

Šiauliai

instant

Essential city guides

2005/2006
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This is the first issue of *Šiauliai In Your Pocket*.

You will be pleased to know that there are many things to look forward to during your stay in Šiauliai. Whether you enjoy filling your mind with memories of quirks and curiosities, filling your stomach with delicious food, filling your blood with alcohol or filling your synaptic gaps with dance induced endorphins, you will get your fill here.

Of course, most people come to Šiauliai to see the Hill of Crosses, but we hope you will stick around to see that there is so much more to see.

One of the most impressive things about Šiauliai is the sense that it is a city that is flourishing - there is a certain pulse and liveliness that is delightful to experience right here and now, and also very promising for the future.

Also promising are the local authorities, who have plans to completely renovate that one main street, turn the bus station into a glitzy shopping complex, clean up the area around the lake, and make more than three or four of the street lights work. Actually, we made up the bit about the street lights, but it must be somewhere on the to-do list. Private enterprise is also playing its part, with the tourist, restaurant and entertainment industries offering some real gems.

If there is one trick to enjoying Šiauliai, it is to look beyond the obvious. So, have a flick through the pages of this guide, have a wander around, and if you have half as much fun as we did, you will leave Šiauliai happy, and with many fond memories of good times..

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Instant Šiauliai

Alcohol

Although the EU may have different standards, according to the late-great (and beloved by a small fraction of Lithuanians) Frank Zappa, one couldn't be considered a real country "unless you have a beer and an airline - it helps if you have some kind of a football team, or some nuclear weapons, but at the very least you need a beer." Lithuania has much to offer in making up for its lack of nuclear weapons. The common local brands are *Horn*, *Kainapiilis*, *Svyturys*, *Utenos*, *Ragutis*, *Taurus* and, the hero of Šiauliai, *Gubernija*, which has been in production since sometime between 1655 and 1675. The brewery won a Golden Award for the World's Best Wheat Ale in 2004. Lithuanian beers tend toward the lighter side of things in regard to colour and texture, but are heavier than many of their US/EU counterparts in regard to alcohol by volume, so drink with caution. And beer snacks (rinkinys prie alaus). In bars expect to pay somewhere in the region of 3 - 6Lt for half a litre. There are numerous local liquors, which run the gamut from the lightly fermented (bread or caraway seeds) known as kvass to the nearly lethal *samanė* with its alcohol content usually above 40%. Lithuanian vodka (degtinė) is worth trying as it stacks up to, if not topples over, many of its Russian and Polish counterparts. Numerous herb and fruit-based liquors will often line the inside of a drinks menu; working as an accompaniment to tea. The local variation of champagne, *Alita*, seems to lose something in the translation.

Customs

As a member state of the EU, visitors from other EU nations have no import restrictions placed upon them. However, trust-fund babies and drug dealers should note that no more than 10,000Lt worth of currency can be brought in undeclared. Non-EU citizens are only entitled to bring in one litre of spirits or two litres of wine, beer and 200 cigarettes/100 cigarillos/50 cigars/250g tobacco. All of these products are decidedly cheaper in Lithuania than in other parts of the world so one would not need said items unless the imports were not available in the Lithuanian state. (So your friends here will appreciate a decent bottle of champagne or wine from a small chateau in France more than that carton of Marlboros.) You can bring 50ml of perfume and 250ml of toilet water. Would-be farm hands take note that as with all EU countries you are not allowed to bring in roots or plants. You can take home as much art as you wish tax free unless it's over 50 years old, in which case expect to pay between a 10% and 20% duty. Two photographs of the art piece and your passport will need to be seen at the Committee of Cultural Heritage, Snipiškų 3, tel. 272 40 05/272 41 13 (Vilnius), where it will be valued and you'll be given all the necessary paperwork you need to export it. Many of the better antique shops can take care of all the paperwork for you. For more detailed information check www.cust.lt.

Local time

Eastern European (GMT +2hrs).

Speed limits

In town, keep your speedometers hovering around 50km/h unless indicated otherwise, on country roads no higher than 90km/h. On the Vilnius-Kaunas motorway no faster than 100km/h is legal and all other motorways are 110km/h from Oct 1 - Apr 1 (no joke) and 130km/h for the rest of the year.

Electricity

Lithuania is now far less dependent on nuclear energy with the January 2005 closure of the first unit of the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant. The country formerly generated as much as 80% of its electricity from nuclear sources. However its new energy is manufactured, you can expect to see the two-pin European variety plugs with the current set to 220V, AC 50Hz unless one happens to a very old un-renovated building in which case the thinner Russian sockets still exist. Travellers from outside of the two-pin socket world should purchase adaptors before leaving for Lithuania unless they want to search through some shopping centre on their first day here.

Safety

Exercise common sense. Don't announce your wealth and open your wallet to allow passers-by to see how much of the local currency you have, or walk home from a nightclub either on a deserted street or in a zigzag formation. Stay cautious, look like you know where you are going, and don't flaunt your wealth and for the most part you'll be left alone. Truly heinous crimes are rare here, but theft is becoming increasingly more common. Do not leave mobile phones, wallets or purses unattended, especially in crowded bars.

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Instant Šiauliai

By bus

C-5/6, Tilžės 109, tel. 52 50 58, www.busturas.lt. There are frequent buses from Riga, Vilnius and Kaunas to Šiauliai. At the time of writing the bus station was even more horrible than it normally is as a result of being completely renovated, so whatever we write here is bound to be wrong by the time you read it. What we do know is that the bus station is pretty central and is just a short walk to the centre of town, and most hotels. For now, at least, the bus station is no place to hang around. Move on... **Open 04:00-22:00.**

By car

If you're coming from Riga, you'll arrive on the A12, which cuts straight through the city of Šiauliai as Tilžės street. You'll pass the Hill of Crosses on your left about 12km before you arrive in town, in case you want to stop for a quick peek. From Vilnius, take the A2 (follow the signs to Panevėžys), and then turn off at the A9 and follow the signs to Šiauliai. Due to a lack of signs after the turnoff, you might find yourself heading into the city of Panevėžys – this is a mistake, and ought to be rectified at the earliest opportunity with a u-turn.

By plane

Lakūnų 3, tel. 54 20 05, airport@siauliai.omnitel.net, www.airport.siauliai.lt. If you're arriving by air to Šiauliai airport, you are probably being smuggled in as a part of a shipment of cargo, as the airport doesn't handle passenger traffic. Whoever nailed you into the crate will probably organise transfers to the city, or to whatever fate awaits you. It's more likely that you will be coming in to Vilnius airport and sticking around in that city for a while before making your way to Šiauliai by road or rail, in which case the details below will be more helpful to you.

By train

C-6, Dubijos 44, tel. 39 34 45, www.litrail.lt. Trains run to and from Kaunas, Klaipėda, Vilnius, Riga, Moscow, and a handful of other places you will never have heard of and won't care about. After giving you the opportunity to banter with smiling drunks drinking beer from plastic bottles, or of sticking your head out of the window like a dog, your train will deposit you in the disorganised carnival like atmosphere of the train station. It's about a ten minute walk from here to the centre of town. Left luggage is in a separate little shack and is always locked – you have to ask at the information desk in the station

Tourist information

Tourism Information Centre C-5, Vilnius 213, tel. 52 31 10/52 11 05, fax 52 31 11, tic@siauliai.lt, www.siauliai.lt/tic/. Not only are these lovely people ceaselessly patient when being asked questions like 'How do I get to the Hill of Crosses?' over and over again (see page 21 for the answer), but they can provide you with maps, hotel bookings, information on many attractions, bicycles, souvenirs and miscellaneous amazing items made by local craftspeople (the amazing thing is that anyone would want to buy them). **09:00-18:00, Sat 10:00-17:30, Sun 10:00-16:00 (Jun 15-Sep 1), 09:00-18:00, Sat 10:00-16:00. Closed Sun (Sep 1-Jun 15).**

Restaurants & Bars

Lithuanian

Juonė Pastuogė C-5, Aušros 31a, tel. 52 49 26, jonis.smukle@splius.lt, www.jonis.lt. This is the only real Lithuanian restaurant in town, but they still just don't get it, and can't be bothered making *cepelinai*, the national dish, available at all times. It's an appalling omission for an otherwise great place, where you can sit at big wooden tables, hacked from logs, in a village like yard. There's plenty of contraptions and distractions to keep kids amused, making this a great family lunchtime venue. In the evenings, they keep locals amused, and foreigners bemused, with an array of oddball entertainment that makes this place a hit for anyone who has outgrown nightclubs. Almost perfect, and a must-see in summer. **Open 11-00-23:00. [☎](#) [☎](#) [☎](#) [☎](#)**

Senasis Sodžius C-6, Stoties 3, tel. 43 18 67. People come to this charming little cottage to eat like wild animals – not because the environment is in any way natural or unrefined (it isn't), but because they are hungry, often in a hurry, and none too fussy about refinements. They just inhale their food. Order at the counter for cheap Lithuanian meals with no fuss, no service, and no shortage of calories. It's a mild adventure with some authentic dishes, but without annoying folk music, costumed staff, or farm implements stuck to the walls. **Open 11:00-18:00, Sat 10:00-16:00. Closed Sun.**

European

Akropolis C-5, Vilnius 173, tel. 42 76 50, fax 43 16 73. This place is plainly popular due to simple good value – meals are large and tasty, and that's about all that matters. It's mostly meat, but you'll also find one of the broadest vegetarian selections in town, and some refreshing daily specials that are enthusiastically gobbled up by a local lunchtime crowd. Sit outside in summer, or ignore the plain interior while you try not to be ignored by the overworked, stoic staff. It's basically good food, good value, and not much else. **Open 11:00-23:00. [☎](#) [☎](#)**

Kapitonas Morganas C-5, Vilnius 183, tel. 52 64 77, www.morganas.lt. We don't know who Captain Morgan is, but he sure knows how to pull a crowd. This place is always bustling with meal munching, beverage sipping beautiful people. There's a balance of casual and trendy, so young mothers can bring their kids here to meet the foreigners. Meals can be deceptively expensive as they charge extra for 'side' items like chips and salad, and it all adds up. The heated outdoor area is popular weather permitting, while the interior is dark, warm, and moody, with a confusion of nautical and aeronautical themes that offers no further clues as to the identity of the mysterious Captain. **Open 08:00-23:00, Fri, Sat, Sun 11:00-24:00. [☎](#)**

Medžiotojų Uželga B-5, Dubijos 20, tel. 52 45 26, www.medziotojuuzelga.lt. Attached as it is to the hotel that it is a hunters' home, this restaurant features a very gamey menu, with 'pheasant hips', 'woodcutter' (more commonly known as beaver, we think), and deer. Finding what you want is a hunt in itself, as the menu is a veritable menagerie of interesting options. The atmosphere is mildly forest like, with wooden tables in a green themed room, but still very refined and luxurious, with white linen quality and service. Given the style and quality of the food, and the pleasant atmosphere, the prices are surprisingly low. **Open 11:00-24:00. [☎](#)**

Saulininkas C-4, Lukauskio 5a, tel. 43 65 55. The idea behind this restaurant is, well... there isn't one, and that's the best thing about it. There is no theme. That means you don't have to sit on logs or pour into a cellar, and there are no stuffed animals, strange bits of art, or farm implements on the walls. Nor will you be served by someone in a silly costume. It has a simple style that is inoffensive and unadventurous – all very tidy and squared off. A moderate range of meals are available, all well prepared and presented by friendly staff. Everything here is just right, but nothing is special. Sometimes that's just what you want. **Open 12:00-24:00. [☎](#)**

Tomas A-7, Tilžės 63a, tel. 45 55 41, info@hoteltomas.lt. A part of a homely family run hotel, this restaurant also offers a warmth of welcome that almost makes the trip out of the centre of town worthwhile. You'll feel like you're being well looked after without being fussed over. The red furnishings and timber interior border on being a bit overwhelming, but once you tuck into your cheap eats (meat and veggies, mainly) you'll soon settle in comfortably. A kids' menu is available, which combined with the friendly atmosphere make this a great stop for families passing through town. A reception hall hosts local weddings and other mass grass gatherings. **Open 11:00-24:00. [☎](#)**

Zeppelini E-6, Vilnius 47, tel. 52 15 42, www.neopolls.lt. Now you can sit under a big blimp while you attempt to turn yourself into one. This restaurant, part of the Neopolis Entertainment Centre, offers mostly grilled meat and fish in a thoroughly modern, and arguably charmless, environment. Given its location, it's best combined with a night of bowling or dancing. Despite the promising name, there is no relief here from the fact that the whole town seems to be clueless about the appeal of traditional Lithuanian dishes – Zeppelini don't serve *cepelinai*. **Open 12:00-24:00, Sat, Sun 12:00-03:00. [☎](#)**

International

Arkos C-5, Vilnius 213, tel. 52 02 05. Here's a nice cellar dining experience that even panicky claustrophobic people can enjoy, as the vast vaulted ceilings give the halls an open and airy feel which is enhanced by some modern and bright lighting – a nice change for cellar style restaurants. The broad range of selections on the menu all have wine recommendations, which is handy when you are unsure what kind of wine goes well with 'tongue salad', 'Pikinese cabbage' or 'meat assorted'. Breakfast is available, there's great value daily specials until '4.p.a.', and they can cook a lot better than they can write. **Open 10:00-24:00. [☎](#)**

Italian

Brodvėjaus Pica C-5, Vilnius 146, tel. 50 04 12. The cheesy pizza oven smell that wafts from the exposed kitchen and wraps around you as you enter makes it clear that they are serious about pizza. The unspectacular interior is noisy and generally full of an easy going effervescence, and the worn varnish on the wooden tables is a testament to the popularity of the place. With over 40 kinds of pizza in four sizes, there's something for everyone, from families with pizza gorging and soft drink guzzling kids, to young couples, and old ladies who sip coffee and scoff cakes that will make their jaws even more floppy. Staff is fun and friendly, and delivery is available. **Open 10:00-23:00, Fri, Sat 10:00-24:00. [☎](#) [☎](#) [☎](#)**

Čili Pica C-5, Vilnius 128, tel. 39 99 08, www.cilipica.lt. It hadn't even opened at the time of writing, but of course will be open by the time you read this. While we couldn't visit, we know what to expect because there are Čili Picas sprinkled all over the country, and they're all pretty much the same, all pretty good but not outstanding, and all immensely popular. **Open 08:00-24:00. [☎](#)**

Bars

Brodvėjaus Bar C-5, Vilnius 146, tel. 50 04 12. The popularity of this place (also mentioned opposite) trickles downstairs in the evening to a bar come dining area where people tend to gather in giggles and indulge in a little scoffing and quaffing before moving on to nightclubs. There is no 'bar' as such, and therefore it might not offer the meeting people opportunities that some are hoping for, but it is nonetheless a casual, friendly and lively environment. **Open 10:00-23:00, Fri, Sat 10:00-24:00. [☎](#)**

Kišenė C-5, Aušros 13, tel. 42 66 66. Regardless of whether you enter from daylight, streetlight, or moonlight, the long alley of a bar will at first appear to disappear into darkness. Once your eyes adjust, you'll see that this dim and low-key local hangout has a bit of a sombre atmosphere, would be a good place to meet the Brothers Grim and their mates, but benefits from straightforward and friendly service, as well as good counter meals. Mind you, the stools are a bit low, and the bar is a bit high, so you will feel like a chicken when you put your elbows on the bar. **Open 08:00-23:00, Sat, Sun 13:00-23:00. [☎](#)**

Clubs

Martini D-5, Draugystės 25, tel. 39 96 88. Just the place to order a dry Martini (shaken, not stirred,) and dance among gentlemen with their shirts tucked in, and girls who haven't grown out of short skirts but should know better by now. This new club glistens with class. Clear plastic egg cup seats jostle among plush red sofas bordering a huge dance floor. Unfortunately, the music policy is awful, and as soon as the yappy DJ has warmed you to the idea of dancing to Russian pop, he ruins it all with some schmaltzy waltzy rubbish. Bar staff are a bit slow, or at least in short supply, and overall it just becomes tedious. **Open 10:00-04:00, Mon 10:00-03:00. [☎](#)**

MAX'as C-5, Aušros 31, tel. 43 44 55, info@maxas.lt, www.maxas.lt. It might still be the biggest, but it's no longer the best. Admittedly, this upstairs nightclub has got it all, including a huge square dance floor (which is a bit sticky if you're in rubber soled shoes), plenty of seating on two levels, a big stage, and two bars. Impressively, the club itself is non-smoking, but puffers can go downstairs to yet another bar and lounge to fill their lungs, and watch their smoke waft back upstairs. Beneath that again is the Metro club, reviewed separately. Despite this vast and impressive setup, the whole place just feels a bit dated, and tends to attract a bit of a hardcore crowd. **Open 11:00-23:00, Thu, Sun 11:00-02:00, Fri, Sat 11:00-03:00.**

Mega D-5, Rūdės 27a, tel. 52 52 92, mega@megaclub.lt, www.megaclub.lt. Other than the strange Hawaiian themed area tacked on to one side, this place is like the entertainment deck of some space station – all very slick and modern. While hardly galactic in proportions, it is quite large, with a decent sized dance floor and plenty of seating. It is also, however, very popular, and thus often crowded. It seems to have a gravity that pulls in the young things and visiting aliens who wish to mingle with them while their morals melt. **Open 10:00-03:00, Fri, Sat 10:00-04:00. [☎](#)**

Metro C-5, Aušros 31, tel. 43 44 55, max@splius.lt, www.maxas.lt. This dodgy smoke filled den is full of bloopers in tight singlets, girls in tight pants and... well, we couldn't see much else through all the smoke. There is a bit of a public transport theme with the seats, and they've certainly got the filthy grimy London Underground atmosphere perfected. Those who are not sitting around or playing pool take to the dance floor and imitate marionettes whose strings have been attached to a kitchen blender. Bizarre. The entrance is, appropriately, on the back side of the 'cultural' building. **Open 11:00-23:00, Thu, Sun 11:00-02:00, Fri, Sat 11:00-03:00.**

Sights

Museums

Bicycle Museum D-5, Vilnius 139, tel. 52 43 95. Look for the big bicycle sculpture out the front, and then don't bother to go inside, as you have just seen the highlight. Really, unless you're very interested in bicycles, and we mean a complete pedal-head, this is all a bit dull. There are lots of bikes. Some of them are old. Apparently they trace the evolution of the bicycle, but really it's not much more than an impressive personal collection of old and new bikes, and will appear to most people to be garage fodder. Hardly worth getting out of the saddle for. **Open 10:00 - 18:00, Sat 11:00 - 16:00. Closed Mon, Sun.**



Cats' Museum E-6, Žuvininkų 18, tel. 52 38 83, jgs@splius.lt. The most impressive thing about this place is not the huge collection of cat pictures and trinkets, the cat windows, or even the 4,000 cat poems or the gallery of original cat related artwork. Somewhere between all that stuff is an amazing and bewildering dedication to and love of cats, and as such there is as much human interest here as there is feline interest. We think the place could be improved by adding experiments involving a buttered piece of bread attached to a falling cat's back, sticky tape on the bottoms of cats' paws, clipped whiskers, and so on; but these suggestions probably wouldn't be welcomed here. Fun and fascination for feline aficionados, but just plain strange for everyone else. **Open 11:00 - 17:00. Closed Mon, Sun.**

Frenkel's Palace D-6, Vilnius 74, tel. 52 43 89, asapaite@takas.lt. This 1908 mansion is easily the most interesting building in Šiauliai from the outside, but the inside is a bit of a work in progress. The palace was a private Jewish school from 1920 to 1940, and one room now features a display of the Jewish history of the region. Other rooms have galleries displaying artworks, including some pretty bad but somehow creepy portraits. The intention is to move the entire artwork collection of the Šiauliai Aušros museum into this building, which will make it a fine gallery indeed. **Open 10:00 - 17:00. Closed Mon, Sun.**

Museum of Photography C-5, Vilnius 140, tel. 52 43 96, siauliai.photo@takas.lt. If you can put up with the musky old schoolroom smell and the lack of English explanations you may enjoy seeing some fascinating old cameras and the works they produced. Or maybe not. It's as if the results of a good fossick through old people's attics have been laid out in various glass cabinets. Whoopee! More rewarding is the gallery downstairs where you can have fun seeing if you can recognise various scenes of Lithuania, and find strangely moved while portraits peer at you. While the museum itself is pretty basic and unsophisticated, some of the photography on display is very powerful. **Open 10:00 - 18:00, Sat 11:00 - 16:00. Closed Mon, Sun.**

Radio & TV Museum C-5, Vilnius 174, tel. 52 43 99, radiotvmuz@splius.lt. If you've been wondering where you can see 19th century musical bees banging on bells, your search is over. The delightful music box is one of a handful of working items in this weird and wired (or wireless) little museum. Other highlights include some very old records (metal discs with slots in them), a Russian pocket gramophone from the 1950s (which they should have named 'iPodski'), and something called a thermogenerator (model TE2E2.2, in case you're wondering). Nothing, however, beats a demonstration by the mild mannered hostess of the Popovo Morse transmitter, which emits startling blue sparks, and keeps working all by itself after the demonstration is over. **Open 10:00 - 18:00, Sat 11:00 - 16:00. Closed Mon, Sun.**

Statues & Sculptures

Grandfather and his Children C-5, Priskėlimo Sq., Tilžės street. One of the most endearing and charming statues in Šiauliai rests in the shade of trees beside busy bus stops, depicting the tranquil scene of three scallywags sitting on their resting grandfather's legs. Despite the humble everyday theme, the sculpture has earned a place on Lithuania's list of cultural monuments, and also a place in the hearts of many visitors and locals alike.

Reading Man C-5, Tilžės 151. This top heavy, top hatted fellow may look like he's about to fall over as a result of smoking too much, and indeed it would be fun to stick a rolled up newspaper 'cigarette' between his fingers, but he is actually supposed to be reading, and reminiscent of times when Šiauliai was a major centre for the press.

Sundial D-5. To celebrate the city's 750th jubilee, the multiple talents of three local artists came together to create this multi-talented archer. Not only can he shoot arrows while balancing on a sphere, which alone could earn him a role in a circus, but he can tell the time. Sort of. The markings of the sundial consist of the hours twelve, three and six, which spell out the year that Šiauliai was first mentioned (1236, for those who need a little help), and give you a good excuse to be late to meetings. The sundial combines the elements of sun, which symbolises the battle of Saulė (or 'the sun') fought in the area, an archer ('Šiauliai' means 'archers'), and time (which just seemed like a good idea at the time).

Churches

St. George's C-6, Kražių 17, tel. 43 07 68. This eclectic looking red brick and chrome tipped church was built in 1909, funded by Tsarist Russia. It has been used for religious purposes by the Russian Army and later the Lithuanian Army, with Germans using it as a warehouse in the intervening period. It was consecrated in 1999. Have a peek inside to see some wooden statues of saints.

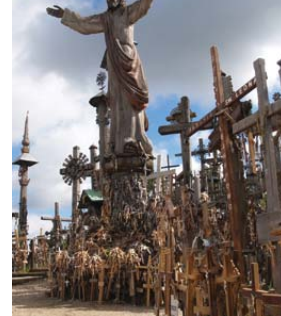
St. Ignatius' C-5, Vilnius 245, tel. 43 76 00. What was once a house was bought by Jesuits as early as 1930 and turned into a church. Bits were added here and there, giving the place a bit of a charming but crazy cake-like appearance. In times when religion was banned, the building was used as a warehouse, a sports hall, and even a small theatre. At the end of 1990 it was returned to the Jesuits. **Services daily 18:00, Sun 9:00, 11:00, 18:00.**

Sts. Apostles Peter and Paul's Church of the Orthodox Parish D-5, Rygos 2a, tel. 43 29 10. A discreet little church nestled near the Russian area of the cemetery. There's not much to see here other than octagon onions atop a humble white box, but it is worth wandering around and then through the cemetery at the back, and on to the lake. **Services Sat 17:00, Sun 09:00.**

Sts. Apostles Peter and Paul's Cathedral D-5, Aušros 3, tel. 52 80 77. This is the church beneath the big white tower with the pointy red traffic cone on top that you can see from just about everywhere. It is well worth visiting as it has a lovely interior, and is situated in a pleasant yard with lovely gardens and a couple of impressive wooden crosses. The current church was built in 1594 on the site of a crumbling old wooden church which itself, legend has it, was built on the site of a dead ox. The church was granted cathedral status in 1997, and certainly has a deservedly impressive interior, which is clean, white, vast, and something like being inside a giant wedding cake. **Mass daily 07:00, 07:30, 17:00, 18:00, Sat 08:00, 09:00, 10:00, 17:00, 18:00, Sun 08:00, 09:30, 11:00, 12:30, 18:00.**

Places of interest

Hill of Crosses (Kryžių Kalnas) 12km out of Šiauliai toward Riga on the A12. This is the reason that most people come to Šiauliai. In the guidebooks and on postcards it looks like an enormous hill festooned with crosses, which makes certain people want to rush to see it. It is, in fact, a couple of modest mounds festooned with crosses, but is nonetheless more impressive than any postcard or guidebook (this one included) could hope to convey.



The thing you can't appreciate without visiting is the feeling of getting in among all those crosses. Sure, they're impressive to look at from afar, but once you start meandering along the little paths that weave all over the hill, or even just along the one straight path that passes over it like a stripe painted down a two-humped camels

back, you become lost in a strange depth. There are, of course, many big crosses. These, however, are crowded and often crawling with smaller crosses. These again are dripping with tiny crosses and rosaries. It's crosses upon crosses upon crosses. On a hill. In some places, there are mini mountains of crosses.

Those who are inclined to pay attention to detail will notice there are names, dates and often messages on most of the crosses – sometimes carefully crafted, sometimes simply hand written. Some crosses offer gratitude or hope. Others convey wishes for world peace, the health of grandchildren, shorter queues at the bank and, presumably, God knows what else. Each cross has a story to tell, and there is something about being in among all those stories, all those hopes and dreams, and all that clutter of compassion and concern, that is both bewildering and moving.

No one owns or runs the Hill of Crosses. There are no tickets to buy or opening hours and the 'gift shop' consists of people who sell things, including crosses that you can buy and then instantly deposit on the hill yourself, from temporary market type stalls. It is just kind of there, and has been for a very long time.

There are claims that the first crosses were planted in the Middle Ages, but the first written record is from 1850, and may refer to crosses planted in memory of victims of the 1831 rebellion against the Russians, whose burial places were unknown by loved ones. The number of crosses swelled after

another rebellion in 1863. In the early 1900s, when we next have a record to refer to, there were about 150 crosses. Numbers dropped a bit after the First World War (we don't know why – cross casualty?) but were up to around 400 by the late 1930s. Then things really took off.

By 1961, when the Soviet government of the time decided that religious sentiment had gone a bit too far, they had over 5,000 crosses to contend with. This they did with the aid of a bulldozer. In an attempt to stop crosses reappearing, the area was guarded by the KGB, rumoured to be infected with various 'epidemics', and there were even discussions about flooding it. But the crosses kept reappearing.

Despite all the restrictions, the bulldozers had another 1,200 crosses to crush in 1975. Thus the Hill of Crosses now is not just a site of religious significance, but a bristling testament to Lithuanian defiance and independence.


To get there take a bus toward Joniškis from the bus station (there are eight or nine buses each day from 8am to 5pm). Get off at the large sign marked Kryžių Kalnas (the Domantai stop) and walk a further two kilometres up the side road. The last bus to take you back to town will be at 5:30pm. If you have a car, hop in and drive north on the A12 (Tilžės). A huge sign marks the point where you need to turn right and drive down the side road. Laughing at all the bus passengers who have to walk this stretch. A taxi from Šiauliai costs about 20Lt, and most drivers will be happy to wait while you look around so they can also pick up the return fare.


Kurtuvėnai Regional Park Parko 2, Kurtuvėnai, tel. 37 03 33, fax 37 03 36, info@kurtuva.lt, www.kurtuva.lt. With only a short drive from Šiauliai, you can feel like you're a long way from anything in the Kurtuvėnai Regional Park. The main attraction here is horse riding. Those who are comfortable putting themselves at the mercy of five or six hundred kilos of raw, elegant nature with a brain half the weight of your own can come here for a day or riding, or enjoy a more enduring horse riding camp. If you're less comfortable with the idea, why not try riding lessons involving professional teachers and very placid horses. And if even that scares you, then just enjoy having your fears fortified by watching a colt going crazy and seemingly trying to tie knots in an invisible rope twelve feet in the air with its hind hooves. Even if you have no interest in horses, it's charming to stroll around the little village of Kurtuvėnai, where a horse drawn cart is as likely to pass you as a car. You can organise rides on the carts at the riding centre. You can also get around on a bicycle rented from the Park Administration Centre. Those who love fishing have no shortage of options to dip into, including natural lakes and ponds created specifically for fishing, and stocked with suicidal carp. (Takes the sport out of it a bit, if you ask us.) At the end of the day, or in the middle of it, drop by the Kryžėle pub, which dates from the 19th century, boasts a charming interior, welcoming and chatty hosts, and hearty meals. It's the sort of place where you can very easily spend more time than you had planned to. Accommodation is available in the Park Administration Centre, which is a modest but handsome old manor. You can also stay in private farmsteads, or just camp in the area. To get there, take the A12 south out of Šiauliai, and just after you pass Bubiai take the turn off to Ramučiai. (If those childish names are baffling you, look for route 215.) There's a turn-off about 6km further to Kurtuvėnai, with a big wooden sign pointing the way.


Old City Cemetery D-5, Ežero. Follow the path to the back of the archer and you'll find that you will soon be lost in one of the most rambling and enchanting cemeteries that you may ever come across. Covering several gentle slopes, you can meander among moss encrusted headstones, tiny charming wooden graves, and vast family vaults, some of which are believed to date back to as early as the late 18th century. This is a resting place for Catholics, those of the Russian Orthodox faith, and those with no particular religious faith at all.

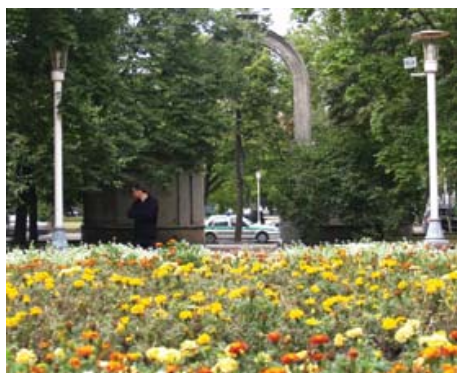
Hotels

Upmarket

Medžiotojų Uželga B-5, Dubijos 20, tel. 52 45 26, fax 52 45 25, www.medziotojuuzelga.lt. If all the stuffed animal heads peering down at you in the atrium don't freak you out too much, and you don't mind walking through the shadows of their antlers in the moonlight, you will enjoy a very pleasant stay in this large, immaculate and very professional hunting-themed hotel. The rooms (which are animal free) are clean, comfortable and well appointed, without offering any over the top luxuries. Bathrooms have notably vast bench tops, which could accommodate a gaggle of girly potions and lotions, and manly hunters will appreciate that the hotel restaurant will offer to cook your catch. Regardless of what sort of local wildlife you choose to pursue, this is an excellent choice. **24 rooms (20 doubles 160 - 200Lt, 4 suites 350 - 400Lt).**  ★★★★★

Šaulys C-5, Vasario 16-osios 40, tel. 52 08 12, fax 52 09 11, info@sauly.lt, www.saulys.lt. Clearly the classiest hotel in town, and often fully booked, those who don't want to compromise high standards should make reservations early. Most rooms have a minty green freshness that would make dentists comfortable, and nice touches for the rest of us too. You also get a hair drier, heated towel rail, minibar, safe, satellite television, internet, and so on. Some rooms have double beds that are actually two singles stuck together, so if you want a real double bed, ask for it. The apartments are amazing, and will make you feel like you're living inside a big strawberry. **41 rooms (20 singles 180 - 200Lt, 15 doubles 250Lt, 2 triples 350Lt, 2 suites 370Lt, 2 apartments 500 - 600Lt).**  ★★★★★

Šiauliai D-5, Draugystės 25, tel. 43 73 33, fax 43 83 39. Surprisingly, this hulking great 12-storey hunk of hideousness houses rooms that are spic 'n' span, and replete with a generous dollop of luxury. The best rooms have huge modern flat screen televisions, minibar, plump sofas that ooze a leathery smell, vast swish bathrooms and views of the silly bird sculpture in the fountain out the front. With brown and beige themes in the rooms and lots of glass and chrome in reception you may feel like you're in a very comfortable time warp, or an early James Bond film (a feeling which can be further enhanced by a visit to the Martini bar and club downstairs). **149 rooms (78 singles 70 - 150Lt, 42 doubles 100 - 160Lt, 3 triples 180Lt, 2 quads 160Lt, 2 suites 300Lt).**  ★★




Mid-range

Saulininkas C-4, Lukauskio 5a, tel. 43 65 55/(8-686) 811 87, fax 42 18 48, info@saulininkas.com, www.saulininkas.com. Gently wedged between 'fruit street', where apple trees grow in every yard, and a park, where the children who pinch them play, this is a real find. It's not far from all the action, but very pleasant and peaceful. Rooms are a bit beige and chitnzy, but well appointed and comfortable, with notably big bathrooms. Service is excellent, and there's even a gym and swimming pool. A cooked breakfast is included in the very reasonable price. Our only niggle would be that some of the fittings, such as door handles, are a bit wonky in a slap-dash renovation kind of a way. **13 rooms (1 single 90Lt, 5 doubles 90 - 150Lt, 1 quad 150 - 250Lt, 6 suites 150 - 200Lt).**  ★★

Tomas A-7, Tilžės 63a, tel. 41 51 50, fax 45 55 41, info@hoteltomas.lt, www.hoteltomas.lt. Little blue Tomas is too far out of town to be of much use to anyone who doesn't have a car and doesn't want to deal with public transport, which is a shame, because it is a nice place run by a nice family who will welcome you to stay in nice rooms and have a nice time. There is a humble honesty and simplicity about the place which is, well, nice. Rooms have a tidy style and include satellite television, refrigerator, and decent sized bathrooms with combined shower and bath. Options include a heated garage, sauna and pool, and 'washing of the underclothes'. Isn't that nice? **30 rooms (12 singles 80 - 130Lt, 15 doubles 160Lt, 1 triple 200Lt, 2 suites 200 - 250Lt).**  ★★

Turnė C-6, Rūdės 9, tel. 50 01 50, fax 42 92 38, hotel@turne.lt, www.turne.lt. Grab all the different styles of furniture that you would find in a department store, put them all in a big beige box, and shake well. The results will be very much like the interior of this hotel, in which items of Scandinavian simplicity jostle with pizza-patterned bedcovers and daggy sofas behind country cottage wooden doors. (Reception combines Rococco, Arabian, and Star Trek styles. Interesting.) Despite the confusion, everything is clean, neat and modern. Bathrooms are a bit small by local standards, but well appointed. Satellite television, minibars, and secure parking complete the offering. **23 rooms (20 singles 110 - 140Lt, 21 doubles 160 - 230Lt, 2 suites 280Lt).**  ★★

Budget


Mobusta D-2, Vaidoto 33, tel. 54 54 88, fax 54 62 75. Unless you want to stay in a hostel, it doesn't get much more basic than this. Sleep in a cot like bed, relax in the sort of armchairs you'd find in a state run old persons' home, or peer out the window and admire the view of rusting tin roofs. The televisions and bathrooms are surprisingly modern (or at least up to date) but everything else is bare-bones simple, although very clean and comfortable. It's not within walking distance of town, but even after the cost of a cab you'll be making a good saving by staying here. A great option if you're on a tight budget, or just have better things to spend your money on. **13 rooms (30Lt/person).**  ★

Hostels

Young Tourists' Centre D-4, Rygos 36, tel. 52 39 92, sjtc@splius.lt. Not only great value, but a bit of an adventure. Rooms generally have no more than a few beds, and there is even one 'apartment' with just a couple of beds. Facilities are basic but clean and functional. Men will have to squat when they go to the toilet, and very skinny people should be aware of the cracks between the floorboards. Lovely hosts, even if they don't speak a word of English. Highly recommended for budget travellers. **15 rooms (15Lt/person).**

Šiauliai College D-5, Tilžės 159, tel. 52 37 64, fax 52 50 91, administracija@siauliuoklegija.lt. The so-called Youth Hostel at the college feels more like a cheap hotel than a typical dormitory type set up, and has the added advantage of being very central. Don't be put off by the complete lack of welcoming signs, just go ahead and barge in, or press the bell. **(30Lt/person).**

Motels

Geltona Hansa Way (A12), 1km from Šiauliai, tel. 51 15 11/81 68 45, fax 55 84 40, geltona@erdves.lt, www.geltonahotel.com. Oh gosh, where do we start? It may be some distance out of town (about 1km) but the zany style and the fact that you can rent rooms for as little as a couple of hours for 50Lt will certainly have appeal for some. One room has pink walls, weird nude artwork, and a big bed with a sprawling zigzag cheetah print. We won't beat around the bush - this is a tacky love nest, but if that's what you want it's about as good as they come. There is one room with bunk beds for kids. Downstairs is a café that actually has good food and decent coffee. A strange discovery, but very well appointed for its intended purpose. **5 rooms (5 doubles 70Lt).**  ★★

Grafaitės Svetainė E-2, Aušros 1, tel. 58 91 20, fax 50 21 52, www.hotelgrafaites.com. A short drive out of town, in the direction of the Hill of Crosses, this is a good spot for those motoring through on their way to somewhere else. (Note that the Aušros street is not the one in the centre, but is in the Ginkūnai region.) Rooms are stylish and airy, with beech furniture, satellite television and internet. Children are welcome, and one room is equipped for disabled guests. **21 rooms (18 doubles 130 - 250Lt, 2 suites 300 - 350Lt, 1 apartment 300Lt).**  ★★



Mail & Phones

The Šiauliai telephone code is **(8-41)**

Post

Šiauliai Region Main Post Office C-5, Aušros 42, tel. 52 37 40, info.siauliai@post.lt. Postal rates abroad/within Lithuania: letters 1.70/1Lt, postcards 1.20/0.80Lt. **Open 07:30 - 19:00, Sat 08:00 - 17:00. Closed Sun.**

Public internet access

S@la C-5, Dvaro 55, tel. 52 68 55. Huge, clean, well connected, and the only option for getting online on the run. **Open 09:00 - 20:00, Sat, Sun 10:00 - 20:00.** **Telekomas WiFi www.telecom.lt/wireless.** The whole of Vilniaus street in Šiauliai is one big wireless hot-spot, thanks to Lietuvos Telekomas. At the time of writing, access was free as a part of a short promotional period presumably designed to get everyone addicted before fees, of which no details were available, would be introduced.

Making the call



Using a fixed line telephone in Lithuania
To call a fixed line number while in Šiauliai just dial the six-digit number (for example, 22 22 22). To call another city, find the code you need, and precede it with an 8 (8+city code+number). To call a Lithuanian

mobile, you need to dial a total of nine numbers. The number should always start with an 8 (for example, 8 622 222 22).

Using a Lithuanian mobile phone in Lithuania
Calling another mobile is the same as calling a mobile as above (for example, 8 622 222 22). To call a fixed line number in Lithuania, precede it with an 8 and the city code, then finish off with the subscriber number (8+city code+number).

Roaming
To call a fixed line telephone in Lithuania, dial your international access code (00 for Europe and 011 for US mobiles) followed by +370, the city code and subscriber number. Calling a Lithuanian mobile from abroad is almost the same as from a fixed line telephone, only you should drop the local intercity/mobile code 8 between the Lithuanian country code (+370) and the subscriber number.