Kuršių Nerija (The Curonian Spit) is a unique natural landscape, part of the UNESCO World Heritage list since the year 2000. This 98 km-long and only 2 km-wide sand dune spit separates the Curonian Lagoon from the Baltic Sea. The Kuršių Nerija National Park is an oasis of natural beauty, with pine tree forests covering a huge part of the sand and seagulls flying their wings into the horizon; a place of fresh air for the soul and for the body; a getaway to a calmer and more harmonious self.

Four ancient fishing villages mark the way along the Curonian Spit: Juodkrantė, Pervalka, Preila, and Nida.

Nida is the largest of the four villages. Today it is a seaside cultural centre where the old and the new are combined harmoniously. Visitors can linger in fishers’ houses where time, it seems, has stopped, preserving the ancient traditions of these sea-loving people.

A cycling path from the port city of Klaipėda all the way to Nida has been renovated recently, totalling 50 km of pristine forests surrounding travellers. Locals will be happy to take you on a boat trip around the Curonian lagoon so you can observe it the way fishers have done for centuries. The Parnidis Dune provides a stunning panorama of the lagoon, the sand dunes, and the sea, as well as the village of Nida from above. Standing on top of it, you will catch an incredible sight: two waters – the sea and the lagoon – as the sun sets or rises.

For music connoisseurs, the annual Nida Jazz Marathon takes place in the summer. The festival’s programme offers an exciting list of activities and performances. Cinema lovers are invited to spend warm summer nights on top of the pine tree-surrounded Urbas Hill, where cinema classics are shown on a giant screen under the stars.

Juodkrantė is probably the oldest inhabited village in the Curonian Spit and the second-largest. Head for a relaxing walk along its quay and enjoy a permanent exhibition of stone sculptures that is installed right on it. For children and adults alike, the Witch Mountain offers a glimpse into the fairytale world where the national psyche can be observed through its oak sculptures of devils, witches, and heroes. Here the imaginary underworld meets life on this side of the earth crust.
Preila is loved by holiday-makers for its peacefulness and quietness. The smallest of the four villages, Preila is a typical single-street settlement that was formed in the 19th century. With its traditional seaside wooden architecture, it offers the opportunity to experience how locals lived here since time anyone can remember.

Pervalka is permanent home to just 40 people, and holiday uproar is only a seasonal appearance. The village is quietly set within a forest, which makes it easy for travellers to escape urban noise and distractions. Only a few kilometres from the village one will find the so-called “Dead Dunes”, a wooden tourist trail along the dunes where sand storms have buried entire villages.

Legend about Neringa

On the western coast of Lithuania, where the sun plunges into the waves of the Baltic Sea, where the Nemunas spills its waters into the Curonian lagoon, on a tall hill once stood the mighty castle of Ventė. An amazing giant daughter was born to its rulers, and they named her Neringa. She grew, and grew so quickly, that at nine months of age, she was as tall as an adult, and her flaxen plaits reached the ground. She was beautiful, good, and courageous. She always willingly helped everyone. When the foaming sea threatened to overturn a fishing boat, she boldly waded through the waves, and carried the boat to safety on shore. Tales of Neringa’s beauty, her good heart and fine mind, spread far and wide.

One day a great storm arose from the west. The sea carried sand onto the shore, piling up large hills, and the strong winds tore them down. The waters of Nemunas and the sea threatened to overtake the land. Ventė, which guarded the mouth of the Nemunas, was in deadly peril. Neringa, thinking quickly, immediately began to build an embankment around castle. She filled her apron with sand from the sea bottom, and carried it towards the land near Ventė, then emptied it. Again and again, despite the raging wind, Neringa carried the sand, and built a long rampart, saving the castle.

As she carried the last apron full of sand, the ties on the apron broke, and veritable hill of sand fell into the waters near shore. In that place, the lagoon is shallow, not more than one meter deep.

And that is how the Neringa peninsula ("Curonian spit") was made.
History of Curonian Spit

Formation of the Curonian Spit began some 5000 years ago. Despite the continual shifting of its sand dunes, Mesolithic people whose main source of food was from the sea settled there in the 4th millennium BCE, working bone and stone brought from the mainland. In the 1st millennium CE West Baltic tribes (Curonians and Prussians) established seasonal settlements there, to collect stores of fish, and perhaps also for ritual purposes.

The temperature increase in Europe during the 9th and 10th centuries resulted in a rise of sea level and the creation of the Brockist strait at the base of the Spit. This provided the basis for the establishment of the pagan trading centre of Kaup, which flourished between c 800 and 1016. This is unique in being the last unexcavated large proto-urban settlement of the Viking period.

The invasion of Prussia by the Teutonic Knights in the 13th century marked a major change in the historical development of the Spit. They were gradually driven out, but armed conflict continued in the region up to the 15th century. The Spit had great strategic importance, and in consequence the Knights built castles at Memel (1252), Noihauz (1283), and Rossitten (1372). They also settled German farmers around the castles, building roads and clearing woodland for agriculture.

The influence of the Knights ended with the peace treaty signed with Lithuania in 1422. Groups of Baltic peoples set up settlements on the Spit and the population increased. However, since their main activities were fishing and beekeeping, this had little impact on the natural environment of the Spit. The early 16th century witnessed the economic and political rise of Prussia, accompanied by intensive industrialization. Industries such as glassmaking, shipbuilding, and salt and metal production required large amounts of wood, charcoal, and potash, all of which could be obtained easily and cheaply on the Spit. Most of the woodland was felled to meet this demand. Loss of tree cover resulted in degradation of the vegetation and exposed the underlying sand to wind erosion.

In the 16th century a new process of dune formation began and settlements became buried in sand. By the early 19th century woodland only survived in a few places on the Spit, which took on the topography that has survived to the present day.

Large sums were made available by the Prussian State Land Management from the beginning of the 19th century to prevent further destabilization of the Spit. The works took the form of the construction of a protective bank of sand to prevent further ingress of dunes (a process that took most of the century) and the stabilization of dunes by means of brushwood hurdles, accompanied by reforestation. By the end of the 19th century nearly half of the Spit had been converted to woodland thanks to these works.

The battles of January 1945 saw considerable destruction of the woodland cover from fire, bombing, and the movement of heavy vehicles. Restoration work began after World War II and has continued with success, despite some serious incursions from the sea; nowadays woodland covers more than 71% of the surface area of the Spit.