

TOP PLACES IN POLAND: STAYPOLAND E-BOOK

TOP PLACES E-BOOK

(StayPoland's miniguide to the 22 most important Polish destinations)

For each Polish region we have prepared a special regional e-book and the selected best attractions are published in this short handbook.

Here you will find more about places which are most visited by tourists coming to discover Poland. To go further than others, download Regional e-Books.

Every e-book has five sections:

1. introduction to Poland and sights,
2. map,
3. "one of a kind" tourist sights (4 places in Poland),
4. "must-see in Poland!": tourist sights (18 places, most popular: Gdańsk, Wrocław, Tatra Mountains / Zakopane, Poznań)
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 CENTRAL-EASTERN POLAND

provinces: 16 voivodeships (in e-Books we cover regions: North-West, North-East, Central-East, South-West, South-East)

area / population: 312,679 sq km (69th worldwide) / 38.1 million people (33rd in the world)

top places: 4 "one of a kind": Kraków, Warsaw, Wieliczka, Auschwitz.
18 Polish must-see: Białowieża Forest, Częstochowa, Elbląg-Ostróda Canal, Gdańsk, Gniezno, Great Masurian Lakes, Kazimierz Dolny, Lesser Poland's Wooden Churches, Lublin, Malbork, Pieniny National Park, Poznań, Słowiński National

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3. "ONE OF A KIND" PLACES

*** **KRAKÓW (SOUTH-EAST) /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 Sukienice (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/Świątokrzyska chapels, royal tombs, view from the Zygmundowska Tower), the Royal Castle - 5 popular exhibition tours: State Rooms, Private Apartments, 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 University - founded in 1364 and featuring an ornate courtyard with an old clock, and an interesting museum with the first globe to include America; the Franciscan Church: gloomy atmosphere combined with breathtaking Art Nouveau stained-glass windows by Wyspiański; the old Jewish Kazimierz District – synagogues listed by popularity: Remuh with its interesting cemetery, Stara, Izaaka, Wysoka, Tempel, Poppera, Kupa, and Mizrachi, the remainder of 90 synagogues 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, Piłsudskiego, 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 Mogiła; (and next to it) the social realist district of Nowa Huta (new communist Kraków): startling architecture, Trabant rides and the famous Arka Pana church; Podgórze district: Oskar Schindler's factory, wartime ghetto museum; Plaszów: concentration camp monument; Twierdza Kraków

TOP PLACES IN POLAND: STAYPOLAND E-BOOK

(19th century fortifications); the daily market in Stary Kleparz; Stary Theatre; St. Faustyna's Sanctuary of Divine Mercy (Sanktuarium Bożego Miłosierdzia) in 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]

*** **WARSAW (CENTRAL-EAST) /2/**

The capital of Poland is an exciting city of contrasts with a poignant history to tell. Severely demolished (destroyed up to 85%) in World War II: to see the contrasts visit the Old Town and the remains of the Jewish ghetto area. Postwar reconstruction implanted socialist realist architecture and drab housing blocks, while post-communism development brought glossy and award-winning modern buildings. The flock of 14 downtown skyscrapers is still guarded by a stern present from Stalin: the Palace of Culture.

++ Old Town (Market Square / Rynek Starego Miasta, faithfully reconstructed streets and churches, secluded courtyards, Zamek Królewski: Royal Castle interiors, viewing terrace on Gnojna Góra, captivating Warsaw Historical Museum, the Barbakan); Palace of Culture (viewing terrace on the 30th floor); Łazienki Royal Castle and Gardens (walk, interiors, Chopin monument); Royal Route (stroll from Plac Zamkowy to Łazienki Park: on the way you can make a short detour to the Sejm parliamentary buildings and Zamek Ujazdowski castle: modern art exhibitions and a restaurant with superb view); Warsaw Uprising Museum (interiors, outdoor memorial wall).

+ Wilanów Royal Castle (outskirts; castle interiors, walk in fine gardens, Polish poster museum); New Town (reconstructed streets and churches, Marie Curie-Skłodowska museum); Plac Piłsudskiego (changing of guards on the square, beautiful Saxon gardens); Plac Teatralny (the Great Theatre, trendy night clubs); Foksal / Nowy Świat / Chmielna Streets (restaurants and cafés); the former Jewish ghetto (walk with a guide: wall remnants, various memorials, the Nożyk synagogue, Próżna Street, Jewish cemetery, Jewish Historical Institute); National Museum (a superb gallery of Polish medieval and modern art); Polish Army Museum (free entry to the courtyard with combat equipment such as tanks and unique aircraft); Fotoplastykon (historical 3D pictures); Praga district (right bank: Ząbkowska and Okrzei streets where walls are riddled with bullet holes from World War II, the old river port, Army memorial, Orthodox church, and the zoo); Plac Konstytucji and the classic and imposing 1950s MDM social realist shopping and residential area (Muranów district is a good alternative if you want to see the 1950s architecture); Zachęta Art Gallery (premium temporary exhibitions of modern art); Jan Paweł II Paintings Gallery (a peculiar, forlorn collection of European works of art); BUW (Warsaw University Library: a modern architectural masterpiece with an interesting entrance hall and rooftop gardens); AWF (University of physical education, north of the centre; intriguing functionalist architecture – if you like that, check also the halls of Polytechnika and SGH universities); Powązki cemetery; Złote Tarasy & Arkadia: the biggest and most opulent Polish shopping malls; Kopiec Powstania Warszawskiego (man-made hill in Sadyba district built to commemorate the Warsaw Uprising); wooden houses of the Soviet builders of the Palace of Culture (so-called Finnish houses near the Sejm or the fascinating Russian spirit Jelonki suburb) and the underground metro line (award-winning metro

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station at Plac Wilsona).

[min: 1.5 day – best: 3 days – max: 5 days]

*** **WIELICZKA (SOUTH-EAST) /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]

*** **AUSCHWITZ (SOUTH-EAST) /4/**

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]

4. MUST-SEE PLACES IN POLAND

** **BIAŁOWIEŻA FOREST NATIONAL PARK (NORTH-EAST) /5/**

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Prepare yourself for an ancient forest experience in Europe's most interesting and largest primeval wooded area, extending partly to Belarus. Shady green, the all-permeating breath of nature, rare species, and the king of the forest, the żubr (wisent/European bison). It is best to access the forest from the village of Białowieża.

++ Rezerwat Ścisły (a strictly protected area) can be entered only in small groups with a guide (7-km walk) or alternatively by a limited number of horse-drawn carts; Muzeum Przyrodniczo-Leśne (Forest Museum) and Szlak Dębów Królewskich (Royal Oaks Trail) – walk among oaks more than 400 years old.

+ Rezerwat żubrów (European bison reserve): here you are guaranteed to see the żubr; Park Pałacowy (Palace Park) remains even though the former palace of the Russian tsars burnt down, Orthodox św. Mikołaja (St. Nicolaus' Orthodox church); private open-air folk architecture museum, the Hwożna reserve (accessible from Narewka) & the Kosy Most observation tower, Miejsce Mocy (the Place of the Power: walk to see mysterious stones assembled for pagan ceremonies) ... and if you can manage it, the Belarusian village of Viskuli where the dissolution of the Soviet Union was signed, bringing the end of an era.

[min: 4 hours – best: 2-4 days – max: 5-7 days]

** CZĘSTOCHOWA (SOUTH-EAST) /6/

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

+ Arsenal (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]

** ELBLĄG-OSTRÓDA CANAL (NORTH-EAST) /7/

Possibly the biggest technological wonder in Poland, this 19th century engineering feat is located among wonderful nature and intersects six lakes. Built in 1848-1876, it is 83.3 km long and its slipways today enable pleasure boats to 'float' over land in wheeled cradles.

++ Boat trip from Elbląg to Małyty (60% of the full boat journey, 6.5 hours), an unusual experience including all five slipways (return to Elbląg by train).

+ Complete boat trip Elbląg – Ostróda or Ostróda – Elbląg (11 hours); small canal museum in Buczyniec; enjoy the old town of the formerly thriving Elbląg (faded since the first half of the 20th century, still being rebuilt) and the local art gallery, pleasant lakes around Ostróda (Szelał Wielki, Drwęckie Lakes) and a walk through the town between the harbor and the old Teutonic Castle.

[min: 7 hours – best: 1 day – max: 2-3 days (if you want to see more lakes). Boat trip must be booked in advance.]

TOP PLACES IN POLAND: STAYPOLAND E-BOOK

** GDAŃSK (NORTH-WEST) /8/

Once a rich Hanseatic port city, today its extensive and charming historical areas pull in local and foreign visitors. Gdańsk is the birthplace of the Solidarity Movement, the place where WW2 started and the nation's leading summer holiday resort by the Baltic coast.

++ Historical Main Town (Główne Miasto): Kościół Mariacki (St. Mary's Church, reportedly the biggest brick church in the world, astronomical clock, view from the tower) and charismatic Mariacka Street (cafés and amber shops); a walk down the Royal Way: Długa Street, Długi Targ and Dwór Artusa (Arthur's Court, interiors – ceremonial hall); stroll along Długie Pobrzeże (Long Embankment); National museum (Gothic & Flemish art, H. Memling's Last Judgment); Stocznia Gdańska (Shipyards, Solidarity Movement monument and the Roads to Freedom Exhibition).

+ Old Town (Stare Miasto) - historically less affluent areas north of the "Main Town": walk around and check the Gothic churches of St. Brigida and St. Catharine; Oliwa Cathedral (longest church in Poland, superb organ recitals), gardens and a nearby mosque; Town Hall (Gdańsk history museum), Wyspa Spichrzów & Olowianka (islands, old granaries, a stunning view of Długie Pobrzeże); Katownia (once the executioner's house, today the Amber museum); Centralne Muzeum Morskie (Maritime museum) including Żuraw (the Crane: city symbol) and the ship MS Sołdek, Dom Uphagena (Uphagen's House, museum of 18th century interior design); Westerplatte (WW2 started here: monument and museum, possible to access by mock-pirate ship from Długie Pobrzeże); old villas in Wrzeszcz (connected to Nobel Prize-winning author G. Grass: Tin Drum); beaches in Jelitkowo or Sobieszewo (also a bird reserve).

[min: 1 day – best: 2.5 days – max: 4 days]

** GNIEZNO (SOUTH-WEST) /9/

Gniezno was the first capital of Poland in the 10th-11th century and since year 1000 had been seat of the first archbishopric. The cathedral is a must for anyone with a keen interest in Polish history.

++ The Gothic Cathedral houses the sarcophagus of the Polish patron saint, St Adalbert (Św. Wojciech), and a Romanesque art masterpiece – bronze doors dating from 1175 depicting the St. Adalbert legends.

+ Town centre, fortifications and especially St. John's church, Museum of the Origins of the Polish State at Jelonek Lake, the view from the cathedral. It is a good idea to travel to Lake Lednica 18 km to the west and take the Gąsawa-Żnin narrow gauge railway more to the north (see Northwestern e-book).

[min: 3 hours – best: 2 days – max: 3.5 days]

** GREAT MASURIAN LAKES TRIPS / MIKOŁAJKI (NORTH-EAST) /10/

Masuria with its three thousand lakes is one of the most amazing areas in Poland. Mikołajki stands out from all other beautiful Masurian resorts as the liveliest place. Besides having modern amenities, it is also ideally situated in the middle of the Masurian boat trip routes.

++ Boat trips: North (to Węgorzewo 7.5 hours or to Giżycko 4.5 hours), South (to Ruciane Nida 2.5 hours) or East (Śniardwy Lake – the biggest lake in Poland 113.8 sq. km – cruise 2 hours); walking, dining and taking it easy; outing to the Łuknajno Reserve (see explore!).

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+ Sailing on the lakes; bike trip to the wild animal park in Kadzidłowo, renting a cottage for a longer stay.

[min: 1 day – best: 2-3 days – max: 5-7 days]

** KAZIMIERZ DOLNY (CENTRAL-EAST) /11/

A small, beautiful and ancient town along the Vistula River. It is rustic, quaint and very scenic, ideal for weekend getaways to bask in the summer sun.

++ Old town (Renaissance square with a unique well, narrow streets with art shops, outdoor market, the Three Crosses Hill, the ruins of a castle and a separate tower).

+ Walk along the Vistula river to see the more remote Renaissance granaries; a boat ride to the opposite riverbank and Janowiec Castle; Jewish synagogue; walks up shady gulley systems.

[min: 3 hours – best: 2 days – max: 4 days or more if you enjoy reading and unhurried strolls, featured in the Simple Pleasures itinerary]

** LESSER POLAND'S WOODEN CHURCHES (SOUTH-EAST) /12/

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 (Biełanka, 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]

** LUBLIN (CENTRAL-EAST) /13/

Set in the middle of Eastern Poland is this nostalgic and historical city, one which even Poles underestimate. The old town is pleasantly more like what one would expect to find in a historical European city.

TOP PLACES IN POLAND: STAYPOLAND E-BOOK

++ Castle (a splendid 14th century Holy Trinity chapel with Byzantium-inspired paintings that are typical for Russia, and a museum of Polish art with a small selection of exquisite pieces), the Old Town (a great atmosphere and unusual, for Poland, an almost circular street plan, the notable and imposing Brama Krakowska main gate, a market square with town hall, hidden passageways: a maze of wooden stairs and balconies to explore, plus a good range of well-priced restaurants and cafés), Majdanek concentration camp museum (outskirts; Holocaust memorial).

+ Archikatedra (cathedral, J. Meyer frescoes); 19th century Krakowskie Przedmieście Street; remnants of a once thriving and prominent Jewish community (well-known story about the Seer of Lublin); Lublin open-air folklore museum.

[min: 8 hours – best: 1.5 day – max: 2 days]

** MALBORK (NORTH-WEST) /14/

The biggest Gothic castle in the world. 1308-1457 the capital of the Teutonic Knights (Malbork is known as Marienburg in German). UNESCO Heritage Site.

++ Both Zamek Średni (Middle Castle) and Zamek Wysoki (High Castle): guided tour of the interiors - halls, the church and the views; walk around the castle, especially along the opposite bank of the Nogat River for a breathtaking view of the castle.

+ Amber collection, walk around the partially preserved Malbork town center (town hall, fortifications).

[min: 3 hours – best: 5 hours – max: 8 hours]

** PIENINY NATIONAL PARK (SOUTH-EAST) /15/

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 Kąty, part of Sromowce Wyżne, end in Szczawnica, 2.5 hrs, use courtesy bus Szczawnica – Kąty 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]

TOP PLACES IN POLAND: STAYPOLAND E-BOOK

** POZNAŃ (SOUTH-WEST) /16/

Poland's most western major city (both geographically and in character) hosts the well-known Polish trade fairs. However, Poznań is not just about business, it is a welcoming destination for any traveler interested in culture and fun.

++ The colorful Stary Rynek (another superb market place with an impressive Renaissance town hall: Museum of Poznań's History, pillory and weigh House); Ostrów Tumski (Cathedral Island) – Basilica of St. Peter and Paul (the cradle of Poland, Poznań was the seat of Polish Kings before Kraków); brazenly Baroque St. Stanislaus (św. Stanisława) parish church, pubs and clubs; and the Stary Browar shopping centre (contemporary design converted from a brewery, the most beautiful mall in Poland).

+ National Museum (an extensive collection of valuable Polish and European art); the Franciscan Church and Monastery (see the model of old Poznań), the Kaiserhaus (the Zamek) built for German Emperor Wilhelm II – now a culture centre (one of the few remaining interiors with Third Reich design elements in Europe); the monument to the victims of June 1956; the Palm House; the Archeology Museum; the charming but forgotten Śródka district; pleasing Malta Lake; Cytadela: the park on the Citadel Hill enclosing the Museum of Weapons and inspiringly strange statues by M. Abakanowicz; St. Adalbert's (św. Wojciech) Church: a wooden belfry and Art Nouveau paintings.

[min: 3 hours – best: 2 days – max: 3.5 days]

** SLOWIŃSKI NATIONAL PARK (NORTH-WEST) /17/

Often described as a mini-Sahara by the Baltic Sea. Huge shifting dunes in a UNESCO biosphere reserve consisting of bogs, forests and very impressive sandy hills. There are over 50 protected species of plants and 250 species of birds.

++ Walk from Łeba to Biała Góra (White Mountain) / Mierzeja Reserve dunes (8 km from Łeba or just 2 km walk if you drive to the parking area); do climb the dunes; Hitler's testing launch pad for V2 rockets (Wyrzutnia) on the way to the dunes; walk across the beach if you return on foot to Łeba.

+ Hike or bike around the Łebsko and Gardno Lakes (wildlife); see the open-air folk architecture museum in Kluki, the National Park museum in Smoldzino, the view of Rowokół hill, the lighthouse near Czołpino; or simply lie on the beach. If you are staying in Łeba, you can also try the romantic beaches further to the east: Stilo and Białogóra – these beaches are not listed on Polish beach rankings, hence there are almost no tourists.

[min: 8 hours – best: 1.5 days – max: 7 days if you stay in Łeba or Rowy]

** ŚWIDNICA (SOUTH-WEST) /18/

The old historical town is internationally known for its UNESCO Heritage Church of Peace.

++ The Kościół Pokoju (Church of Peace) was built in 1656 (after the 30 Years' War) for the Protestant minority. The magnificent church is allegedly the biggest timber-framed church in the world, and it has a great organ within interesting interiors.

+ Rynek (the Market Square) with the Shop-Keeping History museum in the town hall and a view from the Gothic belfry (103 m) of the St. Stanislaus

TOP PLACES IN POLAND: STAYPOLAND E-BOOK

and St. Wenceslas Church, plus a Military Museum.

[min: 1 hour – best: 3 hours – max: 8 hours]

** **TATRA MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK (SOUTH-EAST) /19/**

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 (Jarząbcza, Starobiciańska); Lejowa; Kościeliska; Małej Łąki; Za Bramką; Strążyska; Białego; Bystrej (Kondratowa, Goryczkowa, Jaworzyńska); Olcyska; Suche Wody (Gąsienicowa); 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 Perć (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 (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]

** **TORUŃ (NORTH-NORTH) /20/**

The birthplace of Nicolaus Copernicus and a pearl of Gothic architecture (mostly original buildings since the city was largely undamaged by wars), Toruń is a picturesque and large historical UNESCO heritage city.

++ Old Town: Town Hall (museum & definitely the postcard views from the tower); Nicolaus Copernicus' House (astronomer's museum), Kościół św. Janów (Church of Saint Johns, see both the interior and the tower); stroll along the charming streets and the fortified walls, especially the Krzywa Wieża

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(crooked tower); good cafés and bars; purchase the famous local gingerbread (mind your teeth, the hard ones are produced for decorative purposes).

+ Planetarium (astronomy show); Kościół NMP (St. Mary's Church); Kościół św. Jakuba (St. James' Church); remnants of the Teutonic castle; Dom Eskenów & Kamienica Pod Gwiazdą (two burgher houses with interesting interiors and displays open to public); the Explorers' Museum and Ethnographic museum.

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

** WROCŁAW (SOUTH-WEST) /21/

Behind the metropolitan atmosphere of the capital of Silesia lies a tumultuous history. The large old town with fabulous square and numerous islands connected by 112 bridges help explain why it is considered as one of the most interesting places in Poland.

++ Rynek (the Market Square) with a late Gothic town hall (visit the chambers & in the cellar, the oldest inn in Poland) and imposing burghers houses – there are 11 streets leading out from the square, giving you plenty of choices for strolls around the city; several majestic Gothic churches (St. Elisabeth's, St. Dorota's, St. Maria Magdalena's, St. Vincent's, St. Adalbert's (Św. Wojciech)) and a Bernardine Monastery; Piasek Island with a beautiful Nativity Scene in the Church of Visitation of St. Mary; Ostrów Tumski (Cathedral Island), the oldest part of Wrocław with St. John's Cathedral (visit the tower); Panorama Raclawicka (3D painting depicting the Raclawice Battle); Aula Leopoldina (splendid Baroque ceremonial hall in the University); Hala Ludowa (the Centennial Hall built by Max Berg in 1913, UNESCO heritage site); plus great bars and clubs.

+ National Museum (medieval sculpture, fine Polish painting); Most Oławski (Olawski bridge); Ogród Japoński (Japanese-style garden); Botanical Garden and a zoo; Archeology and Ethnographic museums in the Spaetgen Palace; Stare Jatki street with clubs and a monument to slaughterhouse animals; Hala Targowa (modernist Market hall from 1908 – look inside); Promenada Staromiejska (boulevard along the past fortification walls south of the old town); Awangarda Art Gallery, and the "Olympic" stadium where Hitler had planned to hold the Olympic games.

[min: 1 day – best: 2.5 days – max: 4 days]

** ZAMOŚĆ (CENTRAL-EAST) /22/

Zamość is an UNESCO heritage site. It was built from scratch amid meadows in 1580 by dynamic chancellor Jan Zamoyski as a vision of the ideal Renaissance town. Although this remarkable place is still relatively unvisited, there is a superb square, impressive fortifications to explore, underground bars and restaurants, and a lovely arched walkway surrounding the large market square to shelter you from the heat of the sun.

++ Walk around the moderate-sized but unique town center; Renaissance Armenian houses line the main square, a beautiful town hall, the Zamoyski palace; fortifications.

+ Martyrdom museum in the Rotunda; City History Museum; synagogue (now a public library).

[min: 3 hours – best: 7 hours – max: 1 day]

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BIAŁOWIEŻA

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- 2 best hotels in town available online.
- 1 SPA hotel in nearby Zawiercie (midway to Katowice).
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ELBLĄG

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- 3 best hotels in town available online.
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GDAŃSK AND THE TRICITY

- 60 best hotels in the area available online (including 37 in Gdańsk, 10 in Sopot and 12 in Gdynia).
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- Quality sight and restaurant guide for Gdańsk and environs (120 pages) sent in advance to anyone interested in our tailor-made tours.
- Incentive travel programs for companies.

GNIEZNO

- 1 best hotel in town available online.
- Private chauffeur-driven tours from Poznań to Gniezno.

KAZIMIERZ DOLNY

- 3 of the best hotels in town available online.
- 1 SPA hotel.
- One-day excursions to Kazimierz Dolny from Warsaw and Lublin
- Kazimierz Dolny is one of the highlights of the SIMPLE PLEASURES fixed-date Escorted tour (2 overnights).

KRAKÓW

- 132 best hotels in town available online.
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- Visit to Malbork castle included in GRAND TOUR OF POLAND, our fixed-date Escorted tour.
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MIKOŁAJKI (MASURIAN LAKES)

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- 4 best hotels in town available online.

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OŚWIĘCIM (AUSCHWITZ)

- 2 best hotels in town available online.
- Auschwitz-Birkenau is visited during POLAND IN ONE GO and GRAND TOUR OF POLAND, our fixed-date Escorted tours.
- Private chauffeur-driven or coach tours from Kraków, Katowice, Warsaw, Wrocław or Zakopane.

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- 26 best hotels in town available online.
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SŁOWIŃSKI NATIONAL PARK

- 3 of the best hotels available online in Łeba, 1 in Rowy and 2 in Ustka.
- Option of a private chauffeur-driven tour from Gdańsk.

SZCZAWNICA (PIENINY)

- 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.
- Incentive travel offers for companies.

ŚWIDNICA

- Świdnica Church of Peace is visited during GRAND TOUR OF POLAND, our fixed-date Escorted tour.
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TORUŃ

- 9 best hotels in town available online.

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- Private airport transportation.
- Railway ticket booking and delivery.
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- 3 best hotels in town available online.
- Wieliczka Salt Mine is visited during POLAND IN ONE GO and GRAND TOUR OF POLAND, our fixed-date Escorted tours.
- Private chauffeur-driven or coach tours from Kraków or Zakopane.
- Organization of events in the Salt Mines.

WROCLAW

- 21 best hotels in town available online.
- 50 car models available for rental from Wrocław.
- Wrocław is highlighted during GRAND TOUR OF POLAND, our fixed-date Escorted tour (2 overnights in Wrocław).
- 5 kinds of city tours and private excursions from Gdańsk.
- City break packages.
- Quality sight and restaurant guide for Wrocław (120 pages) sent in advance to anyone interested in our tailor-made tours.

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- Incentive travel programs for companies.

ZAKOPANE (TATRA MOUNTAINS)

- 33 best hotels in town available online.
- 2 SPA hotels.
- Zakopane is visited during POLAND IN ONE GO and GRAND TOUR OF POLAND, our fixed-date Escorted tours.
- Private chauffeur-driven, rail and coach tours from Kraków.
- 3 kinds of city tours and private excursions from Zakopane.
- Ski holidays – skiing packages.
- Incentive travel offers for companies.

ZAMOŚĆ

- 2 of the best hotels in town available online.
- Highlighted in the SIMPLE PLEASURES fixed-date Escorted tour.
- Private chauffeured tours from Lublin to Zamość.

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