

Lithuania attracts tourists after HBO miniseries "Chernobyl"

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In this photo taken on July 16, 2019, a tourist takes a picture of a model of the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) at the information center of NPP in Visaginas, some 100 miles northeast of the capital of Vilnius, Lithuania. The HBO TV series "Chernobyl" featuring Soviet-era nuclear nightmares is drawing tourists to the atomic filming locations and helping Lithuania grow as a tourist destination. Photo by: Mindaugas Kulbis/AP Photo

VISAGINAS, Lithuania — A show on HBO showing nuclear nightmares has sparked worldwide interest in the 1986 Chernobyl disaster. This was an accident at a nuclear power plant in Chernobyl, Ukraine. The show has also helped tourism in Lithuania. It is a country in Eastern Europe.

The country served as the filming location for "Chernobyl." Lithuania and Ukraine were part of the former Soviet Union. It split into 15 separate countries, the largest of which is Russia.

Lithuania has had more visitors since the program aired earlier in 2019.

At the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant, Mikhail Nefediev was staring at the blinking green lights on a control panel. Then a group of visitors poured into the space. The engineer explained to them what happened when a similar plant exploded in Chernobyl 33 years ago.

The Ignalina plant is of the same type as the one in Chernobyl. It has similar construction and the same kind of equipment with a capacity of 1,500 megawatts of power. Megawatts are large amounts of energy, providing electricity for hundreds of homes.

Ignalina was shut down 10 years ago. Closing it and making it safe were key conditions of Lithuania joining the European Union in 2004. The union is a group of 28 countries in Europe that works together on trade and finance.

In 1986, Lithuania, then part of the Soviet Union, was one of the republics affected by the nuclear disaster. Thousands from Lithuania were sent to clean up the mess in Chernobyl. Many of them have died.

Tourist Destination

Today, the nuclear disaster is helping Lithuania grow as a tourist destination.

"Chernobyl," a highly rated show, continues to send curious watchers to the filming locations in the capital Vilnius and at Ignalina. The plant, which is still open for tourists, drew 2,240 visitors in 2018. By July 2019, 1,630 had visited the plant. Demand is growing, plant officials said.

"They have made a good movie, I guess. But what happened long ago does not bother us now. I think looking backward is not good," Nefedyev said, after explaining the explosion.

Tourists who come to this country of 3 million to see the HBO filming locations visit the KGB museum in downtown Vilnius. The KGB is the former Russian spy agency. Parts of the show were shot at the museum. Visitors are taken to a Soviet-era district of homes built in the mid-1980s. The homes look somewhat like Pripyat, a city near the Chernobyl plant.

"People come to see these places that we never used to promote. This is very new and unusual," said Inga Romanovskiene, who works for Go Vilnius agency, which promotes the city.

Lithuania was already a popular movie-making place. It has gained further from the HBO show. The amount of foreign money spent on filming reached \$50.6 million in 2018.

After Vilnius, some tourists travel 100 miles and join a tour of the nuclear plant. They are given helmets, white clothes and shoes before going through a puzzle of long, poorly lit halls. They visit the control center with the red button, which was pushed just before the explosion. Cellphones, cameras, eating, drinking and smoking are not allowed.

The plant tour costs \$75 per person. Tickets are sold until Christmas, said Natalija Survila, who works for the plant.

Lynn Adams came from the United Kingdom to see the whole thing with her own eyes.

Feels Like Stepping Into Scene In Show

"It feels like you are stepping back into one of the scenes," Adams said. She remembers seeing Chernobyl on the news at the time of the explosion. However, she's much more interested after seeing the show, she said. She visited a Soviet-era district, used by HBO as a filming location.

Antanas Turcinas was among those sent to Chernobyl weeks after the disaster. He hopes the interest in the show leads to better care for survivors.

"This movie has brought back old memories. Emotions are very strong, because in 1986 we did not understand what we faced. I am happy to be still alive," he said.

Quiz

- 1 What is the relationship between Lithuania and Chernobyl?
- (A) The Chernobyl disaster in 1986 happened in a city in Lithuania.
 - (B) The Chernobyl power plant moved from Ukraine to Lithuania 10 years ago.
 - (C) Visitors to Lithuania enjoy traveling to Chernobyl and Pripyat.
 - (D) An HBO show about the Chernobyl disaster was filmed in Lithuania.
- 2 According to the article, how do people prepare for tours of the Ignalina plant?
- (A) They pack their cellphones and cameras.
 - (B) They learn how to operate control panels.
 - (C) They put on helmets, white clothes and shoes.
 - (D) They watch a movie about power plant safety.
- 3 Read the introduction [paragraphs 1-7].
- Select the sentence from the section that shows how the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant is like the Chernobyl nuclear power plant.
- (A) At the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant, Mikhail Nefedyev was staring at the blinking green lights on a control panel.
 - (B) It has similar construction and the same kind of equipment with a capacity of 1,500 megawatts of power.
 - (C) Closing it and making it safe were key conditions of Lithuania joining the European Union in 2004.
 - (D) In 1986, Lithuania, then part of the Soviet Union, was one of the republics affected by the nuclear disaster.
- 4 When was the HBO show "Chernobyl" released? How do you know?
- (A) 1986; A show on HBO showing nuclear nightmares has sparked worldwide interest in the 1986 Chernobyl disaster.
 - (B) 2019; Lithuania has had more visitors since the program aired earlier in 2019.
 - (C) 1986; In 1986, Lithuania, then part of the Soviet Union, was one of the republics affected by the nuclear disaster.
 - (D) 2018; The amount of foreign money spent on filming reached \$50.6 million in 2018.