



Stuttford Van Lines Country Guide for

Poland



Country Guides: Courtesy of Overseas Moving Network International (OMNI)

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1 CONTACT ADDRESSES

Location: Central Europe.

Time: GMT + 1 (GMT + 2 from last Sunday in March to last Sunday in October).

Polish National Tourist Office in the UK

Level 3, Westec House, West Gate, London, W5 1YY, UK Tel: (0870) 0675 010 (brochure line). Website: www.visitpoland.org

Embassy of the Republic of Poland in the UK

47 Portland Place, London W1B 1JH, UK Tel: (0870) 774 2700. Website: www.polishembassy.org.uk Opening hours: Mon-Fri 0830-1630.

Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in the UK

73 New Cavendish Street, London W1W 6LS, UK Tel: (0870) 774 2800. Website: www.polishconsulate.co.uk Opening hours: Mon-Fri 0930-1230 (Wed 0900-1100 and Thur 1300-1600).

Embassy of the Republic of Poland in the USA

2640 16th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20009, USA Tel: (202) 234 3800-2. Website: www.polandembassy.org

Opening hours: Mon- Fri 0900- 1600

Consular Division of the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in the USA

2224 Wyoming Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20008, USA Tel: (202) 234 3800.

Polish National Tourist Office in the USA

5 Marine View Plaza, Suite 208, Hoboken, NJ 07030, USA Tel: (201) 420 9910. Website: www.polandtour.org

2 OVERVIEW

Country Overview:

Poland shares borders with the Baltic Sea, the Russian Federation, Belarus, Ukraine, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany. Warsaw, the capital, was completely destroyed during World War II, but the Old Town has been completely rebuilt. The reconstructed Royal Castle is well worth seeing. The Lazienki Palace is set in a lovely park with an open-air Greek theatre and a monument to Chopin. Krakow, Poland's second city, still retains its charming medieval air, having largely escaped destruction during the War. In the centre is the Cloth Hall built in the 14th century. Opposite is St Mary's Church, famous for its wooden altar carved by Wit Stwosz. Gdansk, formerly known as Danzig, was also destroyed in World War II, but has also been restored to its former beauty. Sights include the Town Hall, the 17th-century Golden Gate and the largest Gothic church in Poland. Popular dishes include zrazy (mushroom-stuffed beefsteak rolls in sour cream) served with boiled kasza (buckwheat) and pigs' knuckles. Poland has strong theatrical and musical traditions. Warsaw and the main



cities have theatres and opera companies that put on a whole range of musical and cultural programmes for both locals and visitors.

3 GENERAL INFORMATION

Area: 312,685 sq km (120,728 sq miles).

Population: 38.63 million (official estimate 2005).

Population Density: 122.3 per sq km.

Capital: Warsaw. Population: 1.65 million (official estimate 2004).

GEOGRAPHY: Poland shares borders to the east with the Russian Federation, Belarus, Ukraine and Lithuania, to the south with the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic and to the west with Germany. To the north lies the Baltic Sea. The Baltic coast provides over 500km (300 miles) of sandy beaches, bays, steep cliffs and dunes. Northern Poland is dominated by lakes, islands and wooded hills joined by many rivers and canals. The Mazurian Lake District to the northeast is particularly beautiful. Lake Hancza, the deepest lake in Poland, is located in this district. The River Vistula has cut a wide valley from Gdansk on the Baltic coast to Warsaw in the heart of the country. The rest of the country rises slowly to the Sudety Mountains, which run along the border with the Czech Republic, and the Tatra mountains, which separate Poland from the Slovak Republic. To the west, the River Oder, with Szczecin at its mouth, forms the northwest border with Germany.

Government: Republic since 1918. Head of State: President Lech Kaczynski since 2005. Head of Government: Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz since September 2005. Recent history: President Lech Kaczynski, from the traditionalist Law and Justice party, won a run-off vote in October 2005. Mr Kaczynski, who was Warsaw's Mayor at the time of his election, co-founded Law and Justice with his identical twin brother, Jaroslaw, who heads the party. Under the Polish constitution, the President has fewer powers than the Prime Minister. However, he has a significant say in foreign policy. Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz was nominated as Prime Minister. He has eight non-party technocrats in his 17-member cabinet

Language: Polish is the official language. There is a small German-speaking community. English and Russian are also spoken.

Religion: More than 95 per cent Roman Catholic; other religions include Polish Autocephalous Orthodox, Russian and Greek Orthodox, Protestant, Jewish and Muslim.

Electricity: 220 volts AC, 50Hz; continental sockets.

Social Conventions: Poles are friendly, industrious people and foreigners are usually made very welcome. There are vast contrasts between urban and rural life and the Polish peasantry is very religious and conservative, maintaining a traditional lifestyle. Roman Catholicism plays an important role in daily life and criticism or jokes about religion are not appreciated, despite the general good humour of the people. Music and art are also important aspects of Polish culture. Shaking hands is the normal form of greeting. Normal courtesies are observed when visiting private homes and it is customary to bring flowers. Fairly conservative casual wear is the most suitable attire, but dress should be formal when specified for entertaining in the evening or in a



smart restaurant. Smoking is restricted in some public buildings. Photography: Military installations such as bridges, ports, airports, border points etc should not be photographed.

Passport/Visa

	<i>Passport Required?</i>	<i>Visa Required?</i>	<i>Return Ticket Required?</i>
British	1	No	No
Australian	Yes	No	No
Canadian	Yes	No	No
USA	Yes	No	No
OtherEU	1	No	No
Japanese	Yes	No	No

PASSPORTS: Passport valid for at least three months beyond length of stay required by all except: 1. EU/EEA nationals (EU + Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway) and Swiss nationals holding a valid national ID card. Note: EU and EEA nationals are only required to produce evidence of their EU/EEA nationality and identity in order to be admitted to any EU/EEA Member State. This evidence can take the form of a valid national passport or national identity card. Either is acceptable. Possession of a return ticket, any length of validity on their document, sufficient funds for the length of their proposed visit should not be imposed.

VISAS: Required by all except the following for up to 90 days: (a) nationals of countries referred to in the chart above; (b) nationals of Andorra, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Brunei, Bulgaria, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Hong Kong (SAR), Iceland, Israel, Korea (Rep), Liechtenstein, Macau (SAR), Malaysia, Mexico, Monaco, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Romania, San Marino, Singapore, Switzerland, Uruguay, Vatican City and Venezuela.

Types of visa and cost: Short-stay: £26 (single-entry), £34 (double-entry), £42 (multiple-entry). Long-validity (more than 90 days): £51 (single-entry), £59 (double-entry), £68 (multiple-entry). Airport Transit Visa: £9. Transit: £9 (single-entry), £17 (double-entry), £26 (multiple-entry). Work (one year maximum, multiple-entry): £94. Next day service: additional £22. Payment is non-refundable even if visa is rejected. There is a 50 per cent discount for foreign citizens who have a Polish spouse and a 25 per cent discount for children and students up to the age of 26 (proof of identity is required).

Validity: Airport Transit: two days. Transit: up to five days. Short stay: up to 90 days. Long validity: over 90 days. Work: maximum one year.

Application to: Consulate (or consular section at Embassy); see Passport/Visa Information for details.

Application requirements: (a) Passport valid for three months after planned departure from Poland with blank page to affix visa. (b) Completed application form. (c) One passport-size photo. (d) Evidence of immigration status in country of residence, endorsed in current or previous passport (if applicable). (e) Fee, payable by cash or postal order made payable to 'Consulate General of the Republic of Poland'. Short-stay: (a)-(e) and, (f) Confirmation of travel itinerary, accommodation booking or invitation from friends or family in Poland. The invitation



should be entered in the register of invitations in a Regional Office. Long-validity: (a)(e) and, (f) Letter from applicant's company or organisation and original of a 'Work Promise'. Self-employed persons should produce an invitation from the business partner from Poland. If studying in Poland, an official letter from a college or university must be produced. Transit: (a)(e) and, (f) Visa for country of destination. (g) Transport documentation, such as a rail or aeroplane ticket.

Note: All visitors must possess sufficient funds to cover the cost of their stay. Foreigners staying in excess of three days must possess; PLN100 per day but no less than PLN500 in total or the equivalent in foreign currency if over 16 years of age; PLN50 per day but no less than PLN300 in total or the equivalent in foreign currency if under 16 years of age. Documents required for proof of funds are: traveller's cheques, credit cards or a bank statement. Additionally, each foreigner needs to have PLN300 for each day of the visit or the equivalent in foreign currency to cover the cost of medical treatment; a letter from the insurer can be used to confirm this.

Working days required: Three. For certain passport holders it may take several weeks. Express visas: the following working-day, for an additional fee of £22. Postal applications may take up to two weeks (no express service available).

Temporary residence: Apply to Consulate.

Passport/Visa Information: Embassy of the Republic of Poland in the UK47 Portland Place, London W1B 1JH, UK Tel: (0870) 774 2700. Website: www.polishembassy.org.uk Opening hours: Mon-Fri 0830-1630. Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in the UK73 New Cavendish Street, London W1W 6LS, UK Tel: (0870) 774 2800. Website: www.polishconsulate.co.uk Opening hours: Mon-Fri 0930-1230 (Wed 0900-1100 and Thur 1300-1600). Embassy of the Republic of Poland in the USA2640 16th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20009, USA Tel: (202) 234 3800-2. Website: www.polandembassy.org Opening hours: Mon- Fri 0900- 1600 Consular Division of the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in the USA2224 Wyoming Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20008, USA Tel: (202) 234 3800.

4 MONEY

Currency: Zloty (PLN) = 100 groszy. Notes are in denominations of PLN200, 100, 50, 20 and 10. The new coins are in denominations of PLN5, 2 and 1, and 50, 20, 10, 5, 2 and 1 groszy.

Currency exchange: Foreign currency can be exchanged at all border crossing points, hotels and bureaux de change, some of which are open 24 hours. Cash can also be obtained from Visa credit cards at banks.

Credit & debit cards: American Express, Diners Club, MasterCard and Visa are accepted in larger establishments. Check with your credit or debit card company for details of merchant acceptability and other services which may be available.

Traveller's cheques: Readily exchanged. To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travellers are advised to take traveller's cheques in Pounds Sterling.

Currency restrictions: The import of local currency is allowed up to the equivalent of £8364;10,000. The import of foreign currencies exceeding £8364;10,000 or its equivalent in freely convertible currency must be declared. Residents and non-residents are allowed to export local currency up to the equivalent of £8364;10,000. Residents are allowed to export foreign



currencies up to the equivalent of €10,000. Higher amounts can be exported with permission of the Bank of Poland only. The export of foreign currencies exceeding €10,000 or its equivalent in freely convertible currency by non-residents must be declared. Gold and platinum, metal and articles of gold, platinum or metal are subject to special regulations.

Exchange rate indicators

Date At time of publishing £1.00=PLN5.52 \$1.00=PLN3.14

Banking hours: Mon-Fri 0900-1600, Sat 0900-1300 in main cities. In smaller towns, banking hours are more limited.

5 DUTY FREE

The following items may be imported into Poland by persons of 17 years of age and over without **incurring customs duty**: 250 cigarettes or 50 cigars or 250g of tobacco; 1l of wine and 1l of spirits; goods up to the value of €175.

Prohibited items: The export of all articles of artistic, historical or cultural value is subject to special regulations. Parrots, although in special cases permission is obtainable from the Ministry of Agriculture.

Abolition of duty free goods within the EU: On June 30 1999, the sale of duty-free alcohol and tobacco at airports and at sea was abolished in all of the original 15 EU member states. Of the 10 new member states that joined the EU on May 1 2004, these rules already apply to Cyprus and Malta. There are transitional rules in place for visitors returning to one of the original 15 EU countries from one of the other new EU countries. But for the original 15, plus Cyprus and Malta, there are now no limits imposed on importing tobacco and alcohol products from one EU country to another (with the exceptions of Denmark, Finland and Sweden, where limits are imposed). Travellers should note that they may be required to prove at customs that the goods purchased are for personal use only.

6 PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Below are listed the Public Holidays for the January 2006-June 2007 period.

Jan 1 2006 New Year's Day. Apr 17 Easter Monday. May 1 Labour Day. May 3 National Day. Jun 15 Corpus Christi. Aug 15 Assumption. Nov 1 All Saints' Day. Nov 11 Independence Day. Dec 25-26 Christmas. Jan 1 2007 New Year's Day. April 9 Easter Monday. May 1 Labour Day. May 3 National Day. June 7 Corpus Christi.

7 HEALTH

	Special Precautions	Certificate Required
Yellow Fever	No	No
Cholera	No	No



Typhoid and Polio	No	N/A
Malaria	No	N/A

Food & drink: Mains water is normally chlorinated, and whilst relatively safe may cause mild abdominal upsets. Bottled water is available and is advised for the first few weeks of the stay. Milk is pasteurised and dairy products are safe for consumption. Local meat, poultry, seafood, fruit and vegetables are generally considered safe to eat.

Other risks: Hepatitis A and B and diphtheria occur. Freshwater fish from the Baltic Sea area could contain fish tapeworm, causing diphyllorhosis. Tick-borne encephalitis occurs in forested areas. Vaccination is advisable. Campers and trekkers should wear long trousers when walking near long grass in order to avoid tick bites. Rabies is present. For those at high risk, vaccination before arrival should be considered. If you are bitten, seek medical advice without delay. For more information, consult the Health appendix.

Health care: European Economic Area (EEA) and Switzerland: If you or any of your dependants are suddenly taken ill or have an accident during a visit to an EEA country or Switzerland, free or reduced-cost necessary treatment is available in most cases on production of a valid European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). Each country has different rules about state medical provision. In some, treatment is free. In many countries you will have to pay part or all of the cost, and then claim a full or partial refund. The EHIC gives access to state-provided medical treatment only and the scheme gives no entitlement to medical repatriation costs, nor does it cover ongoing illnesses of a non-urgent nature, so comprehensive travel insurance is advised. Note that the EHIC replaces the Form E111, which will no longer be valid after 31 December 2005. Some restrictions apply, depending on your nationality. Healthcare in Poland is provided by units that have a contract with the National Health Fund (Centrala Narodowego Funduszu Zdrowia or NFZ). In an emergency, go to the nearest basic healthcare GP and make sure they are contracted to the NFZ. If they are not contracted to the NFZ, you will be charged as a private patient and will not be able to get a refund. Check that the dentist you go to is contracted to the NFZ, otherwise you will be charged privately. Only basic emergency dental care is provided free of charge. Depending on the medication, you will have to pay between 30 and 50 per cent of the price of prescriptions, the full amount, or a fixed price. These charges are not refundable. You can go directly to a state hospital in an emergency and get free treatment. A GP can also refer you to a hospital and decide if you need an ambulance. Medicines provided in a hospital are free of charge. More information can be obtained from Central NFZ (National Health Fund) and regional branches, Ul. Grójecka 186, 02-390 Warszawa (tel: (22) 572 6036 or 6112; fax: (22) 572 6330; website: www.nfz.gov.pl/ue).

Travel - International

AIR: Poland's national airline is LOT Polish Airlines (LO) (website: www.lot.com).

Approximate flight times: From Warsaw to London is two hours, to Frankfurt/M is one hour 50 minutes, and to Prague is one hour 20 minutes.

Main airports: Warsaw (WAW) (Okecie) is 10km (6 miles) southwest of the city. To/from the airport: Buses and taxis are available. Travel time: 20-40 minutes by bus; 20-30 minutes by taxi. Facilities: Post office, banks, bureaux de change, bars, restaurants, left-luggage facilities, tourist information services, car hire and duty free shops. Kraków (KRK) (Balice John Paul II) is 16km (10 miles) west of the city centre. To/from the airport: Buses and taxis are available. Facilities: Bar,



bureau de change and car hire. There are duty free facilities in the departure hall. Wroclaw (WRO) (Strachowice) (website: www.airport.wroclaw.pl) is 8km (5 miles) from the city centre. To/from the airport: Buses, taxis and car hire are available. There is a daily connection to Frankfurt/M and twice weekly connection (Thursday and Sunday) to Düsseldorf. Katowice (KTW) is 34km (21 miles) from the city. There are connections to Copenhagen, Frankfurt/M and Munich daily. Facilities: Bank, duty free shop, post office, restaurants and shops. Gdansk (GDN) (website: www.airport.gdansk.pl) is the most common entry point into northern Poland.

Departure tax: None.

SEA: Main ports: The Port of Gdansk (website: www.portgdansk.pl) is situated at the intersection of the principal European transport routes, providing the most convenient connection between both Central and Eastern Europe and Scandinavia as well as between Western and Eastern Europe. Additionally, for countries such as the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine, the Belarus Republic and Hungary, the Port of Gdansk provides easy access to the Baltic Sea. Pol Ferries operates between Poland and Sweden, Denmark and Finland. For further information, contact the Polish National Tourist Office (see Top Things To Do) or Pol Ferries, ul. Chalubinskiego 8, 00-613, Warsaw (tel: (22) 830 0930; website: www.polferryes.com). Tickets can also be purchased from travel agents or the ferry terminal (tel: (58) 343 1887).

RAIL: Polish State Railways (PKP) (website: www.pkp.pl) operates EuroCity trains between Poland and a number of major European cities. All services from Western Europe to Poland pass through the Czech Republic, Germany or the Slovak Republic. The main routes link Warsaw with Berlin and Cologne, Budapest, Prague and Vienna. There is a car-sleeper service from the Hook of Holland to Poznan/ Warsaw. Rail passes: The Inter-Rail pass offers unlimited second-class train travel in up to 29 countries (includes Morocco and Turkey) split into eight zones (A-H). Three different tickets are available: a ticket covering one zone (two to six countries, 16 days' validity), a ticket covering two zones (six to ten countries, 22 days' validity) and an All Zone Pass (29 countries, one month's validity). Ferry services between Italy and Greece are included. Passengers must be resident in Europe for at least six months before the pass is used. Travel is not allowed in the passenger's country of residence. Travellers under 26 years receive a reduction of about 30 per cent. Children's tickets are reduced by about 50 per cent. Supplements are required for some high speed services, seat reservations and couchettes. Discounts are offered on Eurostar and some ferry routes. Available from Inter Rail (website: www.interrailnet.com). The EuroDomino pass enables holders anything from three to eight days' extensive travel within a one-month period on the entire rail network of their chosen country. It is valid in 28 European countries and North Africa, including the ferry service from Brindisi (Italy) to Igoumenitsa (Greece). To purchase a EuroDomino pass you must have been a resident in Europe for at least six months and a passport number is required at time of booking. It is not permitted to purchase a pass for travel within your own country of residence. To qualify for the youth rates, you must be under 26 years on the first date of validity of the pass. Children aged four-eleven years inclusive pay half the adult fares rounded up to the nearest pound. Children under four years travel for free. Seat reservations, couchette and sleeper charges are not included in the cost of the pass and are payable at the normal rate. Passholder fares are payable on some services. Reservation/Supplement charges are payable on all trains within Spain. Available from Rail Europe (website: www.raileurope.co.uk/railpasses/eurodomino.htm).

ROAD: Poland is best reached from the Czech Republic and Germany or the car-sleeper rail service from the Hook of Holland to Poznan/Warsaw. There are extensive bus and coach services. Eurolines, departing from Victoria Coach Station in London, serves destinations in Poland. For further information contact Eurolines (tel: (08705) 143 219; website: www.eurolines.com).



Travel - Internal

AIR: All internal airlines are operated by LOT Polish Airlines (website: www.lot.com) and there is a comprehensive network linking all major cities.

RAIL: Cheap and efficient InterCity trains are operated by Polish State Railways (PKP) (website: www.pkp.pl) and link all parts of the country in a network radiating from Warsaw. There are two classes of travel. The Polrailpass (and Junior Polrailpass for travellers under 26) is available for eight, 15, 21 or 30 days. This pass is available from travel agents and international rail ticket outlets, as well as from railway stations and travel agents within Poland. Children under four years of age travel free. Children aged four to 10 pay half fare.

ROAD: Traffic drives on the right. Poland has a dense network of filling stations. Unleaded petrol is available in most of the petrol stations. Most filling stations located along international routes are open 24 hours a day. The Polish Automobile and Motorway Federation Polski Związek Motorowy (PZM) can be called on 9637 nationwide for assistance. Starter emergency breakdown service can be called on (0801) 122 222. For further information, contact Polski Związek Motorowy, ul Kazimierzowska 66, 02-518 Warsaw (tel: (22) 849 9361; website: www.pzm.pl).
Bus: There are good regional bus and coach services operated by Polish Motor Communications (PKS) as well as the Polski Express connecting most towns. **Car hire:** Self-drive cars are available at the airport or through various car rental offices in town centres. The minimum age is 21. Charges are usually based on a daily rate plus a kilometre charge. **Regulations:** Minimum driving age is 17. The speed limit is 60kph (40mph) in built-up areas, 90kph (57mph) on major roads and 110kph (69mph) on motorways. Seat belts and warning triangles are compulsory. Trams have the right of way. From 1 October to 1 April, all vehicles should have their lights switched on at all times. **Documentation:** Tourists travelling in their own cars should have car registration cards, their national driving licence (driving licences of EU nationals are accepted) and valid Green Card motor insurance. An International Driving Permit is also required.

URBAN: **Bus:** There are good services in all towns, with additional trams and trolleybuses operating in a dozen of the larger urban areas. Warsaw has bus, tramway and rail services. A flat fare is charged and there are pre-purchase tickets and passes. **Tram:** Weekend and seven-day tourist tickets can be purchased. Most public transport operates from 0530-2300. **Taxi:** These are available in all main towns. They are usually found at ranks or can be ordered by phone. There is a surcharge from 2300-0500 and for journeys out of town, as well as at weekends. Taxi drivers may insist on payment in hard currency. Tipping is welcomed.

TRAVEL TIMES: The following chart gives approximate travel times (in hours and minutes) from Warsaw to other major cities/towns in Poland.

Air	Road	Rail	Kraków	1.40	4.00	2.35	Poznan	1.00	4.00	3.00	Wroclaw	1.15	6.00	4.35	Gdansk	1.00	6.00

8 ACCOMMODATION

HOTELS: Most major international hotel chains are represented in Poland. International Student Hotels offer better facilities than youth hostels and are inexpensive, comfortable and pleasant. **Grading:** Hotels in Poland are graded in five categories: luxury, 4-star, 3-star, 2-star and 1-star. In addition there are tourist hotels, boarding houses and motels, each graded into three or four categories.



GUEST HOUSES: Three categories are available in all towns and run by regional tourist boards. Reservations can be made from local offices.

CAMPING/CARAVANNING: There are 213 campsites in Poland, nearly 75 per cent of which are fitted with 220-volt powerpoints and several with 24-volt points for caravans. Facilities also include washrooms, canteens and nearby restaurants and food kiosks. The main camping season is June to August. Holders of an international camping card (FICC) qualify for a 10 per cent rebate on rates. Grading: There are two categories. Category I sites cover an area of 100 sq m (10,764 sq ft) and have 24-hour reception and lighting.

YOUTH HOSTELS: There are 155 hostels in Poland which are open all year round, and 450 only in the summer season.. Addresses can be found in the Youth Hostel Handbook published by the Polish Youth Hostels Association.

ACCOMMODATION INFORMATION: Polish Youth Hostels Association (Polskie Towarzystwo Schronisk Młodzieżowych)Ul. Chocimska 28, 00-791 Warsaw, Poland Tel: (22) 849 8128.E-mail: hostellingpol.ptsm@pro.onet.plPolish Hotel AssociationUl. Nowogrodzka 44 m 2, 00-695 Warsaw, Poland Tel: (22) 622 6991-3.Website: www.hotel.plPolish Federation of Camping and Caravanning (Polska Federacja Campingu i Caravaningu)Ul. Grochowska 331, 03-838 Warsaw, Poland Tel: (22) 810 6050.Website: www.pfcc.info

Introduction

Poland is now one of the major destinations for travellers. Its beauty can be admired in both its old cities and in the wild scenery of 22 national parks, about 1200 nature reserves, more than 100 landscape parks and 400 protected areas. The country's regions are largely divided **into horizontal bands:** the Baltic Coast and the hilly post-glacial lake district. Central Poland is split into northern lowlands and southern uplands, including the Kraków-Wielun Upland with its limestone areas, caves and medieval castles. The Carpathian Mountains, including the Tatras, lie in the extreme south; their mountain scenery, folklore and sports facilities are important parts of their charm.

Warsaw

Spanning both banks of the River Wisla (Vistula), Poland's capital and largest city was almost completely destroyed during World War II. Following massive and painstaking reconstruction, Warsaw's Old Town (Stare Miasto) on the west bank was authentically reconstructed from original plans and is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Polish capital plays an important role in the country's cultural life and there are over 20 museums. One of the best is the Warsaw Historical Museum, which traces Warsaw's history and shows films shot by the Nazis showing their systematic destruction of the city. The National Museum has a superb collection of art and archaeology. Zamek Królewski, the reconstructed Royal Castle, is now an important museum of fine and applied arts. The Wilanów Palace has a spectacular collection of old paintings and furniture; its Orangerie holds the new Museum of Posters. The enormous Palace of Culture and Science was an unwelcome gift from Josef Stalin; however, it offers wonderful views over the whole city. The Łazienki Palace is set in a lovely park with an open-air Greek theatre and a monument to the famous Polish composer Frederic Chopin. The National and the Polish are the most renowned of the city's many theatres. Zelazowa Wola, 53km (32 miles) west of Warsaw, is an attractive park in which stands the manor house where Chopin was born. Nature enthusiasts can visit the nearby Kampinos National Park, where it is possible to see wild boar and elk.

The East



Lublin is a charming medieval university city 164km (102 miles) southeast of Warsaw. Still further east on the banks of the River Labunka is Zamosc, founded at the end of the 16th century and once an important centre on the trade route linking Northern and Western Europe to the Black Sea. Its Old Town has recently been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Its focal point is the Market Square; the old and new Lublin Gates indicate the city's former role as an important regional fortress. Lublin is given a southern flavour through the many buildings designed by Bernardo Morando of Padua, and by the many Armenians and Greeks who settled here. The Bialowieza National Park, an area of primal forest straddling the border with Belarus, is the last major refuge of the European bison as well as being home to many other rare forest-dwelling species.

The South

KRAKÓW: Poland's second city also stands on the banks of the River Wisla (Vistula), but far to the south in the wooded foothills of the Tatra Mountains. It still retains its charming medieval air, having largely escaped destruction during World War II; it is one of UNESCO's 12 most significant historical sites. In the middle of the central Market Square the largest in Europe is the Cloth Hall, which was reconstructed in the 19th century from 14th-century merchants' stalls; this houses the art and sculpture galleries of the National Museum. Opposite is St Mary's Church with its world-famous wooden altar carved by Wit Stwosz. The Jagiellonian University, founded in 1364, is one of the oldest in Europe. After many years of neglect, Kraków's former Jewish quarter, Kazimierz, is reviving; the Old Synagogue (1557) is the oldest surviving in the country. Also in Kazimierz is the country's largest Ethnographic Museum. Kraków was Poland's capital until 1596. Overlooking the city is Wawel Castle, with its marvellous 16th-century tapestries and, beside it, the Gothic Cathedral, where many Polish kings are buried. The Czartoryski Palace houses the city's best collection of ancient art, European paintings and crafts.

EXCURSIONS: Another of Poland's UNESCO World Heritage Sites is the cathedral-like salt mines at Wieliczka, 13km (8 miles) from Kraków. The subterranean route spans 4.5km (2.8 miles) leading to the oldest part of the mine through 14th- and 15th-century chapels and crystal caves. 70km (43 miles) from Kraków lies the site of the Oswiecim-Birkenau (Auschwitz-Birkenau) concentration camp in which 4 million people were killed by the Nazis. The camp area has been designated as a memorial monument and a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. Other important nearby locations include the Bledowska Desert, perhaps the only true desert in Europe; Wadowice, the birthplace of Pope John Paul II; and the Icon of the Black Madonna in the huge Jasna Góra monastery complex at Czestochowa, 100km (60 miles) north of Kraków (reputed to have been painted by St Luke). Bieszczadzki National Park is part of the Carpathian mountain range and contains the surviving fragments of the Great Bieszczady Forest, home to the brown bear, lynx and wildcat.

Tatry (Tatras Mountains)

Although the 80km of the Tatras in the extreme south are only a small part of the entire range, they attract over 1.5 million visitors every year, with high peaks for climbing, excellent trails, cable cars and superb wintersports facilities. Zakopane, about 112km (70 miles) south of Kraków in the foothills, is a charming resort and wintersports centre. There is a fairytale atmosphere here, with its 'gingerbread' wooden cottages and many inhabitants who still **wear national dress. There are four National Parks in the Tatras:** Babiogórski, Gorczanski, Pieninski (also with the beautiful mountain gorge of the River Dunajec) and Tatranski. Camping is not allowed in the parks; climbing is, but only with a guide. Organised trips are available to the Koscieliska Valley, through beautiful countryside; the mountain of Kasprowy Wierch by means of a cable car



offering spectacular views; and Morskie Oko, the glacial lake which is one of the Tatras' main attractions.

The West (Silesia and Wielkopolska)

The principal city in the southwest and the capital of Lower Silesia, Wroclaw (Breslau) can claim **to be the cradle of the Polish state**: it was here that the Polanie tribe built their first fortified settlement (on Ostrow Tumski Island). During the 14th century, the city fell under the rule of Bohemia, followed by the Hapsburgs in the 16th century, and later the Prussians and the German Third Reich. During World War II the town had become a Nazi stronghold, 'Festung Breslau'. But after the war the German population was forced to leave and large numbers of displaced Poles from Lwów (now L'viv) in the Polish Ukraine were encouraged to move there. The mingling of the inhabitants of these two great cities has greatly shaped Wroclaw's culture. The modern city is threaded with 90km (56 miles) of canals and tributaries of the River Oder and there are more than 100 bridges. Important sights include the 15th-century Town Hall, now the Historical Museum; the Ethnographic Museum in the Royal Palace; and the Cathedral on Ostrow Tumski (Cathedral Island). The 120m (400ft) by 15m (50ft) tall painting, Panorama of the Battle of Raclawice, remains the city's best-loved sight; painted in 1894, it celebrates the Russian army's defeat by Tadeusz Krsciuzsko's people's militia. Within easy travel from the city are the spas and health resorts of the Klodzko Valley, the rugged Stolowe Mountains, the ski resorts in the Karkonosze Mountains (part of which is a national park) on the border with the Czech Republic, and the many picturesque medieval (and earlier) towns in the region, such as Boleslawiec, Paczkow and Swidnica. Wielkopolska is the core of the original Polish nation. Poznan, the sedate regional capital, stands beside the River Warta in the middle of the flatlands north of Silesia. Important sights include the Italianate Town Hall in the Old Market Square, the Gorki Palace, the 12th-century Church of St John and Przemyslaw Castle, once the seat of the Grand Dukes of Poland. The National Museum houses one of the country's few displays of old master paintings. Watersports can be enjoyed in and on the many lakes in the woods surrounding the city. The Poznan International Trade Fair is held here every year in June.

The North

Formerly known as Danzig, the important Baltic port of Gdansk has had a troubled history. The Order of Teutonic Knights took it from the Poles in the 14th century and later lost it to the Prussians. In the 20th century, it lost its status as a free city when it was attacked and occupied by Nazi Germany in 1939. Its Lenin Shipyards were the birthplace of Solidarnosc (Solidarity) and thus of today's democratic Poland. Almost the entire city was destroyed in World War II, but was restored to its former glory. The city is now a provincial capital at the mouth of the Wisla (Vistula) and Motlawa rivers and a commercial, industrial and scientific centre. The city has the largest Gothic church in Poland and possibly the largest brick building in the world the Church of the Virgin Mary (Kosciol Mariacki). The 17th-century Golden Gate and the Court of the Fraternity of St George can be viewed along the spectacular Royal Way, one of Gdansk's most historic streets. The National Art Museum has an excellent collection of Gothic art and sculpture. The beach resort at nearby Sopot has Europe's longest pier (500m/1640ft). Within easy reach are the forested Hel Peninsula, the Kashubian Lakeland, and the Teutonic castles at Malbork (Marienburg), Gniew and elsewhere. There is also a narrow-gauge railway that runs along the Vistula Spit offering an attractive way to see part of the Baltic coast. Spread across the northeast is Mazuria, a huge, thinly populated area of lakes, dense forests and swamps. It is rich in wildlife, including wild bison and Europe's largest herd of elks, and offers every form of outdoor pursuit sailing, canoeing, camping even mushroom-picking. In the heart of the Mazurian forest, at Ketrzyn (Rastenburg), is the site of Hitler's 'Eagle's Nest', the concrete bunker where members of his High Staff attempted to assassinate him in August 1944. The medieval walled town of Torun,



a UNESCO World Heritage Site on the banks of the River Wisla (Vistula) south of Gdansk, was the birthplace of the astronomer Copernicus (Mikolaj Kopernik). The most notable historic sites include St Mary's Church, St John's Church (where Copernicus was baptised); the striking Gothic Town Hall and the Granaries (which helped to make Torun a prosperous trade town). Important museums are the Town Museum with the wonderful stained glass for which the town was known, the Copernicus Museum, and the Ethnographic Museum. Szczecin, 60km (37 miles) upstream from the mouth of the River Oder, is the largest port on the Baltic Sea. Formerly known as Stettin, it was the capital of Pomerania and its sights include the Pomeranian princes' 14th-century Palace and the 12th-century Cathedral. The city was largely rebuilt in the last century taking Paris as a model, and has a spacious feel to it with many wide, tree-lined boulevards. It is easy to escape the cities of the north for the beach resorts of the Pomeranian coast, such as Kolobrzeg (large and fashionable) or Leba (a quiet resort with a beach of fabulous white sand), or the beech woods and islands of the Wolin National Park. Slowinski National Park is known for its giant 'wandering sand dunes' which can shift several metres each year.

9 SPORT & ACTIVITIES

Wintersports: The Tatra Mountains are Poland's main skiing destination, the most popular resort being Zakopane (see also Resorts & Excursions section). The season is from November through to May. The densely wooded Bieszczady Mountains in the southeast are highly rated for cross-country skiing. Another popular wintersport is ice-boating on Poland's frozen waterways. Sleigh rides used to be popular with the Polish gentry and 'traditional' rides are available in most resorts.

Watersports: Poland's Baltic coast stretches for some 528km (330 miles), with long sandy beaches. Pollution levels in the Baltic sea are relatively high, particularly in the Bay of Gdansk. Water temperatures are fairly cold, rising to a maximum of 20°C (68°F) during summer. Cleaner and safer swimming is available in the Mazurian Lake District (consisting of approximately 3000 lakes), also a favourite angling destination. Poland's rivers (such as the Parseta, Rega and Stupia) are particularly good for bull trout. Tourists need to buy a fishing licence. For sailing, the Augustow, Ilawa and Mazurian lakes are best. Canoeists may also head to the Brodnica or Mysliborz lakelands, or the rivers Brda, Czarna Hancza and Obra where canoeing trips lasting up to 12 days can be undertaken. However, the main waterways are pretty polluted.

Hang gliding: Both hang gliding and paragliding are popular in the Beskid, Bieszczady and Sudety mountains. The town of Leszno is Poland's main gliding centre.

Other: Poland's national parks and nature reserves offer a variety of hiking trails through different types of landscapes ranging from dunes, beaches, rivers and lakes to deep forests and high mountains. Nature and wildlife enthusiasts can observe elks in Poland's marshes and European bison in the Bialowieza forest. Poland is also reputed to have Europe's largest population of storks. All the parks are open to visitors, though some may only be entered on foot and others, such as the Bialowieza National Park, may only be toured with a guide. Accommodation and catering facilities are available either within or near all parks. Different types of cycling routes are available throughout the country. Special cycling lanes are provided around larger cities. Cycling tours (notably through the Great Mazurian Lake District) are offered by specialist tour operators. Mountain biking is popular in the Bieszczady and Karkonosze mountains. Horses have traditionally been popular in Poland and horseriding enthusiasts have a large choice of riding schools to choose from. Polish stud farms are internationally renowned and welcome guests; board and lodging is provided and many stables also offer riding instruction. Horse



auctions are held at Janów Podlaski, Poznan, Racot and Walewice. The main horseracing tracks are Warsaw (Sluzewiec), Sopot, Raculka (near Zielona Gora), Bialy Bor (near Slupsk) and Ksiaz (near Walbrzych). Inexperienced riders may prefer riding a Hucul a very rare Polish mountain pony.

Entertainment

Food & Drink: Poland has a distinctive cuisine, with typical ingredients being dill, marjoram, caraway seeds, wild mushrooms and sour cream, which is frequently added to soups, sauces and braised meats. Polish meals start with przekaski (starters). Soups play an important part at mealtimes and are usually rich and very thick, and are often served in cups with small hot pasties stuffed with meat or cabbage. Poland is also a good country for fish (ryba). Pastries (ciastka) are also very good. Table service is the norm in restaurants. Western drinks, such as whisky, gin or brandy, can be obtained in most bars but are expensive. Wine is available but, again, is imported and expensive. The best bottled beer is zywiec, a fairly strong lager-type beer. Bars have table and/or counter service. Coffee shops are very popular in Poland and are the favourite places for social meetings from early morning to late at night. They do not close during the day and have the same function as do pubs in the United Kingdom. Alcoholic drinks are available throughout the day. National specialities: Bigos (sauerkraut, fresh cabbage, onions and any variety of leftover meat). Carp served in sweet-and-sour jellied sauce. Poached pike with horseradish in cream. Salted and rolled herring fillets with pickles and onions. Kulebiak (a large mushroom and cabbage pasty). Kabanos (long, thick sausages). Mysliwska (sausage made from pork and game). Barszcz (beetroot soup, excellent with sour cream). Zrazy zawijane (mushroom-stuffed beefsteak rolls in sour cream). Kasza (buckwheat). National drink: Vodka (wódka, in many various flavours). Tipping: 10 to 15 per cent is customary in restaurants and cafes. Tipping in self-service restaurants is not expected. Tips for porter's services in hotels and train stations are customary but amounts are at the traveller's discretion.

Nightlife: Warsaw also reflects the strong theatrical and musical traditions of Poland, with about 17 theatres and three opera companies. Cinemas in Poland show both Polish and foreign films. There are some discos in Poland, as well as a growing number of nightclubs and music bars in Warsaw.

Shopping: Special purchases include glass and enamelware, handwoven rugs, silverware, handmade jewellery with amber and silver, dolls in regional costumes, woodcarvings and clay and metal sculptures. Shopping hours: Mon-Fri 0600-1800/1900, shorter hours on Saturday and Sunday. 'Night shops' open 2000-0800. Supermarkets and department stores open Mon-Sat 0900-2000. Bookshops open Mon-Fri 1100-1900.

Business

GDP: \$463 billion. Main exports: Machinery, transport, food and live animals. Main imports: Minerals, fuels, lubricants, chemicals and intermediate manufactured goods. Main trading partners: Germany, Italy, France, Spain, UK, China and Russian Federation.

Economy: As the largest economy in ex-Soviet eastern Europe, the fate of Poland was, and still is, central to that of the whole region. The economic contribution of the agricultural sector declined steadily throughout the 1990s and now accounts for just 2.9 per cent of the GDP, but still employs one-quarter of the workforce. Livestock and meat are major export earners; rye, wheat, oats, sugar beet and potatoes are the main crops. In the industrial sector, Poland's once substantial coal mining industry like its counterparts elsewhere in Europe has been scaled down in recent years. Other important industries are shipbuilding, textiles, steel, cement, chemicals and



food processing. Again following the trend across the continent, industry's contribution to the GDP has declined to 31.3 per cent, while the service sector has seen rapid growth. With the collapse of the communist system at the end of the 1980s, Poland adopted the 'big bang' strategy of rapid transition to a market economy: price controls (including subsidies) were removed at a stroke; production, distribution and trade were deregulated; large parts of the economy were privatised using a voucher system; the tax and fiscal systems were overhauled; and the national currency (the Zloty) was made fully convertible. The shock of these measures and the collapse of the Comecon trading system threw the economy into temporary crisis, but it recovered quickly and by the mid-1990s was growing strongly. Many of those parts of the economy still under state ownership including several important industrial enterprises were privatised, albeit at a more leisurely pace. By 2000, the private sector accounted for 70 per cent of GDP. Over the next two years the economy suffered mild recession, but by the end of 2003, growth had reached 3.4 per cent and is still rising. Inflation is currently 3.4 per cent. Unemployment, however, has risen consistently since 2000 to its current level of 19.5 per cent, which is one of the highest levels in Europe. This, in turn, has led to the growth of a large informal or 'grey' economy, in which as many as 2 million people may be engaged. Poland became a full member of the European Union on May 1 2004 as one of 10 new entrants. The decision to join was endorsed by 77 per cent of the electorate in a June 2003 national referendum. Within the EU, Poland may be expected to work with its fellow members of the 'Visegrad Group' Hungary and the Czech and Slovak Republics who are also joining the EU. Where necessary, they will seek to protect their regional interests against the larger and more powerful Western European economies.

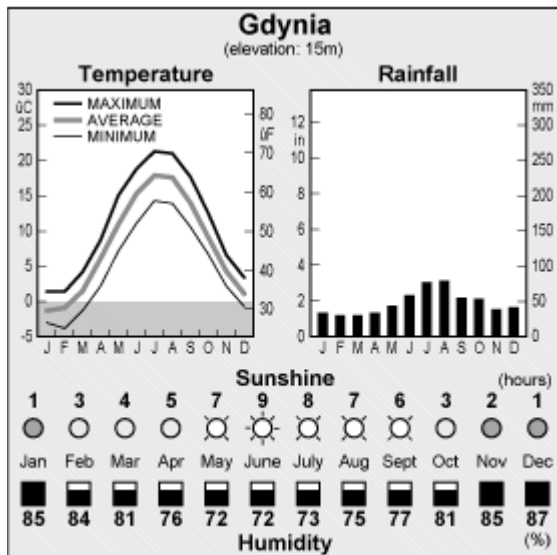
In Poland, a formal approach is favoured and it is therefore advisable to give plenty of notice of an intended visit. Employees in state organisations do not take a lunch break, but they have their **main meal after 1500. Office hours: Mon-Fri 0800-1600.**

Conferences/Conventions: The most popular conference venues are in Warsaw. Events are also hosted in Kraków, while Gdansk, Wroclaw and other towns are used occasionally.

Commercial Information: Polish Chamber of Commerce (Krajowa Izba Gospodarcza) PO Box 361, Trebacka 4, 00-074 Warsaw, Poland Tel: (22) 630 9600. Website: www.kig.pl



10 CLIMATE



Temperate with warm summers, crisp, sunny autumns and cold winters. Snow covers the mountainous area in the south of Poland (mid-December to April). Rain falls throughout the year.

Required clothing: Light- to mediumweights are worn during warmer months. Medium- to heavyweights are needed during winter. Rainwear is advisable all year.

11 HISTORY AND GOVERNMENT

History: For much of the medieval and early modern period, Poland was one of the largest states in Europe, although generally cut off from the mainstream of European life. By the 18th century, however, the combination of an antiquated social structure, the emergence of powerful neighbours, a king with no real power and a parliament that was able to veto any legislation if so much as one member voted against it (the *Liberum Veto*) had reduced Poland to the role of little more than a confused buffer state between Austria, Prussia and Russia. One observer commented on how the Polish state had 'legalised anarchy and called it a constitution.' The situation was finally resolved between 1772 and 1795, when as a result of three partition treaties signed by Austria, Prussia and Russia the country was carved up. A small area around Warsaw briefly enjoyed a form of independence between 1807 and 1831 as the Grand Duchy of Warsaw and Congress Poland but subsequently became a province of Russia. Poland did not re-acquire independence until 1918. In 1926, a military regime ousted the civilian administration and governed Poland until the country was once again dismembered by its powerful neighbours, Germany and the Soviet Union, after the 1939 Anti-Aggression Pact between the two. Prior commitments by Britain to defend Polish sovereignty led the former to declare war on Germany and initiate World War II. In 1941, Germany drove the USSR out of Poland, to be ejected, in turn, by the Soviets four years later. At the end of World War II, the Soviet-backed Polish Workers' Party formed a coalition government under Wladyslaw Gomulka, until he was dismissed for 'deviationism' in 1948. In the same year, the Polish Workers' Party merged with the Polish Socialist Party to form Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza (Polish United Workers' Party, PZPR). In 1956, three years after Stalin's death, Gomulka returned amid growing unrest to



implement a plan of gradual liberalisation of society and the economy. Following disturbances in the industrial port of Gdansk, Gomulka was replaced as First Secretary of the party by Edward Gierek. Opposition to the regime was, significantly, led by elements of the industrial work force in contrast to movements elsewhere in Eastern Europe which were led by intellectuals, such as Charter 77 and supported by the Catholic Church, a major political force in Poland that the communists had never been able to fully suppress. This was a vital factor in the rapid growth of the Solidarnosc (Solidarity) labour movement in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The PZPR's initial response to this challenge was confused. Neither Gierek nor his successor, Stanislaw Kania, proved able to stop the growth of Solidarnosc or the declining of the PZPR. In 1981, with the backing of Moscow, the former army chief-of-staff, General Wojciech Jaruzelski, replaced Kania and imposed martial law. Solidarnosc was banned and its senior figures detained, including its leader, shipyard electrician Lech Walesa. The early 1980s saw a tense stand-off between the state and the unions. Ultimately, the advent of the Gorbachev era in the Soviet Union made an accommodation between the two sides practicable. In 1988, following the virtual collapse of the economy, the PZPR government resigned and opened genuine negotiations with Solidarnosc on economic and constitutional reforms. Solidarnosc was legalised in 1989, paving the way for elections to the new bicameral National Assembly (see below) in June of that year. Not surprisingly, Solidarnosc swept the board in the one-third of seats it was allowed to contest. Tadeusz Mazowiecki became the first non-communist prime minister of a Warsaw Pact country. General Jaruzelski was re-elected as president. This was the high-water mark for Solidarnosc: over the next few years the whole of eastern Europe shed its communist governments, the collapse of the Soviet Union itself followed shortly after. Poland now found itself in a completely new political and economic environment and this brought about the implosion of Solidarnosc in the form of a deep split - mainly over economic policy - between supporters of Walesa and of Mazowiecki. Both stood at the first wholly free presidential election in November 1990. Walesa won, and Mazowiecki was replaced as prime minister by Jan Krzysztof Bielecki. Elections to the National Assembly took place in October 1991. In all, 29 parties, including the Friends of Beer, gained representation in the Sejm (lower house of the national assembly). Since then, the number of parties has been made more manageable - and stable government a more feasible proposition - by the introduction of a 5 per cent threshold. The bitter and closely fought 1995 presidential campaign pitted Walesa against the ex-communist and government negotiator with Solidarnosc, Alexander Kwasniewski, standing for the Democratic Left Alliance. Against most predictions, Kwasniewski was victorious in the head-to-head run-off against the former trade union leader. Walesa's defeat surprised many in the West who failed to appreciate how unpopular he had become at home. Kwasniewski also comfortably won the most recent presidential poll in 2000. In 2001, the DLA also regained control of the Sejm from a coalition of centre-right parties which had formed the government since 1997. The election also brought an ominous development in the rise of a new far-right party, Samoobrona (Self Defence), which espouses a populist, xenophobic platform. Throughout the 1990s, and since, there has been little difference in the principal policies of the main political blocs: securing entry into both NATO and the European Union. As the largest of the former Eastern European states, Poland's position is crucial. Both objectives have now been achieved. Poland joined NATO in July 1997 and the European Union in May 2004. Despite that, there are some outstanding issues which have been left for resolution at a later date and may have a major bearing on Polish politics. These include subsidies for Poland's substantial agricultural sector, which is relatively underdeveloped, free labour movement and the country's poor record on pollution. Elections to both the Presidency and the Sejm took place in 2005. Conservative Lech Kaczynski replaced leftist Kwasniewski as President on 23 October. He won on a platform combining traditionalist Catholic values with promises to curb corruption. The Warsaw mayor captured more than 54 percent of the vote. Two rounds of voting were necessary because neither he nor his opponent Donald Tusk gained a majority in the first round. Aleksander Kwasniewski could no longer run after two five-year terms. The composition of Poland's new centre-right coalition cabinet was made public on October 31.



The cabinet is dominated by the traditionalist Law and Justice party (PiS), which won the September elections pledging to defend Catholic values. Prime Minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz has eight non-party technocrats in his 17-member cabinet, which ends the rule of former communists.

Government: Under the new constitution, which came into force in October 1997, legislative power in Poland is vested in a bicameral national assembly. The 460-seat lower house is the Sejm, while a new 100-seat Upper Chamber has been created with the power of veto over all legislation put forward by the Sejm. Elections are by proportional representation.

Travel Advice

Most visits to Poland are trouble-free but you should be aware of the global risk of indiscriminate international terrorist attacks, which could be against civilian targets, including places frequented by foreigners. This advice is based on information provided by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the UK. It is correct at time of publishing. As the situation can change rapidly, visitors **are advised to contact the following organisations for the latest travel advice:** British Foreign and Commonwealth Office Tel: (0845) 850 2829. Website: www.fco.gov.uk US Department of State Website: <http://travel.state.gov/travel>

Top Things To See

Spanning both banks of the River Wisla (Vistula), Warsaw, Poland's capital and largest city was almost completely destroyed during World War II. Following massive and painstaking reconstruction, Warsaw's Old Town (Stare Miasto) on the west bank was authentically reconstructed from original plans and is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Polish capital plays an important role in the country's cultural life and there are over 32 museums. One of the best is the Warsaw Historical Museum, which traces Warsaw's history and shows films shot by the Nazis showing their systematic destruction of the city. The National Museum has a superb collection of art and archaeology. Zamek Królewski, the reconstructed Royal Castle, is now an important museum of fine and applied arts. The Wilanów Palace has a spectacular collection of old paintings and furniture; its Orangerie holds the new Museum of Posters. For wonderful views over the whole city, go to the enormous Palace of Culture and Science, an unwelcome gift from Josef Stalin. The Lazienki Palace is set in a lovely park with an open-air Greek theatre and a monument to the famous Polish composer Frederic Chopin. See the manor house where Chopin was born in the an attractive park of Zelazowa Wola, 53km (32 miles) west of Warsaw. In Zamosc's Old Town, which has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site, head for the Market Square. The old and new Lublin Gates indicate the city's former role as an important regional fortress. Lublin is given a southern flavour through the many buildings designed by Bernardo Morando of Padua, and by the many Armenians and Greeks who settled here. Immerse yourself in Krakow's charming medieval atmosphere; it is one of UNESCO's 12 most significant historical sites. In the middle of the central Market Square the largest in Europe is the Cloth Hall, which was reconstructed in the 19th century from 14th-century merchants' stalls; this houses the art and sculpture galleries of the National Museum. Opposite, discover St Mary's Church with its world-famous wooden altar carved by Wit Stwosz. The Jagiellonian University, founded in 1364, is one of the oldest in Europe. After many years of neglect, Kraków's former Jewish quarter, Kazimierz, is reviving; the Old Synagogue (1557) is the oldest surviving in the country. Also in Kazimierz is the country's largest Ethnographic Museum. Overlooking the city is Wawel Castle, with its marvellous 16th-century tapestries and, beside it, the Gothic Cathedral, where many Polish kings are buried. The Czartoryski Palace houses the city's best collection of ancient art, European paintings and crafts. Discover another of Poland's UNESCO World Heritage Sites, the cathedral-like salt mines at Wieliczka, 13km (8 miles) from Kraków. The subterranean



route spans 4.5km (2.8 miles) leading to the oldest part of the mine through 14th- and 15th-century chapels and crystal caves. See the Bledowska Desert, perhaps the only true desert in Europe. Visit Wadowice, the birthplace of Pope John Paul II. See the Icon of the Black Madonna in the huge Jasna Góra monastery complex at Czestochowa, 100km (60 miles) north of Kraków (reputed to have been painted by St Luke). Locate Wroclaw (Breslau)'s 100 bridges. Other important sights include the 15th-century Town Hall, now the Historical Museum; the Ethnographic Museum in the Royal Palace; and the Cathedral on Ostrow Tumski (Cathedral Island). The 120m (400ft) by 15m (50ft) tall painting, Panorama of the Battle of Raclawice, remains the city's best-loved sight; painted in 1894, it celebrates the Russian army's defeat by Tadeusz Krsciuzko's people's militia. In Poznan, do not miss the Italianate Town Hall in the Old Market Square, the Gorki Palace, the 12th-century Church of St John and Przemyslaw Castle, once the seat of the Grand Dukes of Poland. The National Museum houses one of the country's few displays of old master paintings. The Baltic port of Gdansk, formerly known as Danzig, is famous for its Lenin Shipyards which were the birthplace of Solidarnosc (Solidarity) and thus of today's democratic Poland. See the largest Gothic church in Poland and possibly the largest brick building in the world the Church of the Virgin Mary (Kosciol Mariacki). The 17th-century Golden Gate and the Court of the Fraternity of St George can be viewed along the spectacular Royal Way, one of Gdansk's most historic streets. The National Art Museum has an excellent collection of Gothic art and sculpture. The beach resort at nearby Sopot has Europe's longest pier (500m/1640ft). Within easy reach are the forested Hel Peninsula, the Kashubian Lakeland, and the Teutonic castles at Malbork (Marienburg), Gniew and elsewhere. There is also a narrow-gauge railway that runs along the Vistula Spit offering an attractive way to see part of the Baltic coast. In the heart of the Mazurian forest, at Ketrzyn (Rastenburg), view the site of Hitler's 'Eagle's Nest', the concrete bunker where members of his High Staff attempted to assassinate him in August 1944. The medieval walled town of Torun, a UNESCO World Heritage Site on the banks of the River Wisla (Vistula), south of Gdansk, was the birthplace of the astronomer Copernicus (Mikolaj Kopernik). The most notable historic sites include St Mary's Church, St John's Church (where Copernicus was baptised); the striking Gothic Town Hall and the Granaries (which helped to make Torun a prosperous trade town). Important museums are the Town Museum with the wonderful stained glass for which the town was known, the Copernicus Museum, and the Ethnographic Museum. In Szczecin, 60km (37 miles) upstream from the mouth of the River Oder, set your eyes on the Pomeranian princes' 14th-century Palace and the 12th-century Cathedral. The city was largely rebuilt in the last century taking Paris as a model, and has a spacious feel to it with many wide, tree-lined boulevards.

Tourist Information: Polish National Tourist Office in the UK Level 3, Westec House, West Gate, London, W5 1YY, UK Tel: (0870) 0675 010 (brochure line). Website: www.visitpoland.org Polish National Tourist Office 5 Marine View Plaza, Suite 208, Hoboken, New Jersey 07030, USA Tel: (201) 420 9910. Website: www.polandtour.org

Top Things To Do

Go to the theatre. The National and the Polish are the most renowned of Warsaw's many theatres. Poland's national parks and nature reserves offer a variety of hiking trails through different types of landscapes ranging from dunes, beaches, rivers and lakes to deep forests and high mountains. Nature enthusiasts can visit the Kampinos National Park, near Warsaw, where it is possible to see wild boar and elk. The Bialowieza National Park, an area of primal forest straddling the border with Belarus, is the last major refuge of the European bison as well as being home to many other rare forest-dwelling species. Bieszczadski National Park is part of the Carpathian mountain range and contains the surviving fragments of the Great Bieszczady Forest, home to the brown bear, lynx and wildcat. Horses have traditionally been popular in Poland and horseriding enthusiasts have a large choice of riding schools to choose from. Polish stud farms



are internationally renowned and welcome guests; board and lodging is provided and many stables also offer riding instruction. Horse auctions are held at Janów Podlaski, Poznan, Racot and Walewice. The main horseracing tracks are Warsaw (Sluzewiec), Sopot, Raculka (near Zielona Gora), Bialy Bor (near Slupsk) and Ksiaz (near Walbrzych). Inexperienced riders may prefer riding a Hucul a very rare Polish mountain pony. Spread across the northeast is Mazuria, a huge, thinly populated area of lakes, dense forests and swamps. It is rich in wildlife, including wild bison and Europe's largest herd of elks, and offers every form of outdoor pursuit sailing, canoeing, camping and even mushroom-picking. The Tatra Mountains are Poland's main skiing destination. Although the 80km of the Tatras in the extreme south are only a small part of the entire range, they attract over 1.5 million visitors every year, with high peaks for climbing, excellent trails, cable cars and superb wintersports facilities. Zakopane, about 112km (70 miles) south of Kraków in the foothills, is a charming resort and wintersports centre. There is a fairytale atmosphere here, with its 'gingerbread' wooden cottages and many inhabitants who still wear national dress. Organised trips are available to the Koscieliska Valley, through beautiful countryside; the mountain of Kasprowy Wierch by means of a cable car offering spectacular views; and Morskie Oko, the glacial lake which is one of the Tatras' main attractions. Another popular wintersport is ice-boating on Poland's frozen waterways. Sleigh rides used to be popular with the Polish gentry and 'traditional' rides are available in most resorts. Relax at the spas and health resorts of the Klodzko Valley, which are within easy travel from Wroclaw (Breslau). Escape the cities of the north for the beach resorts of the Pomeranian coast, such as Kolobrzeg (large and fashionable) or Leba (a quiet resort with a beach of fabulous white sand), or the beech woods and islands of the Wolin National Park. Slowinski National Park is known for its giant 'wandering sand dunes' which can shift several metres each year. Swimming is also available in the Mazurian Lake District (consisting of approximately 3000 lakes), also a favourite angling destination. For sailing, the Augustow, Ilawa and Mazurian lakes are best. Canoeists may also head to the Brodnica or Mysliborz lakelands, or the rivers Brda, Czarna Hancza and Odra where canoeing trips lasting up to 12 days can be undertaken. Pay tribute to the victims of the holocaust at Oswiecim-Birkenau (Auschwitz-Birkenau) concentration camp, 70km (43 miles) from Kraków. The camp area has been designated as a memorial monument and a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.

Tourist Information: Polish National Tourist Office in the UK Level 3, Westec House, West Gate, London, W5 1YY, UK Tel: (0870) 0675 010 (brochure line). Website: www.visitpoland.org Polish National Tourist Office 5 Marine View Plaza, Suite 208, Hoboken, New Jersey 07030, USA Tel: (201) 420 9910. Website: www.polandtour.org

Overview II

Situated at the centre of Europe, and the largest of the former Eastern European states, Poland's position is crucial. The principal city in the southwest and the capital of Lower **Silesia, Wroclaw (Breslau) can claim to be the cradle of the Polish state:** it was here that the Polanie tribe built their first fortified settlement (on Ostrow Tumski Island). The country is best remembered for being the birthplace of the former Soviet bloc's first officially recognised independent mass political movement when strikes at the Gdansk shipyard in August 1980 led to agreement with the authorities on the establishment of the Solidarnosc (Solidarity) trade union. Opposition to the regime was significantly led by elements of the industrial work force in contrast to movements elsewhere in Eastern Europe which were led by intellectuals. It was also supported by the Catholic Church, a major political force in Poland that the communists had never been able to fully suppress. Elections in summer 1989 ushered in eastern Europe's first post-Communist government. A member of the European Union, the country has achieved some success in creating a market economy and attracting foreign investment although growth remains low. Today, Poland is also one of the major destinations for travellers. Its beauty can be admired in



both its old cities and in the wild scenery of its national parks and nature reserves. The country's regions are largely divided into horizontal bands: the Baltic Coast and the hilly post-glacial lake district. Central Poland is split into northern lowlands and southern uplands, including the Kraków-Wielun Upland with its limestone areas, caves and medieval castles. The Carpathian Mountains, including the Tatras, lie in the extreme south; their mountain scenery, folklore and sports facilities are important parts of their charm. Poland is a nation with a proud cultural heritage and strong theatrical and musical traditions. Warsaw and the main cities have theatres and opera companies that put on a whole range of musical and cultural programmes for both locals and visitors.

Communications

Telephone: Full IDD is available. Country code: 48. Cheap rate on long-distance calls is available from 1600-0600. Telephone cards can be purchased from post offices, newsagents and hotel receptions for local calls.

Mobile telephone: Roaming agreements exist with international mobile phone companies. Good coverage.

Internet: There are many internet cafes in cities.

Post: Service to Western Europe takes up to four days. Post office hours: Mon-Fri 0800-1800.

MEDIA: State-owned TV (TVP) still has the largest share of the audience for its two national channels. It also operates regional programmes and the international satellite channels. TVN operate the leading commercial TV channels. Polsat also operates a digital pay-TV platform and is present in the Baltic states. Up to a quarter of Poles also watch foreign television channels. State-owned Polish Radio reaches just over half of the population and there are more than 200 stations on the air. There are more than 300 newspapers, most of them local or regional. Press: The principal dailies are Gazeta Wyborcza, Rzeczpospolita and Super Express. The biggest selling daily, the Fakt Tabloid, is a relative newcomer. Weeklies include Gazeta Polska, Polityka and Wprost. English-language publications include The Warsaw Voice (weekly). TV: Public broadcaster Telewizja Polska (TVP) operates two national networks, regional services and international satellite channel; Commercial broadcaster TV Polonia TVN operates news channel TVN 24; Polsat is a commercial channel and pay-TV operator; The digital pay-TV platform Cyfra+ was launched by France's Canal+. Radio: Public broadcaster Polish Radio operates five national networks and many regional stations; Radio Polonia is a public, external service; RMF FM and Radio Zet are commercial stations.