

openBaltics

FREE GUIDE · 2026

A field guide to

Poland.

Cool facts, real places and the stories behind them, from the local guides at openBaltics.



Poland, *the southern neighbour.*

The places, the food, the odd facts and the best months: everything we tell our own friends before they come to visit. Keep it on your phone, or print it for the trip.

Poland is the largest country between Germany and the former Soviet Union, and its presence is felt in every direction: in Vilnius, where Polish was spoken for centuries; in Gdańsk, which shares the same amber coast as Lithuania; in the Tatra mountains, which form Europe's sharpest transition from lowland plain to alpine rock. For travelers coming south from the Baltics, the border crossing near Suwałki opens onto a country of a different scale, a different density, and a food tradition that ranges from Kraków's milk bars to some of the most ambitious new kitchens in central Europe.

Three cities anchor the visitor's Poland. Warsaw, rebuilt from rubble after 1945, now one of Europe's fastest-moving capitals. Kraków, untouched by the war, with a medieval square and a Jewish quarter that still draws scholars and pilgrims. Gdańsk, the Baltic port where Solidarity began, with painted merchant houses along the Motława and the world's largest brick church behind them. Between the three, the country unfolds in farmland, forest, and the occasional hilltop castle ruin.

The openBaltics team, Vilnius



The bison

The bison is our host in Poland. Europe's largest free-roaming herd lives in Białowieża Forest, on the eastern border.

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AT A GLANCE

The country in *numbers*.

Warsaw

CAPITAL

38 million

POPULATION

312,700 km²

AREA

17 cultural and natural

UNESCO SITES

440 km on the Baltic

COASTLINE

Since 2004

EU MEMBER

Rysy, 2,499 m (Tatras)

HIGHEST POINT

30% of land

FOREST COVER



Four places that make *Poland*.



01

Kraków's Rynek Główny

The largest medieval market square in Europe, surrounded by merchant houses and anchored by the Cloth Hall and St Mary's Basilica. The trumpet call still sounds every hour from the tower.



02

Wieliczka Salt Mine

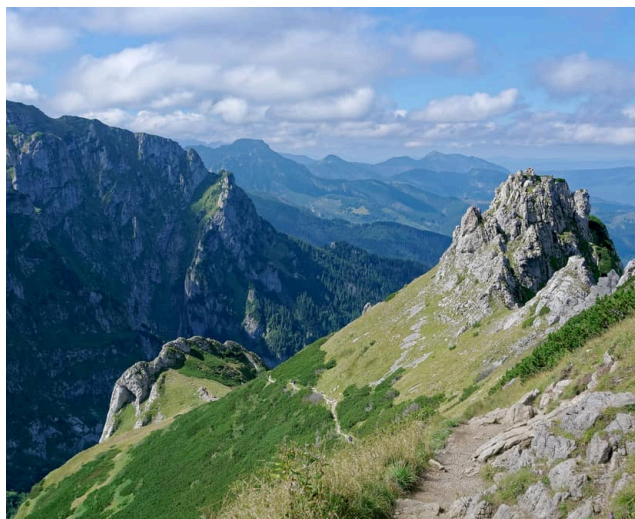
Nine floors underground, 700 years of continuous mining, and a cathedral carved from salt. The single most-visited site in Poland, and one of the few that earns the superlative.



03

Gdańsk, amber and Solidarity

Painted merchant houses on the Motława, the world's largest brick church, and the European Solidarity Centre. The city where the movement that ended communist Europe began.



04

The Tatra Mountains

Two hours south of Kraków, the landscape lifts sharply into alpine peaks, pine valleys, and the wooden architecture of Zakopane. The only true mountains in the region.

Six things that *surprise people.*

80%+

01 A capital rebuilt from paintings

More than 80 percent of Warsaw was destroyed by 1945. The old town was rebuilt stone by stone from paintings and drawings, so faithfully that UNESCO listed it.

Złoty

02 In the EU, not in the euro

Unlike its Baltic neighbours, Poland keeps its own currency, the złoty, rather than the euro.

2,499 m

03 Real mountains

Unlike the flat Baltic states, Poland has real mountains. The Tatras rise straight from the plain, and Rysy reaches 2,499 metres.

Bison

04 Europe's last primeval forest

Białowieża, on the eastern border, is the last primeval lowland forest in Europe, and home to the largest wild population of European bison.

1980

05 Where communism began to fall

In 1980, in the Gdańsk shipyard, the Solidarity movement began, and with it the unravelling of communist rule across the bloc.

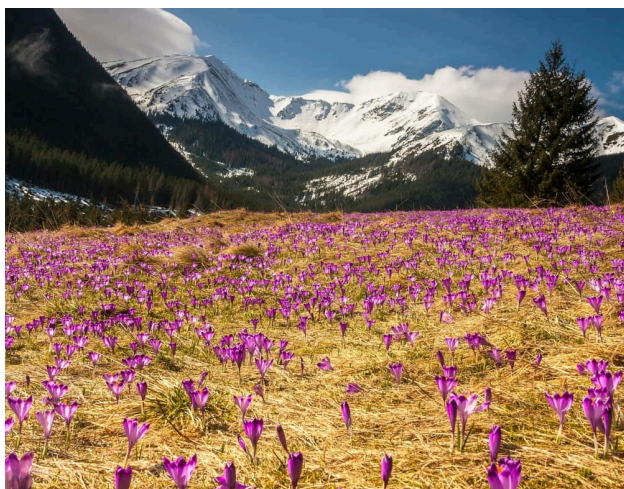
Open field

06 A country named after its plains

The name Poland comes from an old word for open field, after the plains and river valleys that cover most of the country.



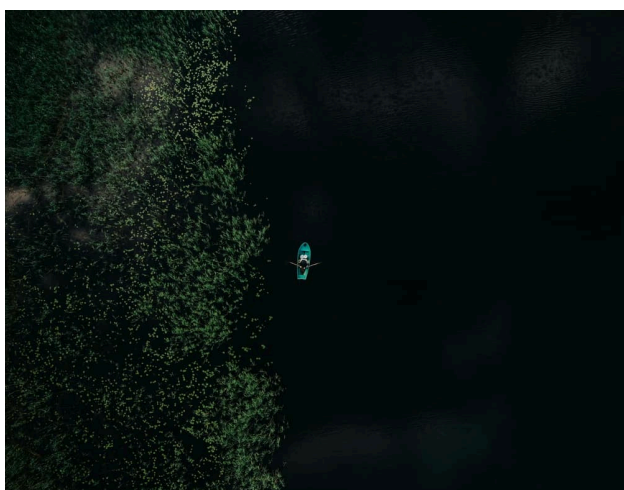
Three bases for *a trip*.



THE MEDIEVAL HEARTLAND

Kraków & the south

The Old Town, the Jewish quarter of Kazimierz, the Wieliczka Salt Mine, and the Tatra foothills. Kraków is the anchor of most first visits, and it earns the time.



THE REBUILT CAPITAL AND THE LAKE COUNTRY

Warsaw & Masuria

Warsaw's painstakingly reconstructed Old Town (UNESCO since 1980), the POLIN museum, and north into the Masurian lake district, where a thousand lakes sit in glacial silence.



THE AMBER SHORE

Gdańsk & the Baltic coast

The Tri-City (Gdańsk, Sopot, Gdynia) on the Baltic coast. Long sandy beaches, the Solidarity shipyards, and a merchant city whose painted facades rival Amsterdam's.



A milk bar in Kraków, open since 1956.

ON THE TABLE

Pierogi, milk bars, *and a new kitchen.*

Polish food begins with pierogi (filled dumplings, boiled or fried), żurek (a sour rye soup with sausage and egg), barszcz (a clear beetroot broth), and the institution of the bar mleczny, the state-subsidised milk bar where a full lunch still costs under four euros. But the country has also undergone a quiet culinary revolution. In Kraków and Warsaw, a new generation of kitchens works with foraged mushrooms, heritage grains, and smoked trout from the Tatra streams. The food tradition runs deep and wide, from roadside oscypek (smoked sheep cheese, grilled over charcoal in the mountains) to the elaborate Sunday obiad that still anchors family life across the country.

The institution of the bar mleczny, the state-subsidised milk bar, where a full lunch still costs under four euros.

The year, *month by month.*

Jan QUIET Cold, clear 7h light	Feb QUIET Cold, clear 9h light	Mar QUIET Thaw, mud 12h light	Apr GOOD Spring, cool 14h light
May BEST Warm, lilacs 16h light	Jun BEST Long days, festivals 18h light	Jul BEST Hot, 25 to 30°C 17h light	Aug BEST Peak, crowded south 15h light
Sep BEST Golden autumn 13h light	Oct GOOD Quiet, colourful 11h light	Nov QUIET Grey, raw 8h light	Dec GOOD Christmas markets 7h light

BEST MONTHS

May to September

May to September is the warm half, when Kraków's square fills with cafe tables, the coast opens and the Tatra trails are clear of snow. December is the other window, for Kraków's Christmas market on the largest medieval square in Europe.



The *practical bits.*

CAPITAL	Warsaw
LANGUAGE	Polish
TIME ZONE	CET, UTC+1 / CEST UTC+2
FLY IN TO	Warsaw (WAW) · Kraków (KRK) · Gdańsk (GDN)
VISA	Schengen, 90/180 days
CURRENCY	Złoty (PLN). Euro not widely accepted; ATMs everywhere
POWER	230V, type E (French-style, with pin)
TIPPING	10% in restaurants; round up for taxis
LANGUAGE TIP	English good among under-40s in cities; Polish phrasebook appreciated in smaller towns



Trips we run *in Poland.*

Planned by people who live here, and changed to fit you.
Every trip can be shortened, stretched or rebuilt.

7 DAYS	Northern Poland self-drive openbaltics.com/itinerary/self-drive-poland-north	FROM €645
7 DAYS	Poland in a Nutshell openbaltics.com/itinerary/poland-in-a-nutshell	FROM €2,095
9 DAYS	Winter Poland openbaltics.com/itinerary/christmas-krakow	FROM €2,610
10 DAYS	Jewish Heritage Tour: Vilnius to Kraków openbaltics.com/itinerary/jewish-heritage-poland	FROM €2,990
11 DAYS	Best of Poland openbaltics.com/itinerary/krakow-deep	FROM €3,125

Prices in euros per person sharing a room. Prices as of 20 October 2026.
openbaltics.com/country/pl

Nothing quite right?

Most of our trips start as an email. Tell us how many days you have and what you like, and we will build one around you.

openbaltics.com/plan-a-trip



PLAN IT WITH US

Cross south to *Poland*.

Tell us your dates and what you love. A real person replies within one working day with a day-by-day plan and a clear price.

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