1. BIALYSTOK

The capital of Podlaskie province, where the beauty of art and nature come together, is an important cultural, academic and tourist centre in north-eastern Poland…

Up-and-Coming Białystok

Multicultural local customs and folklore, performances by one of the oldest puppet theatres – not necessarily just for children, murals, imaginative events, an intense sports and night life, all speak in favour of a visit to the Podlaskie province capital.

Expanses of sunflowers and rapeseed, fields of red poppies, night-scented stock and St. John’s wort overwhelm the senses with their multitude of colours and fragrances in a few dozen locations around Białystok. According to the local government’s plans, the acreage of flowery meadows adjoining the main streets and historical sites will grow with every year. Green bus stops are being added, surrounded by shrubbery and boasting roofs covered with climber plants that stand up well to all kinds of weather. Becoming more eco-friendly, Białystok wants to make life more enjoyable and easier for residents as well as tourists, who will be able to handle high temperatures better on scorching days. It’s the perfect ambience for getting to know all the must-see sites.

City of the Branicki Family

The aristocratic Branicki family, bearing the Gryf coat of arms, ruled the city from the 1660s to the early 19th century, but one particular couple contributed the most to Białystok’s development. They were Jan Klemens Branicki, great crown hetman and Stanisław August Poniatowski’s rival for the Polish throne, and his wife Izabela who, by the way, was King Stanisław’s sister. To them the Podlaskie province capital owes the urban layout preserved to this day and the historic buildings in the city centre along the Branicki Route. Of course the most important of these is the “Polish Versailles” – the Branickis’ Baroque palace-and-park complex, a residence truly worthy of a king. Although it now belongs to the Medical University of Białystok, a ticket to the Museum of the History of Medicine and Pharmacy will enable you to see a lot of the rococo interiors with a guide.

The route also includes the late Baroque town hall that was never the seat of the local authorities, and its interiors were even used for trade sometimes. Today it serves as the headquarters of the Podlasie Museum as well as being one of the sites on the Jewish Heritage Trail in Białystok.

Jan Klemens Branicki’s heart is interred in the late-Renaissance Old Parish Church, Białystok’s oldest historic building. Together with the Minor Basilica, it forms the Complex of the Metropolitan Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The church vault is the final resting place of Izabela, widow of Hetman Branicki. The Branicki Route includes other buildings that were part of the Branickis’ 18th-century estate: the Guest Palace, the Convent of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, the Cekhauz/Armoury, the Old Inn (Austeria) and the Branicki Palace in Choroszcz.

Following the Church Trail

In September 2019 the city offered tourists the new Orthodox Church Route, partially overlapping with the earlier Białystok Church Route. Both routes take visitors to the Orthodox Church of the Holy Spirit, the biggest Orthodox church in Poland and one of the biggest in Europe. It boasts the highest iconostasis. In 2000 the main church received a grand chandelier (*panikadilo*) unique on a global scale. It is six metres in diameter and weighs… 1,200 kg. It was built in Minsk, its shape reminiscent of a crown. The structure is composed of two segments, the higher one placed in the dome itself and the lower one – nine metres from the floor. The chandelier is suspended on 24 ropes symbolizing the Holy Spirit descending to earth. Between the candles are stained-glass cuboids with images of the apostles and saints.

Following either route, it is worth seeing the Orthodox Church of Divine Wisdom modelled on Constantinople’s Hagia Sophia, the Muslim Prayer House that serves as a mosque, and the former Cytron Synagogue (today housing the Śledziński Gallery).

Off these routes, you definitely should see the Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas the Miracle Worker with a copy of the Białystok Icon of the Mother of God, the original of which was lost in Russia during the October Revolution.

Morning Star

You cannot miss St. Roch’s Basilica on the hill of the same name. The Church-Monument to Poland’s Regained Independence, without a cross on its steeple, is an important element of the Białystok cityscape. The steeple, from which a panorama of the city can be admired, is topped with a three-metre figure of Our Lady Queen of the Polish Crown – Morning Star in radiant golden glory.

Tourists visiting Białystok can also follow the Trail of Esperanto and Many Cultures, learning about the early years in the life of Białystok’s most famous native, Ludwik Zamenhof. Other alternatives include the Wooden Architecture Trail, the Białystok Factory Owners Trail and the thematically related Bojary Route.

Street Art

The city has gained a new symbol: Natalia Rak’s *Girl with Watering Can* mural on the wall of the University of Białystok’s Institute of Chemistry. Other large murals – almost 40 of them, all related to tolerance and multiculturality, history and nature – portray Henryk Sienkiewicz, Rev. Michał Sopoćko and Ludwik Zamenhof with his neighbours, among others. Another well-known mural is *Instability* by Italian artist Francesco Camillo Giorgino, aka Millo.

The city hosts many major events, such as the Podlasie Octave of Cultures International Festival of Music, Art and Folklore, the Up To Date Festival, Modern Art Days, Autumn with the Blues, the Żubroffka International Short Film Festival, the Puppet Metamorphoses International Festival of Puppet Theatre for Adults, and the Halfway Festival.

Find out more from Białystok’s tourism web portal

2. BYDGOSZCZ

One of Kujawsko-Pomorskie province’s two capital cities, Bydgoszcz lies on the River Brda which cuts through the city centre and along which cultural, business, sports and tourist life unfolds…

Bydgoszcz: City on a Water Trail

You can take a water tram and see the most precious historic buildings, learn about the city’s “explosive” history at the Exploseum, climb a water tower, hunt for murals – there’s no risk of being bored here.

Bydgoszcz is one of Kujawsko-Pomorskie province’s two capital cities, home to the province governor and most state administration offices. A tour of Bydgoszcz simply must start with a water tram trip. The two tourist routes – called Sunny and Old Town – have been designed to show off the city’s greatest attractions. Choosing the latter, you are in for extra excitement when the boat goes through a lock, especially when there are other boats and lots of kayaks around you. The operation to open and close the sluice gates, raising and lowering the water level, takes 20 minutes, enabling you to admire City Lock No. 2, over 100 years old and recently renovated – including cleaning of the brickwork in the canal!

Bydgoszcz is a very picturesque sight when viewed from the river; the buildings are reflected in water incomparably clearer than in Venice, so you can safely dip your hand. Importantly, the price for an hour-long trip is very reasonable, even though the cutting-edge boats look a lot like the luxury yachts moored in Cannes, for example. Here are the places you simply must see in Bydgoszcz:

Looking from the River

The oldest church in Bydgoszcz, and also the city’s oldest building, is the Gothic Cathedral of Saints Martin and Nicholas with rococo interior decoration and 20th-century, extremely colourful polychromes reminiscent of the paintings of Mehoffer or Matejko. This is the setting for the radiantly golden, crowned picture of the Virgin Mary with a rose, her left arm sweeping up the baby Jesus. It is because of this image of the Madonna, revered for six centuries, that the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Beautiful Love was established here. The cathedral is the most important historic building in Bydgoszcz’s Old Town. It is well worth seeing it from the water tram, just like the neogothic Polish Post building. The latter recently regained its clock, whose renovation took a decade and which is now synchronized with a satellite to ensure punctuality.

Also on the River Brda, you can admire three wattle-and-daub granaries of different heights huddled together, a reminder of times when Bydgoszcz lived by trade, taking advantage of the waterway connecting the Vistula, via the Bydgoszcz Canal, with the Noteć and Odra rivers, i.e. with the west of Europe. Today the granaries are used as exhibition space by the Leon Wyczółkowski District Museum. The museum is named after the great painter of the Young Poland movement for a reason. The artist was fascinated by Bydgoszcz, was a frequent visitor, and donated many of his works to the city. A model of what the town looked like long ago stands near the entrance to the granaries. Also nearby is an ethereal figure on a tightrope, called *Man Crossing the River*, commemorating Poland’s accession to the European Union. At a bend of the River Brda, on the border of the Old Town and Śródmieście district, stands the monumental and modernist Opera Nova building.

Extraordinary TeH2O

The TeH2O Water, Industry and Craft Trail is an industrial themed route presenting the history of 15 sites embedded in the urban space of this city lying on the Brda and Vistula rivers and the Bydgoszcz Canal. They include the Exploseum (an anchor point of the European Route of Industrial Heritage, it boasts a POT Certificate) – an interactive exhibition where a Nazi explosives plant once was, the Granaries on the Brda, the Museum of Soap and the History of Dirt (POT Certificate) where you can make your own soap, and Mill Island (POT Certificate) right across the river from the Opera Nova, at the other end of a footbridge.

This green enclave was home to the Bydgoszcz Mint which minted coins for the whole of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Its story is told by the European Money Centre, part of the Leon Wyczółkowski District Museum in Bydgoszcz. Exhibits there include treasure discovered in 2018 during the renovation of the nearby cathedral. The trail also includes the 120-year-old Water Tower housing a gallery in the now-empty 1,260-cubic-metre water tank and offering a panorama of the city viewed through a telescope once you climb to the top. The Bydgoszcz Canal Museum highlights just how strategically located Bydgoszcz was, at the junction of the most important overland routes and a waterway. The Bydgoszcz Canal connected the Vistula and Oder rivers. Extra attractions await on the TeH2O Trail every September during the TehoFest festival.

Bydgoszcz’s Churches

Bydgoszcz boasts Gothic historic buildings from many centuries ago as well as a number of neogothic, 19th- and 20th-century ones. It is worth seeing the Gothic-Renaissance Church of the Order of Saint Clare with its polychrome coffered ceiling and a painting of St. Stanisław Kostka by Leon Wyczółkowski himself. Another must-see is the third-oldest religious building in Bydgoszcz, namely the late-Gothic Garrison Church of Our Lady Queen of Peace. The city’s largest church is the monumental St. Vincent de Paul’s Basilica Minor, whose central nave was inspired by the Pantheon in Rome. It is dominated by a 40-metre reinforced concrete dome which, however, does not have an oculus, i.e. the opening at the top that distinguishes the Italian original.

Something for the Body

Bydgoszcz has a plethora of gardens and parks (Myślęcinek first and foremost, the biggest municipal park) as well as a lot to offer fans of aquatic sports (e.g. a regatta course and events like Bydgoszcz Water or the Bydgoszcz Triathlon on the river in the city centre). If you are a water-activity enthusiast, we especially recommend the *Ster na Bydgoszcz* (Steer for Bydgoszcz) Water Festival. Also on the riverside, you can enjoy summer concerts in the River of Music series as well as theatre and cabaret performances. You must not leave the city before trying some local beer at Warzelnia Piwa Bydgoszcz (on the TeH2O Trail) or coffee roasted by world champion roaster from Norway, Audun Sørbotten, served at Audun Coffee. Delicious local dishes include roast goose and potato bread, available from the Frymark organic food market, for example. Forget calorie counting when sampling the famous *szneki z glancem* (literally, from the bun of Jewish German origin: glazed schnecken), i.e. snail-shaped yeast rolls with crumble topping and icing, or pralines and cake from the Adam Sowa Bakery, a family-run business.

Find out more from Bydgoszcz’s tourism web portal

3. GDAŃSK

The capital of Pomorskie province, together with Gdynia and Sopot it forms the Tricity, offering a blend of rich history and attractive modernity; a port city situated on the Gulf of Gdańsk…

Gdańsk: City of Freedom and Solidarity

This is a city with a tradition spanning over 1,000 years, Poland’s maritime capital and one of the biggest ports on the Baltic Sea. It is a unique metropolis that has always been filled with a spirit of freedom and courage. Gdańsk’s motto, the Latin saying *Nec temere, nec timide*, best expresses the character of this former Hanseatic city. It is a timeless maxim that each and every one of us should follow: it means “neither rashly nor timidly”.

Cradle of Freedom and Solidarity

Three 42-metre crosses with anchors – the Monument to the Fallen Shipyard Workers of 1970 in Solidarity Square stands next to the European Solidarity Centre, an interactive museum recounting the Polish people’s aspirations to freedom. It is a story about fighting against the communist regime, about hope and the sacrifices made by nations imprisoned behind the Iron Curtain. Finally, it is a story about their ultimate great victory that changed their history and that of the whole world. Right next door, at the Gdańsk Shipyard, in August 1980, the famous strike began that “set Poland on fire” and forced the communist authorities to make numerous concessions, including legalizing the Solidarity Trade Union. Gdańsk’s residents have always been brave, proud of their city as well as valuing their independence.

The Museum of the Second World War, which was added not so long ago to Gdańsk’s already broad educational and tourist offering, features one of the world’s biggest exhibitions related to that bloody conflict. The main exhibition is situated 14 metres underground and tells the story of the heroes of Westerplatte and the Polish Post in Gdańsk, who were the first to offer heroic resistance to the Nazi invaders. The museum shows that horrific war from the point of view of many nations and many regions of the world.

The Royal Way

The most important destination for groups from Poland and from all over the world is the Main Town, which is the most famous, historical part of Gdańsk. Multilingual crowds admire the extremely popular view of the River Motława where tourist boats moor, surrounded by tenements along the quay and the restored Granary Island. This is where tourists exclaim at one of the icons of Gdańsk: the Crane – Europe’s largest port crane in the Middle Ages and today part of a museum.

Tourists walking through the Netherlands Mannerism-style Green Gate to the Long Market can admire the Royal Way formed by a few dozen tenements meticulously restored after the war. The Royal Way is overlooked by the majestic tower of the Main Town Hall, admired by all who see it, just like the nearby Neptune Fountain, Golden House and Artus Court. It’s worth adding that this last building, with stellar and palm vaulting as well as paintings and statues, is where the first Gdańsk beer was served, masquerades were held, various fraternities had their headquarters, court trials took place and monarchs were received.

Artus Court is in fact an integral part of the aforementioned Royal Way, which starts from the Upper Gate and Golden Gate through which the city was entered triumphantly in the past. Next the arriving processions went along Długa (Long) Street to reach the Long Market. Today this entire section is a beautiful, colourful and vibrant promenade.

The ground floors of tenements along the Royal Way house many cosy venues, including children’s favourite: the Ciu Ciu handmade sweets “factory” in Długa Street. To see an example of the brick Gothic architecture typical of the Baltic coast, visit the Basilica of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary with its massive bell tower. Inside you will find a Gothic statue of the Beautiful Madonna of Gdańsk, a Pietà and the five-metre Altar of the Coronation of the Blessed Virgin Mary; the terrace at the top of the 82-metre tower guarantees a wonderful vista when the weather is good.

Another feature typical of Gdańsk’s historical centre are perrons, which are entrance terraces accessed by stairs, above basement spaces. In front of them, your eyes will be drawn to the many stalls selling souvenirs, including items made of amber, Gdańsk’s true treasure. Strolling around the Main Town, it’s well worth visiting the Amber Museum and the nationally unique Gdańsk Shakespeare Theatre with its opening roof and famous Shakespeare Festival.

More Than Just the Old and Main Town

As many as 7,876 pipes and numerous moving elements are to be found in the famous rococo organ in the Gdańsk-Oliwa Metropolitan Cathedral. It’s a good idea to combine a visit to this famous church with a relaxing walk around the lovely Oliwa Park, which features many charming ponds, flowerbeds and paths. The Oliwa Stream cuts across the park, even forming a waterfall in one place.

It’s also worth going a little farther, to Sobieszewo Island. Birdwatching fans should visit the Ptasi Raj (Bird Paradise) and Mewia Łacha (Seagull Sandbank) nature reserves on the island.

We must not forget about one of Gdańsk’s greatest assets: its beautiful, wide, sandy beaches with modern bike paths running along them. Leisure on the Baltic is guaranteed on the beaches in Sobieszewo, Jelitkowo, Stogi and Brzeźno, which lie close to numerous hotels, restaurants and bars with live music.

Families with children will have great fun learning at the Hevelianum, a place that uncovers many interesting scientific and historical facts. In addition, you can admire a magnificent panorama of Gdańsk from Gradowa Hill where this educational centre stands. The centre, which is disability-friendly, is housed in the former Gradowa Hill Fort and surrounded by a 20-hectare park.

If you’re a football fan, you have to see the ENERGA Gdańsk Stadium. This unique facility, built to look like – you’ve guessed it – a piece of amber, was constructed a year before the UEFA Euro 2012 championship. It can seat 41,000 people, and in 2020 it will host the Europa League Final. The stadium also includes a recreation centre offering lots of exciting ways to spend leisure time. The Fun Arena will amuse everyone, regardless of age!

Find out more from Gdańsk’s tourism web portal

4. GORZÓW WIELKOPOLSKI

One of Lubuskie province’s two capital cities, a haven on the River Warta offering great diversity and many tourist attractions…

Gorzów Wielkopolski: Unconventional and Culturally Cool

It resounds with barrel-organ and jazz music, amazes visitors with statues of a homeless man named Szymon Gięty and Romani poet Papusza, energizes fans of speedway racing. This is a city of many remarkable places and events.

Observed from a drone’s point of view, Lubuskie province’s second – next to Zielona Góra – capital catches the eye with its long Warta Boulevard. This verdant pedestrian area of Gorzów is split by just one street – Bolesława Chrobrego Street, and is separated from the big-city hubbub by a historical railway flyover that is also the longest in Poland. In summer the boulevard is decorated with potted palm trees; when it gets colder the gazebos are heated with the help of solar batteries. Time on the boulevard is measured by a European Union sundial, birdsong is provided by an aviary, and there is a constantly expanding food zone that includes a café on the *Królowa Jadwiga* barge moored at the wharf. You can take a trip on the oldest ice-breaker in Poland, the 135-year-old *Kuna*. And at the edge of the boulevard you will find an example of Gorzów’s “urban furniture”, i.e. statues in memory of important people from the city’s history. This one portrays Paweł Zacharek, a former Warta ferryman, of course in his boat, big enough to hop into for a selfie. The nearby municipal beach encourages sunbathing. And these are just the first few attractions in Gorzów Wielkopolski.

From the Middle Ages to Art Nouveau

The most precious historic building, considered a symbol of Gorzów Wielkopolski, is the 13th-century Cathedral of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary with its Renaissance-Mannerist main altar in the form of a triptych. Even though a 2017 fire only damaged the 40-metre defence tower that offered a magnificent view of the city, the church had to be closed and is currently being renovated. Interestingly, many intriguing objects from different periods have been discovered during this work, including an early medieval knife, earthenware from the late Middle Ages, old nails, an 18th-century coin, manuscripts and music scores.

Although the area at the mouth of the River Warta was ruled by the Polanie state in early medieval times, it later passed into the hands of its western neighbour. Reminders of the time when Gorzów was called Landsberg include the fountain right next to the cathedral in the Old Market Square, funded by industrialist Hermann Paucksch. It features the figure of a robust woman, a water carrier popularly called Bamberka, meant to symbolize Gorzów residents’ industriousness and the life-giving nature of the Warta. The Old Town’s Chrobrego and Łokietka streets are lined with many Secession (Art Nouveau) tenements with this style’s typical plant and animal ornaments. Among the eclectic Secession houses once owned by Landsberg factory owners, those that stand out include Max Bahr’s villa, today home of the Bishop Wilhelm Pluta Institute, and Gustav Schroeder’s villa, today the main building of the Lubusz (Lubuskie) Museum. One of the museum’s divisions is housed in the historical wattle-and-daub Granary on the River Warta. It features a model of 17th-century Landsberg that is an excellent illustration of the city’s history.

Words and Sounds

Fans of highbrow culture might want to go to the Juliusz Osterwa Theatre. In the past, its literary managers included Zdzisław Najder and Zbigniew Herbert, it witnessed the debuts of Agnieszka Holland (as a theatre director), Stanisław Syrewicz (as a composer of theatre music), Edward Lutczyn (as a stage designer), and welcomed guests such as Andrzej Wajda, Józef Szajna and Stanisław Grochowiak. For several decades, the theatre has organized the Gorzów Theatre Meetings. Meanwhile, Chopin Picnics are part of the Gorzów Philharmonic’s programme. This is one of Poland’s youngest philharmonics and the pride of the city. Its ultramodern glass and steel architectural form, reminiscent of an organ emerging from a round table, houses an equally revolutionary – in terms of technology and acoustics – interior with auditoriums seating almost 600 people.

Gorzów Wielkopolski is a vibrant city of diverse events, to mention Gorzów Days, Art by Night, the End of Summer Party, the DYM Festival, the Festival of Compelling Films, the Alte Kameraden International Meetings of Wind Orchestras and Marching Show Bands, the Getting Out Festival, the Romane Dyvesa International Meeting of Gypsy Music Groups, and the National Monodrama Festival.

Roses and Speedway

Those interested in Gorzów’s “urban furniture” will find as many as two examples in Wiosny Ludów Park, also known as Rose Park because of its rose garden. The first one is an outdoor sculpture portraying the Gorzów Brass Band which performed 3,500 times and won lots of prestigious awards in its 60 years of existence. The other sculpture is of Romani poet Papusza, real name Bronisława Wajs, who would sometimes sit in the park. A few years ago her story was told in the film *Papusza* directed by Joanna Kos-Krauze and Krzysztof Krauze, starring Jowita Budnik. Wiosny Ludów Park is an oasis in the central Śródmieście district. Its paths are lined with 100-year-old plane trees and red horse-chestnuts, and you can take a kayak ride on the pond.

Not far from here, near the Park 111 shopping mall in Sikorskiego Street, Szymon Gięty – Gorzów’s famous homeless man – has “stopped for a moment” on his bicycle: this is another statue in the “urban furniture” series. A gatherer of paper for recycling, scrap metal and bottles, Kazimierz Wnuk, as he was really called, gained his nickname (meaning Simon the Gab) for the way he told many not always credible stories and composed many different versions of his own biography. During 1 May (Workers’ Day) parades in communist Poland he became famous for happenings parodying the communist authorities and system. Gorzów also has a statue of Edward Jancarz, a famous speedway racer, naturally on a motorbike, and a speedway course named after him.

Are those all the attractions? Certainly not! There’s the Śfinster statue (a naked man of iron), the Witches’ Well related to the legend of the last woman to be burned at the stake in Gorzów for dealings with the devil, and a replica of a historical Landsberg tram. Or maybe you prefer Nordic walking in Słowiański Park, recreation at the Marina complex, or a good dose of music at the famous Pod Filarami Jazz Club where Nigel Kennedy himself has played? You simply cannot be bored in this city!

Find out more from Gorzów Wielkopolski’s web portal

5. LUBLIN

The capital of Lubelskie province, it draws tourists to its history with the help of museums, historic buildings, traditional flavours and legends hidden in streets, lanes and tenement walls…

Lublin: City of Inspiration

It’s impossible not to agree with this motto promoting the capital city of eastern Poland and Lubelskie province.

For centuries, Lublin was a city of key importance for relations between Poland and Lithuania, the two countries that in 1569 formed a union during a joint parliamentary session, becoming one organism known as the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The union took place in Lublin at a castle from Casimir the Great’s time that was destroyed as a result of war in the 17th century. It was replaced with a new castle in the English neogothic style, serving as a prison for 128 years – for the tsarist authorities, then the Second Republic of Poland, later the Nazis and, finally, the Stalinist secret police. Today, as the Lublin Museum, it is a cultural institution and the city’s number one historic building.

Zamkowy Square at the foot of the castle is sometimes the venue for the main circus performance of the Carnaval Sztukmistrzów festival. This flagship city event, which takes place in the Old Town, Krakowskie Przedmieście Street and Litewski Square, is a great celebration of circus performers, conjurers, jugglers, fire eaters and buskers.

Must-See Sites

The Old Town neighbouring on the castle survived the war. Renovated since then, it boasts as much as 70 percent of its original buildings. This historical part of town delights visitors with its colourfully decorated Renaissance and classical houses, and regional dishes served by numerous restaurants and atmospheric cafés. Just one square kilometre of the Old Town is packed with as many as 110 historic buildings. They include the old Town Hall and the Basilica of the Dominican Order, representing styles from Gothic to classical and housing the painting *The Fire of Lublin* as well as the magnificent Tyszkiewicz and Firlej chapels. There is also the Stary (Old) Theatre, the second-oldest in Poland after the one in Kraków, which presents an interdisciplinary, confrontational and dynamic repertoire.

In Katedralny Square stands the Metropolitan Cathedral of Lublin, the city’s biggest religious building. One of the first Baroque buildings erected outside of Italy, it is decorated with famous, authentic polychromes by Józef Meyer, court painter to King Augustus III the Saxon. People come to venerate the painting of the Crying Virgin Mary, a copy of the famous painting from Jasna Góra Monastery in Częstochowa, which was seen to exude tears on 3 July 1949 (the faithful who witnessed the “Lublin miracle” were subjected to harsh repressions by the Stalinist authorities). The sacristy’s good acoustics enables words whispered in one corner to be heard clearly in the opposite one. The Treasury is a special part of the church filled with priceless religious objects. According to Wojciech Górski, author of books about Lublin, “who hasn’t seen the Treasury, doesn’t know Lublin”. Next to the cathedral, the Trinity Tower rises to 65 metres, the terrace at the top guaranteeing a panoramic view of the city. Just behind the tower lies the stone of misfortune. The story is that the executioner beheaded an innocent man on it, and the stone is said to give off bad vibes to this day. Under the Lubomelski Tenement you will find exquisite frescos in the Wine Cellar Under Fortuna. The value of these wall paintings lies in their dating back to the Renaissance and in their secular subject matter.

Two Gates and Kings

The Old Town can be approached from two opposite sides, through gates in what remains of the historical city walls. The Kraków Gate – four-sided at its brick base – is crowned with a white tower with a pointy roof. Its interiors house the Lublin History Museum. The Grodzka (Town) Gate, which looks as if it was cut out of the tenement façade, was once called the Jewish gate because it linked the part of the city belonging to Christians to that inhabited by Jews. In the 16th and 17th centuries, after King Stephen Báthory founded Europe’s only Jewish parliament, called the Council of Four Lands, Lublin was the seat of the strongest Jewish community in Poland. Nobel Prize winner Isaac Bashevis Singer, who had ties to the Lublin region and especially the Biłgoraj shtetl where his grandparents lived, immortalized the atmosphere of bygone times in his novel *The Magician of Lublin*.

You can see what the Jewish quarter looked like thanks to a model of this no longer existing part of town at the Brama Grodzka – Teatr NN Centre. Photographs from those times can also be viewed at the Alter Hotel and the Jewish yeshiva with two preserved Jewish cemeteries. Those interested in Jewish culture and history should follow the Heritage Trail of the Lublin Jews. Tourists often miss the Parade of Polish Kings on the walls of the Metropolitan Seminary, as it is only partially visible from the street.

Apiary, Fountain and Beer

There is much more to Lublin than the Old Town. A multimedia fountain presenting light and sound shows is the pride of Litewski Square, the city’s biggest such space. Its many benches invite visitors to rest comfortably and watch many other events taking place there and to admire the monuments to Marshal Józef Piłsudski, the Unknown Soldier, the 3 May Constitution, and an obelisk commemorating the signing of the Union of Lublin Act in 1569.

The Urban Artistic Apiary is an attraction of the observation decks on the roof of the modernist building of the Centre for the Meeting of Cultures (CSK). A popular chillout zone, the CSK organizes theatre and opera performances, concerts, conferences and film screenings. Besides the Opera Room, Chamber Performance Room, Ballet Room and Cinema Room, the CSK also has open and enclosed exhibition spaces.

The Perła Brewery in Bernardyńska Street is a unique historical site of industry in Lublin. The former interiors of the monastery and church of the Order of the Reformati were converted into a brewery. Beer was made here in 1846-2001. During a one-hour tour of the Perła Brewery cellars, visitors get to know the brewery’s history, the secrets of making beer and see how bottle shapes and labels changed. The tour ends with a tasting.

Lublin offers visitors a great number of fun events, such as the Night of Culture, the East of Culture – Different Sounds festival, the Legends of Lublin Festival, the Jagiellonian Fair and the European Festival of Flavours.

Find out more from Lublin’s web portal

6. ŁÓDŹ

The capital of Łódzkie province is an extraordinary city where history and modernity form a single plane, harmonizing perfectly with historic sites and tourist attractions…

Łódź: “Train” to Hollywood

From how many steps did Polański jump? Does the devil only wear Prada? Where did the factories come from? Where are the most interesting murals? Tourists will find the answers to these and many other questions in this city in the heart of Poland.

All Polish roads seem to lead to Łódź – after all, the city lies at the junction of the two main motorways: the A1 and A2. Full of contrasts, immersed in greenery, with amazing avant-garde installations, it is currently in its second youth. Although the settlement here received its town charter from King Ladislaus Jagiełło in 1423, the town did not develop rapidly until just 200 years ago. As a result of the enormous investment and hard work of Jews, Germans, Russians and Poles, Łódź grew to be Europe’s main textile manufacturing centre, as shown by Andrzej Wajda in his famous film *The Promised Land*. Factory owners built their elegant palaces next to the production buildings. A few dozen can be admired to this day, among them Izrael Poznański’s palace next to his former textile factory – today the Manufaktura shopping, arts and leisure complex.

Two Must-See, Must-Be Sites

Manufaktura is the favourite spot of locals and visitors. A multi-storey shopping mall as well as cafés, pubs and restaurants have been incorporated into a revitalized former industrial factory space. The complex includes a theatre and a cinema, the ms2 Art Museum and the Factory Museum recounting the history of this place. The long list of attractions also includes a climbing wall, a bowling alley, a beach with deckchairs and a zip line offering a bird’s-eye view of Manufaktura. You also get a great view from the glazed swimming pool in the loft-style Andel’s hotel. The pool’s location is unusual: 25 metres above ground, in place of a historical cast-iron firefighting water tank in the former spinning mill of Poznański’s factory.

Equally popular is Piotrkowska Street – Poland’s longest promenade lined with boutiques, clubs, pubs and statues of famous Polish artists; the most spectacular one portrays Artur Rubinstein playing the piano. Vibrant day and night, all year long, Piotrkowska Street is the venue of dozens of events, to mention the Hokus Pokus Festival of Street Art and Magic, the Light Move Festival, the Songwriter Festival, and the Łódź of Four Cultures Festival. Along the street you will find the Avenue of Stars, Łódź’s walk of fame. Be sure to check out the city’s alternative (off, underground, hipster) scene as well, noteworthy examples being OFF Piotrkowska and Piotrkowska 217. In fact, Łódź is often referred to as a mecca for hipsters! It’s also worth seeing the Łódź Citizens at the Turn of the Millennium, Łódź Citizens of the New Millennium, and Łódź Identity monuments.

The Tenth Muse

Graduates of the Łódź Film School, whose renown continues to this day, include Roman Polański, Andrzej Wajda and Krzysztof Kieślowski. The stairs where the future artists once used to perch now feature plaques with their names.

The city’s backstreets have been used as locations for over 200 films, and not just Polish productions. Łódź also hosts the prestigious Drama School Festival.

The Se-Ma-For studio, which won two Academy Awards and specializes in animated cartoons for children, to mention *Peter and the Wolf*, is where Tomek Bagiński’s *Cathedral* was made, as well as his *Animated History of Poland* promoting Poland at the World Expo. Łódź’s film tradition is presented at the Film Museum (currently closed – under renovation until the end of 2020). There is also a special film trail.

Radegast Station

A broken column whose shape evokes a crematorium chimney is the final element in the Tunnel of Memory filled with photos of Holocaust victims. This is the most shocking part of Radegast Station – Łódź’s Umschlagplatz through which 145,000 people, mainly Jews, passed on their way to extermination. The wooden station building, with a row of matzevahs in the background, houses a model of Litzmannstadt Getto – the Łódź Ghetto. Of the more than 200,000 Jews imprisoned there, very few survived. They are commemorated by the Survivors’ Park with the Monument to Poles Who Saved Jews and more than 600 “trees of memory” planted by survivors. Other remembrance sites include the Jewish Cemetery (Poland’s largest), the Children’s Martyrdom Monument, and the Romani Forge in the place where the Germans set up a camp for Roma and Sinti.

Stars in the Sky

Poland’s most modern planetarium and the Science and Technology Centre are housed in the EC1 building. The complex occupies the restored buildings of what used to be a power plant and later a combined heat and power plant. The exhibitions of the National Centre for Film Culture and the Centre for Cartoons and Interactive Narration are due to open in 2020.

3D Mural

More than 150 murals, sculptures and art installations made from metal bars, car parts, pieces of mirror and even moss can be found on the map of Łódź street art developed by the Łódź Tourism Organization. The map enables visitors to admire many large-sized works of art on the walls of buildings, by street artists from Poland (Proembrion, M-City, Etam) and abroad (Osgemeos, Eduardo Kobra, Inti, Aryz, Remed). These murals have been created over the years, for example during the Urban Forms Gallery Festival and, before that, the International Graffiti Festival. The biggest wow factor comes from the first 3D mural in Poland and one of just three in the world by Italian artist Awer, on the wall of the building at 93 Pomorska St.

Looking for Fun

Glamping enthusiasts will never forget a night in a bubble – a lightbulb-shaped see-through tent in the Łódź Hills Landscape Park. Fans of retro-style sightseeing can choose to ride a historical tram along the Tourist Tram Line. If you’re looking for thrills, try the year-round toboggan run on Rudzka Hill.

Find out more from Łódź’s tourist web portal

7. KATOWICE

The capital of Śląskie province, the hub of the giant Silesian conurbation, has many – not only industrial – attractions to offer tourists…

Katowice: Mines as Museums, Lush Greenery, and Music Approved by UNESCO

For at least the past 10 years, Katowice has been working hard to change its urban space. Today it is a modern city, the heart of Poland’s first metropolis, the host of many major events, a UNESCO-recognized city of music, filled with greenery in parks and woodlands that are very popular among residents.

Culture Zone

Located near the legendary Spodek Arena, this is one of the city’s most distinctive spaces. In the 1990s it was still an operational coal mine, but today it houses the International Congress Centre with a green valley for a roof, the auditorium of the Polish Radio National Symphony Orchestra built to world standards, and the Silesian Museum presenting its collection 12-16 metres underground. Lots of events take place here every year, often with thousands of participants. The most important ones include the European Economic Congress attended by representatives of the political, business and scientific communities from all over the world, the finals of the Intel Extreme Masters international e-sports tournament that bring hundreds of thousands of players to Katowice, and the annual Tauron New Music festival. In 2018 the United Nations COP24 climate change conference was held here, and more major events are in store.

Silesian Insurgents’ Monument

Near the Culture Zone, on the other side of Roździeńskiego Street, the Silesian Insurgents’ Monument was unveiled more than 50 years ago, based on an idea of architect Wojciech Zabłocki and sculptor Gustaw Zemła. The monument stands at the site of the Red Army soldiers’ cemetery which was moved to Kościuszko Park. Composed of three eagle’s wings, the monument commemorates the three Silesian uprisings: in 1919, 1920 and 1921. At its base, on the bank from the Ziętka Roundabout side, are the names of localities where insurgents fought against German domination. Today it is one of the city’s main symbols and among the most easily recognizable monuments in Poland.

Modernism

Katowice boasts the most interesting and biggest group of modernist historic buildings of great value on a national scale. Among the most valuable is the building of the Silesian Province Office and Silesian Parliament, which the Polish President has granted monument of history status. A special attraction here is the still operational paternoster lift with a chain of compartments moving slowly without stopping. In the basement of the building is the treasury, protected by a mechanism which – in case of a break-in – submerges the contents in the tank situated below.

Another, equally interesting building was one of the highest in Europe in the 1930s, when its five-year construction ended. It was one of the things that won Katowice the nickname of the “Polish Chicago”. Its steel structure supports 14 storeys above ground, and another three floors are hidden underground. This and 14 other sites form the several-kilometre-long Modernism Trail whose architecture testifies to what was then an innovative approach to urban space.

Valley of Three Ponds

For those who don’t know Katowice very well, it may come as a surprise that greenery accounts for almost half the city’s area. Apart from Murckowski Forest where centuries-old beech trees and therapeutic herbs grow, Katowice’s residents can relax in Kościuszko Park and in the Valley of Three Ponds, the latter being a great place for active pastimes like cycling, rollerblading or simply taking walks. You can hire a bicycle here, but also a kayak to spend a lazy afternoon on the water. The youngest residents simply love the water playground and flock there in great numbers on hot days. The valley also includes a campsite as well as restaurants and bars with a view onto the pond. Many music events take place here, including a multiple award-winning alternative music festival called OFF Festival Katowice.

Industrial Monuments Route

Nikiszowiec, a district once built for mining families, is a unique example of architecture. The housing estate, designed by Emil and Georg Zillmann, is featured prominently in films by Kazimierz Kutz and Lech Majewski, among others. Many say Nikiszowiec is magical, which is probably thanks to the primitivist or naïve artists of the Janowska Group who are still active here today. Even though they portray reality with simple strokes, the Art Naif Festival held annually at the nearby Wilson Shaft Gallery attracts crowds of enthusiasts of this art. This is also a place where local craftsmen work, producing beautiful watercolours and coal jewellery, for example.

For many years now, Nikiszowiec has been part of the Industrial Monuments Route leading visitors to sites linked to Śląskie province’s industrial heritage. Following the route, it is also worth looking at the nearby Giszowiec – a housing estate also built over 100 years ago, for the workers of the Giesche corporation. The design was based on the concept of the garden city developed by English urban planner Ebenezer Howard. The Katowice section of the Industrial Monuments Route also includes the Walcownia Zinc Metallurgy Museum and the China Factory whose revitalized compound has been turned into a technology park where china is no longer made, but it is decorated there, to be sold in exquisite sets or as individual pieces.

The Market Square

This recently revitalized space in the city centre is one of Katowice residents’ favourite meeting places. It is a venue for many concerts, fairs, children’s events and increasingly popular food truck rallies. For a few years now, the square’s special attraction in summer has been palm trees offering shade to passers-by. The five-metre Canary Island date palms stand at a fountain imitating the River Rawa that flows under the market square. In the square, history meets modernity as 19th-century tenements and the Śląski (Silesian) Theatre built over a century ago stand together with the city’s first department stores, Zenit and Skarbek, and newly built restaurant pavilions.

Music

Culture is one of the pillars of the city’s development. This was duly noted by UNESCO a few years ago when Katowice was granted the title of Creative City of Music. It is the first city in this part of Europe to receive the title, and one of a few in Poland belonging to UNESCO’s Creative Cities Network.

Katowice’s renown in the world of culture is built by great orchestras, above all the Polish Radio National Symphony Orchestra in Katowice (NOSPR), and world-famous composers: Wojciech Kilar and Henryk Mikołaj Górecki. Another distinctive feature of Katowice’s cultural life is its many festivals, most of them to do with music, including the OFF Festival, Tauron New Music, Rawa Blues, the Jazz Art Festival, the Grzegorz Fitelberg International Competition for Conductors, and the Karol Szymanowski International Music Festival launched in 2018. There is also no shortage of film festivals (e.g. the Regiofun International Festival of Film Producers), theatre festivals (e.g. the Interpretations National Festival of Directing Art) and others, to mention Katowice Street Art Air – a great celebration of street art. Katowice also contributes to the development of Polish jazz, blues and hip-hop as well as having a strong tradition of amateur music-making which is upheld by many Silesian families.

Find out more from Katowice’s web portal

8. KIELCE

Lying in the heart of the Świętokrzyskie Mountains, the capital of Świętokrzyskie province is the region’s economic and tourist hub and a major trade fair centre…

Picturesque Kielce

Coral, sponge and shell fossils found in local caves are proof that millions of years ago there was a warm sea where Świętokrzyskie province’s capital city is today. What other attractions can tourists expect?

The city lies in an exceptionally beautiful location, cut through by the Świętokrzyskie Mountains. This means that a walk around Kielce takes you to different levels (from 231 metres above sea level to the highest point in the city – Telegraph Hill – at 406 metres). Though small compared to other province capitals, it is the only city in Europe with such a diverse range of rock formations. You can feel and photograph them in Kielce’s five must-see nature reserves (four inanimate nature reserves: Kadzielnia, Wietrznia, Ślichowice and Biesak-Białogon, and the Karczówka landscape reserve). The latest attraction at Kadzielnia is the city’s first waterfall and a system of caves, partially open to visitors, of a completely different nature than the famous Raj (Paradise) Cave.

Rock Solid Fun

An excellent view of Kielce can be enjoyed from Kadzielnia Hill (295 metres above sea level). One of the most famous cave areas in the Świętokrzyskie Mountains, today it is a nature reserve. Three of its 25 caves are part of a 140-metre-long underground tourist route with plenty of fossilized treasures to see: coral, bat, sponge and shell fossils. The modern Kadzielnia Amphitheatre, regarded as the biggest stage in Poland – it is half as big again as the one in Sopot, is the venue of many concerts and artistic events. An adrenaline rush is provided by the Tyrolka nad Kadzielnią rope and zip-line park as well as the annual and extreme Kadzielnia Sport Festival.

In the Karczówka landscape reserve on the hill of the same name (340 metres above sea level), an educational path leads to sights such as a 400-metre-deep crack – a sinkhole left by former mineshafts, of which there are many in the region. An extensive panorama of Kielce and the Świętokrzyskie Mountains can be admired from the observation deck and the neighbouring tower of the post-Bernardine Monastery Complex on Karczówka Hill.

In the Biesak-Białogon reserve in a former quartzite sandstone quarry, you can see the Świętokrzyskie Mountains’ oldest rocks – dating back over 500 million years. Meanwhile, on Wietrznia Hill in the Zbigniew Rusinowski Wietrznia Reserve you will find out what took place on Earth 350 million years ago from a formation dubbed “the card”, a rock wall that is the longest geological cross-section in Poland, measuring 800 metres. The Geo-Education Centre on Wietrznia Hill presents the history of our planet by combining learning with fun.

Absolute Must-See Sites

Leading visitors across Kielce, the City Trail has 32 attractions, reserves as well as historic buildings in the city centre. The most valuable relic of bygone times is the former Palace of the Kraków Bishops to whom the city owed its development for a few centuries, before it changed hands and was transferred to the state. The only so well-preserved residence from the Vasa period in Poland, today the palace houses the National Museum in Kielce.

The nearby Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin Mary with richly decorated Baroque/rococo interiors houses the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Grace, the patroness of Kielce. Opposite the tower is an intriguing 250-year-old plaque with model Polish, English and French measures of length and the alphabet.

It is not far from the basilica to the 200-year-old larch-wood Laszczyk Manor House. The last timber historic building of its kind in Kielce, it is used by the Kielce Countryside Museum. The manor house lies on the slope of Zamkowe (Castle) Hill, one of the city’s most charming spots. At the foot of the hill is the Municipal Park with 100-year-old trees. Writer Stefan Żeromski used to sit on a bench here when he was a student in Kielce, and he later made Marcin Borowicz, one of the main characters from his novel *The Labours of Sisyphus*, sit there waiting for his beloved Biruta. The spring near the pond is named after her and decorated with a sculpture called *Love Vows*.

Around Sienkiewicz

All these historical sites can be found around Sienkiewicza Street. The city’s main promenade, it is lined with historical tenements interspersed with modern architecture. The Nobel Prize winner is the street’s patron for a reason: Henryk Sienkiewicz lived in nearby Oblęgorek, an estate he was given by Polish society for his contribution to Polish literature. The Karski Bench, on which you can sit next to Jan Karski, the famous underground courier for the Polish government-in-exile during World War II, and play… chess with him, is also in Sienkiewicza Street, on the bridge over the River Silnica. At the other end of the promenade than Castle Hill, you will find the Old Town Square surrounded by two-storey tenements as well as St. Adalbert’s Church.

Places worth seeing include the National Museum, the Geological Museum, the Laurens Hammond Museum, the Diocese Museum, the Energy Science Centre at the Kielce Technology Park, the Museum of Toys and Play, the Museum of Stefan Żeromski’s School Years, the Geo-Education Centre and the Centre for Patriotic and Civic Thought.

Active Kielce

Kielce is also the perfect city for active tourists. Cycling enthusiasts will find numerous bike paths and routes (e.g. the 16-kilometre blue bicycle route in the Posłowickie Range south of Kielce, or arguably the toughest bicycle route in Kielce: a five-kilometre loop on the Telegraf slopes). Poland’s longest bicycle route, the Green Velo Eastern Bicycle Trail, also runs through the city.

Fans of horseback riding who would like to see Kielce and its environs from the saddle can use the services of the Stadium Park Equestrian Centre or the MAAG Centre, and ride along marked horse trails in the Posłowickie and Dymińskie ranges.

In winter, skiers and snowboarders have a choice of several centres offering multiple ski-lifts in Kielce and the Świętokrzyskie Mountains. The mostly gentle slopes are perfect for beginners to practise their skiing skills, but there are also plenty of places for the more advanced. The Telegraf northern slope is the steepest. The Stadium on the Pierścienica slope is just as exciting. During snowy winters many sections of hiking trails in the Dymińskie and Posłowickie ranges and the yellow-marked circular trail are excellent for ski-touring. For beginners in this discipline, the paths in the Stadion Leśny complex will be a good choice.

The city welcomes visitors to many regular events, to mention Kielce Day, New Year’s Eve Under the Stars – a party next to the Town Hall in which thousands take part, and the Scout Festival of School Youth Culture which has been held since 1974.

Thanks to its well-developed industry and central location as well as academic traditions, Kielce is also a well-known centre of business meetings at many different trade fairs and exhibitions. Targi Kielce, the local trade fair company, organizes a host of industry exhibitions combined with scientific conferences and presentations, providing excellent opportunities to develop business contacts.

See also: Kielce – Paradise for Children

Find out more from Kielce’s web portal

9. KRAKÓW

The capital of Małopolskie province is one of the oldest cities and a gem of national cultural heritage; it used to be the capital city of Poland and the seat of Polish kings; today it is a vast city on the queen of Polish rivers – the Vistula, visited by a multitude of tourists from all over the world…

Kraków: Royal City

Full of legends, priceless historical architecture and art as well as oases of good fun, Poland’s historical capital, its centre listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site for over 40 years, enchants visitors at first sight.

The city on the Vistula founded by the mythical Krak is easy to tour. Help with discovering its attractions is provided not only by a number of good mobile apps, but also a more traditional system of maps and arrows pointing to the most important sites in the city centre. Visitors travelling by train will need just 15 minutes to get from the main station (via the enormous Galeria Krakowska shopping mall) to the Old Town which is first on the list of must-see places.

Time Travel

As soon as you pass the Barbican and St. Florian’s Gate, you are in a completely different world: the oldest part of Kraków, which survived the turmoil of war. Every elegant and stylish building here has its history. In the Main Market Square of the Old Town you can see Kraków’s famous flower sellers and hear a familiar clip-clop sound as chic horse-drawn carriages pass you by. Pigeons hover over St. Mary’s Basilica and the Cloth Hall where trade flourishes as it has throughout the ages: you can buy amber and silver goods, arts and crafts, miniatures of the unique Kraków-style Nativity scenes, regional costumes and other souvenirs. The Gallery of 19th-Century Polish Art on the first storey of the Cloth Hall features Władysław Podkowiński’s famous painting *Frenzy* depicting a naked woman on a black horse as well as paintings by Jan Matejko, Józef Chełmoński and Henryk Siemiradzki, among others.

The underground interactive route Following Traces of Kraków’s European Identity leads under the Main Market Square, going back 1,000 years to the city’s beginnings. A revolving hologram of St. Mary’s Basilica, whose different-sized towers are allegedly the result of a deadly quarrel between two competing builder brothers, encourages tourists to visit the church itself and to see its priceless altar carved by Veit Stoss.

The Wierzynek restaurant with a tradition spanning 650 years and the cult-status Piwnica pod Baranami are just two of the many restaurants, cafés and clubs with outdoor gardens open till late at night in the summer season. The Royal Road and the Stanisław Wyspiański Route cut across the square, leading along the green Planty park surrounding the Old Town to the castle on Wawel Hill, the seat of Polish rulers, and its necropolis, and to the National Pantheon at the Church on the Rock where famous Poles are buried, including Jan Długosz, Stanisław Wyspiański and Czesław Miłosz.

Kazimierz: Reactivation

From Wawel Hill it is a short walk to the Kazimierz district which cultivates its Jewish tradition. They say that at night near one of the two synagogues in Szeroka Street, you can hear the whispering of wedding guests once cursed by a rabbi. Kazimierz has a plethora of places where you can try traditional, kosher dishes. The Jewish Heritage Route runs through the district. Tourists interested in seeing places linked to the Holocaust should visit Bohaterów Getta (Ghetto Heroes) Square, the fragment of the ghetto wall at 29 Lwowska St., and the exhibition at the Schindler Factory in the Zabłocie neighbourhood.

Interesting Architecture

The concrete and glass building of the MOCAK Museum of Contemporary Art stands in the Schindler Factory compound and is considered a gem of modern architecture. It is Poland’s first contemporary art museum built for that purpose after the war, and is part of the Kraków Technology Trail together with the Glass and Ceramics Centre, also in Zabłocie. If you have time, it’s also worth visiting the local wine cellars.

The historical power plant with a steel and concrete frame above it is an architectural expression of Tadeusz Kantor’s emballage idea: wrapping objects in order to draw attention to their essence and provoking the discovery of hidden secrets. The building houses the Cricoteka Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor and is located in Podgórze district, where the best places to have lunch or dinner are in Nadwiślańska Street (especially the popular Drukarnia club).

Another must-see is the Małopolska Garden of Arts which combines sound, theatre, installation and multimedia art (it is the experimental space of the Juliusz Słowacki Theatre, an institution founded more than a century ago and the second-oldest in Kraków after the Helena Modrzejewska National Stary Theatre). Meanwhile, the Home Army Museum (Muzeum Armii Krajowej) has been organized within the revitalized and converted 19th-century brick walls of a former auxiliary building of the Kraków Fortress, now roofed with armoured glass. The unique collection of mementos and personal effects donated directly by veterans is amazing.

We mustn’t forget to mention Nowa Huta, the ideal socialist town whose construction is shown in Andrzej Wajda’s film *Man of Marble*. Standing among the box-like blocks of flats is the unusual Church of Our Lady Queen of Poland – Ark of Our Lord, shaped like a boat. The evocative figure of the Rising Christ, who seems to be taking flight towards heaven from the cross hanging above the altar, was sculpted by an outstanding contemporary artist, Prof. Bronisław Chromy.

A Handful of Other Ideas

In Nowa Huta, which today is a district of Kraków, you will also find the Nowa Huta Culture Centre, the Ludowy Theatre, the Cistercian Monastery in Mogiła and the Nowa Huta Meadows – a protected area with educational paths, as well as Jan Matejko’s manor house with an original porch designed by the artist himself and mementos of him and constitutional reformer and educationalist Hugo Kołłątaj.

Kraków’s greatest treasure is the Princes Czartoryski Collection, which includes paintings by Leonardo da Vinci and Rembrandt. The city is also famous for its unique Nativity scenes, the biggest collection of which can be found at the Museum of Kraków (this local craft is included on UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity).

Fans of air travel will enjoy the Polish Aviation Museum in the buildings of the former Rakowice-Czyżyny Airport. Spectacular scientific experiments are presented at the Stanisław Lem Science Garden. A clubbing zone awaits visitors in the Dolne Młyny former factory complex.

Gourmets will be interested in culinary events, including regular ones like Kraków Shrovetide (Zapusty) or Obwarzanek (Kraków Bagel) Day celebrating the city’s trademark snack. And because in 2019 the European Academy of Gastronomy granted Kraków the title of European Capital of Gastronomic Culture for the first time in history, many of its restaurants serve dishes from the Kraków Capital Menu, using local products.

Kraków offers visitors many tourist routes (including bicycle trails): the University Route takes you to 17 universities, among them the 650-year-old Jagiellonian University, while Following the Paths of John Paul II includes the famous window in the Archbishops’ Palace at 3 Franciszkańska St. from which the pope addressed the faithful during his pilgrimages to Poland.

Find out more from Kraków’s tourism web portal

10. OLSZTYN

The capital of Warmińsko-Mazurskie province has a great many historical sites and lots of wonderful nature; it is located among lakes and three rivers, amidst a landscape filled with forests…

Olsztyn: Natural Garden

Wrapped in a sea of greenery, surrounded by the waters of 11 lakes, sprinkled with lunar dust, it has many treasures worth exploring, like the world’s only astronomical table made by Copernicus himself or the mysterious statue of a Prussian woman. When sightseeing, be prepared to be on the move. The distances to some of the more remote tourist attractions can be shortened thanks to bicycle routes, but also an electric eco-bus connecting the Old Town with Lake Ukiel as well as modern municipal transport (the shiny new trams and buses are impressive!). Here are places absolutely worth a visit:

Old Town: Definite Must-See

A tour of Olsztyn usually starts from the Gothic High Gate – the only surviving entrance of three that once led to the old part of the town. Also called the Upper Gate, it is the main preserved fragment of the medieval fortifications. From the Old Town side, a niche above the entrance is decorated with a picture of Our Lady funded by John Paul II. The mosaic is made of a special kind of glass, tiles made in a few hundred colours in the workshops of the Vatican Mosaic Studio under the watchful eye of the director, Dario Narduzzi. The same kind of mosaic is found at St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome.

The Old Town – although it has retained its medieval grid street plan – was rebuilt after the war. The tenements around the market square, with the Gothic Town Hall at the centre, have Baroque features but completely contemporary decorations. The stylized houses around the Fish Market closer to the gate are from the early 21st century. The two-storey reconstructed brick building, with a plaque commemorating the 200th anniversary of the Polish national anthem, used to house the editorial office and pre-war printing house of *Gazeta Olsztyńska*, a newspaper that fostered Polish national culture; today it is a division of the Museum of Warmia and Mazury.

Numerous restaurant gardens in front of the houses tempt passers-by with the pleasant smell of dishes that are offered at exceptionally attractive prices. A five-minute walk from the gate will take you to Olsztyn’s oldest religious building: the monumental Cathedral Basilica of St. James the Apostle. It houses relics of St. Adalbert, the throne of the bishops of Warmia and a 19th-century organ once played by the great Polish composer who wrote the music to the patriotic song *Rota* [The Oath], Feliks Nowowiejski. The instrument can be appreciated during the annual Olsztyn Organ Concerts. The Warmia Archdiocese Museum next door presents exhibits forming the heritage of this diocese: church and religious art starting from the 14th century. The most valuable items are a gold reliquary of St. Andrew and the manuscript of Ignacy Krasicki’s mock-heroic poem *Monachomachia* [War of the Monks].

Copernicus in the Castle

The most distinguished resident of the Gothic castle of the Warmia chapter was Nicolaus Copernicus. Besides performing his duties as administrator of the Warmia chapter estates, the great scholar wrote the first version of his monetary treatise here, a work famous for outlining the “Copernicus law” stating that “bad money drives out good”. First and foremost, though, it was here that he produced the first volume of his revolutionary work *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres*. His observations were based on a special astronomical table, partially preserved in the castle gallery to this day. A panorama of the city can be admired from the castle tower, while the green grass of the courtyard features a well as well as the Prussian Woman statue, one of few such surviving mementos of the tribes living here many centuries ago. Despite the name, it actually portrays a man holding a horn in his right hand and a short weapon in his left. The symbolism of this figure continues to divide historians, who speculate whether it represents an Old Prussian chieftain or god. At the entrance to the castle you will come upon Copernicus himself – a bronze figure sitting on a bench; touching his nose supposedly brings good luck. From the River Łyna side, the structure is surrounded by the charming Podzamcze Park. A wooden wattle-and-daub granary at the edge of the Old Town is the sole surviving example of the architecture that dominated in Olsztyn up to the 19th century.

Not To Be Missed

Olsztyn’s other tourist attractions are scattered across the city. The Astronomical Observatory is the only place in Poland that has some of the lunar dust gathered by the crew of the first manned mission to land on the moon, Apollo 11.

The Museum of Modernity Centre for Technology and Regional Development, set up in the former Raphaelson Sawmill, is a reminder of the industrial district that existed here at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.

The only trace of Olsztyn’s Jewish community is the Bet Tahara, the Pre-Burial House. Having a modest exterior, the single-storey building designed by world-famous architect Erich Mendelsohn boasts breathtaking, meticulously reconstructed interiors showing the human journey after death.

It is also worth going to the Nature Museum in a Secession (Art Nouveau) eclectic palace from the early 20th century. The rooms are filled with over 19,000 exhibits related to zoology, botany and geology. The herbarium of German traveller and naturalist Hans Steffen is especially noteworthy.

Leisure, Sports and Fun

Those who enjoy relaxing among nature have many hectares in the Centralny and Jakubowo parks as well as the Ukiel Recreation and Sports Centre, a modern tourist/sports complex on Olsztyn’s largest body of water. Events held here include the Ukiel Olsztyn Half Marathon, the Elemental Tri Series Triathlon and Triathlon European Cup, Mazovia MTB, the Ukiel Beach Rugby Cup as well as the Olsztyn Green Festival.

The most interesting events involving culture and entertainment are the Olsztyn Artist Summer, the Let’s Sing Poetry National Castle Meetings, the Demoludy International Theatre Festival, the Olsztyn Festival of Street Theatres, the Warmia-Mazury and Powiśle Culinary Heritage Festival, Olsztyn Days, the Cheese and Cottage Cheese Festival of Polish Dairy, and Kortowiada – Poland’s biggest student rag event.

Find out more from Olsztyn’s tourism web portal

11. OPOLE

This is not only the capital of Opolskie province boasting many historical sites, but also the capital of Polish song, home to a famous amphitheatre and the Polish Song Museum…

Opole: Smash-Hit City

“I prefer Opole to all other cities in the world”, sing the children in a music video of the Horyzont Foundation Helping Children and Families. You’ll know why as soon as you visit. The Lady of Pasieka is a new symbol of the city. This bronze life-sized statue of an ethereal woman in a sweeping gown holding a parasol on Pasieka Island in the Radio Opole garden is a reminder of the flood of 1997. The greatest disaster in the city’s over 1,000-year history, the flood left most of Opole under water. According to local legend, it was the Lady of Pasieka who saved Opole’s residents…

Islands: Not To Be Missed

You might want to dedicate a whole day to exploring Opole’s islands by bike. The clearly marked green route starts from the main railway station. Among other sights, it leads past an architectural gem: the post office building that looks similar to the Palazzo Pitti in Florence and was designed by an architect called Albrecht who designed many of Opole’s buildings. Contrary to the Italian original, this “palazzo” has added wings, and inside, modernist artists created a modern main hall. The police building (formerly the railway company headquarters) in Korfantego Street is also worth noting.

Across the Młynówka Canal you will find a number of the city’s attractions grouped on Pasieka and Bolko islands. The Piast Tower on Pasieka has been a symbol of Opole for centuries. Built on a part of the island called Ostrówek, on the site of an early medieval settlement, it is the only reminder of the ducal castle that once stood here. The ghost of the lovely Ofka (Eufemia) sometimes looks down into the courtyard from the 35-metre donjon. She is said to have broken off her engagement to Opole Duke John II the Good in this very place, hurling the ring down from the tower. Today the rebellious duchess promotes the Piast Tower, which you can also tour at night.

The next symbol of Opole is the nearby Millennium Amphitheatre where the annual National Festival of Polish Song has been held since 1963. The amphitheatre is home to the National Centre of Polish Song and the Polish Song Museum which is also a venue for meetings with Polish singing stars. You tour the museum on your own, with the help of an audio guide. You can watch a film about the Opole festivals, listen to many different kinds of music, see screenings of interviews with artists, look into the “costume wardrobe” with a selection of the festival singers’ stage costumes, and spend time in the multimedia library. You can also sing, record your performance in a recording booth and send it as an e-mail. The attractiveness of the museum, which recently got its own educational recording studio, was confirmed in 2017 when the Polish Tourism Organization granted it a Best Tourism Product of the Year certificate.

Both attractions look great from across the Castle Pond where light and sound shows take place from May to the end of October. After traversing the six-hectare Nadodrzański Park and crossing the River Oder, you reach Bolko Island, the Zoo being its distinctive feature. An amphibian pavilion, a giraffe enclosure, a gorilla pen, a pool with the only California sea lions in Poland, the opportunity to see animals feeding or to adopt them, a mini-zoo for the youngest children, a rope park – these are just some of the surprises in store for visitors.

Must-See Sites

Although the Soviet offensive in 1945 effectively destroyed part of Opole’s Market Square, it was rebuilt after the war and is definitely worth seeing, especially the tenements at number 32 and at number 1 with a cylindrical donjon. The latter, called the Ducal House or House under the Lion, was allegedly a stopover for John II Casimir Vasa, king of Poland and Sweden, during the Deluge (Polish-Swedish war). It is also alleged that a proclamation calling on the king’s subjects to fight against the Swedes was written here.

In the centre of the Market Square is the neo-Renaissance Town Hall that miraculously survived the wartime bombings. It, too, is inspired by the architecture of Florence, this time the Palazzo Vecchio. A year ago the Market Square gained an impressive equestrian statue by Opole sculptor Wit Pichurski, portraying Duke Casimir I of Opole who founded the city on the right bank of the River Oder over 800 years ago. Thanks to a special app, along the new Learn the Story route the duke and other statues in Opole come alive and tell you their stories through your phone. Many city events are held in the Market Square, including concerts, fairs and film screenings.

The highest point within the Old Town is the recently revitalized University Hill, where campus buildings stand among lush greenery and flowers. The neighbouring Artists’ Square features a number of sculptures by Prof. Marian Molenda from the University of Opole’s Institute of Art: of Agnieszka Osiecka because her songs won awards at the song festival, of Czesław Niemen who electrified the festival audience with his song “Strange Is This World”, and of Jerzy Grotowski, founder of the legendary Theatre of 13 Rows. The city also hosts the annual Opole Theatre Confrontations festival.

The Old Town is connected to Pasieka Island by the Castle Bridge. From here, the Opole Venice stretches to the Cathedral Bridge. It is a section of Młynówka (Millrun), the old Oder riverbed, its name referring to a time when mills operated here. The association with the Italian city of a thousand islands is especially strong at night, when the illuminated buildings are reflected in the canal. The Opole Cathedral with its famously miraculous image of Our Lady painted on a board is an important place of worship. The painting is believed to have saved the people of Prague from the plague, and John III Sobieski is said to have prayed before its copy in Piekary on his way to the relief of Vienna.

Two Important Museums

The Old Town is home to the regional Museum of Opole Silesia. Its core is formed by the historical buildings of the Baroque former Jesuit college together with a classical house and a tenement. Burgher interiors have been carefully reproduced in the latter. The museum has a model of Opole in the mid-18th century and galleries of Polish paintings, and also presents the history of the ceramics industry in Upper Silesia.

Opole in the Past and Today is a tourist route showcasing a few of the most famous sites from Opole’s history, each with a glass exposition case showing a historical photo of the site, conveniently placed to enable visitors to compare the view in the past and today.

Regional farmsteads, a church, a tower, an inn, a school, a forge, windmills, a manor granary – the Museum of the Opole Countryside is a living open-air museum where flower and vegetable gardens flourish behind pole fences and barley, buckwheat, parsnips and millet grow in the fields. The best time to visit the province’s only outdoor museum, occupying 10 hectares in Bierkowice near Opole, is during the Easter Fair. The *marzanna* folk ritual of drowning a straw figure representing winter, stalls selling beautifully decorated Easter eggs, baking and tasting of artisan bread – these are just a few of the event’s attractions.

Find out more from Opole’s web portal

12. POZNAŃ

The capital of Wielkopolskie province is a major economic, commercial, scientific, cultural and tourism centre in western Poland; it is home to the country’s most important trade-fair complex…

Poznań: All That Is Best

The Renaissance Town Hall – considered the most beautiful north of the Alps – with its billy-goat figures butting heads at noon, Poland’s only picture by Monet, St. Martin croissants: this 1,000-year-old city on the River Warta has much to be proud of. It also has its own local dialect.

Although St. Martin croissants are sold by many cake shops in the country, only the Wielkopolska region has the right to bake them. Why? Because the European Commission has listed them as a Protected Geographical Indicator. They are made from Danish pastry dough according to a strict recipe, the main ingredient of the filling being white poppy seeds. For the story of how this baked goodie became the sweet symbol of the capital of Wielkopolskie province, visit the interactive Poznań Croissant Museum. An animated cartoon version of the “croissant history of Poznań” is presented under the polychromed wooden ceiling of a Renaissance tenement in the Old Town Market Square. Of course you get to taste the famous croissants, and can even take part in making them! The museum resounds with the Poznań dialect that is not heard often in the streets any more but was very popular in the 19th century. A mixture of Wielkopolska dialect and German, it is a legacy of the times of the Prussian partition, but also the Bamberg settlers who accepted an invitation to Poznań 300 years ago. Here are some more places you mustn’t miss when in Poznań:

Historical Landmarks

The windows of the Croissant Museum’s 500-year-old tenement offer a great view onto the Town Hall, its front decorated with a three-storey arcaded loggia and a gallery of portraits of Jagiellon kings on the attic. On a small platform above the clock, the figures of two billy goats butt heads every day at noon as a bugle call sounds. Legend has it that the animals escaped from under a kitchen boy’s knife centuries ago, when he was about to turn them into the main course for dignitaries celebrating the installation of the Town Hall’s first clock mechanism. The Market Square is surrounded by Baroque-style tenements and boasts four fountains: an 18th-century one with a statue of Proserpine and three with modern-day figures of Apollo, Mars and Neptune. Poznań residents often arrange to meet at the pillory topped with the figure of an executioner in front of the Town Hall. The Bamberg Woman Well, with a statue of a woman in folk costume carrying water, is slightly hidden from sight. It is a reminder of the time in the 18th century when settlers from beyond the River Oder, who are locally referred to as Bambers, chose Poznań as their home. Poznań was a city of many cultures, with Poles, Germans and Jews living side by side.

Ostrów Tumski (Cathedral Island), in the fork of the River Warta and its tributary, the Cybina, is the oldest part of Poznań. A powerful fortified town existed here at least from the 9th century. Poland’s oldest cathedral, the Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul, stands there to this day. There are remnants of tombs in its vaults – probably the resting place of Poland’s first rulers, Mieszko I and his son Boleslaus the Brave. The history of Ostrów Tumski is presented by the Porta Posnania interactive centre of Cathedral Island's history. The modern building, which has won many architectural competitions, is one of the key sites on the Royal-Imperial Route.

This tourist route links Cathedral Island with the Old Town and the city centre. The former Imperial Castle from the early 20th century is on this route. It is considered Europe’s youngest castle to be built for a crowned ruler. The neo-Romanesque building looks much like a real medieval fortress. The Zamek Culture Centre it houses opens its spaces to experiments by creative personalities from different arts. The Museum of the Poznań Uprising – June 1956 (a division of the Wielkopolska Museum of Independence) is also located here. A monument commemorating the first such mass workers’ protest in communist Poland, from 1956, which was bloodily suppressed, can be found in the nearby Adam Mickiewicz Square.

Leisure Equally Important

The best place for a shopping spree is Stary Browar, which the International Council of Shopping Centres chose as the world’s best medium-sized shopping centre in 2005. The complex combines retail space with an art gallery of modern sculptures and installations. It is also a venue for many cultural events.

The artificial Lake Maltańskie (“Malta”) almost in the heart of the city attracts crowds of aquatic sports enthusiasts. The area around it includes a year-round ski slope with ski-lifts and a toboggan run as well as other sports-related attractions. You can have fun at Termy Maltańskie, one of the biggest water park complexes in Poland, or take the Maltanka narrow-gauge train straight to the New Zoo for an encounter with Siberian tigers, European bison, bears and many other exotic animals.

If you prefer the tropics, the Poznań Palm House, over 100 years old, offers a hot and humid environment and an exciting journey to distant continents among lush vegetation from different climate zones. The experience is made even more impressive by the sound of rushing water, aquariums with exotic fish as well as a rich programme of events, to mention a night-time tour of the Palm House as well as exhibitions and concerts. The Palm House is located in the Secession (Art Nouveau) part of the Łazarz district.

Not far from there is the Poznań International Fair complex neighbouring on the Poznań Główny railway station. From here it’s a short distance to Jeżyce, a district made famous by a series of young-adult novels by Małgorzata Musierowicz. The books’ Borejko family lived in one of the elegant tenements, and the Jeżyce Market Square still resounds with the local dialect.

The final not-to-be-missed site is the Poznań Stadium, the first arena completed for the UEFA Euro 2012 championship. It is the home stadium of the KKS Lech club for which Robert Lewandowski played in 2008-2010. Seating almost 43,000, the stadium is accessible to people with disabilities. It also serves as a venue for concerts and performances. The stadium, including some of its usually inaccessible nooks, can be viewed during regular tours with a guide.

Art lovers should definitely visit the National Museum, where among many works you will find *Beach in Pourville*, the only painting by impressionist artist Claude Monet in Polish collections. The Museum of Applied Arts, meanwhile, lets you touch and even smell bygone times. It is located in a reconstructed royal castle with a tower from which you can enjoy a panorama of the Old Town.

What Else?

After such intense sightseeing, it’s time to try the local cuisine. It might be *pyra z gzikiem* (local dialect for potato with cottage cheese dip) or something fancier, like Poznań-style duck, which comes with potato dumplings, baked apple and red cabbage.

You should also drop into the PLOT Tourist Information point at 59/60 Stary Rynek (Old Market Square), for souvenirs such as socks with the cult-status billy goats or for a Poznań Tourist Card that will make sightseeing in Poznań even more enjoyable and cheaper.

Find out more from Poznań’s tourism web portal

13. Rzeszów

The capital of Podkarpackie province and the economic, academic, cultural and recreational centre of south-eastern Poland…

Rzeszów: Miracles on the River Wisłok

A revolver shooting bullets with snuff and stocks (the punishment device) on the Underground Tourist Route, a castle-fortress, Secession (Art Nouveau) villas, Colargol (aka Jeremy or Barnaby) the bear at the Museum of Bedtime Cartoons – Rzeszów has attractions for everyone!

The Rzeszów Cellars Underground Tourist Route goes 10 metres underground. The 25 cellars and 15 corridors form a single route that is 369 metres long. This rather short walk abounds in attractions dating back to the Middle Ages. Replicas of stocks, a revolver using bullets with pepper or snuff, a sizable store of rather aged Hungarian Tokay wine – these are just a few of the many objects on display in the atmospheric brickwork interiors decorated with stone portals and cross-ribbed vaulting. There’s a surprise at one of the route’s turns: a glass door through which you can peek at the guests of the Ambasadorski Hotel’s restaurant which is also located underground. The entrance to the cellars is in the trapezium-shaped Market Square from which the town of Rzeszów started to develop in the 14th century. Casimir the Great offered the town to knight and diplomat Jan Pakosławic, who later assumed the surname Rzeszowski after the town’s name. Legend has it that an earlier nearby village belonged to a man called Rzesz, but the beginnings of settlement here date back 6,000 years.

Must-See Sites

Rzeszów’s Market Square forms the central part of the Old Town. Like a lone ship, the elegant Town Hall building stands in the middle; built in the 16th century, it gained its present appearance in the late 19th century. The Town Hall is a decorative element in the Market Square and the most distinctive building in Rzeszów.

The red skirts with dark blue stripes and dark blue embroidered vests of Rzeszów women and the white costumes decorated with red thread that were worn by another ethnic group, Lasowiacy, are on display at the Franciszek Kotula Ethnographic Museum at number 6 in the Market Square (Rynek). Children will enjoy the sizable collection of post-war toys. For more about the city’s history, visit the Rzeszów History Museum at number 12.

Lubomirski Castle, which houses the District Court today, is a distinctive fortified stone structure with defensive bastions protecting it. The bastions are named after saints: Francis, Andrew, Jerome and Mary, and their corners are topped with turrets. Originally the castle was meant to be an example of the *palazzo in fortezza* (fortified palace) Italian model that was very fashionable during the Renaissance. A local legend reveals why, despite moats and bastions, the Russians successfully invaded the castle furiously defended by the Bar Confederates: a miller called Luder who had been whipped by the lady of the estate, Joanna Lubomirska, took his revenge on “their lordships” by setting fire to the bridge leading to the fortress when the Confederates attacked enemy positions, blocking their return. Before that, the structure had resisted Tatar invasions and the Swedish Deluge (Polish-Swedish war). In September 1939 the Germans held Wincenty Witos at the castle, urging him to form a Polish puppet government, but the three-times former Polish prime minister refused.

The Lubomirskis’ small summer palace lies close to the castle, and in Pod Kasztanami Avenue not far away there is a row of Secession (Art Nouveau) villas. The eclectic building at number 6 is adorned with a bust of poet Adam Mickiewicz, the villa at number 8 is an example of the Swiss style, and the house at number 10 – Under the Owl – looks like a little castle with a sgraffito chubby sun-face peering out from its frontage.

Churches and Fairy Tales

Poland’s only known knightly tombs decorated with the busts (instead of the usual full figures) of deceased knights are late-Renaissance gravestones situated where the Rzeszowski family members are interred. They are found in Rzeszów’s oldest church, the Parish Church of Saints Stanislaus and Adalbert. They were probably made in the workshops of a pupil of Santi Gucci, the court artist of Sigismund the Old, Stephen Báthory and Anna Jagiellon.

In the Bernardine monastery complex, pilgrims visit the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Rzeszów – the late-Gothic wooden figure is a reminder of the apparitions of the Virgin Mary seen here. The crowns on Mary’s long hair have been stolen many times. The church houses the mausoleum of the Ligęzas, the owners of the town after the Rzeszowski family. Mikołaj Spytek Ligęza, who funded the monastery, was buried under the church threshold. He was the one who started building the castle, made sure the Rzeszowskis’ remains were given a worthy burial in the parish church, and was a generous founder of churches, hospitals and poorhouses. Rzeszów’s biggest churches welcome visitors in July and August to the Podkarpacie Organ Festival.

It’s not far from here to the Wanda Siemaszkowa Theatre, which the famous actress established near the end of World War II in the former building of the Sokół (Falcon) Gymnastic Society, and whose actors included the future great theatre directors Kazimierz Dejmek and Adam Hanuszkiewicz. The theatre’s two stages host the Rzeszów Theatre Meetings and the International Theatre Poster Biennial. The theatre is also home to Poland’s only permanent gallery of works by avant-garde theatre theoretician, painter and stage designer Józef Szajna.

The youngest visitors should see the Museum of Bedtime Cartoons near the Market Square, presenting many favourite Polish animated cartoon characters: Teddy Drop Ear, Colargol, Plastuś the little plasticine man, and finger puppets Jacek and Agatka.

The boulevards on the River Wisłok cutting across Rzeszów and the Lisia Góra (Fox Hill) Reserve within the city limits, with great bike paths, are the best recreation spots.

Ever year on 3 May the city celebrates the Paniaga Festival, from the nickname of today’s 3 Maja Street, the city’s main promenade; in the times of the Austrian partition, this was Pańska Street, which residents referred to as Paniaga. The festival has a different theme every year and features a wide selection of crafts fairs, dance parades, concerts and performances.

Find out more from Rzeszów’s web portal

14. SZCZECIN

The capital of Zachodniopomorskie province is a large port city where the River Oder flows into the Szczecin Lagoon…

Szczecin: Green Paris of the North

The city’s three main squares with a radial pattern of streets are modelled after those in the French capital. Their layout reflects the position of the pyramids of Giza in relation to the Nile and the Orion constellation in relation to the Milky Way. And that’s just the start of the city’s attractions…

Szczecin does not lie on the sea, although that’s what many tourists expect of the capital of a province that boasts 185 kilometres of coastline. It does lie on the River Oder, however. The river’s majestic beauty is best admired from the terraces of the Chrobry Embankment, but you can also set off on a cruise, for example to the wreck of a 90-metre reinforced concrete German tanker, the *Ulrich Finsterwalder*, which sank on Lake Dąbie during World War II. The lake is the fourth-largest inland reservoir in Poland. It has beaches and a bathing area, as do lakes Głębokie, Dziewoklicz and Miedwie, also within the city limits.

Must-See Sites Connected with Water

The romantically inclined should see the Szczecin Venice, which you can reach using the services of the Municipal Kayak Tours or simply on foot from 88/89 Kolumba St., crossing a little bridge onto Jaskółcza Island. Reflected in the Oder, the brick façades of tenements and 19th-century buildings of the former distillery and yeast factory look rather like the Italian city of many islands.

Łasztownia Island, whose name means the place where goods are loaded or unloaded in port cities or ballast is emptied, is newly teeming with life. Historical cranes on the Old Quay are a symbol of the olden days; illuminated at night, they resemble prehistoric creatures, and hence are unofficially called “craneosaurs”. In the distance you can see the mast of the *SS Kapitan K. Maciejewicz*, a general cargo carrier that was named after the “captain of captains” of oceanic sailing, Konstanty Matyjewicz-Maciejewicz before it was scrapped in 1985, previously having sailed under other names and flags. Pedestrians, runners, cyclists but also anglers are drawn to the new boulevards with atmospheric cafés, ships moored at the wharf, and the Old Slaughterhouse Euroregion Culture Centre.

The colour of Lake Szmaragdowe (Emerald) in the Zdroje district is compatible with the name. Lying within the Beech Woods Landscape Park, it was formed in the excavations left from an old chalk mine; there are still pieces of mining machinery at the bottom. The area around the lake is a sanctuary for many protected animal species, including bats wintering in the nearby bunkers and underground adits.

Importance Piece of History

One excellent way to see Szczecin in a nutshell is the City Tourist Route, marked by sites such as the Mieczysław Karłowicz Philharmonic shaped like an iceberg, the Pomeranian Dukes’ Castle, Solidarity Square – a reminder that Szczecin was the first to sign the 1980 August Accords (even before Gdańsk), the Breakthroughs Centre for Dialogue Museum with an exhibition on the city’s post-war history, St. James’ Church, the Royal Gate, the Port Gate, and the birthplaces of two women who became Russian tsarinas: Catherine the Great and Maria Feodorovna.

The mission to “build the regional, national and European identity of Western Pomerania and its residents in the spirit of multicultural, cross-border dialogue and collaboration” is pursued by the National Museum in Szczecin through its divisions, among them the Museum of Regional Traditions.

To find out what vehicles made in Szczecin – pre-war Stoewer bicycles and cars, the unforgettable Junak motorbikes and the prototype of the Smyk passenger car – looked like and how they moved, visit the exhibition at the Museum of Technology and Transport.

Best Leisure Spots

Often called the city of greenery, Szczecin has more than 500 hectares of municipal green areas, including 15 parks with a total area of 142 hectares, 90 green squares with a total area of 55.2 hectares, and cemeteries occupying 193.87 hectares as well as city woodlands. It’s worth going to Jasne Błonia Square near the Municipal Office and to the largest park in the city, Kasprowicza Park. At its edge is the Różanka botanical garden with 9,000 fragrant roses of 99 varieties and the clinker-brick Bird Fountain.

Occupying 170 hectares, Szczecin’s Central Cemetery is the largest necropolis in Poland, and truly a “garden of the deceased”. Gravestones, of which many are the work of great artists, stand amidst a few hundred species of trees, many of them exotic.

Although it’s the second-largest housing estate in Szczecin, Osiedle Pogodno is easy to fall in love with. The park-like greenery is dominated by former German villas with distinctive turrets.

To round off your tour, be sure to try the local speciality – *pasztecik* (a type of deep-fried pasty or pie) at the cult-status Pasztecik bar in Wojska Polskiego Street, the oldest place selling these delicious treats.

The most interesting events in Szczecin include Oder Days, Sea Days, the Tall Ships Races, St. James’ Fair, the Pyromagic International Fireworks Festival, Spoiwa Kultury, Szczecin Jazz, the Szczecin Music Fest and the Kontrapunkt Review of Small Form Theatres.

Find out more from Szczecin’s web portal

15. TORUŃ

One of Kujawsko-Pomorskie province’s two capital cities, its medieval town listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, this is one of the most important cultural and tourist centres in Poland…

Toruń: Home Town of Copernicus

“With its decorative buildings and brick tiles covering its roofs, Toruń shines so wonderfully that few towns can match its beauty and magnificence”, as Polish chronicler Jan Długosz described Toruń in the 15th century. The town was established in the 13th century by the Teutonic Order. It needs noting, however, that Toruń originally lay elsewhere. The reason why it was moved, according to the Teutonic Order’s chronicles, was constant flooding. Within a short time, two towns had developed: the Old and the New, and the Teutonic Knights built their castle between the two.

City of Angels

Today we are reminded that there used to be two towns here by the two historical market squares. In the middle of the Old Town Square is the monumental Town Hall. Above its gate you can see the city’s symbol: an angel holding a key and a gate with three towers. In the gate is a door, “half of it open, the other closed. What is the reason, many might ask? The town door is closed to cruel enemies, but the other half is open to guests”.

Toruń’s Many Animals

Near the Town Hall there is a fountain with frogs whose backs you’re supposed to stroke, according to legend. What do you get in return? Simple: happiness. Standing near the fountain, look up and around to see a black cat, Toruń’s defender, on the roof of one of the tenements. Many a visitor is surprised to see the figure of a donkey standing near the market square. It is a reference to a former site of punishment. In the olden days, unruly guards were seated on a donkey’s back, with a metal rod to inflict pain and weights tied to their feet to make the punishment even worse… On the other side of the square, Filuś the dog sits next to a lamppost, its master’s bowler hat in its mouth. They say that if you stroke its head you’ll get wiser, and if you grab its tail you’ll be lucky in love.

Gothic, Gothic Everywhere

Toruń’s location on the River Vistula affected its economic development from the very beginning. Toruń was a member of the Hanseatic League, and traces of that membership are visible along Szeroka Street, in which the coats of arms of cities with which Toruń traded have been embedded. In the past the city’s wealth was manifested in its defensive walls, town halls, burgher houses and numerous churches. Today you can still see this proof when you stroll around historical Toruń. Not all of the town gates, walls and churches have survived the ravages of time, but even what is left is enthralling and sure to delight even the more demanding visitor.

Town of Nicolaus Copernicus

Once upon a time, a merchant from Kraków arrived in this wealthy town. He was Nicolaus Copernicus, father of four children born Toruń, including a son also named Nicolaus. It remains a great mystery to this day in which house exactly the great astronomer was born. The font at which Copernicus was baptized stands in the Copernicus Chapel at St. James’ Church. Following traces of the famous astronomer, you mustn’t miss the Nicolaus Copernicus House museum, where part of the exhibition is housed in a tenement that belonged to the Copernicus family.

Town of Gingerbread

Toruń is also famous for gingerbread. It is here, under the watchful eyes of master gingerbread bakers, that visitors to the city can obtain knowledge once kept very secret. Surrounded by the aroma of spices, they create gingerbread they can take home as a souvenir. There are a few places where you can make this Toruń treasure for yourself. The biggest ones are the Museum of Toruń Gingerbread and the Living Museum of Gingerbread. The oldest known recipe for Toruń gingerbread comes from a medical book, *Compendium medicum auctum, or a Brief Collection and Description of Illnesses, Their Kinds, Causes, Symptoms, Treatments and Various Ways of Making Vodkas, Oils, Juleps, Syrups, Preserves, Ointments, Plasters and Various Curious Things, Divided into Seven Treatises…* .

Toruń Fortress

Toruń is a former fortress. The medieval walls featured 12 gates, over 60 keeps and two barbicans. The most famous keep is the Leaning Tower. According to one legend, its crookedness was a punishment for a sinful Teutonic Knight. When in Toruń, it’s important to stand under the tower with your heels, back and head touching the wall, arms stretched in front of you. Whoever is able to stand like this without wobbling has a clear conscience. The oldest preserved section of the historical walls faces the Vistula and features three gates once leading into the town. In the 17th century, when Swedish forces were a threat, magnificent bastions were built around Toruń. Two centuries later, the Prussian authorities surrounded the city with a ring of fortifications some 22.5 kilometres in circumference. During construction of this fortress, about 200 defensive structure were built on both banks of the Vistula, including 15 forts. If someone needs disciplining, take them on a tour of Fort IV, where a Prussian soldier will show them what’s what.

Teutonic Toruń

Toruń has a curious site that was a separate fortification in the Middle Ages, namely a Teutonic castle. Built on a horseshoe plan, it was the first Teutonic castle on the right bank of the Vistula. The start of construction dates back to the 13th century. Demolished by Toruń’s burghers in the mid-15th century, it stands as proof of the consequences of the abuse of power. One legend says that the people of Toruń had a helper in the castle, Jordan the cook. He climbed the stairs to the top of the tower and gave the signal to attack. Unfortunately the attackers ultimately blew up the tower, and the force of the explosion pitched the cook into the air. He flew all the way across Toruń and landed on one of the gates.

City of Peace

Two peace treaties ending Polish-Teutonic wars were signed in Toruń, in 1411 and 1466. Under the latter treaty, Toruń became a town belonging to the Kingdom of Poland. As the chronicler wrote, “On Sunday the nineteenth day of October, after fulfilling and confirming the agreement on perpetual peace whose terms and provisions were composed over several days, … King Casimir and Master Ludwig came in person to the Toruń market with large retinues of gentlemen. When they had greeted each other in a friendly manner, silence was ordered, and Rudolf, the papal legate, announced the fullness of the agreement on perpetual peace between Casimir, king of Poland, and his kingdom on one side, and Ludwig, Prussian master, and the Order on the other, successfully concluded…” [based on Jan Długosz’s Annals]

Royal Toruń

Both in Teutonic and in Polish times, Polish kings visited Toruń on many occasions. In late May 1404, when King Ladislaus Jagiełło was visiting, there was an incident of which Długosz wrote as follows: “And when during those three days King of Poland Ladislaus travelled around the streets of Toruń with the master of Prussia to see the town’s location, a cook spilled dishwater all over King Ladislaus. Arrested on the master’s orders and sentenced to drowning, she was saved by the king’s goodness”. However, it was King Casimir Jagiellon who visited Toruń the most often: 16 times to be exact, spending a total of 14 months here.

Toruń’s Biggest and Best…

A bell was hung in the tower of the Church of St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist in 1500. It was dubbed “Tuba Dei” – God’s Trumpet. It was the biggest bell in all of the Kingdom of Poland at the time. It weighs over seven tonnes, is two metres high and its diameter is just over two metres. You can see it when you climb the church tower. From the Vistula side, you can see the “raftsmen’s clock” on the same tower, unique in that it has only one hand.

From a boat on the Vistula, the road bridge or a terrace on the left bank, you can see the best view of Toruń: a panorama considered one of the Wonders of Poland. Recognition for the outstanding universal value of historical Toruń led to it being listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site on 4 December 1997. And it’s definitely a must-see. Be sure to visit Toruń!

Find out more from Toruń’s tourism web portal

16. WARSAW

The capital of Mazowieckie province and of Poland, this is an extraordinary city in the heart of Europe, at the intersection of Europe’s east-west and north-south transport routes, and a major economic, academic, cultural and tourist centre with a multitude of historical sites and tourist attractions…

Warsaw: A City Worth Discovering

Warsaw is a dynamic European metropolis, its trademarks – besides a rich history and amazing historical sites – being its open-minded residents, the River Vistula and exceptional cuisine. The Polish capital is a city that is constantly changing, to be discovered anew with every successive visit.

Old Town: Beating Heart of Warsaw

There is no better place to start your tour of Warsaw than the Old Town, whose history goes back 700 years and which was reconstructed after World War II (on the basis of paintings by Canaletto) with such attention to detail that it is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Today the Old Town is a charmingly cosy area with a unique atmosphere and original architectural details, especially enchanting after nightfall. The Old Town Square is its central area, filled in summer with outdoor cafés and strolling people, becoming one of the Polish capital’s most popular spots. A statue of the Warsaw Mermaid, the city’s symbol, stands in the centre. Eleven tenements around the Old Town Square are occupied by the Museum of Warsaw where historical objects tell the story of the city and its residents. Another historical treasure trove is found in the nearby Gothic St. John’s Cathedral with tombs of the last Dukes of Mazovia, plaques in memory of Polish patriots and statesmen, and the Chapel of Primate of the Millennium Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński.

Along the Royal Route

Warsaw was the seat of Polish rulers for centuries, as evidenced by impressive historical buildings lining the Royal Route: the Presidential Palace, the Ministry of Culture and Art, the Academy of Fine Arts and the University of Warsaw as well as elegant former royal residences. Among these is the Royal Castle, the residence of Polish kings from the 16th century, where you can see royal insignia and thrones as well as paintings by famous artists, including Rembrandt, Canaletto and Matejko. The nearby Sigismund Column is Poland’s most famous monument and a favourite meeting place of Varsovians and tourists alike. Another royal residence on the Royal Route is the Palace on the Water in Royal Łazienki Park. Visiting its interiors, it is worth seeing the paintings from the collection of Poland’s last king, Stanisław Poniatowski. Free piano concerts take place at the Fryderyk Chopin monument in the park every Sunday in summer. The Royal Route ends at the former residence of King John III Sobieski in Wilanów. In this Baroque palace surrounded by spacious gardens, richly decorated and furnished chambers show how the palace’s successive wealthy owners lived and how they upheld the memory of the king who won the Battle of Vienna.

Tracing Recent History

The Palace of Culture and Science, built in socialist-realism style, stands in the very heart of Warsaw and has become a modern icon of the city. Visible practically from every corner of the capital, it houses a theatre, a cinema, museums, cafés and the main Tourist Information Point. A great panorama of Warsaw can be viewed from the observation deck on the 30th floor, including some spectacular new skyscrapers and both banks of the Vistula. After World War II the socialist-realism style was applied in newly built monuments, public buildings and even whole districts, to mention MDM around Konstytucji Square and the Muranów estate built on the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto.

A tourist route running through the historical Jewish district will take you to the multimedia POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, the Umschlagplatz (the site of the railway ramp from where the Germans transported Warsaw’s Jews to the Treblinka extermination camp), a fragment of the wall separating the ghetto from the “Aryan side”, and plaques in the pavement marking where the ghetto boundary used to be.

The eventful and dramatic history of the city can also be experienced at the interactive Warsaw Rising Museum. It documents the 63-day heroic struggle of Varsovians against the occupying forces during World War II. The tragic events of 1944 changed the Polish capital’s image for ever and influenced its present-day character.

On the Vistula, in Praga District

For respite from the big-city hubbub, go down to the riverbank. Clean and groomed beaches attract sports fans and those who prefer to laze around, while the Vistula boulevards with their bike paths, observation decks, a mini-beach and river marinas are appreciated by locals and tourists of every age. At summer weekends, visit the Multimedia Fountain Park near the Vistula to watch the spectacular laser shows inspired by Warsaw legends about Wars and Sawa, the Basilisk, and the Warsaw Mermaid.

The nearby Copernicus Science Centre is also wroth seeing, as is the multi-level garden on the roof of the University of Warsaw Library, from where you can get a great view of the Praga district of Warsaw.

The east-bank part of Warsaw was culturally, ethnically and religiously diverse for centuries. Since it was not destroyed during World War II, it is considered the most authentic part of the city. Walking along its streets, it’s worth exploring the shrines hidden away in the courtyards, seeking out the original murals found in the area, and visiting the Polish Vodka Museum in the revitalized space of the Koneser centre in Praga district – a former distillery. In the evening, visit the Saska Kępa neighbourhood to see lots of modernist architecture and stop at one of the eateries serving flavours from all over the world.

Flavours of Warsaw

Warsaw is also the culinary capital of Poland. Its many bars and restaurants include “milk bars” established back in communist times as well as Michelin star restaurants. Hala Koszyki and Hala Gwardii are among the most trendy spots today, with dozens of restaurants and bars. Anyone with a sweet tooth will also be enchanted by Warsaw: local bakeries and cafés serve Warsaw’s traditional *wuzetka* cakes, Wedel chocolate and natural ice cream. Breakfast markets and food truck rallies as well as the Fine Dining Weekend and Restaurant Week festivals are quite popular.

Find out more from Warsaw’s tourism web portal

17. WROCŁAW

The capital of Dolnośląskie province, with a history spanning many centuries, to which the city owes it great number of historical sites, is the most important cultural, economic, academic and tourist centre of south-western Poland; a city with a plethora of attractions for every tourist…

Wrocław: History, Rays and Dwarves

The city has been reflected in the waters of the River Oder for over 1,000 years. With visible traces of Czech, German and Polish rule, contemporary Wrocław is a truly European city, and one that you simply must see.

City of Bridges

Ships sail along the Oder, almost like in Venice. More than 100 road bridges and footbridges pin together the riverbanks in the capital of Lower Silesia – their number in Wrocław is smaller only than that in Venice, Amsterdam, St. Petersburg and Hamburg. Tumski Bridge is weighed down by dozens of love padlocks – just like the Ponte Milvio in Rome. The Witches’ Bridge, Wrocław’s highest at 45 feet above ground level, connects the towers of the Gothic Cathedral of St. Mary Magdalene. Grunwaldzki Bridge reigns supreme in Wrocław – it has been a trademark of the city for over a century. Its pioneering structure is impressive by day as well as by night when it is stunningly illuminated.

Hits of Times Past

A fortified town built on Ostrów Tumski (Cathedral Island) in the 10th century marked the city’s beginnings. Priceless historic buildings here include the Gothic Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, the two-storey brick Collegiate Church of the Holy Cross and St. Bartholomew, and the Archdiocese Museum. The latter houses the Book of Henryków from the 13th-14th centuries containing the first sentence written down in Polish (listed in the UNESCO Memory of the World Register).

The Old Town Square, a perfect blend of historical Renaissance and Mannerist tenements and post-war reconstructions, is one of the biggest in Europe. It resounds with busker music day and night, and its restaurant windows are inviting. The Baroque House Under the Gold Sun is home to the Pan Tadeusz Museum housing the manuscript of Adam Mickiewicz’s famous poem. After dusk you can see ladies and gentlemen in clothes from the Romantic period moving behind the curtains on the first floor – an incentive to visit the museum. The late-Gothic Old Town Hall houses the Museum of Burgher Art, and in a way is also its main exhibit.

The Four Denominations District is a unique place where an Orthodox church, a Roman Catholic church, a Lutheran church and a synagogue stand next to one another. This charming area is not just a space of religious rapprochement but also a popular clubbing spot.

The reinforced-concrete Centennial Hall, where policeman Eberhard Mock from the crime novels of Marek Krajewski debuted as a specialist solving the biggest crimes, is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Its 28-metre dome is topped with a steel and glass lantern. The fountain in front of the hall is Poland’s greatest and one of the biggest in Europe, spurting water from 300 nozzles, “breathing” fire from three outlets and illuminated by as many as 800 lights.

Another Wrocław hit is the Racławice Panorama – a monumental picture of the 1794 battle between Polish and Russian forces. Painted by a whole team of artists supervised by Wojciech Kossak and Jan Styka, it is 114 metres long and 15 metres high. You can see it in a purpose-built rotunda where added elements, decorations and lighting bring the battle to life.

When in Wrocław, be sure to see the *1,000 Years of Wrocław* exhibition at the Historical Museum located in the Royal Palace surrounded by Baroque gardens. The University of Wrocław features a gem of Lower Silesian Baroque, namely the Aula Leopoldina hall, and an astronomical observatory in the Mathematical Tower with priceless instruments such as a celestial globe from 500 years ago.

Close to Nature

You can get from the centre to the Wrocław Zoo by taking a boat ride. This is the oldest zoo in Poland and the largest in terms of the number of animals. The pools in the Africarium hold 15 million litres and are home to 260 fish species from all over the world, including rays and sharks, and you can hear birds singing in the rain forest. The nearby Szczytnicki Park, the city’s biggest park, tempts visitors with its Japanese Garden featuring many traditional architectural elements.

The exhibition at Hydropolis tells us that the water supply system in Wrocław is the same length as the distance from Silesia to Madrid, and that by 2050, weight-wise there will be more plastic than fish in the oceans. Hydropolis is one of Europe’s most advanced centres where all kinds of multimedia technology, interactive installations, replicas and models are used to teach about water from many intriguing angles.

Fascinating Places, Events and Flavours

Military Historical Sites of Wrocław, In the Footsteps of Eberhard Mock, the Wrocław Film Trail, Street Art in Wrocław – you can follow these and other city tourist routes by following the descriptions on <https://visitwroclaw.eu/en> One of the routes introduces the local dwarves; there are already over 300 of these fun figurines to track down in the streets of Wrocław. They even have an official website: http://krasnale.pl/en/, and tourist information points sell souvenirs and sweets referencing the little rascals.

Wrocław is also worth seeing from the river, whether from a tour boat, kayak, pedal boat, motorboat or catamaran. The River Oder can also be crossed through the air – using the Polinka cableway. A city bike or electric golf cart is a good option for sightseeing.

These are not all of Wrocław’s assets. The fact that it was chosen a 2016 European Capital of Culture only proves how vibrant a city it is. Let’s at least mention the most important festivals: Wratislavia Cantans for music, Nowe Horyzonty for films, and the Crime and Mystery Festival for literature. Culture enthusiasts will find plenty of art galleries, museums, theatres, the opera house and the National Forum of Music whose acoustic design was the work of specialists from New York.

Wrocław has many flavours, but you shouldn’t leave without at least trying the gingerbread. The Silesian gingerbread-making tradition dates back to the 13th century, making it the oldest in Central Europe, 100 years older than Toruń’s! At Piernikarnia Wrocławska near the main market square, you can taste the spicy biscuits or even learn to make them.

Find out more from Wrocław’s tourism web portal

18. ZIELONA GÓRA

One of Lubuskie province’s two capital cities, the “western gate” to Poland, situated on seven hills between the rivers Oder and Bóbr, with interesting tourist attractions…

Zielona Góra: Capital of the Drink of Gods

The city’s old winemaking tradition is steadily reviving, and there’s even a song inviting tourists “to rendezvous with Bacchus” here. After Bacchus was torn to pieces by the Titans, Pallas Athena sprinkled his blood on the Mediterranean coast, France, lands on the Reine and the Moselle. Vineyards sprang from every droplet, marking the beginnings of famous winemaking regions. A tiny amount of the blood also fell on the soil around Zielona Góra… This is the legend told by the Wine Museum exhibition at the Lubuskie Regional Museum – not to be missed during your tour of Zielona Góra.

A Dash of History

Zielona Góra and wine are inseparable. The town received its charter in the 14th century, but its hills were covered with vines even before then. Locusts, smallpox, power changing hands from the Piasts of Głogów, through the Jagiellons, Habsburgs, kings of Prussia, Germany, and back to Poland in 1945 – through all this, nothing managed to disturb the developing wine business. Actually, it was in Zielona Góra in 1826 that production of Germany’s first sparkling grape wine was launched. The bold company to do this belonged to Friedrich August Grempler; 100 years later, when six other wine businesses were operating in the city, this company made 250,000 bottles a year, and just before the war – 800,000. The wine stocks survived the world war, enabling the Lubusz State Wine Production Enterprise to continue making wine. After the political system changed, when the facility was shut down in 1999 and its buildings started falling apart, it seemed the centuries-old winemaking tradition had practically disappeared. However, it started reviving a few years ago. It’s worth seeing places with a winemaking connection, although they are certainly not the only attraction of Zielona Góra.

The Taste of Wine

The Wine Museum has 1,540 exhibits telling the story of winemaking in the region from its beginnings to the present day: winepresses, barrels, casks, manual crushers. A series of paintings by Jerzy Fedro shows winemaking stories, like the one about stag parties in the olden days lasting a fortnight, after which the groom was so drunk he could barely stand up straight at the altar.

The Palm House is definitely worth visiting. Its huge modern glass structure merges with the historical winemaking building Grempler built here in 1818. The historical vineyard in front of the Palm House is a symbolic reference to the times when plantations covered all of the surrounding hillsides. True to its name, the greenhouse boasts tall palm trees and other tropical plants, among which you can enjoy a restaurant meal and then get a view and a snapshot of the cityscape from the upper terrace.

Since you’re on Wine Hill already, be sure to visit the Wine Cellar there and try some of Zielona Góra’s wine.

Follow the Bacchuses

Just like Wrocław has its dwarves, Zielona Góra now has its little Bacchuses. More than 50 of these figurines with funny names can be found on the Bacchus Trail. You’ll find the greatest number of them along the promenade, one of the longest in the country, with plenty of cafés, restaurants and pubs, many of them in former wine cellars.

The Old Market Square hosts many regular events, to mention Summer of All Muses or the Wine Festival during Zielona Góra Days. This is the heart of the Old Town, and features the city’s oldest historic building – the Gothic Cathedral of St. Hedwig of Silesia as well as the Bath Tower, the Town Hall and fragments of the old town walls. The interior of the Church of Our Lady of Częstochowa is rather unusual for a religious building: the white balconies in three tiers look more like a theatre.

Planetarium and Torture

The Venus Planetarium presents the first Polish animation in fulldome technology, *On the Wings of Dreams*, about the history of aviation, as well as many other immersive film shows. It is one of three planetariums in the world with a movable dome whose angle to the audience can be changed during projections. The Planetarium and the Nature Centre together form the Kepler Science Centre. Johannes Kepler was a great 17th-century mathematician; considered the first astrophysicist in history, he discovered three principles governing the movement of planets in the Solar System (these are Kepler’s three laws of planetary motion) as well as introducing the decimal point.

On the tourist trail you will also find the Torture Museum, a permanent gallery of the Lubuskie Regional Museum. Set up in the gloomy cellars of the museum, the exhibition suggestively recounts the history of criminal law, how punishments were enforced and what methods of torture were used in medieval times and the modern era. As you inspect tools from the times of witch trials, you can hear the jangling of chains and the moans of the tortured.

To complete the day, try a concert at the Zielona Góra Philharmonic or relax at the Aquapark of the Recreation and Sports Centre.

Magical Falubaz

An ultramarathon along the new city boundary, the Grand Prix Kaczmarek Electric MTB races, the Dirty Dozen cross-country race, the Wine Harvest Nordic Walking March, the Battle of Europe and the Zielona Góra Grand Prix in long-distance running are just a few of the many sports events held here throughout the year. A visit to the stadium of Falubaz – the champion speedway racing club – will get your adrenaline pumping, as the motorbikes race at 100 km/h with no brakes. Unforgettable sports memories are also made by the basketball players of Stelmet Enea BC, four times Polish champions.

Those who enjoy an active lifestyle have plenty to choose from, including Nordic walking routes, bike paths and boat trips on the Oder. If you plan to stay longer, hire one of the 400 municipal rental bikes and take one of the quality bike paths: to the Ethnographic Museum in Ochla, the palace and park in Zatonie district, or the Botanical Garden and the old Oder riverbed in Odrzański Forest. Happy trails!

Find out more from the website Visit Zielona Góra