



Have you ever wanted to just lie down and enjoy a relaxing afternoon at the beach which stretches as far as eye can see? With wavy sea in front of you and enchanting sand dunes behind, with the fragrance of pine trees in the air?

If the answer to any of these questions is “yes”, Curonian Spit (*Kuršių Nerija*) is a perfect getaway spot for you!

Facts and numbers about Curonian Spit

Curonian Spit is a 98 km long narrow (400 meters wide at its narrowest point and 4 km wide at its widest) sandy peninsula separating Curonian Lagoon from the Baltic Sea.

In 1991 peninsula has received the National Park status, which was granted to it in order to protect its rare and fragile ecosystems as well as the bird migration routes. These treasured natural wonders include the sand dunes, nesting sites of herons, cormorants and the Curonian Lagoon itself.

Here you might meet wild deer, elks and boars running wild within the expansive pine forest, which covers up about 70% of the park. On the other hand, 25% of the Curonian Spit consists of the sand dunes, which are the largest drifting sand dunes in Europe; in fact, the highest dune in the whole national park is whopping 67 meters tall!

That being said, only a teeny tiny bit of the park – about 5% of it – consists of urbanized landscape. Four main villages – Nida, Juodkrantė, Pervalka and Preila, known collectively as “Neringa” – are populated by locals.

The Curonian Spit National Park is a trans-boundary UNESCO World Heritage Site shared by Lithuania and Russia.



Short history of Curonian Spit

In the long-gone past the local pagan duke Karvaitis has begotten a daughter, whom he named Neringa. Neringa, probably blessed by Laima, goodness of destiny, grew big and beautiful – actually, it seemed that she was growing up not by the day, but by the hour. At the age of nine months she already looked as if she was a nine years old.

By the age of 18 she was a giantess, already famous for her deeds – during storms she would walk into the sea and carry fragile fishing boats back to the safety of the shore. If somebody would get lost in the woods, Neringa would be the one to show them a safe path. And so on and so forth.

The word of duke's kind and beautiful daughter has travelled far and wide. A lot of fine lads tried to propose to her. She refused them all saying that she was only going to marry a man, who could manage a feat worth of giant's strength. Only one man managed to do so – young duke from the neighbouring Ventė – therefore, Neringa became his bride.

Sadly, by doing so she has angered another neighbour – Bangpūtys, god of the sea – who himself has fancied Neringa and wished to take her as a bride deep down in his watery halls. In his anger Bangpūtys caused an awful hurricane, which lasted for thirteen days and thirteen nights.

To save her home and all the people there, giantess Neringa went into sea and by forming enormous dunes has built a sand path, thus, creating a barrier for waves and wind to break, which has also granted fishermen a calm and peaceful bay to practice their trade.

That sand path is known as Curonian Spit these days.

Well, in all the fairness, I was told a slightly different (and massively more boring) story while in school. Since nobody knows for sure what actually happened, I choose to believe (and share with you) this version right here.

Things to do and to see

Curonian Spit is a perfect spot to find your inner peace and a zen spot – with miles of empty beaches, desert-like sand dunes and forests it is very easy to feel like you are alone in the wilderness.

You can rent a bike in one of the fishing villages of the peninsula, pack a lunch into your backpack and go exploring. 51 km long cycling track begins in Smiltynė and ends in Nida – biggest and most interesting of all the villages.

Do not forget to stop at the Witches' Hill (*Raganų kalnas*) in Juodkrantė. Since 1978 various local artists have been carving wooden statues of witches, devils and other grotesque creatures from the Lithuanian folklore. All their hard work can be admired (and used as inspiration for your own, personal nightmares) at the Witches' Hill.

On your way to Nida – largest village in the Lithuanian side of the peninsula – do not forget to stop at Pervalka and Preila. Those lovely and charming places can offer fresh and best-tasting selection of smoked fish you have ever savoured – feast upon it while gulping down some fine Lithuanian beer. Also, while in Preila, you might want to visit Vacekrugo dune – this is the tallest (67 meters tall) dune in the whole Curonian Spit.

Once you finally reach Nida, you will be greeted by plenty of attractions.

First thing worth visiting is the most famous of them all – Parnidis' dune (*Parnidžio kopa*). The panorama from the top of this hill is just breath-taking – the sheer scope of the sand dune (it is called “Sahara of Lithuania” for a reason), virginal forest, the pale green sea on one side, Curonian lagoon on the other... You can even see Russia from there. Though unless you are a crazy seeker of extreme challenges which won't end well, we do not recommend to try visit our friendly neighbour without getting all the paper work done first.

Personally for me, one of the most amazing sights of Curonian Spit could be found on the very top of the said Parnidis' dune – it was the smashed remains of the granite sundial. Sundial itself was built in 1995, yet the devastating hurricane “Anatolijus” destroyed it in 1999. The remains of the landmark were left there as a reminder of how powerful nature can be. In 2011 the sundial was rebuilt to its previous 12 meters' height – thus destroying the slightly apocalyptic feeling sensed whilst being on the top of dune with emptiness all around you and just a lonely, broken memento of the once mighty sundial to keep you company. Never mind it now, moving on to the next spot.

If you are interested in historical sites, *Ethnographic Fishermen's Museum* might be just the right place for you – here you will learn about how the local fishermen lived during the 19th century as well as see some original weathervanes decorating the garden. The rooms inside are also arranged just as they were a couple of centuries ago.

There is also *Neringa's History Museum* – here you can see various local historical sites from as far back as the stone age right up to 1943 presented entirely via the black-and-white photos. All of them tell stories, while some are truly astonishing pieces of art in their own right.



At the northern side of the village of Nida you can find yet another museum – this time you will have an opportunity to adore some fine art made from amber as well as visit some other authentic fishermen's houses.

After a long day you should find some time and go to the beach, where you can rest, take a swim in sea and wish a good-night to the sun, as it lays to rest within the in depths of sea (Bangpūtys' watery halls? Perhaps... Sun itself was also a goddess in the old Lithuanian faith, after all), colouring water in fiery red just before the night falls.

Why you should NOT go there

With all the praise said and the tales told, there are only a few things left to add.

If you actually travel to party, each night expecting to find a new pub or a club – you probably will find Curonian Spit to be a bit of a bore. It's more of a family holiday destination and you won't find any wild parties here. Nearby town of Palanga – with its ups and downs – might be more suited to your preferences.

Same goes if you like urban places where you can appreciate man-made parks, squares and architecture. Just under your nose lies the third largest city in Lithuania – Klaipėda, which, coincidentally, has some amazing architecture. Go there and take a relaxing day trip to Neringa if you decide that you like to kick back and escape the city for a while.