

ALONG THE PATHS

OF DUKE VYTAUTAS

Bicycle route:

Trakai—Old Trakai—Trakai

Route length: approx. 14 km

Route starting point: Karaimų str.

GPS 54.649536, 24.930907

Route end point: Karaimų str.

GPS 54.649536, 24.930907



We invite you to take a short (14 km) but interesting journey from Trakai to Old Trakai and back. Both of these places are particularly important for the Lithuanian history – they are related to one of the most prominent and influential personalities of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Vytautas the Great (ca. 1350–1430). Old Trakai is the former capital city of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the birthplace of Grand Duke Vytautas – it is believed that he was born here. Trakai is the main residence of this ruler where he used to spend a lot of time, from where he ruled the country, and where he died in 1430.

You will not only have a fun ride but also learn a lot about the history of our country, not to mention a plethora of lakes surrounding Trakai, the unique Old Town of Trakai, amazing culinary heritage and magnificent panoramas! Part of the route runs along the bike trail, and another part uses the paved streets. However, you should not be scared – traffic speed in the city is low and drivers are accustomed to tourists.



But first, get a good bicycle for yourself! You can bring it for this trip by car or by train. Also, some buses driving to Trakai can carry bicycles, but ask in the bus station first. You can also rent a bicycle in Trakai – there are several bicycle rentals.

It is most convenient to start this trip from the observation deck in front of the castle **1**, connecting Trakų and Karaimų



streets. Follow Karaimų street, but do not rush yet, because in 200 m you will find it worthwhile stopping and inspecting a truly unique object – kenesa **2**, a Karaite house of worship. It is one of the only three kenesas in the world today. About 400 Karaite families were brought from the Crimean to Lithuania by Vytautas the Great in the end of the fourteenth century. Most of them were settled in Trakai. Now it is home to about 60 of their offspring. The first kenesa was built in Trakai immediately after Karaites settled here. The current building survived till the nineteenth century.

Next to kenesa you will see S. Šapšalas Karaite National Museum **3**, telling a story of the Karaite culture, customs, and the madrasa – their school. A bit further – behind the lake – there is a small Karaite cemetery.

Continue down Karaimų street and in 200 meters you will approach a turn to the Trakai Peninsula Castle. The Castle located in the peninsula between Galvé and Bernardinai Lakes, also called the Great Castle, was built in the fourteenth century. Centuries ago, it has been a strong defensive fortress, which is witnessed by its 11 towers, of which 4 are restored. Climb on Aukų Hill, the shrine place of the former old religion, to admire the magnificent panorama of the area, with its greatest gem – the Castle Island, surrounded by the blue waters of Lake Galvé. Then, stop for a moment at a humble, ascetic chapel of the former Dominican monastery. It now hosts the sacral art exhibition **4**.

After visiting the Peninsula Castle, go back to Karaimų street. In a few hundred meters it will turn to Vytauto street. Ride a bit along it, and you will see the spectacular towers of Trakai Church of Virgin Mary Visitation **5**. For 600 years, it has never been closed or used for other pur-



poses. It is really fortunate compared to the majority of Lithuanian Catholic churches. This shrine keeps a number of various values, of which the most interesting is the miraculous painting of Our Lady of Trakai, crowned with a golden crown by Pope Clement XI in the eighteenth century.

Admire the church and continue to peddle along Vytauto street for about 1 km, then on the left you will see Trakai Orthodox Church of the Birth of Holy Mother of God **6** built in the nineteenth century. It commemorates the repression of the Lithuanian uprising against the Russian Empire government in 1863.

In 1 km you will reach the roundabout, then keep left. In another 400 metres you will find yourself on the intersection where you should turn left. After another kilometre turn right before the gas station, and keep right for 300 m on the roundabout. In another 200 meters you will approach the biking trail that will take you to Old Trakai.

This bike trail is also called the trail of Vytautas the Great. In 2000, commemorating the 570th anniversary of the death of this duke, nine wooden sculptures were built near the path to capture the most important life moments of Vytautas. The sculptures, harmoniously blending with the landscape, will accompany you for 2 km to the outskirts of Old Trakai.

Enter the Old Trakai architectural reserve, and in 400 m you will cross the railway, after which keep right in the roundabout. Then pedal for another 800 meters to reach Old Trakai church and a monastery, and the former castle site **7**. It is here that Trakai once was started **7**.

According to the legend, the Old Trakai was founded by the Lithuanian Grand Duke Gediminas, Vytautas grandfather in 1316. He briefly moved the capital city of the Duchy here from Kernavė, but soon changed his plans and chose Vilnius as the capital city instead. In the castle, Birutė, wife of Gediminas' son Kęstutis, gave birth to the future Lithuanian ruler Vytautas.

The castle has not survived to the present day. Now the former castle site has the Neo-Gothic church built in the nineteenth century, and the Annunciation Monastery – one of the oldest monasteries in Lithuania. In 1405 the Benedictine monks were accommodated by Vytautas the Great in his castle, and he built them a church nearby. The present monastery building was erected in the end of the eighteenth century. Today it is a convent

for St. John apostolic sisters.

While visiting Old Trakai, you will feel it's infinite majesty and serenity. Maybe it is emanated by a touch to the sources of the Lithuanian state put, and the lives of the great historical personalities? Maybe you still feel the spirit of the old Benedictine monks and the warmth of the hearts of the current sisters? Be that as it may, try to be inspired by it and it will accompany you on the way back to Trakai, perhaps more than for one day.

PLACES TO VISIT:

- 1 Trakai History Museum**
☞ Pilies sala, Trakai
GPS 54.652633; 24.933611
☎ +370 528 53 946
✉ info@trakaimuziejus.lt
🌐 www.trakaimuziejus.lt
- 2 Kenesa**
GPS 54.647695, 24.932656
- 3 S. Šapšalas Karaitė National Museum**
☞ Karaimų g. 22, Trakai
GPS 54.647196; 24.933048
☎ +370 528 55 286
✉ info@trakaimuziejus.lt
🌐 www.trakaimuziejus.lt
- 4 Exposition of Sacral Art**
☞ Kęstučio g. 4, Trakai
GPS 54.645442; 24.936073
☎ +370 528 55 297
✉ info@trakaimuziejus.lt
🌐 www.trakaimuziejus.lt
- 5 Trakai Church of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary**
☞ Birutės g. 5, Trakai
GPS 54.642881; 24.934491
☎ +370 528 55 907
✉ info@trakubaznycia.lt
🌐 www.trakubaznycia.lt
- 6 Trakai Church of the Birth of the Holy Mother of God**
☞ Maironio g. 4, Trakai
GPS 54.640870; 24.933321
☎ +370 528 52 374
✉ aleksandrsmail@micro.lt
- 7 Complex of the Old Trakai Church, Monastery and Ancient Settlement**
☞ Senieji Trakai, Trakų rajonas
GPS 54.605421; 24.983747
☎ +370 528 36 327
✉ ap.s.vilnius@joanitai.org
🌐 www.senujutrakuvienuolynas.org

