

## The Amber Market

While living in Minsk, Belarus as a Fulbright Senior Scholar, I took a train trip to visit Vilnius, Lithuania.

Trains from Minsk to Vilnius were tricky. As an American, I had to make sure that I did not get a Russian train, as those trains went through a tiny bit of Russian territory on the way to Vilnius and I would likely be kicked off of the train, as I did not have a Russian visa, and left to make my own way back to Minsk ... or the US. Add into this challenge the fact I did not speak but a few words of Russian, and I was dependent on my Belarusian friends to negotiate the tickets for me. As usual, they did a fantastic job!

Vilnius was a treat! There was so much to see, and it was very accessible by foot, so I walked around absorbing as many sights as I could. My favorite was Gediminas Castle, with its road of round cobblestones winding to the top of the hill. The views were fantastic! But I wandered the city for most of two days, so saw the magnificent churches and the beauty of the old town.



However, the most memorable part of this trip was the amber market, a sight that my friends in Belarus had told me was a “must see”. By this time, I was used to the food and household goods and artist markets and loved them. But I had never seen so much amazing amber in so many colors. I had no idea that amber came in such an array of tones!

I fell in love with two magnificent necklaces at one of the vendor stalls. They were laid out on a small table to catch the sunlight – a black amber necklace and a cognac necklace, both with a high degree of plants and insects imbedded in them. Another American had noticed the same two necklaces and we ended up in a friendly discussion of who would get the necklaces, which ended up with each of us buying one. I ended up with the cognac one and still find it to be fantastically beautiful.

We both laughed at the fact that we had to come to Lithuania to have a discussion and ended up chatting for quite some time. Eventually, he asked about my plans on my imminent return to the States and when he found out I was a university professor who would be looking for a position upon my return, he suggested that I contact a small university near the Cumberland Gap, as he had read a story about it and thought it sounded interesting.

A few weeks later, while reading academic listings for teaching positions, there was an ad from this university. I applied and was brought on board into its business division. It was a great experience and I learned a great deal from my colleagues, mentors, and students.

You just never know what might spring from a random conversation ...