

Cultural information Lithuania

Source 8: <http://businessculture.org/eastern-europe/lithuania/business-etiquette/>

Sections used in our cultural research document are indicated as followed:

| *This is a paragraph used in our cultural research document.*

Cultural Information - Conversations

Question:

I am meeting someone for the first time and I want to make a good impression. What would be good discussion topics?

Local Perspective:

When meeting someone for the first time you should be dressed appropriately, it is most important to be clean and tidy. Also a sincere smile and eye contact are valuable.

Any discussion topic is good, you can talk about everything: family, work, where you are from, hobbies (i.e. fishing and sports). Lithuanians are crazy about basketball, very similar to hockey in Canada. It is very important to consider the context and to not repeat the same questions and jokes without taking the context into account. Lithuanian humour is a little bit different from Canadian humour, it is more like British, dry. Canadians will not have any trouble understanding or accepting it. Just try to avoid sarcasm and irony.

Lithuanians talk a lot about politics. People have very strong opinions and usually are not happy with how things are done in the Government. For a Canadian it would be hard to understand the political situation and that is why it is better to stay away from discussing politics.

Canadian Perspective:

For business meetings personal topics should be reserved for later.

Because many people in Lithuania have difficulty differentiating between Canada and the United States, describing how they are different and how Lithuania is similar to Canada could be of use to them. For instance, discussing how both Lithuania's and Canada's economies have been tremendously tied to superpowers, how both have similar weather, good roads etc.

One might describe how Canada's multicultural society is one that values and encourages diversity. It might interest them to know how Canadians work with people from different cultures and how we tend to work by consensus.

Subjects that should be avoided include potentially divisive ones such as politics. Saying anything insulting, condescending, unfair or hurtful to the dignity of Lithuanians is not advised.

Cultural Information - Communication Styles

Question:

What do I need to know about verbal and non-verbal communications?

Local Perspective:

When it comes to acceptable distance when speaking to someone, Lithuanians are very similar to Canadians. Generally stand so that the tips of the fingers of your outstretched arm just barely touches the other person. Distance can be even greater when speaking or dealing with strangers. It is best to carefully observe each person's degree of comfort with touching and their preference for personal space.

The situation is different when you stand in line in the store or bank, people could be standing very close to each other. The same situation is if you take public transportation: people are very close to each other.

It is very important to make eye contact. Just like Canadians, Lithuanians consider it a sign of dishonesty if a person refuses to or is reluctant to make eye contact.

Lithuanians in general will shake hands more often than North Americans. It is a custom to shake hands when greeting each other, especially among men. Hugging and kissing is acceptable only among close friends.

While talking, men and women generally do not touch, but someone patting you on the shoulder could happen. Although Lithuanians do not have very strong sense of space it is best to observe each person's degree of comfort.

Lithuanians do not use a lot of gestures or facial expressions. That could vary from person to person. The meaning of gestures and face expressions are the same as in Canada.

Canadian Perspective:

There should be an arm's length distance when communicating. Eye contact is similar to that in Canada; two sayings related to the eyes are (translated): "You can tell a person by their eyes" and "Eyes are the soul of a person". Staring should be avoided.

Lithuania is a low-contact society. Touching is non-advised. Women tend not to shake hands, although this might be changing. Lithuanians tend to conceal their emotions, be reserved until they get to know you. Lithuanians can be facially expressive.

Cultural Information - Display of Emotion

Question:

Are public displays of affection, anger or other emotions acceptable?

Local Perspective:

In general Lithuanians will show their emotions more than Canadians. The display of anger in public is considered rude but it might happen.

Canadian Perspective:

Lithuanian society is opening up. Young people tend to show affection more openly than older people. Anger is an emotion Lithuanians are comfortable with. Lithuanians tend to complain a lot. With all the difficult changes going on, you could say there is a lot to complain about.

Cultural Information - Dress, Punctuality & Formality

Question:

What should I know about the workplace environment (deadlines, dress, formality, etc.)?

Local Perspective:

Lithuanians pay attention to the quality of clothes and shoes. In formal situations men usually wear a suit, women wear a formal dress or a suit. That could change depending on what kind of business you are in, but it is very important to dress clean and tidy.

Colleagues and supervisors are often addressed by the first name by using Ponas (Mr), Panele (Ms) or Ponia (Mrs) or by title: Doctor, Professor, Director, Principle ect, sometimes by adding last names. For a Canadian it would be very difficult to pronounce and remember Lithuanian last names. The first name is usually shorter and easier to pronounce.

Workers usually are expected to work agreed work hours although there is some flexibility, with superiors permission workers may finish earlier or not work that day. Sometimes workers are asked to stay longer.

Punctuality is important as well as meeting set deadlines.

Canadian Perspective:

Formal dress is appropriate in Lithuania. People tend to dress according to traditional gender roles. A cell phone is important and a cell phone number on a business card that could be reached 24 hours a day. Calls are often not made to the office within business hours.

In the beginning one may want to address colleagues formally as Mr or Mrs and their last name until one is instructed otherwise. As a compromise, you could address colleagues by Mr or Mrs and their first name, for instance Mr. John and Mrs. Rasa.

Lithuanian business people are becoming very punctual. This may not be the case in meeting with all local Lithuanians. One sometimes still needs to cultivate a tolerance for lateness.

Cultural Information - Preferred Managerial Qualities

Question:

What qualities are most highly regarded in a local superior/manager? How will I know how my staff view me?

Local Perspective:

A manager is supposed to be treated with respect and the manager-subordinate relationship in general is more formal than in Canada. Education and leadership skills are highly regarded in a local and non-local superior/manager. Level of experience in the industry or work is also very important. Being open to new ideas would also be a good quality to have in a superior.

Lithuanians are usually more open about their personal life and in most cases everyone at work knows a lot about each other. The same is addressed to a superior. It is important for the manager to be nice and friendly, but it is advisable to keep some distance and to separate personal life from the work place.

People want to know a lot, sometimes even too much about your personal life. You should not be offended by personal questions since Lithuanians can show more curiosity than the average Canadian.

Even though the same qualities are important to a local or non-local superior, someone from abroad probably would have more respect among the staff.

It would be hard to know how staff views you, because people tend not to say directly what they think.

Canadian Perspective:

After many years of inefficiency, competence is highly regarded as well as openness and flexibility.

Non-locals may be viewed more formally at the start. They will be held in good regard if viewed as knowledgeable, approachable and helpful. Language communication difficulties may be a barrier, although more and more, people in Lithuania are speaking English. An effort to learn rudimentary Lithuanian may be difficult, but practical, and it would be an indication of respect for the local language and culture.

Cultural Information - Hierarchy and Decision-making

Question:

In the workplace, how are decisions taken and by whom? Is it acceptable to go to my immediate supervisor for answers or feedback?

Local Perspective:

In the workplace upper management usually makes decisions, but workers might have some input. New ideas are generated in team meetings where everyone has an opportunity to express their thoughts. When management makes decision, workers must follow it.

It is totally acceptable to go to immediate supervisor for answers or feedback, but a lot of times workers first talk with their co-workers.

Canadian Perspective:

For most small businesses, those who invest the money make the decisions as to what goes on. For international companies it is similar to Canadian companies and organisations.

Cultural Information - Religion, Class, Ethnicity, & Gender

Question:

Briefly describe the local culture's attitudes regarding the following: Gender, Class, Religion and Ethnicity. What impact would the above attitudes have on the workplace?

Local Perspective:

Gender: The local culture's attitudes regarding gender are similar to Canadian attitudes. Men and women have the same opportunities. It is important that a man opens the door for a woman or lets a woman enter first.

Religion:

In Lithuania most people are Roman Catholics. Others are Russian Orthodox, Evangelical Lutheran, Judaic, Protestant, etc. Usually in the work place religion is not discussed, everyone respects individual beliefs.

Class:

In the last few years there has been an increase in the gap between the rich class and the poor class. Middle class is quite small. A lot of people tend to live from payday to payday.

Ethnicity:

Most people in Lithuania are native Lithuanians. Cultural and language differences distinguish the regions of Zemaitija (western Lithuania), Aukštaitija (mid and eastern Lithuania), Suvalkija (below Nemunas) and Dzūkija (southern Lithuania), but the differences are very minor and not so important.

Canadian Perspective:

Gender: Lithuanians still have very traditional gender roles although this might be changing. Women may be moving up in the working world but on a personal level there inequalities still exist. Lithuanian males have been described as chauvinistic.

Religion:

According to statistics, Lithuania is a predominantly Roman Catholic society (estimate 80%). In general, the opinion towards religion tends to be that of tolerance. The history of Christianity has at times been highly politicized, ie. between the two World Wars it was actually prohibited. Since the reestablishment of independence, Lithuanian churches have been reopened as places for worship.

Class:

Lithuania is somewhat hierarchical. In the beginning it is probably a good idea to err on formality until corrected by the local Lithuanian.

Ethnicity:

Lithuanians make up about 80% of the population. Vilnius is the most cosmopolitan of the cities with strong representations of minorities. One cannot always tell a Lithuanian from a non-Lithuanian.

Cultural Information - Relationship-building

Question:

How important is it to establish a personal relationship with a colleague or client before getting to business?

Local Perspective:

It is more important in Lithuania to establish a personal relationship with a colleague or client before getting to business than in Canada. It could vary from business to business. It is customary that friends and important people are treated with more respect. It takes time to establish personal relationships. The best way to do it is to find the same interests or hobbies.

Canadian Perspective:

Personal relationships are very important in Lithuania. One needs to invest in developing these friendships which are usually developed over time, informal meetings, on-going communication.

Cultural Information - Privileges and Favouritism

Question:

Would a colleague or employee expect special privileges or considerations given our personal relationship or friendship

Local Perspective:

In Lithuania, a colleague or employee would expect special privileges or considerations given your personal relationship or friendship. It is expected that one give a friend preferred treatment or hire his/her family. Every company is different and most managers would look firstly for qualifications in an employee and just secondly to a personal relationship. Hard working people are noticed and get pay increase or promotions.

Canadian Perspective:

Yes. Each situation needs to be evaluated based on its own merit.

Cultural Information - Conflicts in the Workplace

Question:

I have a work-related problem with a colleague. Do I confront him or her directly? Privately or publicly?

Local Perspective:

Usually work-related problems could be solved directly and privately. If it does not work, it could be discussed in a team meeting or with a supervisor.

Canadian Perspective:

It is advised to at first attempt to work things out privately. Feedback from colleagues will depend on a number of things: the type of problem, the importance of it, how comfortable the person is with confronting and not avoiding the problem, how comfortable the person feels in expressing the problem without repercussions.

Where there is a more collectivist work ethic, people may tolerate more ambivalence and value the group more than themselves and hence try to put up with the problem. A more individualist colleague who is mobile, financially independent, and has many choices may be more likely to raise a problem.

Cultural Information - Motivating Local Colleagues

Question:

What motivates my local colleagues to perform well on the job?

Local Perspective:

In Lithuania it is quite difficult to get a job, so having one is already a motivation to keep it. Also public recognition is very valued, good working conditions and job satisfaction are important too. For a job well-done people could expect bonus or raise.

Canadian Perspective:

It depends on the person and the job that needs to be carried out. For conscientious workers, good, flexible working conditions would be sufficient. For some jobs, such as construction or renovation, supervision and on-going feedback would be required. More money does not guarantee better service in Lithuania. Fear of losing one's job would probably be a greater motivator.

Cultural Information - Recommended Books, Films & Foods

Question:

To help me learn more about the local culture(s), please recommend: books, films, television shows, foods and web sites.

Local Perspective:

Language is the biggest obstacle. Most films and TV shows are in Lithuanian. The most information could be found on Internet. There you can find information about the rich Lithuanian history, culture and current events in different cities. I can recommend these Websites: <http://neris.mii.lt>, <http://www.tourism.lt>, <http://www.inyour-pocket.com/lithuania/en>, <http://www.vilnius.lt/new/en/gidas.php>, <http://www.kaunas.lt/english/index.shtml>, and <http://www.balticroads.lt/en/cities/trakai.asp>.

Among many places to visit I would recommend capital city Vilnius, Trakai, Kaunas and any place by the Baltic Sea.

Canadian Perspective:

The "In Your Pocket" series is very good. They now have guides for Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipeda, Nida, Palanga, Druskininkai, Ignalina, Visaginas and Zarasai.

Cultural Information - In-country Activities

Question:

When in this country, I want to learn more about the culture(s) and people. What activities can you recommend?

Local Perspective:

Among many places to visit I would recommend capital city Vilnius, Trakai, Kaunas and any place by the Baltic Sea.

The food is a bit different. For breakfast: open sandwich with cheese (cottage cheese), ham or home made meat. Bread is black or white. (If you have digestion problems black might be too heavy) also pancakes, eggs... tea, coffee.

Dinner is usually from 2 to 4pm. For dinner: soup, main dish usually potatoes and meat, vegetables (usually according to the season, even though there is a variety of veggies available throughout the year). On a hot day you might try cold borch (if you like beets), Cepelinai Zeppelin (big dumplings made of potato dough and minced meat, Kugelis-kugel, Zemaitiski pancakes (potatoes pancakes with meat), Lots of smoked meat, chicken, fish: Herring, Saluki grilled mutton (pork, chicken)-shish kabobs. Mixed salad (tomatoes, cucumber, green onion...), White salad (like potato salad), Red salad (beets, beans, pickles...). Gira- a non-alcoholic sour drink, home made from dry black bread and yeast. Supper is a bit lighter. From 6 to 8 pm.

It might be a little bit difficult for a vegetarian in Lithuania, but there has been an increase in vegetarian dishes in most restaurants lately.

To learn more about Lithuanian culture and people I could recommend attending concerts and keeping up on current events. Lithuania is famous for a lot of folk festivals and exhibitions. Ballet and Opera Theatre is very popular in Vilnius. To visit sporting events also would be a good idea.

To find a "cultural interpreter" would not be hard. Usually someone from work would be more than happy to show you around. In Lithuania, guests are welcomed to any event that is happening. Lithuanians are very hospitable and welcomes guests to all they do or have.

Canadian Perspective:

The Old Town in Vilnius is important to see. Churches in Vilnius are extraordinary, representing diverse styles for example: the Cathedral (Classical), Peter and Paul's Church (Baroque), St. Anne's Church (Gothic).

Lithuanian dishes tend to be meat and potato-based such as: cepelinai, kugelis, vederai, bulvini blynai (potato pancakes).

Two festivals worth attending are the World Lithuanian Song Festival <http://www.lfcc.lt/ds/principai.html> and the Lithuanian Folk Dance Festival (both Festivals occur in Vilnius every four years).

Cultural Information - National Heroes

Question:

Who are this country's national heroes?

Local Perspective:

Basketball is almost a religion in Lithuania. The best basketball player of all times is Arvydas Sabonis. He still plays in the NBA for the Portland Trail Blazers. Lithuania has many historical heroes, but knowing them is not necessary for a Canadian. To perpetuate the memory of Lithuanian heroes their portraits have been immortalised on Lithuanian money. On the one litas note there's Zemaite (1845–1921) self educated writer, a pioneer of realism in Lithuanian literature; on the two litas note, Moriejus Valancius (1801–1875), a bishop and writer; and on the five litas note - Jonas Jablonskis (1860–1930), a linguist, author of prescriptive grammar of the Lithuanian language. On the ten litas note, Steponas Darius and Stasys Girenas appear. They were the first Lithuanian pilots to make a transatlantic flight, in 1933. Both died when their plane crashed in Germany. The 20 litas note has Maironis (1862–1932), a romantic poet; the 50 litas note, Jonas Basanavicius (1851–1927), a signatory to the Declaration of Independence in 1918, a scientist and a doctor. On the 100 litas note, you will see Simonas Daukanta (1793–1864), writer, historian and the author of the first book on the history of Lithuania written in national language. Finally, on the 200 and 500 litas notes you will see, respectively, Vydas (1868–1953), a philosopher, writer and cultural figure and Vincas Kudirka (1858–1899), a writer and the author of the national anthem.

Canadian Perspective:

King Mindaugas (1236–1263) established the first Lithuanian State in 1230. He became Lithuania's only King. He was crowned 750 years ago on July 6, 1253. His coronation was significant because it marked Lithuania becoming a full-fledged European state.

Grand Duke Gediminas (1316–1341) is credited, among other things, for founding Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania.

Grand Duke Vytautas the Great (1392–1430) is considered Lithuania's greatest leader. He defeated the Teutonic Knights in the Battle of Grunwald (Tannenberg) in 1410 and expanded Lithuania from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea.

Sports stars are considered to be national heroes, eg: basketball greats Arvydas Sabonis and Sarunas Maciulionis; and 2000 Olympic champions Virgilijus Alekna discus gold medallist and Daina Gudzinaviciute trap shooting gold medalist.

Cultural Information - Shared Historical Events with Canada

Question:

Are there shared historical events between this country and Canada that could affect work or social relations?

Local Perspective:

No.

Canadian Perspective:

Not that I can think of.

Cultural Information - Stereotypes

Question:

What stereotypes do Canadians have about the local culture that might be harmful to effective relations?

Local Perspective:

In Lithuania Canadians are very respected, but in a lot of situations Lithuanians will not distinguish Canadians from Americans.

Canadian Perspective:

Stereotypes of Lithuanians being lax and wanting to exploit Westerners will not be conducive to a good working relationship.

Many people in Lithuania are very well educated and sophisticated having also had many educational opportunities in Scandinavia, Western Europe and other parts of the world. They are now able to travel abroad and this contributes to more realistic expectations of the West. Many speak several languages and are well-read and knowledgeable about art, classical music, theatre etc... Many are also very hard-working.

Cultural Information - About the Cultural Interpreters

Local Interpreter:

Your cultural interpreter was born in Kaunas region, Kacergine, the oldest of two children. She was raised in this small town in the mid east of Lithuania until the age of eighteen. She moved to Kaunas to continue her studies. She graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Physical Therapy and Masters in Public Health from the Lithuanian Academy of Physical Education. Afterwards, your cultural interpreter immigrated to Canada to live and work. She is currently living in Burnaby, British Columbia, close to Vancouver. She has worked as a sports-personal care assistant for people with disabilities.

Canadian Interpreter:

Your culture interpreter was born and raised in Toronto, the second of four children. Her parents are of Lithuanian descent. She received her B.Sc. from the University of Toronto in Psychology and Sociology and her M.Ed. in Counselling Psychology from OISE, University of Toronto. In 1993, she was awarded an honorary M.A. in Original Lithuanian Therapy from the Human Study Centre in Vilnius. She is currently completing her doctorate in Counselling Psychology at OISE, University of Toronto. She first visited Lithuania in 1984 while a student at a Private Lithuanian High School in then, West Germany. She has since then been to Lithuania about fifteen times, as a researcher, conference organizer, speaker, teacher and facilitator. She resides in Toronto, Canada.