism, Culinary Tourism, Lithuania, Regional & Local Products, Food Tourism**

### **Introduction**

Tourism becomes more and more important economic activity in many countries and Lithuania is not an exception. The growth of foreign tourism here was one the fastest in Europe during last few years. Incomes, generated by tourism exceed billion of Euros in 2013. However apart from only economical aspects of tourism, which dominates very clearly in national tourism strategy and in tourism policy, there are other important issues related to the tourism. In particular it is very important tool forming the image of the country and building close connections with other nations. Cultural tourism is of the greatest importance in this case. On the other hand, cultural tourism is high personal adventure and many national wide strategies fail to make a serious impact on tourism flows in this case. Even more specific case is culinary tourism. Culinary tourism is the subset of Cultural tourism but very often these two come together. Culinary tourism is experiencing the food of the country, region or area, and

is now considered a vital component of the tourism experience. World Food Travel Association defined culinary tourism as “The pursuit and enjoyment of unique and memorable food and drink experiences, both far and near.” Food tourism is usually linked with other subsets of cultural tourism eg. heritage tourism. We assume that in most cases these forms of tourism are hardly detachable or one is form of another. There is much more chances to attract tourist offering both stomach and eye pleasures. Therefore we will present some most important features of both traditional cultural heritage and food related tourism opportunities of Lithuania, concentrating on some specific cases. We will try to raise a question of promotion of cultural and namely culinary tourism via organisation of specialised regional events, such as fests and other celebrations.

### Main tourism trends in Lithuania

In order to get reliable understanding of any nations’ culture, one needs to go beyond the main tourism attraction points and often outside major metropolitan areas. Analysis of Lithuanian foreign tourism directions, reveals that absolute majority of incomers concentrates in main cities and resort areas (Fig.1).

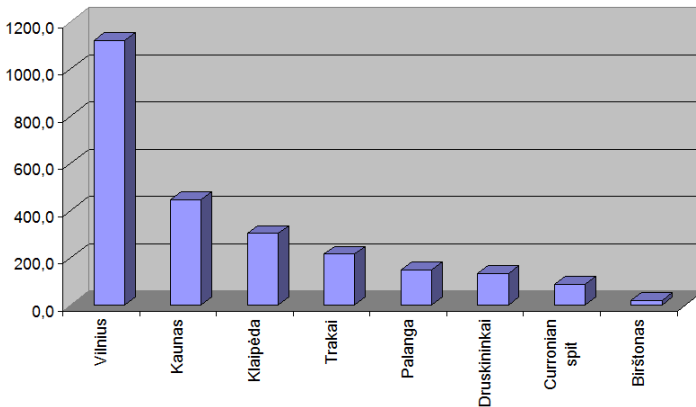


Fig.1. Distribution of foreign tourists in Lithuania in 2011 (source: Department of Tourism of Lithuania <http://www.tourism.lt/lt/naudinga-informacija/turizmo-statistika>)

It's a lucky coincident that many of the most important cultural heritage sites of Lithuania are located in most popular places, but some of worth visiting places remain out of tourist routes. On the other hand, official cultural heritage of national importance (such as objects included in UNESCO world heritage list) automatically attract people and business, what changes way of life in those places sometimes to the great extent. Therefore such places become less attractive for those, seeking to find authentic landscape, culture and cuisine.

Majority of tourist to Lithuania come here for reasons related to leisure (Tab.1), so cultural heritage could be one of their attraction points.

*Tab. 1. Distribution of foreign tourist according to their aim of arrival  
(source: Department of Tourism of Lithuania <http://www.tourism.lt/lt/naudinga-informacija/turizmo-statistika>)*

	<b>Leisure</b>	<b>Business</b>	<b>Visiting relatives, friends</b>	<b>Healthcare</b>	<b>Shopping</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>2007</b>	30,2%	28,5%	26,5%	1,8%	11,6%	1,4%
<b>2008</b>	30,9%	34,7%	25,7%	1,7%	4,2%	2,7%
<b>2009</b>	30,1%	36,2%	26,2%	1,3%	3,3%	2,9%
<b>2010</b>	33,2%	30,2%	27,0%	1,5%	4,9%	3,3%
<b>2011</b>	33,3%	29,7%	26,3%	1,5%	6,9%	2,3%

In order to attract those people to less popular and more authentic places, once should provide information about those places first of all. Permanent promotion of peripheral (touristically) areas is a difficult and expensive task, therefore organisation of local, more or less traditional celebrations, seems to be an affordable tool for this purpose; therefore many municipalities and even smaller towns started to develop this activity, often motivating those events with the local heritage of some kind. Sometimes this heritage is closely related to regional cuisine. The main question in all these cases lays in relation of those regional fests to real cultural heritage. Some serious doubts, concerning main ideas exists. One could get a serious suspicion, that in many cases commercial aspect dominates so much, that cultural heritage vanish from the event's "menu".

## Cultural heritage in Lithuania

In a broadest sense cultural heritage could be understood as virtually everything, what have been influenced by the human beings, but usually we are stressing the value of the human creation. Therefore cultural heritage usually must withhold some cultural importance for human generations, which evaluates things usually from time perspective. Officially cultural heritage in Lithuania is defined as in few generations preserved cultural values of ethnical, aesthetic or scientific kind (Lietuvos kultūros vertybių apsaugos departamentas 2014).

It could be material (tangible):

1. monuments (architectural, art or archaeological),
2. ensembles (groups of monuments and landscape)
3. famous places (creation of people and nature)

Or non material (intangible): way of life, identities, knowledge, traditions, cuisine, etc.

There are great differences of cultural heritage among European countries. This is mostly related to differences of their history. Lithuania is located not in the richest part of Europe, concerning world heritage sites. UNESCO sites in Europe (UNESCO world heritage list....., 2014) ):

- Northern Europe – 36 (Lithuania 4)
- Western Europe – 131
- Eastern Europe – 77
- Southern Europe – 140

Lithuanian cultural heritage under protection of UNESCO:

I. Material (tangible) in UNESCO world heritage list:

- Old town of Vilnius
- Curonian spit
- Kernave cultural reserve
- Struve geodesic structure

II. Nonmaterial (intangible):

- Traditional cross manufacturing
- Tradition of song and dance festivals
- Lithuanian polyphonic songs

The small country located on the Eastern coast of Baltic Sea in the zone of transition between East and West European civilisation, Lithuania experienced influence of different cultures throughout the history. This influence could be red in cultural heritage which exists in the country at present. For main cultural regions of Lithuania have specific cultural heritage, own cuisine and traditions. The specific history of the country resulted in highly mixed cultural heritage, which could be found by tourists here. Common for central European countries catholic and in lesser extent Russian orthodox related architecture dominates in old parts of Lithuanian cities. Heritage created by other religion minorities (Jewish and Muslim), which inhabited the country since 14<sup>th</sup> century, also left their marks in Lithuanian landscapes.

The main street of Lithuanian capital city Gediminas avenue, presents an excellent **symbol** of the circumstances of development of the whole country. Straight street from the east to the west developed during Russian period. It has catholic cathedral in the eastern end and orthodox church in the western one.

The impact of these cultures could be felt not only in architecture but also in national cuisine of Lithuania. The impact of neighbouring countries (Poland and Prussia) also is quite substantial. Many traditional dishes in the country originates or are influenced by

non Lithuanian origin nations. One of the most popular “traditional Lithuanian” dishes Cepelinai (Potato dumplings) originate in East Prussia. Koldunai (boiled or fried dumplings with raw beef meat) were brought to the country with Tatar community in middle ages. Caraim community taught Lithuanians how to make kibinai and other toast dishes. Soviet era introduced dishes from all over Soviet union. Classical examples are: modified middle Asian schashlik (grilled pork instead of traditionally used lamb), plow (rise and lamb stew) or manty (dumplings with beef meat boiled in steam), Chennak or many others. All those and many other dishes nowadays are the most usual components of “menu” of every canteen or restaurant. Most of these traditional dishes of foreign cultures were locally modified and presents unique heritage of Lithuanian cuisine. Many traditional desserts like Šimtalapis (“hundredleaves”), also are of mixed origin (Imbrasiene 2009).

The main threat for material heritage is related for its destruction because of not understanding or profit related reasons. The main threat for intangible heritage is related to human minds ability to forget. People tend to forget things that are not in use, therefore the sustainability of non material heritage extremely depends on the usage of cultural heritage. Even material heritage, which is not used, tends to be damaged by forces of nature or humans, because its preservation is costly.

So summarising we must state that sustainability of heritage finally depends on ability to recognise valuable “things”. It is strongly related to the priorities of the society, especially during last centuries (often: economy and comfort versus aesthetical values). But it also strongly related to accidental things – different places have different development trajectories and this finally results in different transformation patterns. Simply speaking, the fortune also plays important role forming heritage lists of all countries. Sustainability of cultural heritage doesn’t mean only preservation of heritage. It means “wise” use of the heritage. In fact the idea of preservation is closely related to the idea of use – we have to preserve in order to use it for our needs (both material and aesthetic). It is so important

because it is part of our world, history, identity, etc... But also its important because its part of our income and well being.

We will not concentrate on tourism related to UNESCO world heritage list, because information on those topics is easily findable and numerous studies and projects were implemented concerning protection and use of those heritage elements. The next chapters will present most famous examples of culinary heritage of Lithuania and special cases of use of cultural heritage for tourism purposes, related to organisation of local celebrations, which become more and more popular in many East and Central European countries.

### **Culinary heritage in Lithuania**

Culinary heritage is a good way to promote development of tourism in Lithuania. Eating is integral part of all trips longer than few hours. Many tourists appreciate local food. Such attitude gives the opportunity to promote regional cuisine both among domestic and foreign tourists. Consequently, the promotion of culinary heritage facilitate development of other tourist attractions, e.g. Lithuanian folk, traditions and customs and the less-known regions, which sometimes are not along the popular tourist routes (Žuromskaite 2009). The regions known for their tasty and unique dishes can “be discovered” for and by foreign visitors. Culinary tourism in Lithuania becomes more and more popular among tourists. Culinary traditions of Lithuania are very well known in Poland and now are being discovered by other nationalities too.

In Lithuania potatoes are considered second bread and are eaten all year long. The most popular potato dishes are:

- a. “zeppelins” (cepelinai), type of dumpling made from shredded potatoes and usually stuffed with minced meat (Fig. 2);
- b. potato sausages (vėdarai),
- c. potato pancakes.



Fig. 2. Cepelinai. Source: <http://almina-valgykmelskismylek.blogspot.com/2011/01/tradiciniai-lietuviski-cepelinai.html>

One of the Lithuanian regions promoting its culinary heritage is East Aukštaitija. Aukštaitija is located the northeast part of Lithuania and its unofficial capital is Utena. Cuisine of this part of the country is known for its simplicity. Rye bread is one of the most fundamental food products in East Aukštaitija, eaten every day for every meal - breakfast, lunch and dinner as well. Two kinds of bread are traditional - plain fermented and scalded. Plain fermented bread has been baked from many centuries or even millenia. The second kind is much later invention, dating back only to the beginning of 20th Century. East Aukštaitija belongs to European Network of Regional Culinary Heritage (<http://www.culinary-heritage.com>). Culinary Heritage project East Aukstaitija is run by Utena county and Švenčionys district.

Another region of Lithuania famous or its cuisine is Trakai area, where Karaims live. This ethnic group was in 1392 translocated from Crimea (330 Karaims families) by the Grand Duke Vytautas of Lithuania (Schur 1995). Lithuanian Karaims have various national



dishes. One of the most famous non-ritual dishes are kibinlar (sinular: kibin). It is a salty pastries in the form of half-moon and traditionally the lamb and onion filling. It is baked in the oven (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3 Kibinlar from Trakai. Source: <http://www.balticadventure.com/en/tours/199/the-kibin-way--a-taste-of-history.html>

You can make your own Kibinlar thanks to the offer of BalticAdventure agency (<http://www.balticadventure.com>). The aim of making & tasting offered is to give tourists the chance of exploring the dishes of the Lithuanian and Karaite culinary heritage, offering them possibility of hands-on experience, something they unlikely to find anywhere else, but only in Trakai. During making tourists are listening to a tale of the Karaite traditions. Thanks to it they can understand how the special recipe and curious cooking process turn the combination of dough and filling into the unique traditional Karaite meat pasty – the Kibin. Package costs 10 Euro per person and includes: chef demonstration, tutorial and story about kibinlar, all the necessary ingredients for kibinlar making. After preparation tourists can eat their own and ones prepared by local cook. Thanks to the offer You can also learn how to cook *zeppelins* (*cepelinai*) ([www.balticadventure.com](http://www.balticadventure.com)).

Lithuania is also famous, similarly like its bigger neighbour, Poland, for sausages and smoked meats. Amongst many various kinds is best known are *Kindziukas* (in Aukštaitija region) or *Skilandis* (in Suvalkija region) (Fig. 4). This kind of sausage is made from with salted, peppered garlic-flavored minced pork meat of higher quality and bacon and then stuffed into pig's stomach (sometimes also pig's bladder is used). Next stage of preparation is smoking and drying. Skilandis is characterized by its long keeping properties, thanks to very low content of water and special preparation. This type of sausage is an almost legendary. The name "Skilandis" has as gained protected status under European Union law in 2010 (Commission Regulation (EU) No 29/2010).



Fig. 4 Skilandis. Source:<http://nematekas.lt/lt/produkcija/nori-pavaisinti-kolegas/saltai-rukyta-tradicinis-skilandis/> & [http://www.dargita.lt/photos/2Kaimiskas%20skilandis\\_3286.jpg](http://www.dargita.lt/photos/2Kaimiskas%20skilandis_3286.jpg)

Another very tasty and worth trying Lithuanian dish is *Apple cheese* (in Lithuanian. obuolių Suris), and matured at least for half a year. (Fig. 5). Despite the name, has nothing to do with the dairy product - the name is used because of the similarity of the implementation, and the final shape of the two products. It is prepared from sour apples (usually Antaninis (Antonovka) apples cultivar), sugar and cinnamon.



Fig. 5. 4 year matured apple cheese. Source: Authors photo.

### **Local festivals and celebrations – cultural preservation or imitation?**

Local festivals and celebrations are becoming more and more popular across all the country. Though it's a good opportunity both for local business and for tourists, but the question about real relations to cultural heritage exist. Do tourists really have opportunity to know local tradition and namely cuisine or just they could only have nice time there? Clearly this helps to attract more customers to the towns and cities but if this also provides a good chance to know local heritage and traditions? We don't have unambiguous answer to this question. Everything depends on the type of an event, local management and many other accidental circumstances.

There are several kinds of local fests in Lithuania and all of them have their interesting points otherwise they could hardly reach their target – attract people to the place. At present this could be qualified as intangible non-preserved heritage of Lithuanian regions. We could classify local festivals into several groups:

- Traditional festivals based on seasonal nature gifts (like mushroom or migratory fish catching time);
- Traditional “semi-catholic” celebrations based on major year cycles (like Mardi Grass or Palm Sunday or Feast of St. John);
- Traditional feasts and other town celebrations (e.g. based on traditional crafts common for some area – like beer making in Northern Lithuania);
- New traditional cultural festivals like “Vilnius Jazz”, or “Vilnius Cinema spring” and many other.

In our case the most interesting are those festivals, which are related to seasonal goods of nature, because they are related to local traditions and local cuisine. The relations of those feasts are closely related to local culinary heritage and therefore visiting such festivals (though also commercialised) would really have chance to get at least some experience of local cuisine heritage. Other traditional festivals also have some relations with national cuisine, but not necessarily it's a main point of a feast. For example “Kaziukas” fair, organized in Vilnius at the beginning of March for a few hundred years is mainly oriented to the selling of goods, made by local (and nowadays also international) private craftsmen but among them also are those, selling traditional food products. The open air restaurants with traditional Lithuanian cuisine is becoming more and more usual attribute of this (and other) feast, initially devoted for other purposes. Trade of smoked traditional meat products is a necessary part of almost all feasts. We won't concentrate on these events but instead will present the overview of worth visiting (from our point of view) events around Lithuania, directly related to culinary heritage. Many of those festivals or feasts have long traditions, but almost all of them were cancelled during soviet era and revived quite recently or created few years ago. Therefore we may argue concerning their “cultural heritage” status, but anyway, they have close connections to local environment, traditional way of life and cuisine.

We will start from the winter season, which is usually one of the least popular times for tourism activities in Lithuania; therefore the attraction of tourists to the main resort towns, which have infrastructure for huge tourist flows, is a very positive result in this period. The winter is a season when small salmon related fish Smelt (10 – 20 cm length) approaches Baltic coasts in huge quantities. Fishing and tasting this tasty fish with a strange cucumber smell is a long lasting tradition in these areas. This finally resulted in creation of new local feast in two main sea resorts of Lithuania. “Smelt festivals” are being organised separately both in Palanga and Nida, which attract tens of thousands people enjoying both fish meals (fish soup, grilled and backed fishes) and sea coast.

Another mass migratory fish – vimba, which inhabits sea coast and nearby rivers in spring and autumn results in organisation of vimba days (“Žiobrines” in Lithuanian) in several towns along Nemunas river and sea coast (Neringa, Jurbarkas and other). The beginning of May is the main time for these celebrations.

Another unique for Lithuania is a “Cherry celebration”, organised in Northern Lithuanian town Zagare, famous for its local breed of cherries, popular in whole country. Cherry jam, drinks, wines, cookies and other meals are being made and tasted there in the middle of summer (July).

The day of “Craft, Music and Beer” is being organised in Northern Lithuanian towns in August. Town Pakruojis held this festival in 2013, when 19 local beer makers offered 37 kinds of beer in best beer contest. The beer making tradition in small breweries in Northern Lithuania wasn’t lost even during Soviet time, when this activity was prohibited. The “beer road” in other town Biržai is offered for tourists all year round, where one can taste different kind of local beers and traditional meals, which go with beer. Northern Lithuanian beer region is also famous among world beer lovers for its specific unique breed of yeast, different from all other world regions. Another 3 day long “beer festival” is being organized in Vasaknai manor, Zarasai municipality in June. This event also presents opportunity to taste beer related meals.

The southern Lithuanian town Varena is unofficially qualified as a “capital of mushrooms” in Lithuania. Municipality tries to promote itself by the way of organizing “Mushroom feast” in September. Mushroom feast along with “mushroom gathering championship”, organised there, is a nice opportunity to taste local mushroom meals and to have nice time in green and clean local pine forests.

Another unique case of exploitation of new heritage could be found in small central Lithuanian town Vidukle. It was one of the very few places in Soviet Lithuania, where travellers were able to stop for lunch or dinner in road restaurant. In fact this use to be one of popular at that time specialised canteens, which was serving almost exceptionally only dumplings “koldunai”, mentioned in section above. Using this soviet created heritage “Koldunai feast” is being organised every June in the town. Here one could try various kinds of dumplings boiled or grilled in different ways.

### **Conclusions**

The cultural tourism is not only an opportunity to develop tourism and related economic activities. It is also very appropriate way to create positive image and promote international relations of any country. Culinary tourism is important part of cultural tourism, which have specific territorial consequences because it opens otherwise unnoticed places for local and foreign tourists. One of the ways of promotion of such tourism is organisation of various locally related feasts, festivals, fairs or other kinds of similar events. Not always those events have strong cultural heritage dimension but usually they create an opportunity to feel at least some cultural traditions of various less famous but still often unique and interesting places. The recent boom of such activities in peripheral Lithuanian towns and municipalities illustrates the usefulness of such events for local economies and societies. Also it provides new attraction points for those seeking something more and something different than a common tourism attraction points can offer.

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