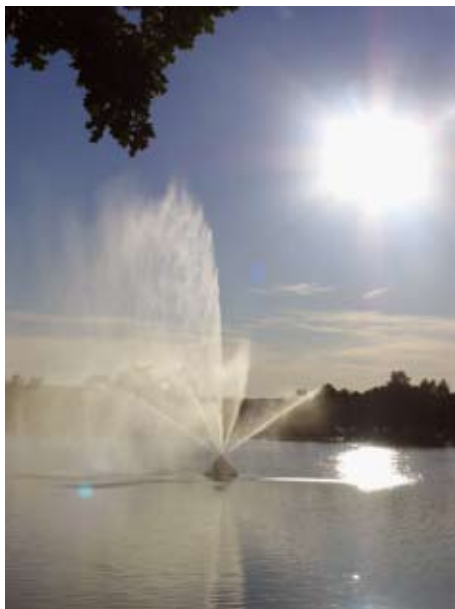


instant

DRUSKININKAI

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2009



The word Druskininkai comes from the Lithuanian word for salt, *druska*, after the salt-rich earth hereabouts, formed when the region was under the sea several thousand years ago and explaining why, in 1794, the town was granted the distinction of becoming an official health resort. Druskininkai is one of the country's fastest growing destinations, a former nomenklatura playground and host to some startlingly unique architecture from its wonderful Russian Orthodox church to a handful of 1970s, Futurist-style buildings. The town can also claim two past great artistic residents in the Jewish sculptor Jacques Lipchitz and the Lithuanian national hero Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis. It's also just a 10-minute drive from Grūto Parkas, the huge Soviet theme park run by the millionaire father of the town's mayor. Whether you're planning a visit based on culture, relaxation, or a bit of both, this handy PDF guide should provide you with what you need.

Restaurants
Sights
Hotels
Transport

and a whole host of other useful information

Maps & Money

A map of Druskininkai is well worth packing before you set off, although many hotels and the Tourist Information Centre do have a few free, if not particularly detailed, copies. Most bookshops and large supermarkets in Vilnius and Kaunas stock them. Recommended is the small red one published by Briedis, which also includes a map of the region and costs less than 10Lt. The map references in this version of *Instant Druskininkai* refer to this map. Many of the places listed in this guide only accept cash, so be sure to carry some with you at all times. The bus station doesn't have an ATM, although there are plenty in town.

Some 130km or so southwest of Vilnius and almost exactly the same distance south of Kaunas, Druskininkai can be reached by road from either city in two hours or so. Close to two international borders, people driving from Poland to Vilnius, central Lithuania or beyond should consider visiting Druskininkai when passing through.

Arriving by bus

A dozen or so buses operate between Vilnius and Druskininkai daily, with a similar amount arriving from Kaunas. Buses start fairly early in the morning and run until mid evening. The journey time for both is just over two hours, depending on the weather. Druskininkai's bus station is a small, crumbling affair a healthy five-minute walk north along the edge of the lake into the town centre. Facilities include toilets (0.50Lt) and a few lockers (2Lt) for people visiting the town for the day. Taxis can usually be found waiting outside. A trip to your hotel will cost anything from 4-10Lt depending on where it is. There's no ATM at the station.

Bus Station E-3/4, Gardino 1, tel. +370 313 513 33, www.druskininkuautobusai.lt. ▶ Open 05:10 - 20:00.

Tourist information



Tourist Information Centre E-4, Gardino 3, tel. +370 313 608 00, information@druskininkai.lt, info.druskininkai.lt. A friendly place to go for information not listed here and well as the personal touch in English, find a battalion of brochures, maps and other tourist-related necessities. They can also advise on tour guides as well as things to see and do in the region. Also at Čiurlionio 65, tel. +370 313 517 77. Open 10:00 - 18:45, Sun 10:00 - 17:00. ▶ Open 08:30 - 17:15. Closed Sat, Sun.

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Arriving by car

On a good day you can drive to Druskininkai from Vilnius or Kaunas in about 90 minutes, although it's advisable to allow a good couple of hours for the journey. To get there from the former, take the A1 (E85) highway west out of the city, followed by the A4 in the direction of Druskininkai and keep driving. The road turns to the left at the crossroads at Merkinė, then it's straight from there. There are several options for getting to Druskininkai from Kaunas. Ultimately you need to head south out of the city and travel more or less via Alytus, an uneventful town with a small centre that could be used for a break along the way. Parking becomes unbearable in Druskininkai during the summer, making booking a hotel with guarded parking a definite advantage.

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ESSENTIAL CITY GUIDES

Instant Druskininkai

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Cafés

Credo D-3, Vilniaus 2a, tel. +370 313 515 55, fax +370 313 400 27, www.credo-hotel.lt. A modern café inside the hotel of the same name, it hardly makes you feel like you're having a ball in Paris but the view of the Catholic church and leafy surrounds more than make up for its shortcomings. A small terrace opens out the front during the warmer part of the year. ▶ Open 10:00 - 22:00. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖ ☗ ☘

Kolonada C-4, Kudirkos 22, tel. +370 313 512 22, info@kolonada.lt, www.kolonada.lt. Originally built between the wars to celebrate 10 years of Polish independence and now brought up to date in the style of a swanky modern café and music club (see Clubs), the last visit here for research purposes revealed a baffling contradiction in working styles from grinning efficiency to utter indifference. The small menu reads considerably better than it tastes, leaving little in the way of praise to pile upon it beyond recommending a visit for coffee or to chance your arm at one of its many live music events. ▶ Open 11:00 - 23:00, Fri, Sat 11:00 - 04:00. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖ ☗ ☘

Mona Liza D-4, Kudirkos 37, tel. +370 698 353 64. It appears almost impossible to open a café in Druskininkai without building a hotel upstairs these days, Mona Liza being the latest example. Inside the town's old post office building and diagonally opposite the lake, Vienna it isn't, but don't let that put you off. As the name implies, da Vinci's enigmatic masterpiece is the main draw here, including a series of amusingly created if somewhat crude incarnations built into the light fittings in the ceiling. ▶ Open 10:00 - 22:00, Fri, Sat 10:00 - 23:00. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖ ☗ ☘

Pepės Ledai B-3, Vilniaus 13 (Druskininkų Vandens Parkas), tel. +370 616 058 80. Green and pink plastic furniture to compliment the ice cream, plus coffee, soft drinks, wine and a small selection of spirits. A conveniently located café to help put the fat back on your bones. Also a useful, temporary diversion for children. ▶ Open 12:00 - 21:00, Fri 12:00 - 23:00, Sat 10:00 - 23:00, Sun 10:00 - 21:00. ☕ ☖ ☗ ☘

Rūta E-5, Čiurlionio 97, tel. +370 313 477 77. A somewhat pedestrian hotel café, this one plonked a fair distance from the action. Alongside a menu of café-style beverages including an average cup of coffee are a collection of local hot dishes for a good price. Find the entrance hidden away in an alcove to the right. ▶ Open 08:00 - 22:00, Fri, Sat 08:00 - 23:00. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖ ☗ ☘



If you're thinking of visiting Druskininkai strictly for the dining, think again. Although the options available are perfectly adequate, there's no real fine dining available. Somewhat strangely, international cuisine is available only inside a few hotels, of which we recommend the restaurants inside the Europa Royale and Regina. Nightlife options continue to grow, with a couple of bars worth spending a few hours in if you catch them on the right night, plus one or two clubs aimed at both the local and tourist markets.

Dining

From Armenian to pizza to Soviet slop, the pots and pans of Druskininkai and its immediate surroundings bubble away day and night, wishing only to keep you fed and happy. The options here are by no means complete, but do offer more than enough options to keep all but the fussiest of food snobs sated.

Armenian

Armėniška Užėiga Grūtas, tel. +370 685 666 00, www.armeniskauzeiga-el.lt. Close to the corner of the turn off for Grūto Parkas and only really worth visiting if you happen to be driving past or waiting for a bus into town across the road. Your best option here is to avoid everything that isn't šašlykai (skewered kebabs), marinated to perfection and cooked on a wood fire in the traditional Armenian manner. ▶ Open 09:00 - 22:00. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖ ☗ ☘

Lithuanian

Bebėniukas E-5, Čiurlionio 83, tel. +370 313 535 14. Located in the basement of a Soviet-era housing block, don't expect wine waiters in bow ties or for that matter a menu written in English. For those who don't mind mucking in with the locals, rewards come aplenty, including an a-to-z of delicious if unambitious Lithuanian lunchtime favourites on the menu, all of them for unbelievable, seemingly giveaway prices. ▶ Open 10:00 - 20:00.

Forto Dvaras D-3, Čiurlionio 51, tel. +370 313 554 38. Priding themselves on churning out traditional Lithuanian cuisine using local ingredients, this ever-expanding national chain's Druskininkai operation can be found overlooking the lake, just next to the Druskininkai Museum. The interior is folksy without going to Disneyland proportions and the food is generally excellent and filling. ▶ Open 11:00 - 22:00, Fri 11:00 - 23:00, Sat 10:00 - 23:00, Sun 10:00 - 22:00. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖ ☗ ☘

Senasis Nemunas D-4, Fonbergo 7, tel. +370 313 420 79. Slightly hidden away but worth the minor safari required to locate it, latter-day Livingstones will be rewarded with sturdy wooden tables suitable for groups of diners and an intriguing house dish of turkey and pork. Geared almost exclusively towards the locals, menus have thankfully been provided to make up for the staff's lack of English. ▶ Open 10:00 - 22:00, Fri, Sat 10:00 - 23:00. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖ ☗ ☘

Vido Malūnas F-5, Veisiejų 4, tel. +370 313 523 56. Inside a converted water mill on the Ratnyčia at the far south-western end of town, Vidas' Mill is especially worth a visit during the summer when you can sit outside on the pleasant terrace. The food ranges from classic grilled meat dishes to the great big ostentatious affairs that the Lithuanians and Poles do so well. One of the best places in town for meeting members of the local community. ▶ Open 10:00 - 21:00, Fri, Sat 10:00 - 24:00. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖ ☗ ☘

Pizza

Čili Pica B/C-3, Vilniaus 13 (Druskininkų Vandens Parkas), tel. +370 313 531 53. Vast and joined together with little glass bridges over pools full of goldfish, Lithuania's favourite pizza chain stokes the stomachs of Druskininkai's diners with a tempting array of pizza including several options for vegetarians plus a further foray into the non-pizza world courtesy of a battalion of pasta and meat dishes. If you prefer a more intimate pizza experience, it's only a few minutes walk to Sicilia. ▶ Open 10:00 - 24:00. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖ ☗ ☘

Sicilia D-4, Talkos 9, tel. +370 313 518 65, www.sicilia.lt. After a tough day relaxing and generally doing nothing, plonk yourself down at a large beech table and choose from one of some 60 savoury and a couple of sweet pizzas, cooked in minutes and served with a smile. Sicilia also serves a fine range of salads and some decent potato pancakes. If you're dragging somebody small around town, there's a diminutive yet thoughtful children's menu too. ▶ Open 10:00 - 23:00, Fri, Sat 10:00 - 24:00. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖ ☗ ☘

Soviet

Grūto Parko Kavinė Grūtas, tel. +370 313 479 14. Essentially a tasteless restaurant full of stuffed animals and photographs of the sculpture park's Great Leader catching big fish on the walls, among the local dishes on offer find a small menu of classic Soviet-era snacks including sprats with a glass of vodka, borsch and greasy meat cutlets. ▶ Open 09:00 - 22:00. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖ ☗ ☘

Nightlife

A small spa town in Eastern Europe is hardly going to provide the sort of nightlife worthy of a double page spread in a sparkling Condé Nast publication, but for a place the size of Druskininkai, the things to do after sunset are better than ever and improving all the time. Featuring everything from lurid bars full of tipsy locals to one or two surprisingly modern clubs, Druskininkai may not be able to promise happiness or the mother of all pub crawls, but that's not really why it's there in the first place.

Bars

Salt Blues C-4, Vilniaus 7, tel. +370 313 422 21, fax +370 313 422 23, renginiai@saltblues.lt, www.EuropaRoyale.com. A large, semi-circular conservatory without the foliage is what you'll find inside the Europa Royale's in-house bar. About as action-packed as the Sahara most of the time, a sudden influx of guests sees it transformed, especially during the summer when the outside seating's available, into a lively, chattering den. The draught Guinness is superb, and among the cheapest in the country. ▶ Open 11:00 - 24:00. The bar is opened 11:00-24:00. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖ ☗ ☘

Saulėgraža C-3, Vilniaus 22, tel. +370 313 523 18. In the heart of the action yet refusing to bow to tasteless tourist principles, The Sunflower's café-bar credentials make it worth a peep inside any time of night or day. The gloomy wooden interior hides an interesting mix of colourful locals, and, best of all, the room to the left comes with two pool tables and another for Russian billiards. ▶ Open 10:00 - 20:00, Fri, Sat 10:00 - 24:00. Closed Mon, Tue, Wed. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖ ☗ ☘

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Clubs

Amber B/C-3, Vilniaus 13 (Druskininkų Vandens Parkas), tel. +370 313 591 95. Somewhat awkwardly hidden away at the bottom of a flight of steps that lead to an underground car park, Amber caters predominantly to the Eastern European holiday crowd. Accordingly, the place is awash with mirror balls and areas with large sofas on which to sit and show off your bling. The music policy, which features both Lithuanian DJs and some live music, is 100% bland European pop. ▶ Open 22:00 - 03:00, Fri, Sat 22:00 - 04:00. Closed Mon, Tue, Wed, Sun. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖ ☗ ☘

Dangaus Skliautas C-5, Kurorto 8, tel. +370 313 518 19, dangauskliautas@gmail.com. Located immediately behind the lacklustre restaurant of the same name, this now legendary Druskininkai night club on two levels panders almost exclusively to local boys and girls in their late teens. DJs and live bands batter the brains of the town's cashiers and construction workers with an insipid blend of colourless pap. ▶ Open 22:00 - 03:00. Closed Sun, Mon, Tue, Wed, Thu. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖ ☗ ☘

Kolonada C-4, Kudirkos 22, tel. +370 313 512 22/+370 612 110 88, info@kolonada.lt, www.kolonada.lt. A couple of sofas, a pot-bellied stove and a few chairs and tables to the right of the entrance provide the setting for the town's one and only live jazz venue. Essentially an oversized musical greenhouse with a waitress, the music comes in all flavours, unlike the beer which at the time of writing consisted of Horn on tap and a few cans of Guinness. The admission price is absurdly expensive, a fact only yet eclipsed in its silliness by the policy of allowing everybody sitting to the left of the entrance to watch the show without paying. However, we must applaud it for being the only cultural venue in town to appeal to the over-16s. ▶ Open 11:00 - 23:00, Fri, Sat 11:00 - 04:00. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖ ☗ ☘

Wine

Kurorto Vyninė D-3, Vilniaus 8-4, tel. +370 313 523 85, www.kurortovynine.lt. Little more than a decent shop selling a large amount of quality wine as is the current trend in Lithuania, there is a space to sit and drink the stuff here, although it hardly qualifies as a bar. Handy for picking up a bottle for people looking for a night in back at their hotel who'd prefer not to pay hotel wine prices. ▶ Open 11:00 - 19:00, Sat 10:00 - 19:00. Closed Sun. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖ ☗ ☘

Druskininkai is by no stretch of the imagination bristling with fabulous churches and world class museums. What it does possess however are a handful of places to visit offering a fascinating insight into the town and some of its more illustrious former inhabitants as well as a few evocative gems. It's possible to use up an entire day exploring the town's cultural sights and open spaces, and well worth making the time to do so.

Cemeteries

The Old Town Cemetery (Senosios Miesto Kapinės), located immediately west of the bus station provides a swift and atmospheric ethnic history lesson, featuring graves going back several hundred years with inscriptions in Polish, Lithuanian, Russian and Belarusian. One can only wonder where the town's Tartar community are buried. The two other cemeteries of note (below) are located just south and north of the Old Town Cemetery respectively.

Jewish Cemetery (Žydu Kapinės) F-3. Find the tiny cemetery/memorial hidden in the woods, a few hundred metres directly southwest of the Tourist Information centre at Gardino 3. A chilly combination of silence, Hebrew script and deep forest, this is not a place for the timid.



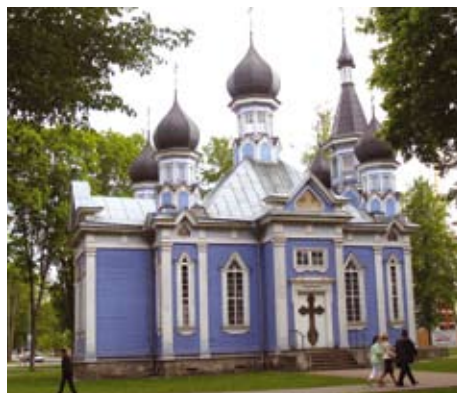
Soviet Soldiers' Cemetery (Sovietų Karių Kapinės) D-3. The Soviet regime replaced the Nazi regime in Druskininkai with the capturing of the town by Red Army soldiers on July 14, 1944. As in many other Eastern European towns, the 'liberation' was commemorated with the opening of a cemetery to honour Stalin's fallen troops. Druskininkai's Soviet Cemetery moved twice before being finally settled in this lakeside spot southwest of the bus station in 1962, having previously been relocated from more sensitive parts of the town including near to the Catholic church. At the northern end of the cemetery is a typically bombastic work of Soviet art. More interesting are the individual graves, of which some are still well looked after.

Churches

Holy Virgin Mary Scapular Church (Švč. Mergelės Marijos Skaplierinės Bažnyčia) D-3, Fonbergo 15, tel. +370 313 552 28. The first brick church in Druskininkai was completed in the 1844. Suffering a singularly strange career, the church didn't get a priest until 1879, and was eventually demolished under puzzling circumstances in 1931, the same year the current church was completed. A red, neo-Gothic beauty, the building was designed by the Polish architect Stefan Szyller (1857-1933). Countless visits have found the doors firmly bolted. What's inside remains a mystery. ▶ Services: 18:00, Sat 10:00, Sun 09:00, 10:30, 12:00.



Russian Orthodox Church (Druskininkų Ortodoksų Bažnyčia) C-3, Laisvės Aikštė, tel. +370 313 555 44. Originally built between 1861 and 1865, this diminutive blue wooden building is delightful, both inside and out. When you've finished gaping in wonder at the exterior (unfortunately the glazed cupolas can't be visited) go through the main door and be astonished at the sheer splendour of the array of icons and religious paintings scattered throughout. The church was completely renovated towards the end of the Soviet occupation with the assistance of experts from the Heritage Museum in St. Petersburg.



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Museums

Druskininkai Museum (Druskininkų Muziejus) D-3, Čiurlionio 59, tel./fax +370 313 510 24. This collection of small rooms packed with old photographs, furniture, maps, letters, bottles, pianos and much more besides charts the rise of Druskininkai as a health resort and also sees time to host the occasional concert. Of particular interest are the fabulous maps on the walls, including the one from between the wars that clearly shows the bizarre international border running down the middle of Meilės Sala (see Parks & Gardens). The nice people who work here speak some English, and can be persuaded to show you around if it's not too busy. Admission: adults 3Lt, children 1Lt. ▶ Open 11:00 - 17:00. Closed Sun.

Forest Echo (Girios Aidas) F-7, Čiurlionio 116, tel. +370 313 539 01. A unique wooden structure just out of town in the direction of Grūto Parkas, and essentially an education museum aimed at enlightening the local population on all things natural as well as explaining humanity's place and function within the natural world. Featuring a wealth of exhibits including wood carvings, stuffed animals and a small display commemorating Lithuania's most celebrated naturalist, Tadas Ivanauskas (1882-1971), outside find a large collection of large wood carvings and a specially designed trail to follow through the woods. Unfortunately most displays are in Lithuanian only, although some printed information is available in English on request. ▶ Open 10:00 - 18:00. Closed Mon, Tue.

Museum of Resistance & Relics Of Deportations (Rezistencijos ir Tremties Muziejus) C-3, Vilniaus 24, tel. +370 656 083 73. This diminutive museum aims the spotlight on the local resistance movement who fought the Soviet occupiers from their forest hideaways from the end of WWII until the last of them were flushed out in 1953. A low budget affair with little information in English, a journey round with somebody who can translate for you makes the experience much more worthwhile. Seldom open to the public, a telephone call usually gets the doors unlocked. ▶ Open 13:00 - 17:00. Closed Mon, Tue, Thu, Fri, Sat.

Out of town

Česnulių Sodyba Naujasodė, tel. +370 313 524 48, www.cesnulisodyba.puslapias.lt. Local woodcarver Antanas Česnulis' garden has been turned into a large timber fairytale, complete with an extraordinary, four-storey windmill he built himself at the entrance. The jovial folk artist has lived here for some three decades, producing a range of carvings both big and small and based on many characters from religious figures to people in the theatre. An interesting diversion, Naujasodė is about 3km from Druskininkai, just the other side of Ratnyčia. Admission: adults 5Lt, children 3Lt. ▶ Open 09:00 - 17:00.

Dzūkija National Park (Merkinės Lankytojų Centras) Vilniaus 2, Merkinė, tel. +370 310 572 45, www.dzukijosparkas.lt. Lithuania's largest national park occupies 50,000 hectares of rich farmland a few kilometres north of Druskininkai. Here the country folk, known for their particularly resolute and hardy character, have preserved ancient traditions such as communal haymaking, herb-gathering and beekeeping. Two areas of the park, the Skroblius River Valley and the Čepkeliai Marsh, are wildlife conservation areas and off-limit to visitors. The information office can help arrange a stay in a bed and breakfast or at a campsite, give you the scoop on the best sights in the area and point eager explorers in the right direction for hiking trails and river routes. The Merkinė Museum houses old utensils, hundreds of old radios and some equipment to make alcohol at home. The website features lots of extremely useful information in English and some great photography.

Čiurlionis

Lithuania's greatest artist and composer was a Polish-speaking man by the name of Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis. Born in the nearby town of Varėna, Čiurlionis (1875-1911) spent his childhood in Druskininkai and the town remains the spiritual home of the much loved man. An immensely prolific artist, Čiurlionis wrote extensively for the piano, composed string quartets, and also penned the country's first symphony, Miške (In The Forest). His musical style shifted between the pastoral and romantic to occasional dabblings in serialism. A busy painter too, Čiurlionis was one of the primary organizers of the country's first exhibition of Lithuanian art in Vilnius in 1907. He served as a conductor, was deeply involved in the Lithuanian independence movement, married the writer Sofija Kymantaitė, dabbled in photography and even found time to design stained glass. Such a hectic life for a man renowned for his profound shyness was bound to take its toll. Repeating attacks of depression saw him finally retiring to a nursing home near Warsaw where he died of pneumonia at just 35. Čiurlionis left one daughter, whom although almost a year old when he died, he never saw. Several of his descendants still live in Druskininkai.



Čiurlionis Memorial Museum (Čiurlionio Memorialinis Muziejus) D-3, M.K.Čiurlionio 35, tel. +370 313 511 31, mkcmemorialm@takas.lt. Possibly of more interest to anyone who ever fancied a look inside a traditional Lithuanian wooden house, this small museum of four individual timber buildings can be found at the site of Čiurlionis' childhood home in the street that now bears his name. The museum's contents include recreations of the living conditions of the time, reproductions of Čiurlionis' works and a small gallery for temporary exhibitions. The first house, which also doubles as the ticket office sells a range of postcards, posters and CDs of the man's work. In the summer the museum boasts bizarre weekend piano concerts, during which a pianist plays through an open window to an audience sat outside in the garden. Admission: adults 4Lt, children 2Lt. ▶ Open 11:00 - 17:00. Closed Mon.

Čiurlionis Monument C-4. Almost Cubist in its appearance and unveiled in 1975, a three-metre likeness of Čiurlionis can be found lurking at the far northern end of Kudirkos. Cast in bronze, the monument is the work of the Lithuanian sculptor Vladas Vildžiūnas (b. 1932).

Out of town



Grūto Parkas Grūtas, tel. +370 313 555 11, fax +370 313 474 51, info@grutoparkas.lt, www.grutoparkas.lt. Several Stalins and loads of Lenins litter this bizarre, mildly controversial outdoor sculpture park and information centre less than 10km north of Druskininkai just off the main road to Vilnius. The brainchild of local mushroom millionaire Viliumas Malinauskas, gaze upon row after row of retired communist sculptures, collected en masse from their former positions of importance throughout Lithuania, and take a look inside the park's purpose-built wooden shacks which hide some wonderful examples of Soviet art and propaganda. A small zoo is also thoughtfully provided so the wild boar in the cages can bite off the little children's fingers, and if you're hungry there's a restaurant too. Designed to show the negative side of Communism, one does have to wonder where all the money goes. It's certainly not being used to help overthrow Europe's last great dictatorship a few kilometres away in Belarus. Like it or loathe it, Grūto Parkas is unique, and an essential part of any visit to the area if not Lithuania itself. The statue of a seated Lenin once graced the centre of Druskininkai and was one of only three ever made of the great man sat on his behind. Well signposted, find it less than 1km from the main Vilnius-Druskininkai road. Buses run regularly from the capital to the turn off. Local bus N°2 runs all the way to the park from the front of Druskininkai's bus station. Admission: adults 20Lt, children 10Lt. ▶ Open 09:00 - 17:00.



Parks & Gardens

A quick look at a map of Druskininkai shows the town as a little speck of orange in a huge sea of green. Overflowing with lush open spaces, from the patches of grass surrounding the Catholic church to the 293-hectare forest that hems it in, Druskininkai's status as a rural oasis is more than justified. For those looking for outdoor rest and relaxation, look no further.

Druskininkų Miškas At a little under 300 hectares, Druskininkų Miškas (Druskininkai Forest) provides plenty of opportunities for getting away from it all on foot or two wheels. A typically Eastern European paradise of predominantly pine, birch, linden and chestnut trees, although it's not exactly a wildlife sanctuary there's still plenty of fauna to be found including squirrels, hedgehogs and an abundance of birdlife. Popular with the locals year round, including during the autumn mushroom season, the forest features several routes to follow on foot or by bicycle. Options for the latter include the Žvaigždžių Orbita (Orbit of the Stars), which starts at Druskonio Ežeras (Druskonis Lake) and follows a number of routes of up to 24km. For more information about routes and bicycle rental, check out the tourist information people or ask in your hotel.

Gydyklų Parkas C-3/4. The area of grass and trees covering the six hectares of land between Vilnius and the Nemunas no longer sees regimental rows of model Soviet citizens doing endless press-ups in Hungarian designer track-suits, although its connection to the spiritual and physical wellbeing of the community remains. Featuring some of the quirkiest sculptures in the country, the park, like the town itself, is currently receiving a makeover. Future promised additions include information kiosks, health-orientated pathways and a new fountain.

Meilės Sala (Love Island) B-1. The small, lozenge-shaped Meilės Sala (Love Island) on the Nemunas to the northwest of the town requires a boat or a bracing swim to reach it, but is more than worth the effort if you're looking for a little isolation. Curiously, between the wars when the Nemunas formed the border between Lithuania and Poland, the little island was split in two by a barbed wire fence. Although no records remain regarding whether the Lithuanians used their half or not, the Poles continued to visit in droves over a footbridge that unfortunately no longer remains, where they'd lie on the southern beach a few metres away from a country they were technically at war with.

Sveikatingumo Parkas E-4, Sausoji 1. This extraordinary example of post-war Soviet thinking was at one time a socially-designed space for the healthy benefit of the common people. Once planted with flora designed for their health-giving properties and featuring a café and outdoor swimming pool, the park has since independence fallen into serious disrepair although it's still open to the public. An investment of 1.5Lt million has been put aside for its regeneration, with Japanese gardens, a new bathhouse and pretty paths and benches all promised in the near future. The lovely mosaic by the entrance dates from 1962 and is the work of the Lithuanian artist Marija Mačiulienė (b. 1929)

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According to the local Russian Orthodox priest, the mud used for therapeutic purposes in Druskininkai is, unlike most mud used in the West, pure, and therefore much, much better for you. This may or may not be true, but what is for certain is that like just about everywhere else in the world, Druskininkai is being forced to adopt a more modern approach in order to survive as a tourist destination. Where once the town offered nothing but fresh air, exercise, mineral baths and a peaceful, natural environment, it now sees a modernistic vision of nature complete with spaceship-looking buildings concealing scores of tired executives and their wives in nylon underpants receiving electronic therapy under fluorescent lights to the sound of MTV. Nature is fighting back however, and the balance is being rightfully restored. If your idea of a relaxing weekend isn't lying by the side of an indoor swimming pool and listening to the screams of 500 children, be assured that there are more than enough peaceful options on offer as well.

Bowling & Billiards

Sūkurys D-3, M. K. Čiurlionio 51, tel. +370 313 522 12, www.sukury.lt. Eight lanes of bowling, two pool tables, a boxing machine and outdoor tennis courts. There's a bar too, which seems to be the favourite haunt of the town's youth who still aren't old enough to get into a proper bar or club. Accordingly it gets busy (if not a little rowdy) during weekends. ▶ Open 15:00 - 24:00, Fri 15:00 - 02:00, Sat 11:00 - 02:00, Sun 11:00 - 24:00. ☺

Massage & Spa

Druskininkų Gydykla C-4, Vilniaus 11, tel. +370 313 605 08, fax +370 313 605 09, registr@gydykla.lt, www.gydykla.lt. An interesting collection of old and new architecture in perhaps the best location in town. The range of therapies on offer is extensive, including treatments for everything from heart disease to breathing problems. Lie in a bath of mud or simply take a curative shower. ▶ Open 08:00 - 20:00. ☺

East Island B-3, Vilniaus 13 (Druskininkų Vandens Parkas), tel. +370 313 566 43/+370 670 004 44, spa@east-island.lt, www.east-island.lt. Combined spa, massage and what they call exotic treatments (honey and chocolate massages etc., nothing saucy) inside the Druskininkų Vandens Parkas. The list of services available is longer than the telephone bill for the entire Second World War. Check the website for more information. ▶ Open 10:00 - 21:00, Fri, Sat 10:00 - 22:00, Sun 09:00 - 21:00. ☺ ☑

The great outdoors

One could be excused for thinking that everything there is to see and do in Druskininkai takes place under a roof of one description or another. Not so. For those looking for a literal breath of fresh air, the town and surrounding region can accommodate in plenty of ways. The starting point is in one of the parks or gardens mentioned in the Sightseeing section of this guide, which can be enjoyed on foot or with the help of two wheels. Several cycle routes, each divided into different lengths for different abilities and tastes, now exist in and around Druskininkai, taking you on a number of pleasant meandering journeys around lakes and through forests. Plants have been grown along parts of these routes to introduce specific health-giving properties into the lungs. The town also provides opportunities for everything from quad

bike adventures to ice-hockey on the lake during the winter. For maps, information on hiring bicycles and more about the multitude of available outdoor options, visit the Tourist Information Centre or speak to somebody in your hotel. The local air really is clean and the nature, if not exactly breathtaking, is at least picturesque.

Raudoni Drambliai Tel. +370 643 334 33, info@raudonidrambliai.lt, www.raudonidrambliai.lt. For those looking for high adrenalin adventure who don't mind scaring the living daylight out of the local wildlife, Raudoni Drambliai (Red Elephants) offer quad bike rental and excursions in the local area. Available throughout the year and in all weather conditions, take a look at their Lithuanian-only website for photographic evidence of their insanity.

Water parks

Druskininkų Vandens Parkas B/C-3, Vilniaus 13, tel. +370 313 523 38, info@akvopark.lt, www.akvopark.lt. Converted from the town's most extraordinary Soviet-era architectural masterpiece with no attention to aesthetic detail, Druskininkai's number one tourist attraction panders to the local hoi polloi as well as the masses from further afield. So popular is it in fact that a new bridge across the river is being built to stem the hideous flow of traffic in the town centre, begging the question whether getting any rest and relaxation here is at all possible. There's no escaping the fact however that it's jolly good fun. Expect a large pool, bubbling brooks, a veritable Spaghetti Junction of waterslides, restaurants, spa, massage and a gaggle of in-house restaurants and cafés. ▶ Open 12:00 - 22:00, Fri 12:00 - 23:00, Sat 10:00 - 23:00, Sun 10:00 - 21:00. ☺



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Spa Druskininkai C/D-4, Kudirkos 45, tel. +370 313 544 01, info@spadruskininkai.lt, www.spadruskininkai.lt. A smaller and less frantic version of its vast neighbour, find this one tucked away behind the Druskininkai hotel. The flying saucer design conceals a decent sized pool with water slides and, according to their own publicity 'naughty waves' and 'funny showers'. There's a sauna too, plus a range of massage and spa treatments and an average café to boot. ▶ Open 12:00 - 22:00, Mon 12:00 - 20:00, Sat 10:00 - 22:00, Sun 10:00 - 20:00. ☺ ☑