

SOUTH-EASTERN POLAND

(StayPoland regional e-book)

For each Polish region we have prepared a special regional e-book. It is a short guide that enables you to quickly familiarize yourself with a new territory. The best of each region is listed in order of importance.

There are five regional e-books and each of them has five sections:

1. introduction to region and sights,
2. map,
3. “must-see” tourist sights (15 featured locations in South-Western Poland e-book),
4. “explore!": tourist sights (31 places in South-West),
5. information on what STAYPOLAND travel agency & reservation system can do for you in selected places.

Two important points:

- A great number of the place & activity recommendations are made based on our customers' experiences. Your comments are welcome. We are looking forward to your feedback at e-books@staypoland.com (best comments will be published).
- You will find the guide very practical. It enables the independent traveler to make the most of their trip to Poland. At the end of this guide we post information on what STAYPOLAND travel agency can do for you in every destination. For more details check: www.staypoland.com.

1. INTRODUCTION TO SOUTH-EASTERN POLAND

provinces: 3 voivodeships: małopolskie (Lesser Poland), śląskie (Silesian) and podkarpackie (Subcarpathia)

area / population: 45,364 sq km / 10 million people

featured must-see places: 3 “one of a kind”: Kraków, Auschwitz, Wieliczka
4 Polish must-see: Częstochowa, Lesser Poland's wooden churches, Pieniny National Park, Tatra National Park
8 regional must-see: Bieszczady National Park, Jura castles & Ojcowski National Park, Kalwaria Zebrzydowska, Łańcut,

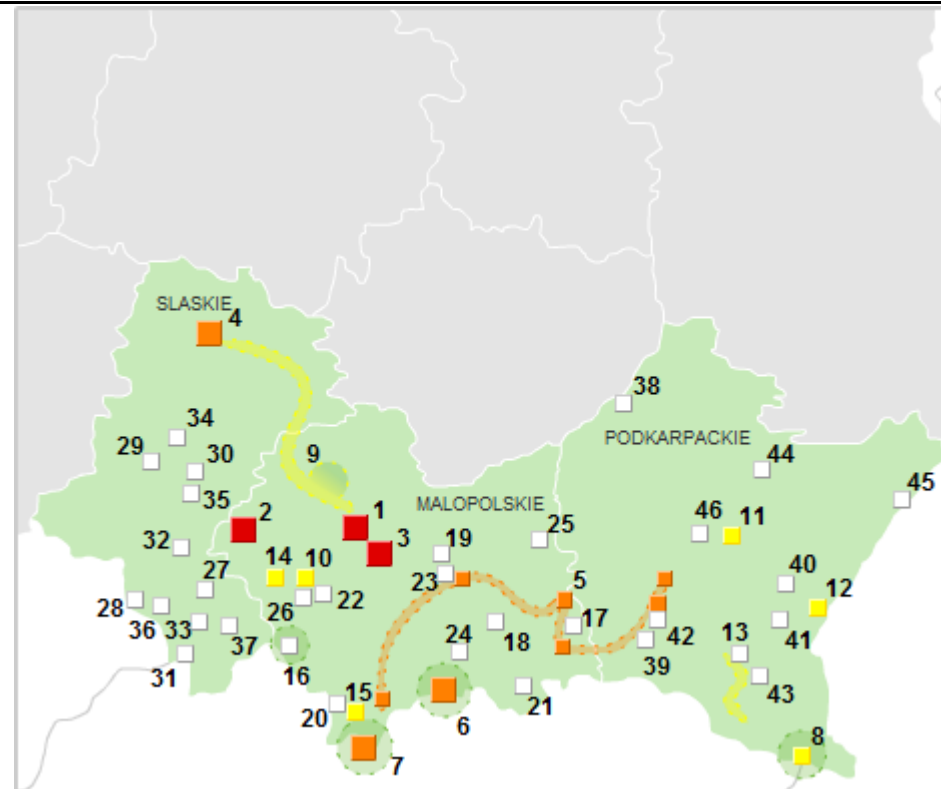
Przemyśl, Sanok and the Icon trails, Wadowice, Zakopane

explore!:

31 off-the-beaten-path: Babiogórski National Park, Baranów Sandomierski, Biecz, Bielsko-Biała, Bochnia, Bobowa, Bóbrka, Chocholów, Cieszyn, Gliwice, Jarosław, Katowice/Chorzów, Koniaków, Krasiczyn, Krosno, Krynica, Lanckorona, Lesko, Leżajsk, Nowy Wiśnicz, Pszczyna, Radróż, Rzeszów, Stary & Nowy Sącz, Szczyrk, Tarnów, Tarnowskie Góry, Tychy, Ustroń, Zalipie, Żywiec (in text below listed by voivodeship)

UNESCO World Heritage:

5: Kraków, Wieliczka, Auschwitz Birkenau, six wooden churches in Lesser Poland, Kalwaria Zebrzydowska (the Dunajec River Gorge in the Pieniny is on the tentative list)



3. MUST-SEE PLACES

*** KRAKÓW (1)

Without a doubt the most popular place to visit, Kraków is Poland's ancient capital and one of 12 UNESCO prime World Heritage sites in the country. Kraków has a perfectly preserved Old Town, a royal castle and several fascinating areas. The historical districts are big enough such that you won't be bored and yet nothing is so far apart that you couldn't comfortably reach on foot. On top, there is a great number of superb travel destinations in the vicinity.

++ Rynek Główny (Main Market Square), this was the biggest square of medieval Europe (200x200 m), where today you can shop in the ancient Sukien-nice (shopping stalls, 19th century Polish art gallery upstairs, cafés downstairs), hear the hejnał trumpeter play at the hour, view the Mickiewicz monument, climb to see the view from Wieża Ratuszowa (Town Hall tower), wander around the museums, and enjoy the wide range of restaurants. Some of the must-see include: St. Mary's Church (Kościół Mariacki) with its very famous, huge wooden Gothic altar designed by Wit Stwosz (the wings are opened for viewing daily except Sundays/holidays at 11:50 am); Wawel Hill and its cathedral – the coronation venue of Polish monarchs from 1320 (Sigismund's and Holy Cross/Świętokrzyska chapels, royal tombs, view from the Zygmundowska Tower), the Royal Castle - 5 popular exhibition tours: State Rooms, Private Apart-ments, Treasury, Oriental Art Exhibition, and Lost Wawel historical displays; Dragon's Den (Smocza Jama) – a huge statue by the river that spews real flames, even at night; the old town streets (walks, cafés, restaurants, shopping): especially in the beautiful Kanonicza, Floriańska, Jagiellońska streets; the Barbican and the other remains of fortifications and Planty (the green belt along the entire perimeter of the former fortifications); the Czartoryski Museum (Leonardo Da Vinci's "Lady with an Ermine", bounty from the victorious battle over the Turks in Vienna in 1683); the Collegium Maius of the Jagiellonian Uni-versity - founded in 1364 and featuring an ornate courtyard with an old clock, and an interesting museum with the first globe to include America; the Francis-can Church: gloomy atmosphere combined with breathtaking Art Nouveau stained-glass windows by Wyspiański; the old Jewish Kazimierz District – syna-gogues listed by popularity: Remuh with its interesting cemetery, Stara, Izaaka, Wysoka, Tempel, Poppera, Kupa, and Mizrachi, the remainder of 90 syna-gogues that existed before WW2 - and the many Kazimierz bars, pubs and clubs. Kraków is the best party destination in Poland.

+ Horse-drawn carriage ride; other interesting churches in the centre of Kraków (of 123 churches in the city: Św. Piotra i Pawła / St. Peter and St. Paul's, Św. Andrzeja / St. Andrew's, św. Krzyża / of Holy Cross, św. Trójcy / of Holy Trinity, św. Katarzyny / St. Catharine's and Paulinów / of Pauline Order in Kazimierz); the Art Nouveau venue of Jama Michalika or the famous cabaret Pod Baranami; the best museums: National Museum, Dom Hipolytów (18th-19th century burgher house furnishings), Jan Matejko, S. Wyspiański and J. Mehoffer (famous Polish painters), Pharmacy, Ethnographic and Archeology museums; the Manggha Centre of Japanese Art and Technology; man-made mounds (Kościuszki, Piłskudskiego, Wandy, Kraka); the Benedictine Abbey in Tyniec; the Norbertine monastery and Salwatora Church in Zwierzyniec; the Camaldolese Hermitage in Bielany; the Cistercian Abbey as well as the lovely wooden church in Mogila; (and next to it) the social realist district of Nowa Huta (new communist Kraków): startling architecture, Trabant rides and the fa-mous Arka Pana church; Podgórze district: Oskar Schindler's factory, wartime ghetto museum; Plaszów: concentration camp monument; Twierdza Kraków (19th century fortifications); the daily market in Stary Kleparz; Stary Theatre; St. Faustyna's Sanctuary of Divine Mercy (Sanktuarium Bożego Miłosierdzia) in

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Łagiewniki – do not miss the small old chapel and the big tower; Rakowiecki Cemetery (famous Poles buried there); or the super-modern Park Wodny swimming centre with its great slide rides. Don't forget, though, to try out the remaining milk bars, remnants of a former era and where you can eat really cheaply like in a film from the early 1960s.

[min: 3 days – best: 5-6 days – max: 8 days including 3-4 days for excursions]

*** AUSCHWITZ (2)

Auschwitz-Birkenau is synonymous with terror, cruelty and the Shoah – the annihilation of European Jews. This is the largest of the former Nazi German concentration and extermination camps. The surviving barracks now house a very graphic museum of the Holocaust recounting the terror inflicted on various nationalities jailed and gassed on the location. Approximately 1.3 million human beings died here between 1940-1945. Located in the town of Oświęcim, 60 km west of Kraków. Please do not call the Oświęcim town by the German name of Auschwitz as the local residents consider it very offensive.

++ Konzentrationslager Auchwitz I (museum with a 15-minute movie, gate with the famous “Arbeit macht frei” motto, national memorials, gas chambers); Auschwitz II – Birkenau (3 km away, no museum, gruesome barracks).

+ Jewish centre (Centrum Żydowskie) in Oświęcim (exhibitions, restored synagogue); areas of the former IG Farben Bune factory, Auschwitz III – Monowitz.

[min: 3 hours (necessary to visit both camps) – best: 4-5 hours – max: 6 hours]

*** WIELICZKA (3)

Possibly the most famous salt mine and oldest functioning business enterprise in the world. Salt has been mined here since the 13th century and probably even earlier. Today there are 300 km of surviving corridors spread over 9 floors as deep as 327 m underground. Your visit to this subterranean kingdom of salt (12 km from Kraków) will be unforgettable. The national daily newspaper, Rzeczpospolita, voted this as the top cultural wonder of Poland.

++ Exciting and very popular guided tour: the best of the corridors, sculptures in halls and three chapels (3 km walk in 2 hrs, descend on foot approx. 400 stairs, return by lift).

+ Wieliczka underground museum (separate entrance); wooden 16th century St. Sebastian's church; possibility of a curative stay in the sanatorium deep down in this kingdom of salt, and other events such as New Year Eve's parties.

[min: 3 hours – best: 3 hours – max: 1 or more days curative stay or a party – we help organize events in Wieliczka]

** CZĘSTOCHOWA (4)

Częstochowa, or more precisely the Jasna Góra monastery, is the religious centre of Poland, a national symbol and one of the most visited pilgrimage desti-

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nations of Christendom (5 million pilgrims / year, the main feast on August 15). The monastery belongs to the Pauline Order and it became very famous during the 1655 Swedish siege when the Black Madonna protected the Polish defenders.

++ Basilica (especially the miraculous Black Madonna, most probably a Byzantine icon from the 6th century, two damaged spots made by a Hussite saber in 1430, place for mass prayers); Knights' Hall (17th century, large paintings); belfry (view), Museum 600-lecia (museum of the 600th Anniversary, exhibits include Lech Wałęsa's Nobel Peace Prize).

+ Arsenał (original weapons from the Turkish wars); Skarbiec (treasury); walk along the fortification walls and the four bastions; don't forget the city of Częstochowa itself with its long boulevard, several churches and matchbox museum; also a good idea to visit Olsztyn Castle ruins (12 km away, first castle on the Jura trail).

[min: 2 hours – best: 3 hours – max: 1 day including Olsztyn]

** LESSER POLAND'S WOODEN CHURCHES (5)

The cute, wooden churches are a unique feature of south-eastern Poland. There are around two hundreds of them (linked by six Wooden Architecture trails), with six being designated as UNESCO World heritage: (from west to east: Dębno Podhalańskie near Szczawnica – Lipnica Murowana near Bochnia – Binarowa close to Biecz – nearby Sękowa between Gorlice and the Magura National Park – Haczów and Blizne near Krosno in Subcarpathia).

++ Churches listed by age: Haczów (Assumption of Virgin Mary, 1380s, the oldest in Poland and said to be the biggest wooden Gothic church in Europe, interior paintings from 1494); Blizne (All Saints', possibly 1480s, three kinds of beautiful polychromy dated 1550, 1649 and 1700); Dębno Podhalańskie (St. Michael the Archangel's, 1490s, larch wood, beautiful polychromy); Lipnica Murowana (St. Leonard's, 1490s, best preserved of all the churches, naïve Baroque polychromy from 1689, additionally there is also another interesting Gothic church in the village); Binarowa (St. Michael Archangel's, 1500s, marvelous Passion paintings); Sękowa (St. Philip and St. James', 1520s, interiors less interesting).

+ Many other churches – here arguably the best of them: Catholic (Trybsz between Niedzica and Zakopane – oldest painting of the Tatra as a part of the Final Judgment, Lachowice near Sucha Beskidzka, Orawka westwards of Chochołów), Greek-Catholic (Bielanka, Kunkowa, Owczary, Gładyszów near Gorlice) and Orthodox (Powróźnik near Krynica); check also Radróż and Sanok Icon Trails; there are also numerous wooden houses and mansions.

[30 minutes per church, be sure to get the key unless the church is open – which can be difficult sometimes]

** PIENINY NATIONAL PARK (6)

One of the smallest Polish national parks (4 sq km), but mountain lovers often say that Pieniny is the loveliest mountains in Poland. In any case these mountains are ideal if you do not have special trekking equipment (needed in the Tatra) and do not want to wander too far from civilization (which can happen in the Bieszczady). There are several fabulous hikes, cultural landmarks, and the famous Dunajec River Gorge rafting trip: one of the best attractions in

Poland. The bases for exploring the Pieniny are the spectacular spa town of Szczawnica (wooden architecture) and lively Krościenko. The southern part of the Pieniny is located in Slovakia.

++ Breathtaking Dunajec River rafting trip (start in Kały, part of Sromowce Wyżne, end in Szczawnica, 2.5 hrs, use courtesy bus Szczawnica – Kały or a take 3 hrs walk from Szczawnica), the raft trip is not dangerous, you won't get wet and if you want more there are also beautiful rafting trips in Slovakian Pieniny: Červený Kláštor - Lesnica; scenic hikes onto Mt. Sokolica (747 m, 1.5-2.5 hrs from Szczawnica) extremely steeply perched over the Dunajec; further 1.5 hrs to Mt. Trzy Korony ("three crowns", 982 m) with a fantastic view of the Tatras and 2 hrs hike to Krościenko; visit to Niedzica Castle by Czorsztyn Lake (14th century, originally the most northern tip of Hungarian Kingdom, moderate exhibition) and the nearby Czorsztyn castle ruins (a great view).

+ Trips from Szczawnica to the picturesque Wąwoz Homole and Biała Woda reserve (possible to organize a 'kulig' sleigh ride in winter), wooden church in Grywałd and especially the UNESCO Heritage wooden church in Dębno; the Pieniny museum in Krościenko (the 6th most visited museum in Poland).

[min: 5 hours Szczawnica & Dunajec – best: 2-3 days (raft trip & hiking) – max: 5 days including trips to Slovakia]

**** TATRA MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK (7)**

The Tatras are the highest, most dramatic and varied mountain range in Poland, alpine in style, with the highest Polish mountain, Rysy, at 2499 m. Only 22% of the mountains are within the Polish border; the larger and higher southern part is in Slovakia (Gerlach 2655 m). The Tatras are perfect for hikers – in the Polish part there are over 70 hiking routes, each taking 1-4 hrs. The town of Zakopane is the most popular base camp, though you should also try Chochołów or Witów in the west; or Białka Tatrzańska, Murzasichle or Bukowina Tatrzańska in the east, especially during peak periods when Zakopane can get very crowded. The most popular trails lead up to the summits (szczyt, wierch) through the valleys (doliny): listed from west to east: Chochołowska (Jarzabcza, Starobiciańska); Lejowa; Kościeliska; Małej Łąki; Za Bramką; Strążyska; Białego; Bystrej (Kondratowa, Goryczkowa, Jaworzyńska); Olczyska; Suche Wody (Gaśienicowa); Filipka; Białki (Roztoki, Pięciu Stawów Polski, Rybiego Potoku). In winter the area is a very popular skiing destination for Poles (Kasprowy Wierch: 3 lifts, 4 pistes, 18 km / Nosal: 6 lifts, 6 pistes, 2 km / Gubałówka: 3 lifts, 2 pistes, 2 km / Szymoszkowa: 4 lifts, 3 pistes, 2 km / Harenda: 5 lifts, 5 pistes, 5 km / Witów: 2 lifts, 2 pistes, 1.2 km. Best for beginners: Szymoszkowa, Harenda, Witów; Best for experienced: Kasprowy Wierch).

++ Kasprowy Wierch (trip by cable car from Kuźnice, advance bookings essential; return possible on foot 2.5-3.5 hrs); Morskie Oko (a very remarkable lake, hike start from Łysa Polana parking, 6 hrs both ways through Dolina Białki & Rybiego Potoku, on the way is the waterfall Wodogrzmoty Mickiewicza. If the hike seemed long or impossible 8 out of the 10 km each way can be made by a horse cart); Rysy (the highest mountain, accessible from Morskie Oko, steep mountains, the way up takes 3.5 hrs, return 2.5 hrs); Dolina Kościeliska (accessible from Kiry, traditional shepherd houses, numerous caves – best is the icy Jaskinia Mroźna); Giewont (1694 m – legendary and most frequently climbed mountain, access via beautiful Dolina Strążyska, return through Dolina Białego, 7 hrs); Orla Perc (Eagles' Path for the most adventurous hikers, from Zawrat to Kryżne: 8 hrs, 4 km).

+ Dolina Chochołowska (the biggest valley, 10 km relaxing walk, John Paul II enjoyed this route as he grew older, hence the 'papal trail'), Świnica

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(2301 m, accessible from Kasprowy Wierch, 1.5 hrs tough hike/climbing, possible continuation to Orla Perć); Dolina Pięciu Stawów (5 lakes, accessible from Morskie Oko, a bit tough, Sikława waterfall, voted by professional mountaineers as the most beautiful Polish valley after the winning but quite unknown Rybiego Potoku valley); Pustelnia Brata Alberta (Brother Albert's hermitage) in Kalatówki Polana.

[min: 2 days to get a taste – best: 5 days – max: 14 days relaxation in Zakopane including trips to Slovakia]

* BIESZCZADY NATIONAL PARK (8)

The wildest and most remote nature park in Poland, the Bieszczady Mountains, huddles in the southeast along the border with Slovakia and Ukraine. It is sometimes referred to as Polish “wild east” or “Alaska”. In the last two decades it has started to attract a regular but limited number of local travelers. Even so, the Bieszczady are the best destination if you seek a boundless and exotic experience. The mountains are home to bears, wolves, foxes, lynx, beavers and eagles and are well known for “poloniny” – treeless pastures at the higher altitudes (Wetlińska, Caryńska, Bukowska), where there are almost no human communities. Culturally, there are some architectural remnants of the ethnic groups of the Uniate-Catholic Lemkos and Boyks who were largely displaced after World War II. The mountains can be accessed from the town of Sanok, but it is better to find a temporary base in Muczne, Wołosate, Ustrzyki Górne, Wetlina or even Cisna. They are most beautiful in September and October, but please be aware of the changeable weather.

++ Short hike from Wetlina to Polonina Wetlińska (return 3 hrs, 1255 m) or further to Polonina Caryńska (2 hrs from Wetlińska one way, 1297 m); Polonina Caryńska is accessible also from the east from the village of Ustrzyki Górne via Przełęcz Wyżniańska pass; from Wołosate you can climb the two highest mountains: Tarnica (1346 m) and Halicz (1333 m); or there is a return trip by narrow-gauge railway from Cisna-Majdan to Przysłop (2.5 hrs).

+ Hike from Ustrzyki Dolne to Mt. Wielka Rawka near the border of three countries; see the abandoned Ukrainian villages of Bukowiec and Tarnawa Wyżna; take the most demanding hike via Polonina Bukowska to the abandoned village of Sianki; try fantastic horse riding (local breed of Hucul horses in Wołosate); drive to the village of Smolnik (beautiful Boyko-style church) and continue to Lutowiska (abandoned oil industry artifacts, Holocaust memorial), Olchowiec (old-fashioned charcoal production) towards Solińskie Lake (boat trips from Solina) and Lesko (see separate entry in this e-book).

[min: 2 days, best: 2-4 days, max: 1 week]

* JURA CASTLES & OJCOWSKI NATIONAL PARK (9)

Jura is a hilly region between Częstochowa and Krakow. There are many limestone rocks and high grounds stretching for 120 km that provided perfect terrain for many strongholds, and back in the 14th century the Jura formed the border between the Bohemian and Polish kingdoms. Casimir the Great fortified the southwestern border of his Polish kingdom with 29 castles nicknamed as the Eagle's Nests. Almost all of the castles have since become scenic ruins, while only Pieskowa Skała located in the charming Ojcowski National Park (the smallest national park in Poland, 400 caves inhabited by 17 bat species) was in the 16th century transformed into a fine Renaissance palace.

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++ The rocks of Ojcowski National Park (especially Maczuga Herkulesa near Pieskowa skała – one of the most photographed formations in Poland) and caves (notably Wierzchowska Górna – beautiful stalagmites, alternatively visit Łokietka Cave), Pieskowa Skała: Gothic-Renaissance castle on a steep cliff, richly decorated interiors from various period styles), see at least one of the other ruined castles (preferably Ogrodzieniec or Olsztyn).

+ It is especially good to focus on the fantastic Jura castle ruins; the best are (from north to south): Olsztyn, Mirów, Bobolice, Morsko, Ogrodzieniec, Pilica, Smoleń, Bydlin, Rabsztyn, Pieskowa Skała, Ojców, and Korzkiew. There are also perfect cliffs for amateur rock-climbing: Góra Zborów and Okiennik Wielki; and a real desert: Pustynia Błędowska (4x 10 km, increasingly attracting hedges and grass).

[min: 4 hours, best: 2 days, max: 4 days]

* KALWARIA ZEBRZYDOWSKA (10)

The only Polish monastery and pilgrimage centre listed by UNESCO, and a favorite place of young Karol Wojtyła (later on Pope John Paul II), who was born in the nearby Wadowice and loved this place. The Bernardine monastery and its 41 Calvary chapels modeled on Jerusalem at the time of Jesus Christ were built in 1600-1601. The pilgrimage complex has a beautiful setting amid verdant hills.

++ Pilgrimage church with the miraculous image of Virgin Mary and at least a part of the 6 km trail linking the cavalry chapels.

+ If you are lucky to be in this part of the world on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, come to participate in the powerful Passion Plays. Elaborate processions also take place before August 15 (Ascension).

[min: 1 hour, best: 4 hours, max: 1 day along with Wadowice and Lanckorona]

* ŁAŃCUT (11)

Łańcut is regarded by many as the most beautiful and best preserved noble residence in Poland. The castle palace was rebuilt several times between the 16th-18th centuries and it belonged to the foremost Polish aristocratic families: the Lubomirskis, Czartoryskis, and Potockis.

++ Guided tour of the castle museum (up to 2 hrs, encompasses almost 50 rooms filled to the brim with art objects dating from various epochs); orangery (palace greenhouse) and a beautiful castle park; the Museum of Coaches (south of the castle – 55 aristocratic carriages); Jewish synagogue (possibly the most beautiful interior among all the surviving synagogues in Poland); and an interesting Vodka distillery museum (Muzeum Gorzelnictwa).

+ Religious art museum in the castle stables (Orthodox icons); Jewish cemetery north of the historical centre.

[min: 3 hours, best: 6-8 hours, max: 1.5 day]

* PRZEMYŚL (12)

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One of the most interesting small historical towns in the region. In contrast to most Polish towns, it is located on the slopes of a hill and overlooks the River San. The town streets are at various levels and offer diverse vistas. There are many remarkable churches, interesting museums, and relaxing places to have a beer or two. Last but not least, Przemyśl used to be the biggest fortress of the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy and an important stopping place for the brave Good Soldier Švejk.

++ Churches: the Catholic Archikatedra (cathedral), Carmelite, Franciscan, Jesuit church converted into Uniate church; Clock Tower (Wieża Zegarowa) houses on seven levels the captivating Museum of Bells and Pipes (kids like the museum – also be advised that the craftsmen are still practicing their trades in the village of Ostrów near Przemyśl); leisurely walks in the Rynek (Market Square).

+ Renaissance Castle (only a panoramic view); Kopiec Tatarski (Tartar Mound): legendary grave of a Tartar army leader who allegedly founded the town; two synagogues; on the outskirts parts of the enormous Austrian fortifications (best in Siedliska and Bolestraszyce); numerous World War I cemeteries; and of course the nearby Krasiczyn Castle.

[min: 4 hours, best: 1 day, max: 2 days]

* SANOK & THE ICON TRAILS (13)

Small regional centre and gateway to the Bieszczady (30-60 km away), Sanok is well-known for its Open-Air Folk Architecture Museum (the largest and arguably the most exotic of all the numerous folk architecture museums) and the Historical Museum with a superb collection of over 500 Ruthenian icons. Besides the main ridge of the Bieszczady, from Sanok you can set off on two very captivating wooden architecture trails.

++ Superb Open-Air Folk Architecture Museum (Lemko and Boyk houses, churches, and mills); the Castle with the Historical Museum (besides the icon collection also the gloomy post-surrealist paintings of Z. Beksiński).

+ Icon Trails (Szlaki Ikon): you can choose from two trails - the San River Valley and the Oślawa River Valley. The San River valley trail leads to the north and the main destination is the fabulous Orthodox church in Ulucz (built in 1510, keys in house no. 16), plus there are other churches: Międzybrodzie, Hłomcza, Łodzina – the trail itself is almost 80 km long, and it is good to hike at least a part of it. The Oślawa River Trail (similar in length to the San River Trail) goes to the south through picturesque Western Bieszczady: Lemko churches can be seen in Dolina, Zagórz, Morochów, Mokre, Szczawne, Rzepedź, Turzańsk, Komańcza (three churches: Uniate, Catholic, Orthodox & mineral springs), and Radoszyce.

[min: 4 hours, best: 2 days, max: 4 days]

* WADOWICE (14)

A small town which may seem rather ordinary except that Karol Wojtyła (Pope John Paul II) was born here on the 18th May 1920. The town is often visited by pilgrims and tourists, also because it is located only 46 km from Kraków and 15 km from Kalwaria Zebrzydowska.

++ The Wojtyła family house where one of the greatest Poles was born (Kościelna 7, good museum); parish church where he was baptized.

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+ Pastry shop where he had his favorite “kremówki” (cream) cakes and the grounds where he used to play football.

[min: 1.5 hours, best: 2 hours, max: 4 hours]

* ZAKOPANE (15)

This Polish “winter capital” is undoubtedly the most popular mountain and ski resort in Poland. The town has less than 30,000 inhabitants and survives almost exclusively on tourism. The greatest of Zakopane’s advantages are: proximity to the Tatra mountains (great hiking in summer and skiing in winter), well developed service industry (almost 300 big and small places to stay, restaurants, regional products – especially oscypek cheese) and the pleasant and traditional “zakopiańska” wooden architecture with the local highlanders (górale) traditions.

++ Base for hiking and skiing (the easiest trip is by funicular train to Mt. Gubałówka, or by cable car to Mt. Kasprowy Wierch further south in Kuźnica, for details see the Tatra Mountains entry); many places to relax and enjoy yourself: shops, stalls and walks along the main boulevard, Krupówki Street; charming highlander graveyard of Pęksowy Brzyzek with its wooden St. Clement’s (św. Klemensa) church; rambling around the interesting streets with villas: Kościeliska (no. 18 Willa Koliba); Nowotarska; Chramcówki (no. 20b Willa Krzemień, no. 22 Willa Pyszna, no. 24 Willa Polonia); Kasprusie (no. 19 Willa Atma) or Strążyska streets, neo-Romanesque Parish church of the Holy Family at Krupówki (view from the roof).

+ Highlander (górale) horse-cart ride, highlander evening show; Bystre district 2 km east of the centre: Koziniec neighborhood (no.1 Willa Pod Jedłami) and the stunning wooden chapel of Jaszczurówka (created by S. Witkiewicz); Tatra Museum (Muzeum Tatrzańskie) at Krupówki 10; Museum of painter S. Witkiewicz and Zakopane architecture in Willa Koliba; museum of composer K. Szymanowski in Willa Atma and the perplexing gallery of avant-garde artist W. Hasiór; visits to the many cute small private galleries (glass painting); and cycling.

[min: 1 day, best: 2 days for Zakopane or 4 days if you want to enjoy the mountains, max: 2 weeks if you do more hiking or skiing]

4. eXPLORE! PLACES

LESSER POLAND (MAŁÓPOLSKIE) VOIVODESHIP

BABIÓGÓRSKI NATIONAL PARK & ZUBRZYCA GÓRNA (16)

The Babia Góra Mountains belong to the Beskids, the second highest range (after the Tatras) in Poland, and one of the top off-the-beaten-path mountain destinations in Poland. The most popular trip is the hike to Mt. Babia Góra / Diablak (1725 m) from Zawoja. The very pretty Orawa region’s open-air country living museum in Zubrzyca Górna (beehives, chapels, belfries, sheep farm, blacksmiths, and windmill), and Mannerism-style castle or Karczma Rzym in

nearby Sucha Beskidzka come recommended as well.

BIECZ (17)

Biecz is one of those cute small towns where time seems to have stopped. The fortified walls are still standing and the market square ranks as one of the biggest in the whole country (with an interesting and large tower in the center). As you might expect, there is a fine and big Gothic parish church (open only between masses), and what you might not expect – an exhibition dedicated to the town’s executioner, a busy man, in the positively surprising Regional Museum (also contains pharmacy, musical instruments and old weapons exhibits). Pop into nearby Binarowa to see the UNESCO Heritage wooden church.

BOBOWA (18)

Bobowa lies between Nowy Sącz and Biecz / Gorlice, and gives a good opportunity to visualize what a prewar Polish “shtetl” (small town inhabited mainly by Jewish people) looked like. The town has a great importance in the history of Hassidim Jews as it was the seat of Yeshiva (Jewish school) in the 17th century, and because the founder of the Bobov Hassidic dynasty – later on transferred to the USA, (Shlomo Halberstam, Bobover Rebbe) was born here and active in the local community. There is the well-preserved 18th century Bobover synagogue, and a Jewish cemetery with an ohel. In present-day Bobowa you can buy some of the best traditional laces. There is also an interesting 15th century parish church.

BOCHNIA (19)

Bochnia’s salt mines (30 km to the east from Wieliczka) claims to be even older than its world-renowned competition. In Bochnia we know that the rich salt deposits were discovered in 1248, while we do not have a verified date for Wieliczka. Bochnia also has an underground salt exhibition, and while the mine is more modest than Wieliczka, this ensures that your visit is less hasty and you get to go even deeper: 170 m - 290 m underground. There are two trails: tourist and tourist-geologist. The highlights are: 255 m long Wyżyn chamber, St. Kinga’s Chapel, the toboggan-elevator, and the choo-choo train. There is also a good sanatorium for people with respiratory ailments.

CHOCHOŁÓW (20)

Chochołów, 15 km west of Zakopane, is the best-looking highlander (górale) village at the foothills of the Tatra Mountains. There is a wooden church, many 19th century wooden cottages (especially Anna Styrcuła’s cottage) and a museum dedicated to the highlander uprising against Austria in 1848.

KRYNICA (21)

Krynica – called sometimes Górska (mountainous), is possibly the most popular of all Polish spa towns. If you need time to chill out while in this part of Poland, you might consider visiting and absorbing some new experiences with the help of the powerful Krynica mineral springs (the taste is an experience in itself). The must-do’s are relaxation, a visit to the “water-drinking” room (Pijalnia), walks along Novotarskiego Street (the ‘deptak’) and sampling the other

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spring waters; funicular train to the Góra Parkowa observation point; and the museum of naïve Lemko painter Nikifor (almost a beggar in his lifetime, at present very famous).

LANCKORONA (22)

Lanckorona used to be a town, now it has faded into just a village, although still a very charming and peaceful spot worth visiting after seeing Kalwaria Zebrzydowska, which is an hour's walk away. Reasons for visiting: its setting on a hill slope – the view, castle ruins, church, and picturesque wooden houses on the Rynek market square.

NOWY WIŚNICZ (23)

A pretty Renaissance / early-Baroque castle located close to Bochnia. The irregular but harmonious-looking castle palace reminds of buildings in Italy. There are not many exhibits in the interiors, but the view, frescos, the chapel, and models of other Polish castles are worth the time.

STARY SĄCZ & NOWY SĄCZ (24)

If you have a lot of time and want to discover the Lesser Poland region in depth, your attention will be drawn to two nearby (6 km apart) towns with similar names. Old Stary Sącz dates back to 1186, but now it is ten times smaller than its sister new Nowy Sącz (90 thousand inhabitants), founded in 1292. The first choice is Stary Sącz (the fortified 13th-14th century church in the Convent of Poor Clares: Klasztor Klarysek with the grave of St. Kinga) and a good small cobblestoned Rynek (Market Square). Nowy Sącz has a much bigger neo-Gothic Rynek, 17th century synagogue and a good open-air folk architecture museum.

TARNÓW (25)

When stopping in the off-the-beaten-path Tarnów, you can sense the cultural richness of South-Eastern Poland. The prevailing Renaissance architectural style is palpable in the Rynek (Market Square) with its charming town hall. Do not miss the cathedral (Katedra), which houses impressive Renaissance tomb stones, the General Józef Bem's mausoleum, Dom Mikołajewski, Sanguszków Palace and the museums: including the regional museum in the town hall (porcelain, glassware, Sarmatic portraits and many other exhibits), the diocesan museum, and especially the lively museum dedicated to the Roma (Gypsies). If you do not make it to see the other wooden churches in Poland, there are two churches south of the centre (the closer, St. Mary's, dates from 1440), and if you are also interested in Jewish heritage, there is a synagogue, bath house, and cemetery. The best observation point is from Góra Św. Marcina. The place is small and if you don't have much time, three hours is enough to see most of it.

ZALIPIE (26)

The village of Zalipie is the premium place to go in Poland to see living folk art. The nickname "painted village" appeared in 1930s when the local women

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started to put colorful floral patterns on their cottages, wells, tool sheds, furniture, cutlery, and dog houses. There are also the local laces, embroidery and straw decorations. Visit the museum and art centre at Dom Malarek (the House of Women Painters) and Zagroda Felicji Curyłowej (F. Curyłowa's Croft), to see the artists at work and perhaps buy some souvenirs.

SILESIAN (ŚLĄSKIE) VOIVODESHIP

BIELSKO-BIAŁA (27)

Two names for two cities united in 1951. Historically Bielsko belonged to Silesia and Biała to Galicia / Lesser Poland. The two, quite distinct town centers (an interesting feature) are separated by the small Biała stream. Bielsko-Biała is a handy stopping point with some amenities for tourists and good, though a little neglected, bourgeois architecture. Do visit if you travel to the Beskid or cross Poland in the west-south direction. Anyway, it is a short walk to see the Zamek castle, St. Nicolas Cathedral (Katedra św. Mikołaja) and the Rynek in Bielsko – as well as having a cup of coffee in Biała along with a glimpse of the elegant town hall, Evangelical church and the funny Kamienica Pod Żabami (the House under the Frogs). If you have more time, check the cute wooden church in the Mikuszowice suburb, Dom Tkacza (historical weaver's loom) or go by cable car to Mt. Szyndzielnia (part of the Beskid mountains).

CIESZYN (28)

This old historical town divided, due to territorial disputes after World War I, to become Cieszyn in Poland and Český Těšín in Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic). The historical center remained in Poland and it is a very pretty place – if you want to focus on Silesia, do not miss it. Cieszyn was once the capital of a Silesian principedom and thus there are four central squares; the castle hill (very valuable Romanesque 11th century St. Nicolas' rotunda next to a Gothic tower: superb view); and a few good churches; a picturesque well (the place where Cieszyn was founded). There are several good cafés (especially at Larisch Palace) and pubs which remind us that this used to be a flourishing Austrian town. Check the "Cieszyn Venice" Street and go on foot into the Czech Republic.

GLIWICE (29)

Gliwice is possibly the nicest of the 14 industrial cities forming the Upper Silesian Metropolitan Area (also called the Katowice agglomeration). There are stately German turn-of-the-century villas, a market square and a castle with a medieval feel. History buffs know well that World War II started following a staged attack by the Nazi secret police on the radio station in Gleiwitz (Gliwice). The radio station still exists (Szobiszowice district): it is 118 m high and made solely of wood (thus arguably is the biggest wooden structure in the world!).

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KATOWICE / CHORZÓW (30)

The capital of Silesian Voivodeship and the centre of the Upper Silesian Industry Area (in fact a conurbation totaling 2.8 million people). Katowice is commonly associated with the coal industry and steelworks, still lags in not having any super-modern infrastructure and there is little by way of a recorded historical heritage. However, if business is not your goal, Katowice has a photogenic post-industrial bizarre landscape. Once in Katowice, venture south-east to the former historical miners' neighborhoods of Nikiszowiec and Giszowiec, south-west to see the 16th century timber church of Michael the Archangel and northwest to the Park of Culture and Recreation in Chorzów (zoo, famous Ruch Chorzów football stadium, planetarium, open-air folk architecture museum and an amusement park). In the very centre do not miss the Spodek sports hall and the Old Railway Station (not to be confused with the nasty current one!).

KONIAKÓW (31)

One of the "Beskid mountain village triplet" along with Istebna and Jaworzynka. All three are recommended if you want to experience a more authentic highlander culture, hikes and cross-country skiing. Koniaków has a Museum and Gallery of Laces (you can buy special lace underwear – some say it is sexy), similar museum institutions (with less emphasis on laces) and folk architecture specimens in Istebna and Jaworzynka.

PSZCZYNA (32)

Make a stopover to refresh in Pszyczyna and visit the 19th century castle which before World Wars belonged to the affluent von Hochberg family. The castle, for several years, was home to the famous composer G.P. Telemann (summer vacations 1704-1707) and during World War I, even the German emperor Wilhelm II. The rooms are furnished opulently but with taste and a sense of proportion. Afterwards, walk through the lovely palace park. Pszyczyna has another one of the ubiquitous "skansens", i.e. open-air folk art museums.

SZCZYRK (33)

Szczyrk is a very important Polish ski centre (30 lifts, excellent downhill skiing). It lies in the Beskid Śląski and is the most accessible of the three largest Beskid resorts (also Ustroń and Wisła). Besides skiing in the winter, it is a good place to go hiking throughout the rest of the year: Mt. Skrzyczne (1245 m, you can get there by cable car), Mt. Klimczok (1117 m) and Mt. Barania Góra (1220 m) with the source of the longest (1047 km) river in Poland, the Wisła (Vistula). Downtown there is a good choice of bars and restaurants.

TARNOWSKIE GÓRY (34)

The most tourist-oriented place in the Katowice industry agglomeration, the town of Tarnowskie Góry has several medieval mines where silver, copper and lead were extracted. The most visited is the Sztolnia Czarnego Pstrąga (Silver Trout Shaft), where you can see what mining used to be like (better illustrated in the Museum of Silver Mining 3 km away), and enjoy a mystical underground boat trip along the former drainage canal.

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TYCHY (35)

Part of the Upper Silesian Industrial Region, Tychy is home to a historical brewery (SABMiller, Kompania Piwowarska). Tyskie beer is among the most popular beer brands in Poland (second is Żywiec, third Lech brewed in Poznań). If you like hops and malt, consider stopping in Tychy, visiting the brewery museum, taking a guided tour of the brewery, and drinking half a liter or so. If you do not have time by day, in the summer there are also night-time brewery tours.

USTROŃ (36)

Ustroń, the most peaceful of the three Beskid Śląski centers (the other two are Wisła and Szczyrk), is a spa resort known for health sanatoriums. The sanatorium / spa hotels are almost all built in the same pyramidal architectural style that curiously matches the picturesque mountainous landscape. Once in Ustroń, you can relax and enjoy walking and hiking to Mt. Równica (884 m) and Mt. Czantoria (995 m, also by cable car). There are two museums: ethnographical and metallurgical.

ŻYWIEC (37)

Żywiec beer ranks among two most popular and visible brands in Poland. It was founded in 1856 by Karl Ferdinand von Habsburg and now belongs to Heineken. The old brewery became a museum and similarly to Tychy, there are guided tours and an interesting exhibition. In comparison to Tychy, Żywiec has a historical centre with a castle (15th century, pleasant romantic park) and an interesting Holy Cross (św. Krzyża) church.

SUBCARPATHIAN (PODKARPACKIE) VOIVODESHIP

BARANÓW SANDOMIERSKI (38)

This Renaissance palace was built in the 1590s and in contrast to many other castles in Poland, it survived World War II unscathed. It is partly open to visitors (superb arcades) and partly a high-end hotel, one of the most popular castle lodgings in Poland. There is a very beautiful park and a museum of sulphur. The palace is located halfway between Sandomierz, Tarnów and Rzeszów.

BÓBRKA (39)

You might have heard about Poland's current struggle to ensure a steady import of oil and gas, but possibly less about the Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria, a territory dependant on Austrian Habsburg monarchy in the 19th century. The capital of Galicia was in Lwów (Ukrainian Lviv) and second major town was Kraków, the population spoke Polish, Ukrainian and Yiddish. Lo and behold, neither the Persian Gulf nor Texas, but Polish Galicia was the place where the petroleum industry stepped up towards a global boom in 1854-1856. The village of Bóbrka has several 19th century rigs and drilling derricks, as well as

a museum reminding us that it was Ignacy Łukasiewicz who created the first modern oil refinery.

JAROSŁAW (40)

Jarosław inherited its name from the founder, an 11th century prince of Kiev, mighty Yaroslav the Wise, and flourished until the end of 18th century. Visit this captivating historic town with several Renaissance monuments. Particularly famous are the Orsetti Mansion (Kamienica Orsettich) and the Underground Tourist trail, but you will find dozens of other interesting buildings of varied architectural value. Drop in at the town museum and see the churches.

KRASICZYN (41)

This might possibly be the most picturesque Renaissance castle in the country: four round bastions (dedicated to the God, the Pope, the King, and the Noblemen); sgraffitos (decorative wall moldings) and an awesome park. There is not much to see on the guided tour (the towers, portrait gallery, courtyards), and apart from the exteriors, the main attraction is the castle hotel and conference rooms. Krasieczyn is only 10 km from Przemyśl.

KROSNO (42)

The centre of modern Polish petroleum and gas industry, Krosno is also famous for the glassworks (produces most Polish beer glasses), but it should quench the thirst of anyone who loves historical towns with a distinct Renaissance feel. There are charming arcade passages in the Rynek (Market Square) and two exceptional churches: the Franciscan Church with an ornate early Baroque Oświęcim Family Chapel and the monumental Gothic parish church (very impressive polychromy and artistic treasures). If you have more time, see the big collection of kerosene lamps in the Regional Museum and the nearby Traditional Crafts Museum.

LESKO (43)

Lesko is a small town only a short journey from Sanok on the way to Solińskie Lake. Lesko is an off-the-beaten-path highlight thanks to its unusual Renaissance-style synagogue with Sephardim architectural influences (art gallery with parts of the preserved interiors), as well as possibly the most impressive small town Jewish cemetery (from 1500 onwards, 2 thousand matsevas).

LEŻAJSK (44)

The first mental link most people living in Poland have with Leżajsk is the local beer, a good brew which is not available everywhere. However, the biggest all-year attraction is the Bernardine monastery church, famous for its miraculous image of the Virgin Mary, as well as having a huge organ (74 registers, 5894 pipes). If you are lucky or have checked in advance, you may get to hear it being played. The third notable fact is that Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk (1717-1786), one of founders of the Hassidic movement (a Jewish mystic group), is buried here, and at the end of February thousands of the Hassidim pilgrims converge at the tzaddik's grave in Leżajsk's synagogue.

RADRUŻ (45)

What a find even for the most seasoned explorers who have seen it all. Radruż is located right on the Ukraine border, somewhat away from other attractions. We mention it because there is the unusual Uniate fortified wooden 16th century St. Paraskeve's church complex (church, belfry, 2 cemeteries and priest's house) – open on Saturdays. Practically next door is the small town of Horyniec Zdrój with mineral springs and not faraway also the really unique wooden structure of the church in Chotyniec.

RZESZÓW (46)

Rzeszów is the capital of Subcarpathia. Although the touristically attractive Subcarpathia is one of the less developed parts of Poland, you will find Rzeszów modern and tidy with a decent amount of cultural life plus eating places concentrated around the Rynek (Market Square) and several good hotels. All in all, it is a convenient location for trips to other attractions in the region. Interestingly, it is the third city in Poland (after Warsaw and Kraków) to have seasonal direct LOT airline connections to the USA (New York - Newark), as well as budget airlines to London. Points of interests are: Rynek, the Underground Tourist Route (start in Króla Kazimierza Street, 213 m walk through 34 cellars), an ornate Bernardine Church and other churches along with two former synagogues and a good-looking castle (closed to visitors).

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BIELSKO-BIAŁA

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- 2 SPA hotels.

BOCHNIA

- 2 best hotels in town available online.
- 1 SPA hotel.

CIESZYN

- 2 of the best hotels in town available online.

CZĘSTOCHOWA

- 2 best hotels in town available online.
- 1 SPA hotel in nearby Zawiercie (midway to Katowice).
- Częstochowa is visited during POLAND IN ONE GO and GRAND TOUR OF POLAND, our fixed-date Escorted tours.
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DĘBNO

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GLIWICE

- 3 best hotels in town available online.
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KALWARIA ZEBRZYDOWSKA

- 1 best hotel in town available online.

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- Kalwaria Zebrzydowska is visited during POLAND IN ONE GO and GRAND TOUR OF POLAND, our fixed-date Escorted tours.
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KATOWICE

- 12 best hotels in town available online.
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ŁAŃCUT

- The palace and vodka distillery museum are visited during SIMPLE PLEASURES, our fixed-date Escorted tour.

NOWY WIŚNICZ

- The castle is visited during SIMPLE PLEASURES, our fixed-date Escorted tour.

OŚWIĘCIM

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- 3 best hotels in town available online.

RZESZÓW

- 4 best hotels in town available online.
- 19 car models available for rental from Rzeszów.

SANOK

- 1 best hotel in town available online (if you want to be as close as possible to the Bieszczady, we have a hotel in Muczne).
- Private chauffeur-driven tours from Kraków (the same tour can also include Bobowa and Lesko).

SZCZAWNICA

- 1 best hotel in town available online.
- The Pieniny Mountains area is visited during SIMPLE PLEASURES, our fixed-date Escorted tour.
- Dunajec River Gorge trip available as a chauffeur-driven or coach tour from Kraków and Zakopane.
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SZCZYRK

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- 4 best hotels in town available online (plus one in nearby Żywiec).
- 1 SPA hotel.

TARNÓW

- 2 of the best hotels in town available online.
- The town is visited during SIMPLE PLEASURES, our fixed-date Escorted tour.
- Private chauffeur-driven tours from Kraków.

TYCHY

- 2 best hotels in town available online.
- 1 SPA hotel and 1 more in nearby Żory.
- 9 car models available for rental from Tychy.
- The Tychy Brewery is visited during GRAND TOUR OF POLAND, our fixed-date Escorted tour.
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- Incentive travel offers for companies.

USTROŃ

- 5 best hotels in town available online.
- 3 SPA hotels.

WADOWICE

- Wadowice is visited during POLAND IN ONE GO and GRAND TOUR OF POLAND, our fixed-date Escorted tours.

WIELICZKA

- 3 best hotels in town available online.
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- Organization of events in the Salt Mines.

WISŁA

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