

PHOTOGRAPHING VILNIUS



VILNIUS



Vilnius is a city of many faces; from the classic sight of its red-roofed Old Town buildings, to the Baroque architecture among its green parks, and its spacious squares and winding streets.

This publication; however, is aimed at guiding you through more than just that. Off the well-trodden tourist paths lie wooden houses that still guard family secrets, hills with great views of the town and residential areas dating back to the early 20th century.

Wherever in town you may find yourself, one thing is certain; Vilnius is best viewed under the setting sun. For a short while, it seems to come alive and bask in the warmth of the sunlight. Early mornings are a close second. While the city is waking up, you can hear the sound of your own footsteps in the streets and watch life begin to pour into town.

To capture the real face of Vilnius and discover its cosiness, lift your gaze up, listen to the streets, and try to feel your way around - even with this guide in hand.

VILNIUS PANORAMAS



1. VILNIUS CATHEDRAL BELL TOWER Katedros a. 1 , www.bpmuziejus.lt

Climb 140 wooden stairs that have been in use since the 19th century - you'll reach a panoramic terrace located 50m above street level and have an excellent view of the city.

TIPS For the best shots, make your way to the top of the bell tower and take photos through the windows that don't have bars on them. Point your camera at the sculptures on the cathedral's roof. You can also get Gediminas' Tower in the shot. Other windows are suitable for taking photos of the Old Town. The light is suitable for photos throughout the day.



2. GEDIMINAS' TOWER



Arsenalo g. 5, www.lnm.lt

Gediminas' Tower marks the spot where the Vilnius Upper Castle once stood. While the tower is not nearly as grand as the castle was, it still holds a special place in the hearts of locals and is a popular tourist spot, too.

TIPS The best time for taking photos of the tower is until about 2 p.m. Face the tower and stand either on or along the stone wall on the left. Your shot can include the Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania (left) and Gediminas' Tower (right). If you happen to be here at sunset, stand on the side of the hill facing the Neris River - you'll get a good view of Vilnius' skyscrapers.



3. THE HILL OF THREE CROSSES



Entrance from T. Kosčiuskos g.

Come here to experience one of the most romantic spots in Vilnius, from which most of the Old Town will be visible. The hill is named after the Three Crosses that stand atop it, which were created by architect and sculptor Antanas Vivulskis. The original crosses were demolished in 1950 by the Soviets, but the monument was rebuilt in 1989.

TIPS For photos of the city, you'll find the light is best in the mornings and evenings. The evening view is exceptional because you can also catch the streetlights and illuminated buildings of the Old Town. This spot is also good for sunsets.



4. VILNIUS UNIVERSITY BELL TOWER

Šv. Jonų g. 12, www.muziejus.vu.lt

You can see spectacular panoramas from the viewing deck on top of Vilnius University's St. Johns' Church Bell Tower. This is the highest building in the Old Town, and lets you enjoy a 360-degree view of the city centre and nearby districts.

TIPS It's an excellent spot for taking panoramic photos and close-ups of specific buildings, and the lighting is suitable throughout the day.



5. TAURAS HILL

V. Mykoliaičio-Putino g. 5

Also known as Devil's Hill or Ghost Hill, Taurus Hill is where Baltic religious holidays were celebrated a long time ago. No reports of the supernatural have ever been made, but the panoramic view atop the hill is truly enchanting. Climb the stairs that go up from Pamėnkalnio Street and soak in the view of Vilnius' old and new architecture. The TV Tower, the district of Žvėrynas and the high-rises in the new city centre are all visible from here.

TIPS When you look at the town from here, the sun is always behind you, offering excellent light throughout the day. Take photos of the distant high-rises with Taurus Hill's trees also in your shot. The evening is good for capturing the same view with the buildings illuminated.



6. THE BASTION OF VILNIUS CITY WALL

Bokšto g. 20, www.lnm.lt

It is believed that the bastion was built in the 17th century as part of Vilnius' defensive wall, which protected the town from enemies from the east. This is a great spot to see the Old Town's church spires, and the dome of St. Casimir's church with the crown on top looks truly majestic from here. It is also where you can snap shots of hot air balloons taking off from the field at the bottom of Bastion Hill. Gediminas' Tower, the Orthodox Church of the Blessed Mother of God and the district of Užupis are all visible from here.

TIPS The spot is good for taking photos throughout the day - the sun will be behind you as you face the panorama of the Old Town and Užupis. For something different, catch the night lights after sunset.



7. SUBAČIAUS LOOKOUT

Subačiaus g.

Between the streets of Paupio and Subačiaus, close to the site of an old monastery with its gardens and ponds, lies the Subačiaus lookout. Come here for a panoramic view of both new and old Vilnius with the Užupis quarter in sight - which has served as an inspiration for many painters and photographers. Nearby, you'll find the Church of the Ascension of the Lord - a true Baroque jewel in Vilnius.

TIPS When you face the city, the sun will be behind you at all times of the day, providing good lighting. The evening hues are magnificent. Zoom in a little to bring out the details in the buildings.



8. LIEPKALNIS

Minsko pl. 2, www.liepkalnis.lt



Liepkalnis is the highest point in Vilnius (235m above sea level) and is protected as part of Pavilniai Regional Park. Its elevation made it a good candidate for the town's airport and you may well see airplanes up close on approach to landing. From here, you'll get a view of the hills in Ribiškės and a panorama of Vilnius, including the Old Town, the Hill of Three Crosses, and the TV Tower. Far in the north and west, the Soviet-era residential districts will also be visible.

TIPS Get to the highest point of the hill and point your camera at the town's buildings, zooming in as close as you can. If you're lucky you'll be able to capture a passing plane in your shot. The lighting is good throughout the day.

THE OLD TOWN



9. BERNARDINŲ STREET



This 16th century street was part of the road that joined Vilnius' castles with the Bernardine Gate of the Vilnius City Wall, and is one of the oldest streets in Vilnius. Its end near Pilies Street is decorated with teapots on the side of a wall. You're guaranteed to get a postcard-worthy shot here.

TIPS If you plan on capturing architecture (e.g. The Shakespeare Hotel), come here in the afternoon when the sun is in the right spot. Face the arch of the hotel and stand as far away from it as possible to get the widest shot. Don't miss the facade of St. Anne's church at the end of the street. The afternoon light is good for this, too - stand on the small square and snap a shot of the church through the tree branches.



10. BERNARDINE GARDENS

Mairionio g.



The Bernardine Gardens lie surrounded by the Old Town's architecture. The park is where the oldest oak tree in Vilnius grows; it has been here for well over a hundred years. By taking just a short walk from the city's main square, you can hide from the noise and hear the Vilnelė River flow. Take a walk through the gardens and look for good views of Gediminas' Tower, St. Anne's and Bernardine churches, and the park's fountains. This is a great spot for nature photography - the ducks seem to love hanging out in the river right by the park.

TIPS Without a doubt, the fountains are the most photogenic structures in the park. The Grand Fountain should be photographed in the morning sun, against the sun rays, so as to catch the light on the water. The evening view if also worth your time - that's when the fountain is illuminated.



11. LITERATŲ AND RUSŲ STREETS



Literatų Street, with its numerous dedications to writers and poets, is a true gem of the Old Town. Alongside it, the cobblestoned Rusų Street looks out onto the Orthodox Church of the Blessed Mother of God. This street has become a favourite among foreign film production companies. Natural light during the day and artificial lights at night bring out ever-changing shades and colours.

TIPS For a great photo, come here from Pilies Street and point your camera at the roofs of the Old Town and Literatų Street. The light is best in the afternoon. Another good photo opportunity lies at the bottom of the street – don't forget to include the decorated wall and the white church.



12. COURTYARD OF THE SIDABRYNAS ANTIQUE SHOP



Pilies g. 32

This is one of the most beautiful courtyards on Pilies Street. Pass the massive wooden gate and take the cobblestone path to the yard, where one of the buildings has a "Sidabrynas" sign on it. This courtyard, which has been an artist residence for centuries, is best photographed in the afternoon, when the sun sheds its light on the inner yard.

TIPS Take photos standing under the arch, with the front view of the yard and the Virgin Mary sculpture in your shot, symbolically framed from above by the arch's vault.



13. VILNIUS UNIVERSITY



Universiteto g. 3, www.vu.lt

The architectural ensemble of Vilnius University is a unique object in the UNESCO-protected Vilnius Old Town. It's a perfect representation of one of the oldest universities in Europe. Here, every courtyard has its own history, architecture and colours. This is a place you can visit at any time of the day. Some courtyards are covered in playful shadows in the morning, others are best viewed when the sun is high. The part of the day offering the most beautiful shots is probably the evening when the sun is in the west, saturating the colours of the buildings.

TIPS Stand at a point where you're facing the church of St. Johns, in the most distant corner on the left. The view through the arch will allow you to capture both the church and the bell tower. The light is best from noon to evening, and still suitable after sunset.



14. ALUMNATAS COURTYARD

Universiteto g. 4



The most impressive Renaissance courtyard in Vilnius. The Renaissance-style palace that was built here in the 18th century created a truly mystic Vilnius courtyard. If the staircase on the left of the entrance is open, climb to the upper floor to get a better view of the space.

TIPS You can start taking photos as soon as you've passed through the entrance arch. Capture the row of arches on the right and get a part of the courtyard in your shot, too. Another option is to stand at the opposite end of the courtyard, having the tree in the left of your shot. Pass through the second arch opposite the entrance to find another courtyard, where you'll be able to photograph the garden of the Presidential Palace. The lighting here is best in the afternoon.



15. THE STREETS OF STIKLIŲ - M. ANTOKOLSKIO - ŽYDŲ



These three charming streets in the Old Town still bear signs of the old Jewish quarter that was once here. Window shutters and arches catch the eye. Warm colours dominate as the sun fills the streets with light.

TIPS For the most beautiful colours, come by early in the morning or just after lunch. Early mornings are a better time in the summer, because you'll see the streets empty of chairs and tables, which fill them once the restaurants open. On summer evenings, these little streets are teeming with people having dinner or drinks. To get a good shot, face the Stikliai Restaurant and move away from it as far as you can, towards the house at Gaono Street 10. Your shot will then include the beautiful building of Stikliai Restaurant, the church tower in the distance and the house on the left. The light is best in the afternoon and early evening.



16. ŠV. IGNOTO STREET



This is where Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque styles all co-exist. You'll spot the unveiled facade of a one-story house, a gate and a part of the city wall that used to encircle the whole town, complete with openings that were used for shooting.

TIPS You can watch the shadows play in the streetlights on sunny mornings, but ultimately, the street is best photographed in the afternoon. To get a good shot, stop at the small arch at Šv. Ignoto Street 5 and aim to capture the arch and the church in one shot.



17. ŠV. DVASIOS STREET



An old favourite among photographers, the street lies just beside the Gates of Dawn and the Orthodox Church of the Holy Spirit. A walk through the street will take you past the defensive wall, which has stood here since the 16th century. Old walls and windows make it a top spot for capturing the spirit of old Vilnius.

TIPS The street looks best in the afternoon when the evening sun shines on the walls and the pavement. Stand at the end of the street that's closer to the Gates of Dawn, and capture part of the foliage next to the first house at Šv. Dvasios Street 4/2. Alternatively, go to the opposite end of the street to bring out the texture of the buildings' walls.

OUTSIDE THE OLD TOWN ↑



18. ŽVĖRYNAS



Žvėrynas, located on the right bank of the Neris River, is one of Vilnius' most picturesque districts. It's like a separate little town within the city. Cross the Žvėrynas Bridge to enter a neighbourhood lined with wooden houses, gardens and pine trees. The 108 wooden houses in this district are regarded as a valuable collection of wooden architectural heritage. Morning to early afternoon is when you'll find them in the best light.

TIPS The most photogenic object here is the old Žvėrynas Bridge. You can photograph it from the embankment or move down to the level of the river and capture its illuminated structure in the evening. Another good idea is crossing the Liubarto Bridge to get a good view of the Orthodox Church - this is best done in the second half of the day or at night.



19. RESIDENTIAL COLONY BY JUOZAPAS MONTVILA Savickio g. 3 to Savickio g. 21



This group of 22 cottages with a common courtyard is the oldest housing community in Vilnius. With their distinct architecture, these Secessionist style 20th century buildings look very similar to English cottages.

TIPS For best light, take photos in the afternoon and get the street's trees in your shot to help complement the great architecture.



20. RESIDENTIAL COLONY IN RASOS

Balstogės g. 14



Located in a historic part of town that doesn't get many visitors, the residential colony in Rasos is a block of late 19th century/early 20th century houses. This is where Stanislovas Filibertas Fleris, one of the most prominent photographers and painters of that era, lived. The colony is unique in its architecture and planning. The cobblestoned Balstogės Street adds a special charm to the area.

TIPS You'll find the best light in the morning. Again, aim to capture a part of the trees to liven up your shot.



21. ŠNIPIŠKĖS

Kintų g. 24



The locals also call it Shanghai to reflect the fast transformation from sleepy village-like part of town to modern business district that it underwent. You can still find many late 19th century/early 20th century wooden houses here. Some of them are in use. The district tells a story of a unique multinational community right in the heart of the city. For an interesting shot, find places where old and new architecture meet.

TIPS Photograph the garages with the high-rise buildings in the background. The lighting is best in the afternoon.

QUIRKY PLACES *



22. THE CHARACTERS OF UŽUPIS



Vilnius' most bohemian neighbourhood is home to a handful of photogenic characters that have become part of the locals' lives. Spot the Mermaid, the Angel, the "Place of Power" obelisk, Jesus with a parachute, an Užupian with a cat, and a few other surprises.

TIPS This is an all-day spot, but you'll find it best on a bright day, when the sun shines through the tree branches, leaving beautiful shadows. The mermaid is best photographed from the Užupis Bridge, with the Orthodox Church in the shot. Alternatively, you can capture it from the river level - that way, you'll also see the swings under the bridge.



23. PUTIN AND TRUMP GRAFFITI



Pylimo g. 66

An object that has received wide international attention, this work of street art by local artist Mindaugas Bonanu depicts a kiss between Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump. Heavily featured in worldwide media, the piece is truly well-known. After being vandalised, the artist decided to reframe it: instead of a kiss, it now depicts a smoke they're sharing. The two don't just catch the eyes of locals - they're a popular tourist spot.

TIPS You can get close-ups or wider shots that will also let you capture the mural on the nearby wall. For best light, come here in the second half of the day.

GLIDE OVER VILNIUS IN A HOT AIR BALLOON

You'll be amazed at how quiet it is up in the air. There's nothing but the occasional sound of the hot air balloon's burner to distract you from gazing down at Vilnius in serenity. Take a morning ride to see the city waking up, or take off in the evening for a glimpse of the enchanting shadows and warm hues.

Both morning and evening hot air balloon rides are great for taking photos - that's when the sun and the sky create a wonderful mix of light and shadows. If you can't take to the sky, snap photos of hot air balloons taking off from the fields near White Bridge (Upės Street) or by the Bastion of Vilnius City Wall (Maironio Street).



