

POLAND, UKRAINE & MOLDOVA**24 days**

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Day 1 Arrive in Krakow

Arrival in Krakow.

Krakow is one of the most beautiful cities in Europe. It was originally the home of the Polish royalty (between 1038 and 1596), before the capital was moved to Warsaw. The cobblestone streets, majestic churches (almost 100!), and old world charm make Krakow an unforgettable destination.

PLEASE NOTE: Our Poland program will operate slightly differently depending on the date selected. Because of closures on certain days of the week, the sightseeing order will vary from Spring to Fall (our overnight points, however, remain the same). This itinerary reflects the order of sightseeing for the immediately upcoming departure; once that trip departs, this itinerary will be updated for the following date.

Overnight in Krakow.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Krakow: City Walking Tour

Krakow is very compact, and the whole central region with its cobblestone streets is full of well-preserved architecture, Gothic churches and splendid museums. On our sightseeing tour (largely on foot at a leisurely pace) we visit Wawel Hill with the Royal Castle, Market Square, and the 16th century Renaissance Cloth Hall. We continue onward to Jagiellonian University and St Mary's Church with the Wit Stwosz altar. This was designed in 1489 by Wit Stwosz of Nuremburg and is the finest sculptural work in Poland.

We then stroll down the hill from the castle complex and enter the Old Town, one of the most famous old districts in Poland and the centre of Poland's political life from 1038 until King Sigismund III Vasa relocated his court to Warsaw in 1596. The entire medieval old town is among the first sites chosen for the UNESCO's World Heritage List. The district features the centrally located Rynek Glowny, or Main Square, the largest medieval town square of any European city. There is a number of historic landmarks in its vicinity, such as St. Mary's Basilica (Kosciol Mariacki), Church of St. Wojciech (St. Adalbert's), Church of St. Barbara, as well as other national treasures.

While in Krakow, we'll also have a walking visit of Kazimierz, once an independent town governed separately from Krakow until the late middle ages. Later, it became known as the Jewish Quarter of the city and was finally transformed into a center for Krakow's beatnik bars and cafe culture.

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.

We'll then break for lunch* after which we'll head to the Wieliczka Salt Mines. On our 5km (3 mile) journey below the earth's surface we will see the salt-formed caves and grottoes, a subterranean lake and a chapel with statues carved from salt. The mines' 11 levels of galleries stretch 300km (186 miles), and some 20,000,000 tonnes (22,000,000 tons) of rock salt were extracted over 700 years. According to local legend, the deposits were discovered in the 13th century by a Hungarian princess named Kinga, whose lost ring was found in a block of salt extracted here.

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* 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 first stop today is the Oswiecim (Auschwitz) and Brzezinka (Birkenau) Nazi concentration camps preserved as memorials to the 1.5 million people of 28 nationalities who perished here, the overwhelming majority of whom were Jewish. Our guided walking tour of the site reveals the compelling history of this region and the very human aspect of this particular historic location.

We continue to Czestochowa, the "spiritual home" of Poland, where pilgrims from every corner of the country come to Jasna Gora (Luminous Mountain) Monastery to revere the image of the Black Madonna, Poland's most important icon. Legend says that the icon was painted by St Luke the Evangelist on a piece of cypress wood from the table used by Mary in Nazareth. The icon was brought from Jerusalem and installed in the monastery around 1384.

We finish our day in Lodz (pronounced: Wooj). A small settlement, that in 1423 was granted civic rights, was thriving at the beginning of the 19th century. Lodz became one of the Europe's biggest and fastest growing textile industry centre. At that time, a new identity of the city - "a promised land" and "a city of many cultures" was created. In Lodz people of different nationalities and religions shared the same dream of a success. Despite the differences they were able to build the city together.

We arrive in time for dinner.

Overnight in Lodz.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Lodz - Warsaw: City Tour

This morning we travel to Warsaw, arriving in time to embark upon a full city tour.

After WWII, a reconstruction campaign by its citizens resulted in today's meticulous restoration of Warsaw's Old Town with its churches, palaces and market-place. It is an outstanding example of a near-total reconstruction of a span of history covering the 13th to the 20th century. Warsaw has shrugged off its dour Eastern Bloc image, and is finally showing its true colours. The vibrant heart of the largest country in "New Europe", Warsaw is now poised to make its presence felt as a business and cultural hub.

We begin our sightseeing with a drive along the Royal Route and a brief orientation drive around the city before beginning our walking tour of the Old Town, a UNESCO protected site. We visit Castle Square, the Uprising Monument, and then drive over to the Praga area for a view of the river. From there go to the Jewish Ghetto area and to Umschlag Platz where we visit the Museum of History of Polish Jews. The museum features a multimedia narrative exhibition about the vibrant Jewish community that flourished in Poland for a thousand years.

Overnight in Warsaw.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Warsaw Sightseeing - To Torun

Before leaving Warsaw, we'll visit the Warsaw Uprising Museum, dedicated to the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 (we visit today instead of yesterday as the museum is closed for group visits on Sundays). The museum sponsors research into the history of the Uprising, and the history and possessions of the Polish Underground State. It collects and maintains hundreds of artefacts, ranging from weapons used by the insurgents to love letters, in order to present a full picture of the people involved. The museum's stated goals include the creation of an

archive of historical information on the Uprising and the recording of the stories and memories of the still living Uprising participants.

We then continue our journey to the picturesque medieval town of Torun, a beautiful medieval city in northwestern Poland, situated on the Vistula River. Torun's architecture managed to escape bombing, and as such represents one of the only examples of true Gothic architecture in Poland. At warm times of year Torun's old town is full of street cafes and restaurants where you can eat and drink outdoors and enjoy the medieval atmosphere.

Overnight in Torun.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Torun: Nicolaus Copernicus Museum - Gdansk

This morning we enjoy the sights of Torun. Its Old Town has been included in UNESCO's list for its impressive 13th century Town Hall, superb churches and historic streets preserving Torun's past glory. We will visit the Nicolaus Copernicus Museum, Copernicus House, which collects materials about the life and work of Copernicus: a library, old prints and books from the time of Copernicus, various editions of his work, "Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres," and models of the astronomical instruments he used.

We continue to Gdansk, an absolutely charming place with its tall, narrow buildings, peaked roofs and decorative facades that combine perfectly with the cobblestone streets. The famous Gdansk Shipyards are visible from most parts of the city. During our time in Gdansk we'll visit the marvellous Old Town and its main street -- Dlugi Targ (Long Market).

Overnight in Gdansk.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Gdansk Area Tour

Its position on the Baltic has historically made Gdansk one of the most important port cities in Northern Europe, and tragically also the scene of a rather disturbing past. World War II was ignited by a dispute over the control of the city. By the end of the war the city lay almost completely in ruins. The German population was expelled and replaced by Poles as the city came under Polish rule and changed its name to Gdansk. However, the impact of its former German ties is still evident. Although most of the old buildings were damaged or destroyed in WWII, they have been painstakingly restored or rebuilt.

This morning we head out of town a short distance to visit the Oliwa Cathedral. This Holy Trinity, Blessed Virgin Mary, and St Bernard's Church was first erected as a Cistercian shrine back in the 13th century. Reconstructed in 1350 after a great fire, it re-emerged in the Gothic style, but many of the new fixtures were to be relatively short lived. The Gothic interior was extremely damaged in a 1577 fire and was replaced with the Baroque fixtures we admire today for their beauty and intensity.

The Oliwa Cathedral is perhaps best known for its massive, splendid organ. The organ is comprised of over 7,000 pipes and is decorated with movable angels and brightly painted stars. When built, the instrument was the largest in Europe. The main altar is also very impressive, and if the organ is in use, you're sure to be riveted by its magnificent sound!

While in Gdansk we'll also visit the European Solidarity Centre, a museum and library devoted to the history of Solidarity, the Polish trade union and civil resistance movement, and other opposition movements of Communist Eastern Europe.

The balance of the day is free to enjoy Gdansk. Gdansk is sometimes called the Amber Capital of the World; the surrounding area is the richest known source of this semi-precious stone, and the product can be viewed (and purchased, of course) in many shops in town. In order to maximize your free time in this interesting place, we do not include dinner this evening.

Overnight in Gdansk.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast

Day 9 Gdansk - Malbork - Olsztyn

After breakfast, we drive to Olsztyn. En route, we stop at the Teutonic Knights Castle in Malbork, the largest brick building in Europe and one of Poland's greatest tourist attractions.

In the afternoon, we continue to Olsztyn, a town located in a region of lakes and forests. The most attractive part of the city is the old town, encircled by a set of fortified walls.

Overnight in Olsztyn.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Olsztyn - Olsztynek - Warsaw

After breakfast, we return to Warsaw. On the way, we visit the Ethnographic Park in Olsztynek, site of the Museum of Folk Architecture, one of the oldest open-air museums in Europe. The museum contains many interesting examples of folk architecture, including houses, barns, windmills and other traditional buildings. A particular attraction of the park are the interiors of old houses, the evangelical church, a blacksmith, a pottery stand, a windmill as well as various temporary displays representing items of traditional craftsmanship and modern folk art and handicraft from the region.

Continue to Warsaw.

Overnight in Warsaw.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Warsaw, Poland - Kyiv, Ukraine

Today we fly from Warsaw to Kyiv ("Kiev" in Russian), capital of Ukraine.

Overnight in Kyiv.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Kyiv: City Tour

Today we have a full day of sightseeing in Kyiv, the capital city of Ukraine. Our day will start at the cathedral of Hagia Sophia, the oldest cathedral in Ukraine. Founded in the early 11th century, and largely rebuilt during the 17th and 18th centuries, it is now a museum with beautiful Christian frescoes. St Sophia Cathedral is inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

During our tour we will see the Golden Gate, the historic gateway in the ancient city walls of Kyiv. We will visit St Andrew's Church, designed by Rastrelli, the famous architect who built the world famous Winter Palace in St. Petersburg. Just nearby is Andrew's Ascent, (Andriyivky Uzviz), Kyiv's most popular street with tourists and locals alike. Named after the nearby Baroque St. Andrew's Church, this street was once the connecting avenue between the aristocratic strongholds called the Upper City and the mercantile center of dockside Podil.

We will tour St Michael's Monastery; a precious Kyivan relic, sky-blue in colour, with its golden glitter of cupolas and vividly decorated arches. The Archangel Michael is considered to be the patron of Kyiv. A highlight for many will be our visit to the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, also known as the 'Kyiv Monastery of Caves'. Here we will be able to see the famous caves, one of the most sacred places of Orthodox Christianity. Within this complex we also visit the unique museums of precious historical items, and collections of ancient books and icons.

During our touring of this city we will be sure to stop nearby Kreshatyk, the 'main street' of Kyiv. We will walk along this street to Independence Square. Kreshatyk teems with people as it gently curves through the nation's capital. This street has a regal feel and leads directly to the main and most beautiful square in the city -- Independence Square.

Overnight in Kyiv.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Kyiv - Lviv

This morning we head to the suburbs of Kyiv to the sobering memorial at Babi Yar. Kyiv had a Jewish population of 175,000 on the eve of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. The Nazi forces captured the city in mid-September; within less than a fortnight, on the 29th and 30th, nearly 34,000 Jews of the ghetto were brought to a suburban ravine known as Babi Yar, near the Jewish Cemetery, where men, women, and children were executed over two days. In subsequent months, most of the remaining population was exterminated.

Today we will also visit the Chernobyl Museum in Kyiv. This museum houses models and memorabilia designed to educate the public about the many aspects of the Chernobyl disaster.

Later today we will fly from Kyiv to Lviv, the "capital" of Western Ukraine and one of the country's most impressive cities. Lviv, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, has a rich and impressive history. Numerous historical events are concerned with the city. The walls of old Lviv buildings still keep the spirit of past centuries; cozy streets and fascinating monuments make it a unique attraction among the Ukrainian and Eastern European cities. The Ukrainian Catholic Church, forced underground by Stalin in 1946, re-emerged here with Glasnost in the late 1980s to play a significant role in a new Ukrainian independence movement.

Overnight in Lviv.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Lviv: City Tour

Lviv's architectural landscape joins the monuments of numerous styles and different epochs. From the gothic 14th Century Latin Cathedral, to the baroque of St. George (Sviatoho Yura) Cathedral. Renaissance-style Bernardine Monastery and Chapel of Boimes co-exist with the strict simplicity of Armenian Church.

Today we will enjoy a city tour (mostly on foot) of the major highlights of Lviv. We will start by driving to the High Castle Hill, once the location of the main defensive fort of the city. A visit here provides us with a great panorama view over the surrounding region. Down in the city center we will visit the 13th Century St. Nicholas Church, one of the oldest functioning Orthodox churches in Lviv. Nearby the Church of the Assumption (which we also visit) is one of Lviv's most conspicuous landmarks, the Korniakt Tower from the 16th Century.

Along our walk we will stop to step inside the Pharmacy Museum of Lviv, dating back to 1735. The Market Square in Lviv is the central square of the city, with history dating back to the 14th Century. The town hall stands in the middle and is surrounded by about 44 burgher houses of various architectural styles, each with its own history.

We will also stop at the 17th Century Church of St. Parasceve and St. Georges Cathedral. Our walk through the historical center will end along Svobody Prospekt (Freedom Avenue), Lviv's main boulevard in the city. The most impressive building here is the magnificent Opera House, built in 1897-1900.

Overnight in Lviv.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 Lviv: Lychakivsky Cemetery & Museum of Folk Architecture and Rural Life

Today we will drive out to the Lychakivsky Cemetery. With the same sort of overgrown grounds and Gothic aura as the famous Parisian necropolis, Pere Lachaise, Lychakivsky is the final resting place for more than 400,000 people. A trip to Lviv wouldn't be complete without a wander here. Initially opened in 1787 in compliance with an Austrian law to move burials from the centre of town, the cemetery soon became one of Europe's finest. Generations of Lvovians were laid to rest here: intelligentsia, bourgeoisie and nobility.

We also visit the Lviv Museum of Folk Architecture and Rural Life, an open-air museum containing 120 monuments of folk architecture including six wooden churches, which create a genuine atmosphere of Ukrainian villages from different regions of the country. We also visit the Lviv Ethnographic Museum before enjoying some free time in this charming city.

Overnight in Lviv.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 16 Lviv - Simferopol - Yalta

Today we fly to the Crimean capital of Simferopol (via Kyiv). Upon arrival we continue by road to Yalta (approx 1.5 hours).

Yalta is a seaside resort on the Crimean Peninsula, long a favoured spot for Russian and Ukrainian elite who constructed palatial homes here. The city is located on the site of an ancient Greek colony that is said to have been founded by Greek sailors who were looking for a safe shore on which to land. With its Mediterranean climate there are many vineyards and orchards in the vicinity.

Overnight in Yalta.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 17 Yalta & Sevastopol

Today we will enjoy a full day of sightseeing starting with the magnificent Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, with its intricate Byzantine adornment and golden 'onion' domes. Our coastal drive brings us to Livadia Palace, summer home of Tsar Nicholas II, built in 1911 in elegant renaissance style. Livadia later hosted the 1945 Yalta Conference when Churchill, Stalin, and Roosevelt met at the end of WWII to carve Europe into spheres of influence. Today the palace houses a museum that we will visit.

We continue out to the west coast to Sevastopol where we will visit the site of the Crimean War (1864-1865) and the scene of the famous "Charge of the Light Brigade". We will stop to visit the Panorama Museum with its famous 360-degree painting. After a break for lunch we will visit the ancient Greek town of Khersones. Khersones is located on the shores of the Black Sea, and is the site of an ancient Greek colony founded approximately 2500 years ago. Today the buildings here mix influences of Greek, Roman and Byzantine.

Overnight in Yalta.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 18 Yalta - Odesa

Today we enjoy a full day scenic drive to Odesa ("Odessa" in Russian). Our journey takes us north and crosses over the Crimean Peninsula and onto 'mainland' Ukraine. We will cross the famous Isthmus of Perekop and later cross over the Dnieper River before arriving in Odesa.

From the ancient times the area was inhabited by Scythians, Sarmats, Greeks, and Slavs. In the times of Kyiv Rus it was a part of this huge Slavic state. In the 13th century it was annexed to the Tartar-Mongol Empire, "The Golden Horde". At the beginning of the 15th century it was annexed to Lithuania, and in some 50 years, to Turkey. In 1791 the territory became a part of the Russian Empire.

Overnight in Odesa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 19 Odesa Catacombs

Odesa underground tunnels (catacombs) were created nearly 200 years ago during mining of building materials that were used to build the city. Currently it is the maze of 2,500 kilometers with hundreds of entrances, exits, caves, and tunnels.

During the World War II, in 1941, when German and Romanian army occupied Odesa during the war, the Soviet Military headquarters gave the order to organize the partisan resistance. And Odesa catacombs were chosen as the camp for the unit of partisans. The provisions and weapons was enough there so the unit could stay underground for half a year. The partisan unit was fighting with nazi and Romanian army during all the period of occupation.

You'll walk in underground tunnels, where conditions of partisan camp are reconstructed and will listen to the history of struggle.

Overnight in Odesa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 20 Odesa: City Tour

Today we enjoy a half-day city tour, including many architectural sites of 19th & 20th centuries, many of them designed by world famous architects and engineers. Most notable are the Opera House (resembling the Vienna Opera and the Dresden Court Theater) built in 1884-87; the Marine (Potyomkin) Stairway (1837-41) -- one of the largest stairways in the world; and the heart of Odesa and immortalized in Sergei Eisenstein's 1925 film, Battleship Potemkin; Deribasivska [Deribasovskaya] Street with plenty of shops, cafes and restaurants. We will visit the five-domed Uspensky Cathedral, and drive out to the Shevchenko Park with its views of the Black Sea. During our sightseeing we will also tour inside the Fine Arts Gallery (formally Count Pototsky's Palace), which houses Russian and Ukrainian paintings dating back to the 15th century.

There will be some free time this afternoon before dinner. Odesa is a great city for walking, and this free time will give you a chance to do some exploring on your own.

Overnight in Odesa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 21 Odesa - Belgorod-Dniestrovsky - Chisinau, Moldova

Today we depart Odesa and travel to Belgorod-Dniestrovsky and visit the impressive fortress on the banks of the Dnister River. Stefan II of Moldavia founded the 13th century fortress, one of Ukraine's largest, on a strategic spur of land overlooking the Dnister estuary. The drive to get here is picturesque, taking us through a rural region of quiet villages, farmland, rural communities, and providing us with an occasional view of the Black Sea.

We cross into Moldova. Although not well-known, Moldova offers some attractions that would surprise even the most seasoned traveller. Little Moldova has a landscape covered with vineyards, pristine forests and lakes, medieval monasteries and fortresses, wine caves stretch for miles, a rich history, and eight ethnic nationalities.

A chronicler once called Moldova "a country on the way of all disasters". The territory of Moldova is located on the boundary of the Eastern and the Western Europe and has been populated from ancient times. The earliest leavings are of the post Paleolithic times, then the Chernyakhovskaya culture, and the treasures of the Romans, to the 4th century AD, the Slavonic settlements in the 8th-9th centuries. The ancient Romans and wandering tribes that used to migrate over this territory, left vestiges of their stay.

Our journey today traverses the valley of the Dneister River with its orchards and vineyards. The first town, Tiraspol, was founded as a stronghold by Gneral Suvorov in 1792, but named after the ancient Greek colony of Tiras. Built in the grid pattern of 18th century "new towns," Tiraspol retains traces of the original fort. Some of the older houses, with their traditional Moldovan balconies, betray a Turkish influence.

A little further we pass Bendery, which has been the site of a fortress commanding the Dneister crossings since the second century BC. The original 12th century fortress was built by the Genoese, who traded actively with the Black Sea ports. It fell to the Turks in the 16th century. The rectangular fort with its citadel was built by the Turks in the 1530s. It was besieged several times by the Russians in the 18th century as part of their drive for Bessarabia, and was all but destroyed in the German retreat of 1944.

Overnight in Chisinau.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 22 Chisinau: City Tour & Wine Country

The history and life of Moldova through the centuries is best presented in the History and Regional Lore Museum, a beautiful Turkish-style complex, which we will visit along with The Fine Arts Museum, which houses good examples of Russian, West European and Moldovan paintings, sculpture and applied arts.

A visit to Moldova would not be complete without a trip to the Moldovan wine country. We visit Cricova, the world's largest wine cellar. It is actually a subterranean city with winding streets extending for 60 kilometres (37 miles). The street names orient visitors toward Str Cabernet, Str Pinot or Str Merlot. There are over one million bottles of white wines -- 648 types are stored in the cellars at a uniform temperature of 12 C (54 F). A tour of Cricova is one of the best ways to sample the wide variety of Moldovan wines and champagne which are gaining great popularity outside Moldova's borders, including Western Europe and North America.

Overnight in Chisinau.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 23 Chisinau: Orheiul Vechi Monastery

Among Moldova's greatest wonders are its monasteries, and we visit the most famous, the cave monastery in Orhei Vechi.

En route to Orheiul Vechi we stop at Ivancea and the excellent ethnographic museum housed in a 19th-century stately mansion on beautiful grounds. Its eight halls are filled with traditional Moldovan costumes, musical instruments, pottery and folk art.

This 13th century church of Orheiul Vechi was excavated from a limestone cliff by Orthodox Christian monks who believed the cave would be resilient against invaders. Archaeologists have recently discovered ruins of Turkish baths and a protective wall built in the 15th century, which surrounds the religious complex. Stefan the Great erected a fortress in Orhei Vechi in the 14th century, destroyed by Tartar invaders in 1499. The Cave Monastery was inhabited until the 18th century. Closed during Soviet times, it was re-opened in 1996, and services are now held regularly.

Return to Chisinau.

Overnight in Chisinau.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 24 Departure from Chisinau

Departure from Chisinau.

BON VOYAGE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast