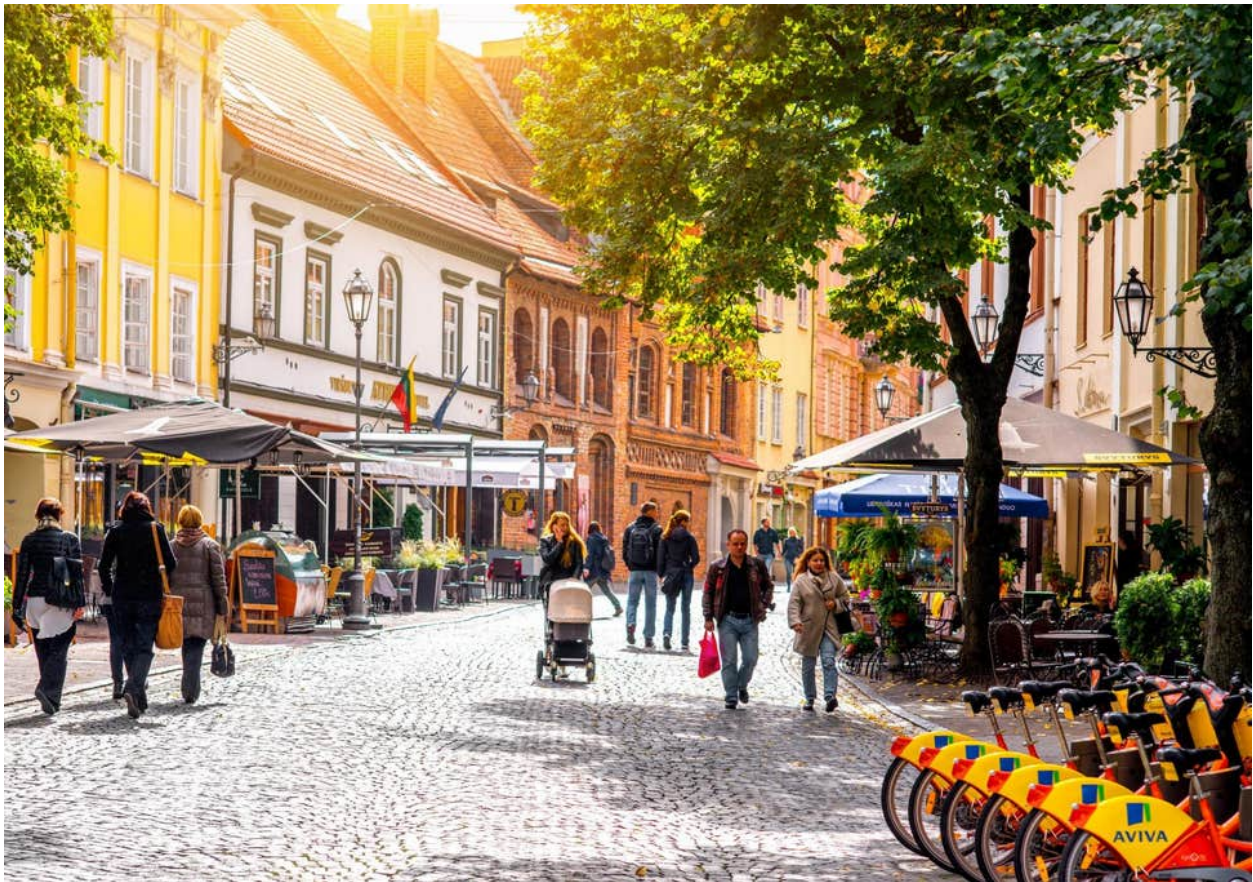


City authorities open up historic public spaces and give €400,000 in restaurant vouchers to medical workers as lockdown lifts

- [Harry Cockburn](#)
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- <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/lithuania-coronavirus-vilnius-open-air-cafe-restaurant-bar-social-distancing-lockdown-a9488576.html>



Vilnius has one of the largest surviving medieval old towns in Northern Europe (iStock)

[Lithuania](#)'s capital, [Vilnius](#), is to turn over many of its streets and open spaces to bars, restaurants and cafés to allow the catering industry to return to work, while people can maintain social distancing to help avoid the spread of [Covid-19](#).

Many of the city's public spaces – which until now have rarely been used for outdoor eating, such as the city's Cathedral Square in the Unesco-listed Old Town – are now open to support the city's restaurants.

The announcement was made on Friday, and by Monday morning 162 business had applied to take advantage of the scheme.

Lithuania has already begun to lift some of its lockdown measures. The country has recorded a total of 1,344 cases of the [coronavirus](#) and 44 deaths so far.

Many shops, cafés, and other businesses began to reopen this week but with social distancing measures still in place.

The plan to give greater space to catering businesses was reportedly greeted as a “lifesaver”, the city authorities said, as restaurants and cafes had been left with just two options to earn money and keep jobs: by providing takeaway food or by limiting customers indoors and outdoors due to restricted space.

However, this had still left many establishments unable to operate at all. Vilnius’s extensive medieval Old Town has narrow streets and alleys where space is already at a premium.

Under the rules in Lithuania, outdoor cafés are only allowed to operate if they ensure a 1-metre distance to pedestrian ways and a 2-metre distance between customers sitting at different tables. For some this was impossible indoors, and many had no outside space in which they could serve customers.

Mayor of Vilnius, Remigijus Šimašius, said: “The activity is very high, which shows that catering establishments see this opportunity as efficient and essential to the survival of their business.”

“Plazas, squares, and streets – nearby cafés will be able to set up outdoor tables free of charge this season and thus conduct their activities during quarantine.

“Just open up, work, retain jobs and keep Vilnius alive,” he said the day after the government announced the easing of quarantine restrictions.

“Of course, the top priority remains safety for all,” he added.

Applications to use public outdoor space will be divided into three categories and the first permits will be issued “to those establishments which would not require changes in pedestrian movement and road traffic,” the Vilnius City Municipality said.

The support package for catering businesses also stipulates that outdoor cafés will be exempt from charges for the duration of 2020.

Evada Šiškauskienė, the head of the Lithuanian Association of Hotels and Restaurants, said: “Vilnius’ offer to help our cafés and restaurants came just in time.

“This additional space will help them accommodate more visitors and bring life back to the city streets without violating security requirements.”

Furthermore, in celebration of Lithuania’s “National Day of Medical Workers”, which apparently takes place on 27 April, the municipality said it is thanking its medical staff by giving them some €400,000 worth of restaurant vouchers, which they can use at restaurants across the city.