The Adventure Begins:

Finally in October of 2011, while the last winds of a vanishing summer were blowing through the open plains of Northern Germany, I found the time and opportunity to realize my hopes to travel to the realm of amber and Nordic lights.

For logistical reasons, and because I wanted to traverse as much of the Lithuanian countryside as possible, I started my trip from the German seaport of Kiel.
This was mainly due to the limited means available to travel to Lithuania's only seaport of Klaipeda (aka the former German town of Memel).
But fact is that there are few practical land based alternatives left anyway.
Because even so both Germany and Lithuania, as well the the transit nation Poland, are members of the European Union, the highway connections between the central and the Eastern parts of Europe are abysmal at best.
Almost no German rental car agency would permit travel to Eastern Europe in one of their vehicles, and border controls between Poland and the Lithuania border can delay transit for hours.
Travel by train is even more cumbersome, as most connections require switching trains and at times even to travel by bus.

But there is a fairly reliable, albeit somewhat costly, ferry service available from *DFDS Seeways* (http://www.dfdsseaways.de/)

One of the many DFDS ferry ships frequenting the Baltic and Scandinavian routes.

<u>The journey to Klaipeda (Memel):</u>

There were additional ferry services available from other German sea ports, but as far as ports close to Germany's Lower-Saxony were concerned, DFDS was it.
While a single ticket could be bought for less than €40, all you bought with that was the "privilege" to be on-board.
It neither secured a seat in any of the public areas, nor did it include any overnight sleeping arrangements.
Indeed, the public sleeping rooms were solely comprised of less than a dozen semi-closed-off large sitting areas, cramped, crowded and filled with the enticing odor of old sweat, hard comforts and cold sauerkraut.
 If you wanted access to a shower and a real bed, then you had to spend the extra €200 plus for your own 2 bunk-bed cabin.

Owing to the low number of reliable land routes, a large amount of the cargo volume between the Baltic Nations and the EU is shipped by sea.

If traveling with a dog, it must either stay in the car (barely advisable, as you might not even be able to take him out for a walk and temperatures can drop drastically during the winter months) or you have to rent a cabin for you and your dog. In any case, the canine may not stay in the public rest or in the restaurant areas.

In my honest opinion, it took the sturdiness of a Russian miner to find the sleeping arrangements in the open seated mess hall even halfway comfortable.
But even those who decided to travel by cabin, had to make due with the comfort level of a *Klingon Bird of Prey*.
This, despite each cabin being equipped with a camping style shower and toilet, not the least due to a total disregard for passenger comforts by the mostly Russian and Ukrainian crew members.

The labyrinthine hallways of the passenger deck, eternally vibrating with he ship's engines' power.

My cabin, my backpack and my lord & master Morenga watching over all of it.

The food was as unsophisticated as it was unhealthy by Western standards.
A fat laden and overcooked mix of *something*, presented by an uninspired crew with the enthusiasm of a communist cafeteria, and the in-cabin air conditioning literally consisted of opening the cabin door when it got to humid inside and closing it again once it got too cold (yes, it got freezing cold already at the start of October).

The restaurant area itself is a lot more appealing than the food being sold in it.

But I survived and maybe Western "*softies*" can learn a thing or two from from the hardened souls at home in the Baltic region, as I couldn't find any of the locals complaining throughout the trip.
Or maybe they just drowned their sorrow in the ample supply of Vodka, Whiskey, Gin and innumerate other varieties of hard liquor being sold in small shops throughput the ship.

Talking of "the locals", most passengers aboard the ship where Russians or Ukrainians by origin, as indeed I only found few native Lithuanians at all.
Since, during the conclusion of World War II, the former Soviet Union's dictator Joseph Stalin decided to shift Russia's border Westwards (with the tacit approval of Roosevelt & Co.), he not just forcefully drove people like the Polish ahead of his expanding borderline, but also reoccupied countries like the Baltic Nations - who had gained independence from Tsarist Russia only a few decades earlier.

As a result of this humongous "people shakeup" Russians, and other ethnic groups from the bygone Soviet Union, nowadays live as more less well integrated minorities across the member states of the former Eastern Bloc.
But it also resulted in a remnant of Communist Russia, which used to be part of old Germany's Eastern Prussia, to become wedged in between Lithuania and Poland.

That leftover piece of what used the German city of Königsberg and its surrounding hinterland, before it was transformed into a huge military reservation by the Red Army, is now effectively blocking many a land route from the European Union's most Eastward member countries into the EU's heartland.
This is both due to the fact that there are no visa free travel agreements between the EU and Russia, as well as to Moscow's continues distrust of any Western encroachment of what the Kremlin regards as its legitimate sphere of influence to this very day.