

POLAND: Bridging East & West

11 days

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Day 1 Arrive in Krakow

Today we arrive in Krakow.

For over five centuries, from 1038 to 1596, this enchanting city served as the seat of Polish royalty before Warsaw claimed the crown. Tonight, we step into a living fairy tale where nearly 100 churches pierce the skyline and medieval squares echo with the footsteps of history. As twilight falls over the old world charm that has made Krakow one of Europe's most beloved destinations, we settle into our accommodation.

Overnight in Krakow.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Krakow: City Walking Tour

We begin our exploration atop Wawel Hill, where the Royal Castle commands sweeping views over the Vistula River. This limestone outcrop has witnessed Poland's most pivotal moments, from coronations to royal funerals. Our sightseeing unfolds largely on foot at a leisurely pace through Krakow's compact, well-preserved centre, where cobblestone streets connect architectural treasures within comfortable walking distances.

As we descend into the heart of the Old Town, we enter Europe's largest medieval market square—the magnificent Rynek Główny, where merchants have traded for over 700 years. The haunting trumpet call from St. Mary's Church towers above us, a tradition dating to the 13th century when a trumpeter's warning saved the city from Mongol invasion. Inside, we marvel at the Wit Stwosz altar, carved in 1489 by the master craftsman from Nuremberg—Poland's finest sculptural masterpiece. Our journey continues through the cobblestone streets to Jagiellonian University, one of Europe's oldest institutions, where Copernicus once studied the stars.

We conclude in Kazimierz, the former Jewish Quarter that has transformed from medieval independent town to vibrant cultural district. Here, centuries of Jewish heritage blend with contemporary café culture, creating an atmosphere both poignant and alive with possibility.

Overnight in Krakow.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Oskar Schindler Museum & Wieliczka Salt Mines

This morning we visit the Oskar Schindler's Factory Museum. The story of Oskar Schindler and his employees is one which has been well-known since the book and film by Thomas Keneally and Steven Spielberg (whose film 'Schindler's List' was shot almost entirely in Krakow). Individual histories of Krakow's wartime inhabitants guide visitors through the exhibit which covers the war of 1939, everyday life under occupation, the fate of the Jews and the city's underground resistance using vast archival documents, photos, radio and film recordings, period artifacts and multimedia.

After a break for lunch featuring Polish specialties,* we'll embark on a truly unique adventure: a descent into the Wieliczka Salt Mines. This isn't your average mine tour. Prepare to be amazed as we journey 5 kilometers (3 miles) beneath the earth's surface, exploring a world sculpted entirely by salt.

We'll wander through a labyrinth of salt-formed caves and grottoes, each with its own unique character and charm. Our descent will lead us to a mesmerizing subterranean lake, its surface reflecting the eerie glow of the mine lamps. And, perhaps the most awe-inspiring sight of all, we'll visit a chapel adorned with intricate sculptures, all carved entirely from the surrounding salt.

The scale of this operation is truly staggering. The Wieliczka Salt Mines boast 11 levels of galleries, stretching an incredible 300 kilometers (186 miles) in total. Over 700 years of continuous mining have yielded a staggering 20,000,000 tonnes (22,000,000 tons) of rock salt.

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But the history of the Wieliczka Salt Mines goes beyond mere extraction. Local legend tells the tale of Princess Kinga, a Hungarian princess whose lost ring was miraculously found within a block of salt mined here in the 13th century. This discovery is said to be the origin story of the mines themselves.

Return to Krakow.

* Because of the fullness of our day, and because past travellers indicated a desire for some independence for dinner while in Krakow (and an earlier night), we include a light lunch instead of dinner today.

Overnight in Krakow.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 4 Krakow - Oswiecim (Auschwitz) - Czestochowa - Lodz

Our journey takes a solemn turn as we arrive at Owicim and Birkenau, where the preserved barracks and railway ramps bear witness to humanity's darkest chapter. Here, 1.5 million souls from 28 nations perished, their stories now preserved as an eternal reminder of the importance of tolerance and human dignity. Our guide shares personal testimonies that transform statistics into human faces, ensuring these voices are never forgotten.

From this profound experience, we travel to Poland's spiritual heart—Czstochowa and the Jasna Góra Monastery. Within these sacred walls resides the Black Madonna, Poland's most venerated icon, believed painted by St. Luke himself and brought from Jerusalem in 1384. Pilgrims have journeyed here for centuries, drawn by the mysterious power of this darkened image that has survived Swedish invasions and Nazi occupation.

Our day concludes in ód (pronounced "Wooj"), the city that rose from humble village to Europe's textile powerhouse in just one century. Once known as "the promised land" and "city of many cultures," this multicultural marvel welcomed Germans, Russians, and Jews who together wove the fabric of industrial prosperity. Tonight, we discover how this diversity created one of Europe's most fascinating urban tapestries.

□
Overnight in Lodz.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Lodz - Warsaw: City Tour

Today our journey continues to Warsaw, a city that rises before us like a phoenix from ashes—refusing to surrender its soul to destruction. After being systematically razed during World War II, Warsaw's citizens embarked on one of history's most remarkable reconstruction projects, rebuilding their beloved Old Town brick by brick, using paintings and photographs as their guide. Today's UNESCO-protected historic centre stands as testimony to Polish determination and cultural pride.

We begin along the elegant Royal Route, where kings once processed to their coronations, then dive into the meticulously restored Old Town. Castle Square pulses with life while the Uprising Monument honours the heroes of 1944. Crossing the Vistula River to the Praga district, we gain panoramic views of this resilient capital that has shed its Soviet-era persona to emerge as Central Europe's dynamic business hub.

In the former Jewish Ghetto area, we visit the poignant Umschlagplatz memorial before exploring the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. Through innovative multimedia exhibitions, we discover the thousand-year story of Poland's Jewish community—once Europe's largest—whose vibrant culture flourished here before the Holocaust forever changed this landscape.

□
Overnight in Warsaw.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Warsaw Sightseeing - To Torun

The morning begins at the Warsaw Uprising Museum, housed in a former tram power station where artifacts tell the story of the city's 1944 rebellion. Love letters, weapons, and personal belongings of the insurgents create an intimate portrait of ordinary citizens who chose extraordinary courage. These exhibits reveal how 200,000 Warsaw residents fought for freedom during 63 days that would define their city's character forever.

Leaving Warsaw's complex history behind, we journey north to medieval Toru, a UNESCO World Heritage gem that time forgot to destroy. Nestled on the Vistula River's banks, this enchanting city miraculously escaped World War II bombing, preserving its Gothic architecture in pristine condition. The warm glow of red-brick buildings reflects centuries of Hanseatic League prosperity, when merchants from across Northern Europe gathered in these cobblestone squares.

As evening approaches, Toru's outdoor cafés come alive with the aroma of local delicacies. The majestic St. Mary's Church towers above us, its bells calling across centuries of Polish history while we settle into the timeless rhythm of medieval life.

Overnight in Torun.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Torun: Nicolaus Copernicus Museum - Gdansk

We begin in the very house where Nicolaus Copernicus was born in 1473, the man who revolutionised our understanding of the universe. The museum's collection of rare astronomical instruments, ancient star charts, and original manuscripts reveals how this Polish genius challenged centuries of accepted wisdom. Standing in his birthplace, we appreciate how medieval Toru nurtured the mind that would prove Earth revolves around the Sun.

The imposing 13th-century Town Hall dominates our morning explorations—one of Northern Europe's most magnificent civic buildings. Its Gothic towers have overseen seven centuries of commerce and culture, while the surrounding streets preserve the medieval urban planning that made Toru a Hanseatic League powerhouse.

Our journey continues to Gdask, the "Maritime Pearl of Poland," where narrow, peaked-roof buildings create one of Europe's most photogenic skylines. This Baltic port city carries the weight of momentous history—World War II began with disputes over Gdask's control, while decades later, Lech Wasa's Solidarity movement launched from its famous shipyards.

Tonight, we stroll the iconic Duga Street, past Neptune's Fountain and into St. Mary's Church, one of the world's largest brick churches, as Baltic sea breezes carry stories of merchants, warriors, and revolutionaries.

Overnight in Gdansk.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Gdansk Area Tour

Gdask's strategic Baltic position has made it one of Northern Europe's most coveted ports for centuries, a blessing that became a curse when competing powers tore the city apart. By 1945, the German population had fled and Polish settlers renamed the ruins "Gdask," beginning the painstaking reconstruction we admire today. Though most buildings rose from rubble, master craftsmen ensured every Gothic detail matched the original splendour.

We venture to nearby Oliwa Cathedral, where Cistercian monks first built their shrine in the 13th century. Fire destroyed and transformed this sacred space multiple times—the Gothic interior gave way to magnificent Baroque fixtures after a devastating 1577 blaze. The cathedral's crowning glory awaits: a massive organ with over 7,000 pipes, decorated with movable angels and painted stars. When constructed, this instrument was Europe's largest, and today its thunderous voice still rivals any concert hall.

At the European Solidarity Centre, multimedia exhibits chronicle how electrician Lech Wasa sparked a movement that would topple communism across Eastern Europe. The story of Solidarity—from shipyard strikes to Nobel Peace Prizes—unfolds through personal testimonies and artifacts from this pivotal chapter in modern European history.

The afternoon belongs to you in this "Amber Capital of the World," where shops display fossilised treasures from the Baltic's ancient forests. In order to maximize your free time in this fascinating place, we do not include dinner this evening.

Overnight in Gdansk.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast

Day 9 Gdansk - Malbork - Olsztyn

Our morning begins with Europe's largest brick building—the magnificent Teutonic Knights Castle at Malbork. This 13th-century fortress stretches along the Nogat River like a medieval city unto itself, its towering walls and Gothic halls testament to the military might of the Crusading order. UNESCO protection ensures future generations will witness the architectural genius that once commanded the Baltic trade routes.

As we continue southeast, Poland's landscape transforms into the pristine beauty of the Masurian Lake District. Rolling hills give way to sparkling waters and dense forests that have remained largely unchanged since the Ice Age carved this terrain. Olsztyn emerges like a fairy tale town, its medieval walls encircling narrow cobblestone streets where Gothic churches and Renaissance townhouses create perfect architectural harmony.

The fortified walls surrounding Olsztyn's old town whisper tales of Swedish invasions and Napoleonic campaigns, while cozy cafés and artisan shops invite us to experience the gentle rhythm of lake district life. Tonight, we rest in this charming sanctuary where nature and history exist in perfect balance.

Overnight in Olsztyn.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 10 Olsztyn - Olsztynek - Warsaw

Our final morning in the lake district brings us to the Museum of Folk Architecture in Olsztynek, one of Europe's oldest and most comprehensive open-air museums. Wooden houses, rustic barns, and historic windmills transported from across the region create a living timeline of traditional Polish life. These structures, saved from demolition and lovingly restored, preserve centuries of craftsmanship and cultural memory.

We explore the interiors of beautifully restored farmhouses, where traditional furniture and household items reveal the daily rhythms of rural Polish families. The evangelical church, blacksmith workshop, and pottery stands demonstrate how entire communities once functioned as self-sufficient units. Temporary exhibitions showcase contemporary folk art alongside ancient handicrafts, proving these traditions continue to evolve rather than merely survive.

As we journey back through the Polish countryside toward Warsaw, wooden windmills and thatched-roof villages dot the landscape like scenes from a living museum.

Tonight, we return to Poland's dynamic capital carrying memories of a nation that has preserved its cultural soul while embracing its European future.

Overnight in Warsaw.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Departure

Our Polish odyssey concludes as we bid farewell to Warsaw, or continue onwards to explore the Baltic States.

From Krakow's royal spires to Gdask's maritime heritage, from the depths of salt mines to the heights of castle towers, we've witnessed how

Poland bridges East and West through centuries of resilience, creativity, and unwavering spirit.

SZEROKIEJ DROGI! (Have a safe journey!)

Included Meal(s): Breakfast