



Palanga is one of most popular – and the most controversial – summer destinations in Lithuania.

With its 10 km long beaches, sandy dunes and wooden boardwalks leading from the sea to the nearby pine forest it does sound like a nice place for a summer getaway. Unlike the nearby Curonian Spit, Palanga also sports a vivid and colourful nightlife: the town is constantly swarming with tourists and has lots of attractions to offer.

All that being said, lets discuss the “controversial” aspects of this cosy town. First of all, when I described the nightlife as “vivid and colourful”, in all the fairness I should probably elaborate of what it actually entails: overload of loud Russian pop music, massive crowds of all kind of people, which largely consist of the proud visitors from Russian Federation and Belarus as well as some of our own loveliest emigrants, coming back home for summer holidays wearing their shiny, new *Adidas* tracksuits... bought from the second-hand stores, of course.

As it is the case with all of the stereotypical opinions, this one should be taken with a grain of salt.

Basanavičius street (the main one in Palanga) is usually crowded with lively vacationers escaping their mundane jobs and tedious routines to enjoy some quality S&S (sun and sea). If you wish to imagine how it’s like, try picturing this: the street is crammed with vendors, selling knick-knack souvenirs; the rich scent of chocolate-dipped-wafers permeates the air; some kids are crying over the dropped ice cream cones; and the benches are occupied by gossipy old ladies, observing the life going by and loudly discussing how the world went downhill since they were young. In the evening pubs and nightclubs open up; they are waiting for customers, offering them live shows, booze and dancing. Afterwards, the sharp stench of urine and fresh puke dwells in the air; you can best savor it if you go out for a run in an early morning – but

hey, I've heard even worse things about Paris, yet people still thinks it is the most romantic city the whole wide world.

When you get tired of Basanavičius street, you can go explore the rest of this charming little town – its parks, museums and pine forests.

When you are busy strolling around Palanga's open air sculpture exhibitions, riding a rented bike and generally enjoying the lovely scenery, make sure you don't forget to make a stop at **Birutė park**, which is said to be one of most beautiful parks in Eastern Europe. The park invites town guests to enjoy lush greenery, some solitude, and peace. Designed in the 19th century by an accomplished French architect Édouard François André, Birutė park proudly shows off its botanical garden and a series of ponds. During the summer season, you can expect to experience a variety of musical shows or historical re-enactments, which are often organized there. The whole park (including its Neo-Renaissance mansion) was commissioned by a locally-famous aristocrat - Count Tiškevičius. Nowadays this mansion serves as **an amber museum** in which you can see over 28 000 exhibits – Lithuanians do love their amber.

If you wish to partake in some more engaging activities, you can take a few horse riding lessons – though if you do so, do not forget to properly converse with your teacher. Believe me, you would definitely be amused by the stories of how the typical *Adidas* aficionados usually try to show-off their macho horse riding “skills” to their female companions (while actually sitting on the back of the horse for the first time in their lives and having no clue how to properly command this smart, and sometimes very whimsical and fussy beast).

On the other hand, you can ignore Palanga during summertime entirely and come back for a visit in the early spring or the second half of autumn instead. During those seasons typically-crowded summer destination gets deserted (almost to the “ghost-town” levels of emptiness) and transforms into a rather attractive and affordable destination for a romantic weekend. You will have the whole wide beach solely for yourself; you can go for the long walks with plenty of lovely spots just waiting for you to sit down and have a picnic – and no one will be there to bother you.

If you are going to enjoy your visit to Palanga or not really depends on your expectations and personal preferences. Some of the things written here can be easily said about any other summer destinations – Barcelona is a really crowded and loud city; Paris *does* smell like pee (and if you are lucky you might see some locals proudly urinating in public in the middle of the day); New York overall smells like rotten garbage. Yet if you stay away from Palanga's town centre (or visit the town before/after summer season), it certainly does have its charm.

While visiting Palanga also don't forget to drop by in the nearby city of Klaipėda – it is a third largest city in Lithuania, famous for its XVII – XVIII century *Fachwerk* (also known as timber framing) architecture, marvellous old-town and vibrant cultural life.