



Lithuanian drinks: history and nowadays

Strong drinks are inseparable part of a culture. Some people like them, the others – not so much, however, the history of their consumption inevitably reveals the development of sociability, culture, economics, and technology as well.

Mead

Mead is the oldest alcoholic drink known to have been used by European and Asian nations. Mead was consumed throughout the areas where the wild bees lived. At that time Lithuania was home to large forests and well-developed beekeeping traditions, which provided large amounts of honey for the production of mead. It is believed that people enjoyed both honey and mead even before the agriculture was discovered. People used to drink water with honey and at some point noticed that this liquid fermented into alcohol. Eventually, the process of mead evolved into the following: boiling water and honey with some extra herbs or hop, or even dried fruit. In Lithuania mead was generally produced from linden's honey.

According to Lithuanian archaeologists' research, Lithuanian ancestors used to drink mead (and beer as well) from the special horn, covered with metal. The most ornate horns are found in men's graves of the 4th and 5th centuries. These horns were used during burials: horns filled with mead or beer were clogged with wooden plugs and placed in graves. Mead, which was drunk both by lords and by peasants, was the most important drink in Lithuania. It was used daily as well as in rituals and for medicinal purposes. Every important family and public event involved mead drinking rituals. For example, in 1429 the ruler of the Grand Duchy Vytautas the Great convened the Congress at his residence in Lutsk Castle (in present day Ukraine). Vytautas ordered 700 barrels of mead and other drinks served daily to his approximately 12,000 guests. In 16th century 30 barrels of beer and 30 barrels of mead were consumed weekly in the manor of Grand Duke Sigismund Augustus.

Since European Catholic aristocracy drank wine and the Lithuanian nobility wanted to follow their example, during the 16th and 17th centuries mead began to be replaced by imported wine. Mead was also losing its popularity among the poor people who could not afford it because of



high prices. Instead of mead, they consumed cheaper drinks such as beer and, later, vodka. By the 19th century, all these new alcoholic drinks had nearly replaced mead, which became shrouded in legend until the 20th century attempts to revive it. In the interwar period mead was made in a beer brewery which was situated in Prienai. Nowadays, mead is produced by the company “Lithuanian Mead” in Stakliškės.

Mead in Lithuanian ethnic culture

Mead is frequently mentioned in Lithuanian folklore, especially in songs. It was used in funerals: mead was buried graves, and it was also drunk by the mourners. Ancient Prussian historian David Luke wrote: “It was customary to put a tightly capped jar with good mead near the dead man’s head, so it could be drunk in the afterlife.” These kinds of rituals caused great despair among Christians. At the beginning of the 15th century German bishops attempted to prohibit these customs which were believed to be pre-Christian (pagan) and to limit parties during family holidays.

On January 26, 1427 the decree of Lower Prussia said: “During funerals, which the Prussians like to observe, it is forbidden to drink more than one barrel of beer.” In the next decree a line was added, which said: “And it is extremely important to abandon pagan customs: clothing, sanctification of animals, beer and all other unauthorized liquor, which is known as kvass or mead.” However, the old habits continued for a long time. For example, during the second half of the 17th century skalvians used to lay grain or fish on a board, pour mead, milk or beer on top of it, and cover the mixture with hot coals. This was a sacrifice to honour the gods. At the beginning of the 14th century the Crusader chronicler Peter emphasized the particular hospitality of Prussian nation: “They believe that the guest is not welcomed properly unless he becomes drunk. Prussians have a custom to place wagers that entice guests to drink equally and excessively with their hosts.”

The favourite drink in Lithuania – beer

Beer and wine were some of the most popular drinks throughout Europe. In Northern and Eastern Europe the most popular drink was beer, and in Western and Southern Europe – wine. Beer culture usually accompanied agriculture, since beer was usually made from barley, which is one of the oldest grains cultivated by Indo-Europeans (there is evidence that barley was grown in Lithuania



7000 years ago). Lithuanians made beer out of barley malt, hops and yeast. Peasants used to make homemade malt beer since ancient times. Such beer was made mostly by men, although there were few women brewers as well. In places where domestic beer was popular, almost every peasant knew how to make it.

Homemade beer was made throughout Lithuania, but at the turn of the 20th century the territory of beer production and consumption began to decrease. At that time, the western part of Lithuania was home to a weak beer, made with dried bread, yeast, sugar and hops. This region of Lithuania was greatly influenced by Bishop Motiejus Valančius's sobriety societies. The contraband transportation of drinks across the Russian-Prussian border also affected the region. The cheaper smuggled liquor became more popular and replaced barley beer. Consequently, home-brewing traditions survived better in the Northern, Central and Eastern Lithuania.

Brewers prepared malt well in advance. Barley was soaked, sprouted, and dried; the seedlings were then crushed by hand and sifted. Malt prepared in this way was stored for half a year or even a whole year. When it was time to make beer, the malt was brought to the mill and ground. If the ground malt was kept for too long, it would lose its sweetness. The most difficult part of beer production was the actual brewing. Soft water was needed, which was usually taken from the dam or a well. The procedure of beer making was quite long – the brewer had to prepare vats, etc. Brewers had different superstitions about beer brewing. For example, children were not allowed to make noise while the beer was being fermented. It was believed that if you made noise during the process, the beer foam would subside and then the beer would become acidic and tasteless. If people argued while brewing, then it was believed there would be no songs during the celebrations where the beer was used. Moreover, the brewers had to keep peace with their family members during the brewing for fear that otherwise the beer might be “angry.”

Until the middle of the 20th century, even into the 1980s, there were customs of beer strainers. Beer strainer is a time when the beer has soured, but the drums are still unfiltered. Usually, neighbours came to taste it, and the brewer devoted several pitchers of the strongest beer for the occasion. The quality of beer depended on how carefully it was brewed. Each brewer had his own beer recipe and the flavour of every beer was different due to each brewer's unique brewing experience, skill level and talent.



If the malt was good, it could yield 10-12 buckets of the “first” beer, if poor – only 6-8 buckets. The very first round of brewed beer was called the *first-grader*. It was the strongest beer that was usually served to guests. Beer of the third brewing was like kvass. Workers used to drink it while working in the fields in the summer.

Beer: customs and rituals

As recently as the 16th and 17th century, Lithuanians followed ancient native traditions. Each celebration began with beer drinking. Before drinking any beer, Lithuanians used to spill a little bit of it on the ground for the goddess *Žemynėlė*. Christian beer blessings may also be found in the 17th century sources: „May God bless our drink, so that we may stay cheerful and happy, and that we may be given more in the future, not less.” Till the beginning of 20th century, Lithuanians used to drink beer and mead from wooden gourds and only later they started using glasses. While drinking, Lithuanians traditionally wished each other health: “*I sveikatą // To health*”. Also, there was a custom to send a container of beer around the table according to the position of the sun. Usually the beer was served in pitchers which were made of glazed clay and had the capacity to hold 2-3 litres. Beer could also be poured into glass, porcelain or even metal pitchers. While waiting for guests, the hosts set up 4 or 5 tables in the sitting room, with pitchers of beer on each of them. The decorated pitchers were not only functional but also served as adornments of the table.

Throughout the 19th and the 20th centuries in the Northern region of Lithuania there was a custom to begin every celebration with beer tasting. A few glasses of beer were drunk before guests sat down to feast. Both hosts and guests liked to take photos while holding pitchers of beer. At the end of the celebration, the host asked guests to drink a glass of beer, so that they could have a nice trip home. Beer was drunk even during Christmas Eve celebrations.

In Northern Lithuania it was customary to drink beer during Pentecost (seven weeks after Easter). Before this event, the villagers would decide how much malt and food each household would contribute. Women used to bring bacon, sausages, cheese, butter, eggs, bread, pies and cakes. Men were responsible for arranging tables and benches, while the women set the tables with tablecloths and dishes. The master of the celebration would take a pitcher of beer and a loaf of bread and walk out into the fields. After he returned, he would take a glass of beer from the table and pour it with his right hand over his left shoulder, so that the harvest would be plentiful.



Afterwards, he used to kiss the bread and respectfully put it on the table, and only after this the celebration would begin.

Brewer's industrial production

From the 16th to the 18th century, beer in Lithuania was made by craftsmen who resided in towns and estates. In the 18th century Lithuania began importing industrial beer from England and Germany, and in the 19th century mass production of beer started in Lithuania itself.

Vodka

Vodka has been produced since the end of the 15th century in Lithuania. It was made and sold by churches, monasteries, estates, and townspeople. Until the middle of the 19th century, vodka was made from raw grain alcohol, which was diluted with water. Rectified potato and grain alcohol started being used to produce vodka in the second half of the 19th century. Pubs, which had the right to sell beer, mead and vodka, were established as early as the 14th century.

Vodka can be used to make infusions and bitters. Lithuania has followed European traditions: like the Western European monarchs, Lithuanian nobles also loved bitters. The best known of the old Lithuanian liqueurs were “Trejos devynerios” and “Starka”. The bitter “Trejos devynerios” (*Three Nines*) is made out of a tincture, prepared with 27 (9 +9 +9) plant flowers, leaves, fruits and roots. This product has been granted the status of Lithuanian culinary heritage.

Krupnik is a strong Lithuanian honey liqueur. At the end of 16th century, it was produced from honey and aromatic herbs by the monks at the residency of Radvilas family. Krupnik was quite similar to mead but was much stronger. Essentially, krupnik was vodka made of herbs which was kept for a long time (frequently in oak barrels), then mixed with honey, strained and left to mature for a while again. Krupnik was often drunk after being heated to 50 ° C temperature; usually it was served with tea or coffee. In Lithuania it was particularly popular in the 1930s. (Photo of the bottle).

Wine

Wine came to Lithuania together with Christianity. Wine was expensive: it was drunk only by the grand dukes and the highest aristocracy. By the 18th century, wine was drunk by the lower nobility as well. A source from 1854 mentioned that the cellars in Žemaitija (a region of Lithuania) were always filled with good wine and mead. The stocks of wine usually were the following: 6



bottles of white wine, 6 bottles of French wine, 4 bottles of red, 1 bottle of old French wine, 3 bottles of porter, 10 bottles of mead, and a simple wine cask. If a person went to town, he might purchase arrack (sweet vodka), champagne, Moldavian and Rhine wines, Madeira, and rum. Vodka was seasoned with lemon, anise and other spices.

The Temperance Movement

In the middle of the 19th century, the Catholic Church, especially bishop Motiejus Valančius, started organizing the temperance movement in order to spread information about healthy lifestyle and pull the nation out of morass of drunkenness. Valančius began to spread his idea of temperance in 1858. He established sobriety societies, which drew mass participation by the peasants. The induction ceremony into the brotherhood of sobriety was solemn: in front of a church altar, the inductee made a vow not to drink alcoholic beverages (wine, beer and mead). Afterwards, the name of the new member was recorded in the Sobriety Book. Due to sobriety societies the Russian Empire lost 3,373 million rubbles in Kaunas province alone. While 1,033,500 buckets of vodka were produced in 1858, only 129,200 were produced in 1860. Most of the pubs had to close. As a result, the Russian government prohibited the activities of temperance societies in 1864.

Drinking in proverbs and folksongs

The first proverbs and proverbial phrases denouncing drunkards were recorded in the 17–18 centuries and repeatedly printed in Lithuanian publications; they are still being recorded nowadays. This indicates the high relevance and painfulness of this problem, because excessive drinking is among the most socially deplored human weaknesses, resulting in various misfortunes and ultimately, in the general material and spiritual decline. This is reflected by the Lithuanian proverbs and proverbial phrases, censuring drunkard's behavior, ridiculing his gait and appearance, and describing the miserable existence of the drunkard's family. Drinking is similarly deplored in publications from the 19–beginning of the 20 century promoting temperance and in numerous



educative booklets on the harmful effects of drinking, the authors of which also use proverbs and proverbial phrases in their reasoning. Drunkards are likewise ridiculed by the Lithuanian humorous and didactic folksongs, with certain folksong motifs and images probably migrating into the sphere of proverbs and proverbial phrases.

Very important part of feasts songs is songs about drinks. Popular drink beer is described most beautifully. Songs about making, drinking beer are very common. If beer is not tasty then hosts are reprobated. In feasts songs drinking beer is related to beautiful singing and lightness. There are also feasts songs about wine, mead and vodka. Usually vodka is not a good drink in songs. This drink does not make a good atmosphere. Participants of feasts say:

My heart is happy
Without any vodka

Usually in feasts songs drunkenness is being condemned. In these songs there is no proud to be drunk. People are ashamed of drunk person. They ask not to slander him, but take him to bed that no one will see him.

The short description of the monopoly law in the inter-war Lithuania (1918-1940)

After the declaration of independence, the Lithuanian government put the spotlight on the restoration of the economy. The policy of alcohol production and trade had to guarantee high and fast budget income. In 1923, the national vodka monopoly was introduced in Lithuania and continued to be effective until the Soviet occupation in 1940. The production of alcohol was strictly regulated by the laws and rules of the central government and by the laws issued by the municipality councils. The retail trade in alcohol was permitted in commercial companies of the three categories: state shops of alcoholic beverages, alehouses and the inns.

The state vodka shop was usually called the *monopoly*. This definition had been used since the times of the ruling of the Russian Empire. In the 19th century and the early 20th century, the Russian Empire, which then also had Lithuania in its composition, officially produced by 105-110 million buckets of vodka annually. Bucket was the unit of measure of vodka that was in force



in Lithuania until the First World War. The procedure described by Ivan Pryzhov in the history of Russian alehouses was valid for some time: "... only drinking is permitted and eating is forbidden in the alehouses". Until 1885, it was required to sell vodka to take way in buckets only.

In 1894, the monopoly law was introduced in Russia. Since then, only the state had a right to sell spirit, vodka and vodka products in the internal market, meaning, that only national factories could produce and sell vodka. People could buy vodka in national and private shops but only at a price dictated by the state.

In the *monopoly*, one could purchase vodka, ordinary and methylated spirit. The shop sold bottles for take away only. It was forbidden to drink in the shop or nearby.

The alcohol was not sold to young persons under the age of 18 or people under the influence of alcohol and also was not sold on loan. In 1920s – 1930s, the anti-alcohol campaigns were strongly promoted. The stores and pubs were required to have periodical and non-periodical publications issued by abstinence fellowships as well as posters. It was forbidden to display bottles in the windows or other similar places of the shop and there had to be no images or any other advertising of alcoholic beverages in the signboards. The curtains were obligatory in the windows of the shops.

Drinking habits in Lithuania

In Lithuania, as all around the world, drinking has its own old traditions. Because of alcohol spread it has become a part of our culture. The culture of drinking has developed in many countries and it is hard to fight with this. Due to the historical circumstance countries are eager to take drinking traditions from each other. The same situation had happened in Lithuania as well: traditions were taken from the Russians.

Lithuanians use to drink not often but a lot at one time, especially during weekends or celebrations. Also, the society has tolerant attitude towards this kind of drinking. While drinking Lithuanians do not have any measure despite of the fact it is casual day or occasion. Unreasonable drinking can take from several hours till several days. Moreover, it is accepted that if person drinks, he does that almost every day. The American sociologist W. C. Cockerham has said that usually this kind of alcohol users drink as much as they can or until they have what to drink.

Lithuania by the consumption of alcohol enters the first top twenty countries in the world. Statistics Lithuania informs that, based on provisional data, in 2012, one resident of Lithuania consumed, on average, 13 litres of legal absolute (100 %) alcohol, one resident aged 15 and older – 15.2 litres, which in each case is by 0.3 litres more than in 2011 (Statistics Lithuania, 2012). This index has been the highest throughout the 12 years and since 2000 has raised 45 %. If we pretend that every adult is the user of alcohol, in this case every adult should drink 5 litres beer or 0,7 litres vodka every week. What is more, these numbers are taken from official statistic but we have to remember the fact that illegal alcohol market also exist.

In Lithuania the most popular alcohol is beer and it takes 45 % whole used alcohol. Spirits and alcoholic cocktails constitute 36% of total consumption of alcohol content.

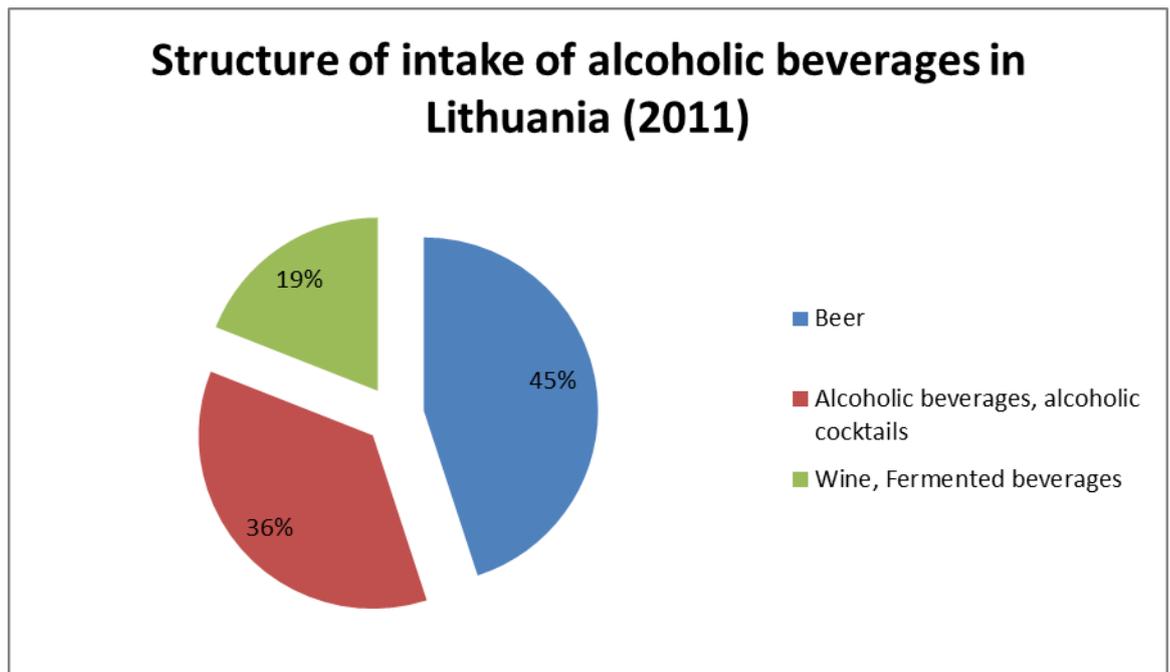


Chart 1. Structure of intake of alcoholic beverages in Lithuania (2011)

Over the past four years the beverages of strong alcohol drinks fell but there is a tendency that such drinks as wine and beer become more popular. The interesting point is that Lithuania as neighborhood countries such as Latvia, Estonia and Poland belong to the Nordic countries where 90% of beer are drunk at home while in such countries as Greece, Ireland, Malta, Portugal and Spain more than 60% of beer is drunk in the bars.



One of the reason why Lithuanians use such a big amount of alcohol is that the mental health of society is really bad: people feel unhappy and they drink alcohol as the alternative to feel better. Lithuanians, especially men, use alcohol as the way of relaxing – they believe that drinks help to forget routine. In Lithuanian there is a huge amount of alcoholics: there are 60 thousands alcoholics and 450 thousands people whom drink alcohol every day. The drinking during weekends, celebrations, weddings, funerals or just for relaxing became a part of culture. The habbit of drinking is one the most painful problem.

Alcohol policy in Lithuania

The principles of the State policy of alcohol control shall be as follows:

- 1) to reduce availability of alcoholic beverages through taxation;
- 2) to ensure through State regulation measures the State control of alcohol, protection and strengthening of the health of the population and funding of the programmes of education of minors;
- 3) repealed;
- 4) to limit promotion of the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages;
- 5) to prohibit the means of promotion of buying and consumption of alcoholic beverages by youth;
- 6) to encourage legal persons who are engaged in alcohol business to join in implementing the State alcohol control policy;
- 7) to increase public information regarding the issues of the social and economic harm inflicted on health and economy through the consumption of alcohol;
- 8) to sponsor action programmes of health and temperance societies and thus augment the number of people who don't consume alcoholic beverages;
- 9) to promote the production and sale of non-alcoholic beverages;
- 10) to support planning of an alcohol-free living environment;
- 11) to promote the creation of a social environment free of alcohol;
- 12) to promote scientific research and dissemination of information concerning the harm caused to health by the consumption of alcohol;
- 13) to strengthen the cooperation with other Member States of the European Union and international organisations regarding the issues of the reduction of the consumption of alcohol.



System of Formulating of State Alcohol Control Policy

The Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, the National Health Council, municipal councils and other institutions specified by the law shall, within the scope of their competence, formulate and co-ordinate the State alcohol control policy.

Restriction of Alcoholic Beverage Consumption

the Republic of Lithuania, consumption of alcoholic beverages shall be prohibited in:

- 1) places of confinement, the premises housing military and equated services, the police and other statutory, health care, education establishments and areas thereof;
 - 2) state and municipal institutions and agencies. This provision shall not apply to official receptions, other functions involving protocol, ceremonies of registration of marriages carried out on the premises of the said institutions and agencies, as well as to the catering establishments set up in these institutions and agencies, where the undertakings have licenses to engage in retail trade in alcoholic beverages;
 - 3) all types of public transport, except for international trains, narrow-gauge railway trains and the ships which contain separate catering establishments, and also the aircrafts flying beyond the borders of the Republic of Lithuania;
 - 4) in public places, except for the catering establishments holding licenses to engage in retail trade in alcoholic beverages, and at exhibitions, fairs and mass events where undertakings, European legal persons and their branches have been issued licenses in accordance with the procedure laid down by municipal councils to engage in the sale of alcoholic beverages;
 - 5) sports halls during sports events which take place in these halls..
2. In the Republic of Lithuania persons under the age of 18 shall be prohibited from consuming alcoholic beverages or from having them.

Restriction of Alcohol Advertising

1. Alcohol advertising of all forms shall be prohibited in the Republic of Lithuania if it:

- 1) aims at children and adolescents up to 18 years of age;



- 2) features persons under 18 year of age in promotion campaigns;
- 3) has among participants athletes, doctors, political figures and persons famous in art and science circles, and other famous public figures, and uses their person, name, picture, etc.;
- 4) links consumption of alcohol with improvement in physical condition;
- 5) links consumption of alcohol with driving;
- 6) links consumption of alcohol with physical activity improvement, personal problem resolution;
- 7) links consumption of alcohol with stimulating, sedating and other beneficial characteristics;
- 8) links consumption of alcohol with social success and enhanced sexual activity;
- 9) favourably portrays immoderate consumption of alcoholic beverages or negatively responds to abstinence or moderation;
- 10) presents greater ethyl alcohol strength by volume as an advantage of alcoholic beverages;
- 11) presents false and/or misleading information about alcoholic beverages.

2. Alcohol advertising shall be prohibited:

- 1) on the outside covers of newspapers and independent supplements thereof, also outside covers of journals and books;
- 2) in the newspapers, journals, books, television and radio programmes aimed at children and adolescents;
- 3) in programmes broadcast by the broadcasters and re-broadcasters under the jurisdiction of the Republic of Lithuania, being broadcast from 6:00 to 23:00 (except for the international art, cultural or sports events broadcast or rebroadcast directly or continuously);
- 4) at concerts, circus, discotheques, youth sport and leisure time events, other mass events, theatre presentations, movie and video film demonstration locations, except for the retail outlets located at sites of such events. At mass events (except for events intended for children and adolescents of up to 18 years of age) the name and (or) trade mark of the undertaking which is sponsoring the event and is the producer and seller of alcoholic beverages whose sales are permitted at mass events, may also be displayed provided that by their content and form they do not contradict the requirements of legal acts;
- 5) at education, science and training institutions;
- 6) at all healthcare institutions;
- 7) inside and outside of means of public transport;



- 8) at petrol stations and areas thereof, except for the alcohol retail outlets located there;
 - 9) on postcards, envelopes and postage stamps.
3. It shall be prohibited to give out alcoholic beverages as prizes or along with them, at lotteries, games and contests.
4. Outdoor alcohol advertising, except for beer, beer blends with non-alcoholic beverages and naturally fermented wine and cider, shall be prohibited in the Republic of Lithuania.