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GUIDE TO IMPRESSIVE MODERNIST ARCHITECTURE IN KAUNAS, LITHUANIA

(Last Updated On: 03/04/2021)

If you like the architecture of the 20th century Kaunas, Lithuania will be a real treat for you!

The city's development from the interwar period between 1919 and 1939 is a real masterpiece and a reason itself to **visit Kaunas**. The number of buildings in the modernist style is enormous and following the architecture route is one of the **best things to do in Kaunas** that will keep you busy for a few hours.



kami...lwlw.mywanderlust.pl

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Background of modernism in Kaunas

Due to the turbulences in history, in 1919 Kaunas suddenly became a new capital of the restored Lithuanian state, temporary replacing **Vilnius** in that position.

ABOUT KAMI



Hi! I'm Kami, a solo female frugal traveler from Poland! I'm working full time and balancing my job with extensive travels all over the world. I adore discovering off the beaten path places (especially in Central Europe) and exploring alternative spots, street art scene and local cafe culture.

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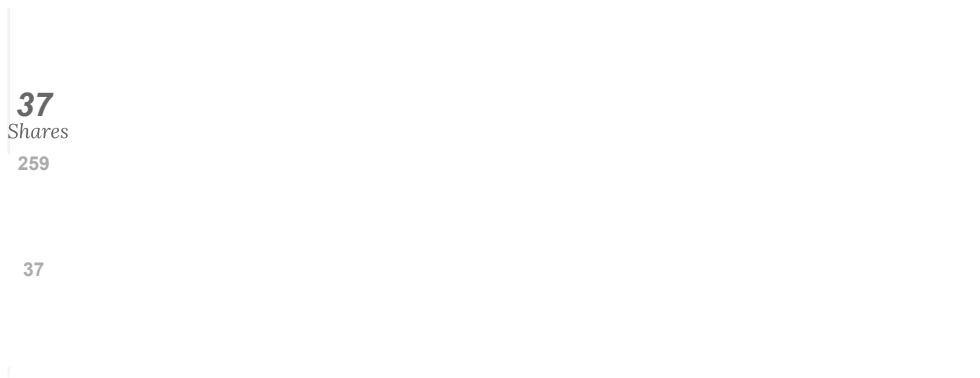
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Before it was just a small and modest town on the outskirts of the Russian Empire, the center of the Kovno Governorate (one of 117 in the Russian state). Overnight it had to change into the capital.

Buildings of the public use were much needed and eventually built: offices, hospitals, schools, hotels, infrastructure, residential and industrial spaces.

Overall, in those 20 years, around 12.000 new buildings appeared in Kaunas. Around half of them are still present in Kaunas, many are a perfect example of modernist architecture of that time.

Even if Kaunas is one of the oldest cities in the region, the interwar period was the most important time in the city's development (hence it's often called "the golden age of Kaunas") and shaped the current vibe, look and identity of the place.



Best architects of Kaunas modernist architecture

The city had to be built from scratch, therefore lots of people were involved in its development.

Some of the most known Lithuanian architects helped with creating a new capital were Feliksas Vizbaras, Vladimiras Dubeneckis, Karolis Reisonas, Edmundas Alfonsas Frykas, Arnas Funkas, and Vytautas Landsbergis-Zemkalnis. Besides them, some foreigners were also invited to help.

Thanks to them Kaunas modernist architecture became a mix of international influences, with knowledge brought from Italian, German, French or Russian schools. That's why at that time Kaunas was sometimes called "Little Paris" (after avant-gardist French Art déco) or "Little Boston" (after luxurious American Art Deco).



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Why modernism in Kaunas is so unique

In the interwar period, modernist architecture was at its peak of popularity and Kaunas isn't the only city with many buildings in that style (look at [Gdynia, Poland](#) or [Tel Aviv, Israel](#) for example!). But modernism in Kaunas is unique and that's why it is such an important part of the city's identity and heritage.

If you look carefully at some of the buildings you will notice references to the local symbols or beliefs and national art. Lithuanians are very connected with nature and you will see unique details showing what's important to the local people. You can also find Baltic folk elements and regional Baroque motifs on the buildings.

While in other cities the public space is clearly divided into the functional zones, in Kaunas everything is built in a fairly small area, with the borders between the zones interpenetrating.

With so many international influences mixing here with the small-size city, symbolism and the intimate character of Kaunas, the local modernist architecture is one of a kind and it's impossible to compare it to the movement in any other city.

But the main reason why modernism in Kaunas is so popular and so impressive is the number of buildings built in this style, around 12.000. No other places in Europe can compare to Kaunas in that aspect. The dense concentration of modernist buildings in the city center is unique in the European scale!



The future of modernist heritage in Kaunas

I'm not the only one who enjoys and appreciate the modernism in Kaunas. The city got a few important awards and recognitions for its interwar architecture.

Modernist architecture in Kaunas is already included in the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List and has great chances to be part of the list itself as [“The Capital Inspired by the Modern Movement”](#).

Kaunas also holds the title of [“UNESCO city of design”](#) and one of the reasons why it got this award was the modernist architecture.

When sightseeing in Kaunas you might notice the [European Heritage Label](#) sign on some of the modernist buildings (exactly 44 of them). This award, granted by the European Commission, is proof of the extreme value in the creation of today's Europe.

Only 38 buildings, documents, museums, archives, monuments or events from all over Europe have this title and the modernist architecture in Kaunas is the only Lithuanian addition to this list. This shows how unique and valuable the interwar architecture here is!

Today some of the buildings with European Heritage Label are abandoned and in poor condition while others are still shining after the renovations. But with all these recognition and understanding of the value, I believe it's a matter of time all the significant buildings will be renovated.

The modernist architecture in Kaunas is constantly discovered, awarded and promoted and I'm not afraid of its future. I'm sure it will be admired and appreciated by many in the years to come.



Where to find modernist architecture in Kaunas

When you visit Kaunas and would like to discover the local modernist architecture you should plan a big part of your time in the New Town. That's where you will find the most beautiful buildings.

The good news is they are located not too far away from each other and you can easily walk from one place to another.

The only exception is the Aleksotas funicular but you shouldn't miss it anyway – not only the funicular is really cool, the view from Aleksotas hill is one of the best you will see in Kaunas.

Most of the impressive buildings can be found along V. Putvinskio street (a former embassy street, that's where usually the foreign governments had their representatives in the interwar period), K. Donelaičio, Kestucio, Maironio, and Mickevičiaus streets.

They are located fairly close to each other, in the New Town so discovering Kaunas modernism should be easy. However, the area is not so small, you will stop often to take a picture and admire the buildings so save at least a few hours for modernist sightseeing.

Other, nearby places where you can find modernist architecture include the area around Ramybes Park, the Radio district and Perkunas Avenue. Kaunas really is full of beautiful buildings that are waiting for you to see!

The best way to discover the interwar architecture is with the dedicated map – “Modernist's Guide” – you can get in the tourist information. It is located in the town hall and open daily (Monday-Friday from 9 am to 6 pm, Saturdays 10 am to 4 pm and Sundays 10 am to 3 pm).

You can also find [the map online here](#). Kaunas is the city with the best selection of themed maps so check other maps too. I'm sure you will find other interesting themes to explore in Kaunas, not only modernism.



Best examples of modernism in Kaunas

Now, that you know the story behind Kaunas modernist architecture you might be wondering what are the buildings you can't miss. You will see most of them on the "Modernist's Guide" map but it might be difficult to see all 68 of them, especially if you are short on time.

Here are the best examples of modernism in Kaunas that you can't miss:

- Kaunas Central Post Office, Laisvės al. 102 – probably the most important building from the interwar period in Kaunas, with impressive architecture and lots of folk accents in the decor. Be sure to step inside too!
- Vytautas Magnus War Museum, K Donelaičio g. 64
- Bank of Lithuania, Maironio g.25
- Kaunas State Philharmonic Hall, Sapiegos g.5
- Zaliakalnis Funicular, Aušros g. 6 – by the way, did you know Kaunas is the only city in Lithuania with funiculars?
- Aleksotas Funicular, Amerikos Lietuvių g. 6
- The Headquarter of milk processing company "Pieno Centras", S. Daukanto g. 18



- Romanas Polovinskas Apartment Building, K Donelaičio g. 22
- Evangelical and Reformed Church, E.Ozeskienes g.41 – a smaller copy of Christ's Resurrection Basilica

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259 Kaunas Municipality, Laisvės al. 96

Former Vatican's Enunciante, currently House of Artists, V. Putvinskio g. 56

National M.K. Ciurlionis Art Museum, V. Putvinskio g. 55

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Tartar Mosque, Totoriu g.6 – the only brick mosque in the Baltic countries



- Former "Pazanga House", Laisvės al. 53
- Former County Government, Vytauto pr. 91
- Former Residential House of Doctor Nadiedza Nagorniene, V. Putvinskio g. 54
- Former Residential House of a Lawyer Kazimieras Skema, V. Putvinskio g. 60
- Former Residential House of Mayor Jonas Vileisis, V. Putvinskio g. 68



- Former Residential House of Vincas and Ona Tercijonai, V. Putvinskio g. 72
- Former Residential House of Elijas Sneideris, Vaidilutės g. 3

former residential house of Jonas Šaulys and Aleksandra Ignienė, 18
Donelaičio g. 19

and many more!
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Pictures of Kaunas modernist architecture

To show you that Kaunas architecture is really special here are a bunch of pictures from my latest visit to this Lithuanian city.















Final thoughts on discovering Kaunas modernism

For me, an avid fan of the 20th-century buildings, Kaunas was a real treat and one of the most interesting cities to visit in Europe architecture-wise. The number of modernist structures that caught my attention was outstanding, the buildings with all the details are so impressive.

At some point, at V. Putvinskio street, I felt so hyper surrounded by all these masterpieces I didn't know where to look! Taking the modernist funiculars or walking on the rooftop of the modernist basilica are pretty unique experiences too.

Kaunas modernist heritage is one of a kind and every fan of architecture, especially from the interwar period, should include this city on the bucket list.

While there are so many other cool things to do in the city (like incredible [Kaunas street art scene](#)), the modernist architecture is already the reason itself to travel to Kaunas.

I'm sure I will be back soon to see even more amazing buildings there!



For the end I left a few announcements that might interest you:

- If you don't want to miss new posts and news from me [click here to sign to my newsletter!](#) You can also [follow me on Bloglovin!](#)
- Join my Facebook group about Eastern Europe, the Balkans and former USSR and connect with fellow travellers and enthusiasts of these regions – [just click here!](#)

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Kaunas modernist architecture



Disclaimer: My recent trip to Kaunas was in collaboration with [Visit Kaunas](#) but my I simply adore this city and all you can read here are my honest opinions.



*Love,
Kami*

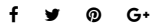
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2 Comments



By KAMI

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2 COMMENTS



JOHN
09/12/2019 at 14:21

Reply

I had no idea that Kaunas had so much of this architecture to offer. Riga is always touted for its Jugendstil architecture – would be nice to see Riga get the same attention.



KAMI
17/12/2019 at 09:31

Reply

I was so surprised when I first found out about modernism in Kaunas. It's so spectacular, yet not many seem to know about it. Art nouveau in Riga is pretty amazing too!

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