

A dog show. An indoor one, unfortunately.

We set off on Friday at noon, expecting that the worst traffic in Warsaw would occur in the afternoon. Well, we were wrong. We got stuck in a traffic jam from Rembertów to Zegrze. We reached the Białystok road at 2 p.m. and we had to drive through Marki in a huge line of cars. Driving through Białystok was no better. From there we headed for Augustów. There the traffic lessened a bit. Sadly, it was already 5 p.m. Lithuanian border - 8 p.m.

It was my first trip to Lithuania but I'd thought to myself that "It's Europe after all. It's going to be just like in Austria or Italy." Zonk! (If you still remember "Idź na całość"). First of all, the fear of Lithuanian traffic police who, rumour has it, have an extraordinary liking for targeting Polish drivers. Giving my national bravado a free hand I drove 71 km per hour in places where the road signs allowed only 70. After our previous trips to Croatia and Italy Beata's friends said that most probably we would arrive late again if I was driving. That sour comment still rings in my ears. And it turns out they were right- it was past 10 p.m. when we reached Vilnius.

Since it wasn't Beata's first trip to Lithuania, she had booked the hotel and it didn't even occur to me to ask for directions. To give you an idea of what it looked like I'll only say that the hotel was situated, more or less, in the main gate of our Royal Castle in Warsaw. It is the main street of Vilnius's old town, just like Krakowskie Przedmieście. To be honest I was reluctant to go inside with two slobbering Great Danes so I sneaked into the reception area alone and only mentioned that I had two dogs with me and that those 2 dogs would join me soon. I was surprised that we were actually speaking English. I always considered Lithuania a Slavic country but it is rather Baltic and has as much in common with the Slavs as people from a Polish region of Kaszuby. However, because of my age you can call me Borys Godunov, when I was in high school we had compulsory Russian language classes and they didn't go for nothing. I guess the Lithuanians aren't fond of that but every person who is over 40 speaks Russian. That's a fact. The problem is I was talking to a girl in her 20's, for whom 'matuszka Rossija' and the Polish-Lithuanian union was a rather sad period of history. What counts is that the room was available and she had been expecting the dogs to come as well. Moreover, there was a mini-bar in the room. However I strongly suggest you don't use it- hurts when checking out. Unfortunately I hadn't checked the prices and emptied the bar very fast.

Day One

In the morning we drove to the show area which was situated relatively close to the hotel. At first everything looked wonderful: big parking lot, huge exhibition venues so we thought it would be better than in Zagreb in 2007. No freakin' way. Beata had gone in earlier to prepare a spot for our dogs (only Asia was competing that day but we took her mom Stefanka to keep her company) so naturally we expected we would have a bit of space for ourselves. By the time we entered the crowd had already got considerably big (at the gate they put a stamp mark on your arm – like they do at discos in Władysławowo). When we got to our spot it turned out that our blankets had been shoved into a corner and our place was now occupied by Lithuanians with Welsh Corgi. My first reaction was to point out to them that it was our spot they had taken but the Lithuanian guy merely took out his hand as if for a handshake. Don't ask me what I wanted to show him in response. Later on the crowd got so large that it became apparent to us that any further battle for a piece of floor was useless. At that moment our medieval-renaissance union flew out of the window. In the end however we all ended up laughing and celebrating especially because their bitch won a prize. In my opinion, all the indoor shows I have been at were a mistake, apart from the one in Poznań. There simply isn't enough space. The dog owners do their best and manage somehow but when it comes to the audience it is difficult to explain to them that tail is a part of a dog and not sth you should step onto. Dogs are stressed and keep looking for their masters and vice versa. Remind you of Karcelak? (provided you know what it was).

Important: the atmosphere at the show was sad. I don't know if it was due to the absence of Italians who can turn every show into a fiesta (and I don't mean it in a bad sense, as I'd put it in my article about the show in Tenuta del'Boscone) or because Lithuanians as a nation do not belong to the most cheerful people. I may be picky but in our hotel, situated in a highly frequented place, there was no noise at night which I would say are a characteristic feature of European cities (even in

Austria, commonly considered a sad country and I have witnessed it myself). All locals are sad (or maybe they are just quiet) and dogs' dung lying in the street is a mystic experience to them. I cannot say for sure if that's really what's going on there- this is only my personal impression. Quiet, sad, colourless, dull. 'Podhale' shoes (people born before 1975 will know what I'm talking about) would fit into this gloomy picture perfectly.

After the first show was over, we thought we would have some 'zeppelins' in a nearby restaurant. For those who don't have a clue what 'zeppelins' are-they are large round noodles with meat stuffing. Unfortunately, it may be that a dietician had got on the restaurant board and so we were served zeppelins with turkey stuffing. I know, healthy food and all that, but even the leanest turkey meat won't soothe a longing for a fat juicy pig. I got aggravated and I emptied the mini-bar, again. When I asked for it to be resupplied, the lady at the reception desk felt sorry for me and pointed to a grocery shop window across the street. Beer cost same as in Poland so I drifted into a state which Pilch is so talented at portraying in his books.

However before the beer transported me to the lala land we went for a stroll in the old town, which by the way helped me rid of any doubts as to the overwhelming gloom of the town. One of the restaurants was completely empty. We also had a photo shoot outside the famous church- we have pics with red-eyed Asia and Stefanka posing with her back to the front.

Day Two

Day two was just as sad as day one. Our Asia won again but the altogether depressing atmosphere of the show wasn't to my taste. Perhaps I should have used the bar there which, apart from standard coffee, also served stuff that could easily get you hammered. My conclusion is simple: even the dogs Lithuanians own are sad. One Lithuanian had beautiful dogs (they competed in several categories) but it was just too obvious that those animals were afraid of him and didn't want to appear in the ring. But for all I know it may have been a coincidence. As I said, it was my first trip to Lithuania, yet I have an impression that this show wasn't as enthusiastic as the ones in Poland. But enough whining. It's becoming a tradition that on our way home we do some shopping. So we did this time, in a local supermarket. We got some typically Lithuanian delicacies, e.g. dried squid, sth completely alien in Poland and after devouring it I no longer wonder why. We also got dried beef which I do recommend. And it was in this local store in a Lithuanian village where I got to speak Russian with the cashier. As a rule, I don't travel to Russia so I'd thought that the 8 yrs I spent learning Russian at school (4 yrs in primary school and another 4 in high school) would never come in handy. So I was surprized.

The way home was like "In search of lost time". We passed a crossroads where one of the roads leads to a town called Serwy. My parents and I used to camp at a lake there. Then there was a town called Przewięź where lakes Białe and Studzienne meet and where we spent a summer holiday once. It's where eating butter with a spoon helped me gain popularity. I also remember sitting on a motorcycle- either Junak or Sokół- which belonged to the local foresters. And then we passed Białobrzegi where I drank my first ever beer from a beer mug in a restaurant called 'Turystyczna' (4zł for a mug of beer and 7 for potatoes with kargulena -some of you don't even know what that is) but telling you how old I was while doing that would be highly inappropriate. I don't think that building exists anymore.

This wraps up our trip to Vilnius.

Since I'm writing this several months after the show I'd like to add a personal message: I'm sorry we couldn't save you, Italiana. Wait for us and in the meantime look for Buka and Franek.

Podróżnik (aka Old Timer)