

EUROPE · HISTORY · CITY BREAKS · ARCHITECTURE · FOOD · HIKING



Poland

Some of Europe's best-preserved old towns sit alongside sobering 20th-century history in Poland. Kraków's market square and Wawel castle, the rebuilt merchant houses of Gdańsk, the rock-salt chapels of Wieliczka and the Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial anchor most trips, while the Tatras offer serious hiking. Fast trains and cheap, hearty food make it excellent value.

i Before you go, read the UK government's travel advice for Poland and entry requirements (visas, passport validity). Last updated by FCDO 11 August 2026.

CAPITAL Warsaw	CURRENCY Polish złoty (PLN) £1 ≈ PLN 5.20	LANGUAGE Polish	BEST TIME May-Sep
DAILY BUDGET £40-£180 ££ Moderate	PLUGS Type C, E 230V · adapter needed	FLIGHT FROM LONDON 2h 20m direct ~£50-£200 return	TIME ZONE UTC+1 standard time

Poland stretches from Baltic beaches in the north to the granite Tatra peaks on the Slovak border, but most first trips concentrate on the south. Kraków, which escaped wartime destruction, makes a natural base for Auschwitz-Birkenau, Wieliczka and Zakopane. Fast trains link it with Warsaw, whose old town was rebuilt from rubble after 1945 and is now UNESCO-listed, and on to Gdańsk on the Baltic. With more time, add Wrocław's bridges and market square, the vast Gothic Malbork Castle, or Białowieża's primeval forest and its European bison.

Poland offers excellent value: a hearty lunch at a milk bar costs a few pounds, trains are cheap and good hotels are priced well below western Europe's. Kraków gets crowded in summer and with weekend stag parties, so midweek visits are calmer, while Gdańsk and the coast fill up in July and August. Winters are cold but bring Christmas markets and skiing near Zakopane. The country suits history lovers, city-breakers, food fans and hikers. First-timers are often surprised by Warsaw's modern skyline and by how much Polish cooking offers beyond pierogi.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

ARCHITECTURE

Kraków's Old Town and Wawel

Rynek Główny, one of Europe's largest medieval squares, centres on the Cloth Hall and St Mary's Basilica, where a trumpeter sounds the hejnał every hour. A short walk south, Wawel's castle and cathedral hold the tombs of Polish kings.
- 2

HISTORY

Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum

At the former Nazi German concentration and extermination camp, where about 1.1 million people were murdered, a memorial and museum now bear witness. Allow at least three and a half hours to see both Auschwitz I and Birkenau.

3

ARCHITECTURE

Gdańsk Main Town

Tall merchant houses, rebuilt after 1945, line Long Street and the Long Market down to the medieval crane on the Motława River. The European Solidarity Centre and the Museum of the Second World War tell the city's 20th-century story.

4

HISTORY

Wieliczka Salt Mine

Over seven centuries miners carved chapels, statues and even chandeliers from rock salt. The tourist route descends to about 135 m and includes the vast underground St Kinga's Chapel; the mine is about 30 minutes from Kraków.

5

NATURE

Zakopane and the Tatra Mountains

Poland's only alpine range rises above Zakopane, a resort known for wooden highland villas and grilled cheese. Hike to the lake of Morskie Oko or ride the cable car up Kasprowy Wierch; summer trails are busy, so start early.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Warsaw

≈ 3.3 million people

The reconstructed old town is only part of the story: the Warsaw Rising Museum, the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews and the Praga district make two days worthwhile.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Katowice

≈ 2.1 million people

Hub of the Upper Silesian conurbation, Katowice has reinvented its coal heritage with the Silesian Museum in a former mine and the NOSPR concert hall; nearby Nikiszowiec is a red-brick miners' estate.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Kraków

≈ 1.5 million people

Poland's royal capital deserves three days or more, with day trips to Auschwitz and Wieliczka; base yourself in the old town or Kazimierz, the former Jewish quarter now full of cafés and bars.

Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

When to go to Poland

Best time: **May–Sep.**

Jan

Feb

Mar

Apr

May

Jun

Jul

Aug

Sep

Oct

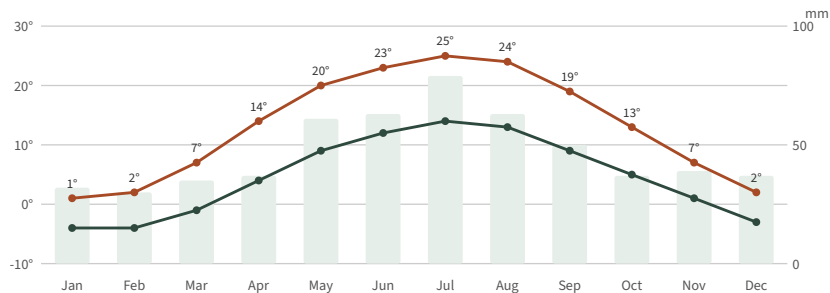
Nov

Dec

■ Best ■ Good ■ Mixed ■ Poor

Average climate in Warsaw

— High °C — Low °C ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Mar–Apr	Wielkanoc (Easter) On Holy Saturday, families carry decorated baskets of eggs, bread and sausage to church to be blessed; on Easter Monday, Śmigus-dyngus turns streets into good-natured water fights.
Jun–Jul	Jewish Culture Festival Held in Kraków's Kazimierz district every summer since 1988, with klezmer and cantorial music, workshops and talks, ending in a large open-air concert on Szeroka Street.
Jul–Aug	St Dominic's Fair Gdańsk's Jarmark św. Dominika, first held in 1260, fills the Main Town for about three weeks from late July with antiques, crafts, food stalls and street performers.

How much does Poland cost?

SHOESTRING £40 per person / day ≈ PLN 208 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £90 per person / day ≈ PLN 468 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £180 per person / day ≈ PLN 937 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
---	---	--

Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Pierogi Half-moon dumplings, boiled or fried, filled with potato and curd cheese (ruskie), sauerkraut and mushroom, or meat; summer brings sweet blueberry versions.	Żurek A tangy soup of fermented rye flour with white sausage and a halved boiled egg, traditional at Easter and sometimes served in a hollowed-out bread loaf.	Oscypek Smoked, spindle-shaped sheep's cheese from the Tatra highlands, protected by EU designation; buy it grilled with cranberry jam from stalls in Zakopane.
--	--	---

Getting around

PKP Intercity's fast trains, including Pendolinos, link Warsaw with Kraków and Gdańsk in around two and a half to three hours; book on the Intercity website or app for reserved seats. Regional trains and FlixBus fill the gaps, and minibuses run frequently between Kraków and Zakopane. Cities have good tram networks, and the Jakdojade app plans routes and sells tickets. Bolt and Uber are cheap and widely used.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE  C E 230V — bring a UK-to-C/E adapter	EMERGENCY NUMBERS Ambulance: 999 Fire: 998 Police: 997 Source: FCDO “Getting help”
DIALLING CODE +48	TIME ZONE UTC+1 (standard time)

TAP WATER

Generally safe to drink

DRIVING

On the right

TIPPING

Leave about 10% in restaurants for good service. Saying 'dziękuję' as you hand over money signals that you don't want any change back.

ETIQUETTE

Greet shop staff with 'dzień dobry', remove shoes in homes and give flowers in odd numbers. Be respectful at memorial sites, and never describe the Nazi German camps as 'Polish camps'.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Warsaw Chopin Airport (WAW), Warsaw; Kraków John Paul II International Airport (KRK), Kraków; Gdańsk Lech Wałęsa Airport (GDN), Gdańsk

Visas & entry for Poland

Shown for a British passport.

No visa needed

You can travel without a visa to the Schengen area, which includes Poland, for up to 90 days in any 180-day period. This applies if you travel: as a tourist; to visit family or friends; to attend business meetings, cultural or sports events; for short-term studies or training.

The requirements for working in Poland are different.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Tetanus

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Rabies

Tick-borne encephalitis

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

No yellow fever certificate is required to enter.

MALARIA

No malaria risk

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Poland

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Sun 1 Nov 2026	All Saints' Day
Wed 11 Nov 2026	National Independence Day
Thu 24 Dec 2026	Christmas Eve
Fri 25 Dec 2026	Christmas Day
Sat 26 Dec 2026	Second Day of Christmas
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Wed 6 Jan 2027	Epiphany
Sun 28 Mar 2027	Easter Sunday
Mon 29 Mar 2027	Easter Monday
Sat 1 May 2027	National Day
Mon 3 May 2027	National Day of the Third of May
Sun 16 May 2027	Pentecost
Thu 27 May 2027	Corpus Christi
Sun 15 Aug 2027	Assumption Day

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Polish

ENGLISH	POLISH	SAY IT
Hello	Dzień dobry	<i>jen DOB-ri</i>
Thank you	Dziękuję	<i>jen-KOO-yeh</i>
Please	Proszę	<i>PRO-sheh</i>
Excuse me	Przepraszam	<i>psheh-PRA-sham</i>
How much is this?	Ile to kosztuje?	<i>EE-leh toh kosh-TOO-yeh</i>

Know before you go

Most shops, including supermarkets, close on Sundays under Poland's trading restrictions; stock up on Saturday, though petrol-station shops and small kiosks usually stay open.

Reserve Auschwitz-Birkenau entry well ahead through the museum's official website, visit.auschwitz.org; entry slots are limited and summer guided tours sell out.

Pay in złoty rather than euros, decline card terminals or ATMs offering to charge you in pounds, and avoid stand-alone Euronet cash machines, whose fees and rates are poor.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.