



# POLONIA - POLSKA



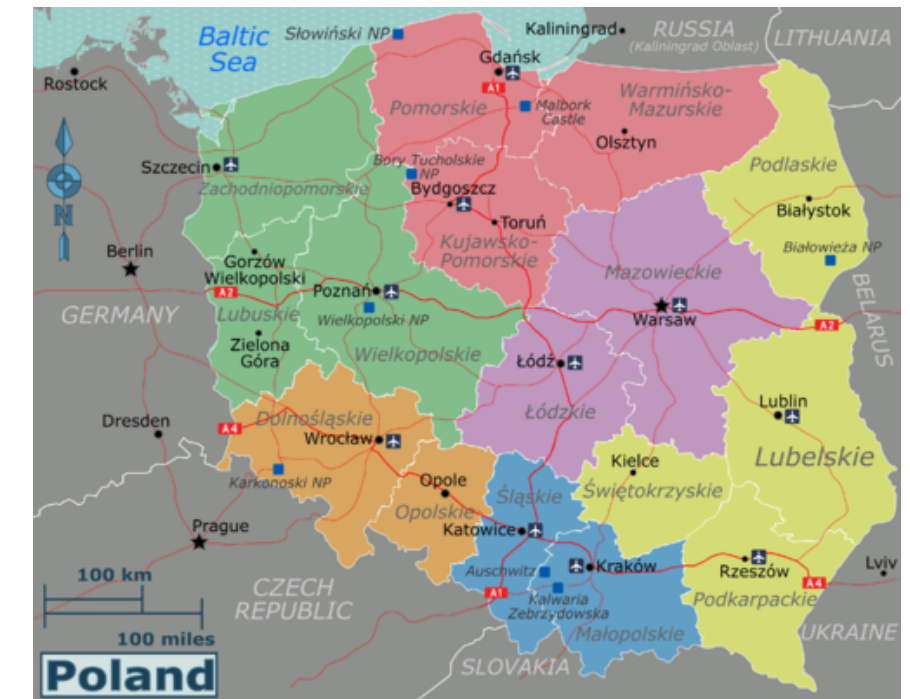
**Poland**, is a country in Central Europe with a rich and eventful history, colourful heritage reflected in the variety of monuments from different periods and very varied landscape, extending from the long Baltic Sea coastline in the north to the Tatra Mountains in the south. In between you will find lush primeval forests featuring fascinating species of animals including bisons in Białowieża; beautiful lakes and rivers ideally suitable for various watersports, the best known of which are in Warmińsko-Mazurskie; rolling hills; flat plains; and even deserts.

Poland's administrative regions are called *województwa*, abbreviated "woj".



<b>Capital and largest city</b>	Warsaw
<b>Official language</b>	Polish
<b>Recognised minority language</b>	Kashubian
<b>Ethnic groups</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 94.83% Polish</li> <li>• 1.12% Silesian-Polish</li> <li>• 0.98% Silesian</li> <li>• 0.60% Kashubian</li> <li>• 0.38% German</li> <li>• 0.13% Ukrainian</li> <li>• 0.12% Belarusian</li> <li>• 0.49% Other minorities</li> </ul>
<b>Religion (2011<sup>[4]</sup>)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 87.58% Roman Catholic</li> <li>• 7.10% Opting out of answer</li> <li>• 1.28% Other faiths</li> <li>• 2.41% Irreligious</li> <li>• 1.63% Not stated</li> </ul>
<b>Government</b>	Unitary semi-presidential republic
• President	Andrzej Duda
• Prime Minister	Mateusz Morawiecki
<b>Area</b>	
• Total	312,679 km <sup>2</sup>
<b>Population</b>	
• 30 June 2017 estimate	38,422,346

- Central Poland** (Łódzkie, Mazowieckie)  
 Central Poland is focused around the capital city of Warsaw and the large city of Łódź with rich textile manufacturing heritage.
- Southern Poland** (Małopolskie, Śląskie)  
 Home to spectacular mountain ranges, the world's oldest operating salt mines, fantastic landscapes, caves, historical monuments and cities. The magnificent medieval city of Kraków is Poland's most-visited destination, while the Silesian conurbation is the largest in the country.
- Southwestern Poland** (Dolnośląskie, Opolskie)  
 Colorful mixture of different landscapes. One of the warmest regions in Poland with the very popular, dynamic city of Wrocław. Within this region you will find Polish, German and Czech heritage.
- Northwestern Poland** (Lubuskie, Wielkopolskie, Zachodniopomorskie)  
 A varied landscape, profusion of wildlife, bird-watcher's paradise and inland dunes. Much of this part of Poland belonged to Germany for centuries, which shaped its heritage.
- Northern Poland** (Kujawsko-Pomorskie, Pomorskie, Warmińsko-Mazurskie)  
 Home to Poland's attractive seaside; sandy beaches with dunes and cliffs; lakes, rivers and forests.
- Eastern Poland** (Lubelskie, Podkarpackie, Świętokrzyskie, Podlaskie)  
 Very green area filled with lakes. It offers unspoiled nature and the possibility of camping in beautiful countryside. Unique primeval forests and picturesque rivers (e.g. Biebrza river) with protected bird species make the region increasingly interesting for tourists.



**Warsaw** (*Warszawa*) — capital of Poland, and one of the EU's thriving new business centres; the old town, nearly completely destroyed during World War II, has been rebuilt in a style inspired by classicist paintings of Canaletto.



**Gdańsk** — formerly known as Danzig; one of the old, beautiful European cities, rebuilt after World War II. Located in the centre of the Baltic coast, it's a great departure point to the many sea resorts along the Baltic coast.



**Kraków** — the "cultural capital" of Poland and its historical capital in the Middle Ages; its centre is filled with old churches, monuments, the largest European medieval marketplace - and now with trendy pubs and art galleries. Its city centre is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

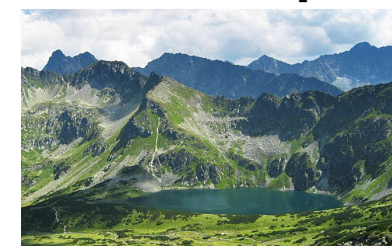


**Auschwitz-Birkenau** — An infamous complex of German Nazi extermination and slave labour camps that became the centre of the holocaust of Jews during World War II. UNESCO World Heritage Site.



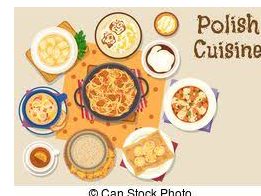
### Natural attractions

With 23 national parks and a number of landscape parks spread all over the country, natural attractions are never too far away. **Białowieża National Park**, on the Belarus border, is a World Heritage site for it comprises the last remains of the primeval forest that once covered most of Europe. It's the only place where European Bisons still live in the wild. If you're fit and up for adventure, take the dangerous **Eagle's Path** (Orla Perć) in the Tatra Mountains, where you'll also find Poland's highest peak. Pieniński National Park boasts the stunning **Dunajec River Gorge** and Karkonoski National Park is home to some fabulous **water falls**. The mountainous Bieszczady National Park has great hiking opportunities and lots of wild life. Wielkopolski National Park is, in contrast, very flat and covers a good part of the pretty **Poznań Lakeland**. The Masurian Landscape Park, in the Masurian Lake District with its 2000 lakes, is at least as beautiful. Bory Tucholskie National Park has the largest woodland in the country and has a bunch of lakes too, making it great for bird watching. The two national parks on Poland's coast are also quite popular: Wolin National Park is located on an island in the north-west, Słowiński National Park holds some of the largest **sand dunes** in Europe.



### FOOD

Polish cuisine shares many similarities with other Central European cuisines. It is rich in meat, especially pork, chicken and beef (depending on the region) and winter vegetables (cabbage in the dish *bigos*), and spices. It is also characteristic in its use of various kinds of noodles, the most notable of which are *kluski* as well as cereals such as *kasha* (from the Polish word *kasza*).



**Pierogi** are an immediately recognizable Polish dish. They are often served along side another dish (for example, with *barszcz*), rather than as the main course. There are several types of them, stuffed with a mix of cottage cheese and onion, or with meat or even wild forest fruits.



**Bigos** is another unique, if less well-known, Polish dish: a "hunter's stew" that includes various meats and vegetables, on a base of pickled cabbage.



**Gołąbki (cabbage roll)** is a typical traditional Polish food made of minced pork with some rice, onion, mushrooms, wrapped in white cabbage leaves. There are also other variations of fillings such as poultry, mutton or without meat. Before serving cabbage are simmered / fried in fat.



**Polish pancakes** are very thin and they are served either with cheese, quark previously mixed with sugar, jam, fruits and powdered sugar or with meat and vegetables- all equally tasty.



### Castles & other rural monuments

The Polish countryside is lovely and at times even gorgeous, with countless historic villages, castles, churches and other monuments. Agrotourism is therefore increasingly popular. If you have a taste for cultural heritage, the south western parts of the country offer some of the best sights, but there's great stuff in other areas too. The impressive Gothic **Wawel Castle** in Kraków may be one of the finest examples when it comes to Poland's castles, but most of the others are located in smaller countryside towns. The large, red brick **Malbork** castle (in northern Poland) is perhaps the most stunning in the country, built in 1406 and today the world's biggest brick Gothic castle. The castle of **Książ** in Wałbrzych is one the best examples in historic Silesia, which also brought forward the now semi-ruined **Chojnik castle**, located on a hill above the town of Sobieszów and within the Karkonoski National Park. After surviving battles and attacks for centuries, it was destroyed by lightning in 1675 and has been a popular tourist attraction since the 18th century.



## New Year's Traditions



New Year's Eve in Poland is like New Year's Eve in other parts of Europe. Individuals host parties, attend private events or head to city squares for fireworks extravaganzas. January 1 is often a day for concerts in auditoriums and carols sung in churches throughout Poland. For example, if you travel to Krakow Poland in January, the Philharmonic performs a year-opening concert.

## Easter



In Poland, Easter traditions are both symbolic and fun. Blessed food, decorated eggs, church services, Easter palms, and seasonal markets help to mark this springtime celebration of faith, joy, treasured customs, food,

## Wianki

*Wianki*, which means "wreaths" in English, is a pagan festival honoring the midsummer solstice. Wreaths symbolize the cyclical seasons. Krakow's *Wianki* celebrations are second to none, and they include concerts by big-name performers, fireworks displays, and an annual market.



## Mikolaj's visit

Mikolaj, the Polish Santa, visits children on December 6, during Advent church services, or on Christmas Eve. He brings children small gifts to reward them for good behavior, but he may also remind them not to be naughty by including a switch with their presents.



## Christmas

Christmas is a magical time in Poland during which animals are said to speak and forgiveness is offered to those who have offended. The Christmas Eve feast, known as *Wigilia*, is shared by family members. The day after Christmas, Poles observe St. Stephan's Day, which extends the Christmas celebrations.



## MUSIC - LITERATURE - RELIGION



**Fryderyk Chopin** was a renowned classical composer and virtuoso pianist.



**Artur Rubinstein** was one of the greatest concert pianists of the 20th century.



**Adam Mickiewicz** was an untiring promoter of Poland's culture and heritage. His national epic poem **Pan Tadeusz** is considered a masterpiece of Polish literature.



**Joseph Conrad** is often regarded as one of the greatest novelists of all time. He was the author of popular books such as **Nostromo** and **Heart of Darkness**.

## POLISH TRADITIONS AND CELEBRATIONS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

### Drowning of Marzanna



The drowning of Marzanna is a pagan farewell-to-winter tradition that occurs on Death Sunday, before Easter. An effigy of Marzanna, the goddess of the winter seasons, is taken to the riverbank and thrown into the water. Participants watch her "drown." With the passing of Marzanna, the ills of winter are forgotten and spring can return with warm weather and natural bounty.

### Juwenalia



*Juwenalia* is Polish for a college student festival that occurs in May or early June before student exams. This event is marked by colorful parades, contests, games, and parties. *Juwenalia* is an annually anticipated event and started in 15th century Krakow, Poland.

**John Paul II** was the first Pole and Slav to become a Roman Catholic Pope. He held the papacy between 1978 and 2005.

