

The welcome was overwhelming, as Algis – one of the two organizers – as businessman and owner of several companies knows how to give foreign guests 'the tour'. As we were early we really got a touch of Lithuanian culture (and dinner culture in fancy restaurants), visited an open air museum, showing the rural past (and in some cases still present) aspects of this small Baltic country.



As the other Baltic countries, Lithuania suffered from invasions from the Germans, Polish, Danes and Russians throughout its history, being independent only several short times in a millennium. It is a miracle that the culture and language survived. Many language scholars now visit the country to learn Lithuanian. With extinct Old-Prussian and Latvian, the language is old and uncorrupted, giving us a view of how language evolved from the times of old Sanskrit, with which it seems to have much in common. With average monthly wages of about \$ 445 (in 2005) it is a poor country, and the poorest of the Baltic states. Here like everywhere else in the former East Block countries, the nouveau riche drive in fancy cars (so like us in this case!) and economic progress is on its way. Don't be mistaken by the cars you see, for the rich may get richer, the poor certainly do not that easily!



History of the Dances in Lithuania

James Burgess started the dances here some ten years ago and for a long time the country was not inviting any other teachers. Similar to the last two events in Latvia, again agendas clashed as James also had a weekend previous to our weekend, but this had no effect on the dance weekend, as we virtually started anew, with only some more experienced dancers though the outreach work of our Latvian mentee Fatima and our weekends in Riga, organized by her.

The workshop

All in all we had 26 people plus 2 organizers plus us, making a nice circle of 30 altogether. Six people came from Latvia and seventeen never had danced before. That was very hard work the first evening! But it already paid off the next morning and the weekend was wonderful.

Like in Slovakia, we did a full session on Christianity (Lithuania is a strongly Catholic country, though not as fervent as Poland), with a danced universal worship on the closing Sunday morning. With the keen interest and open in Sufism this gave a good balance, as the organizers told us afterwards.

The sessions were Russian timetable like, so a very prolonged day session with the evenings free, dancing actually more than we'd do in a Western style weekend.



Language issues



As a former Soviet state, all older participants had to learn Russian, the lingua franca of the wider area of Eastern Europe. Lithuania has much less original Russian within her borders than Latvia or Estonia. Young people (going to secondary school after 1991) learned English and not Russian. And we had some 5 young people under 25 (what a promise for the future!). With the non Lithuanian speaking Latvians present, translation was done from English into Lithuanian and in Russian, a remarkable achievement by our interpreter. Halfway we

released the poor woman of her heavy duty and had the dances only translated into Lithuanian. We were very sorry the language barrier prevented us from talking with all the participants. We asked for some written feedback, but this will take some time and there are some language barriers to cross, as very few spoke English (we conversed in German with our hosts). We'll send it to you when it reaches us.

*Heure, Belgium May 7, 2008
Wali & Ariëne van der Zwan*