

What Is Poland Known For?

Not sure what Poland is known for? Worry not.

With 20 million visitors per year, Poland is one of the most visited countries in the world. Poland is situated in central Europe, with influences from neighbouring nations seen throughout the country.

Poland is famous for more than its vodka, although it is worth tasting. The county boasts breathtaking mountainscapes in the High Tatras National park, vibrant cities, and castles larger than the ones you've seen in movies.

Keep reading to discover the 21 things Poland is famous for and the 21 reasons you need to book your ticket!

What Is Poland Known For?

1. Pope John Paul II

Poland is one of the most religious countries in Europe, with many Poles adhering to Christianity. Therefore it's not surprising that one of the most well-known popes was Polish. Pope John Paul II, elected in 1978, was the first non-Italian pope since 1523.

Pope John Paul II is remembered fondly in Europe for his successful efforts to end communism. He is the most famous citizen of Poland, as evidenced by statues and museums commemorating him in Warsaw and Krakow.

2. Start of World War II

Although a less cheery claim to fame, the initiation of World War II is a significant facet of Polish history.

The Battle of Westerplatte marked the first German attack and success during World War II. German troops first invaded the northern coastal town of Gdansk (formerly the Free City of Danzig) on September 1st, 1939. This advance drove Great Britain and France to declare war on Germany on September 3rd.

From this first attack began the biggest and deadliest war in history that stretched over six years, involving over thirty countries.

3. Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum

The Auschwitz and Birkenau Memorial and Museum is one of Poland's most visited tourist attractions due to the site's significance during the war. Auschwitz was the largest German Nazi concentration camp, with over 1.1 million people losing their lives there during the war.

Educational information is scattered throughout the concentration camp, allowing you to explore the site while learning how it operates.

You can visit the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum and Memorial for free without a tour. However, the guided tours incorporate valuable additional information, and the guides can answer the questions you will inevitably have. The site is so large it can be overwhelming, so we recommend booking a guided tour for \$15-\$20.

4. Gdansk.

Situated on the Baltic sea, this port city is one of the country's most underrated places to visit. The buildings are colourful and characterful, the streets are full of musicians, and the entire city is steeped in history. Of course, all of this is to be enjoyed with a seaside backdrop; what more could you want?

The city is also famous for its role in the solidarity movement. (I know- Poland has almost too much history to learn about!) The solidarity or 'Solidarność' movement was an anti-communist movement campaigning for social change and was said to have contributed heavily to the fall of communism.

Gdansk is also conveniently located near several other famous attractions in Poland, so it can be a useful base camp for your trip.

5. Tatra National Park

The Tatra mountains create a shared border between Poland and Slovakia, spanning over 200 km², with peaks as high as 2499 metres. The park is divided in half between the neighbouring nations and are technically separate national parks under the same name.

The Tatra National Park has been recognised by CNN as one of the best parks to visit in the world. With towering snow-capped mountains, glittering glacial lakes, Alpine huts and over 170 hiking trails to choose from, the Tatra mountains have it all.

You can lose yourself on the trails or enjoy the views from sea level whilst sipping a delicious and ridiculously cheap beer.

6. Pierogis

Pierogis are traditional, filled dumplings that can be sweet or savoury. The unleavened dough is wrapped around a filling that can be made from potato, cheese, sauerkraut, meat or fruit. They are usually topped with sour cream, fried onions, or both if you are lucky.

Pierogis are the food of the Polish people and even used to be considered peasant food. You can find pierogis at restaurants, supermarkets and food stalls all year round.

With the many filling options, there's a Pierogis for everyone. They're unpretentiously delicious and worth giving a try!

7. Malbork Castle, The Biggest Castle In The World

Malbork castle is a 13th-century fortress near the town of Malbork, in northern Poland. The castle is impressive for several reasons, one of which is its title as the largest castle in the world. Malbork Castle sprawls over 52 acres and comprises three separate castles.

This UNESCO world heritage site is a short 45-minute drive or train ride from Gdansk and is worth the journey to enjoy endless photo opportunities to act as the king or queen of this legendary castle.

8. Marie Curie

Marie Curie is another famous name to come out of Poland, one that many of us have heard of, but perhaps don't know why.

Curie was the first female recipient of a Nobel prize in 1911 and is the only female to receive two Nobel prizes. She was born in Warsaw and initially studied there, but later moved to France for further education.

Marie Curie became a high-level physicist and chemist who pioneered the way for research on radioactivity, even discovering the elements polonium and radium.

Curie also saved lives in WWI, as she discovered how electromagnetic radiation x-rays could help doctors locate bullets and shrapnel in soldiers and remove them. Undoubtedly, she was an impressive woman.

9. Warsaw

The Polish capital, Warsaw, is sometimes called the new Berlin due to its vibrant culture and varied selection of bars, restaurants and alternative clubs.

The eclectic city is worth visiting to enjoy its old streets and squares, the array of museums; the local food; and edgy nightlife.

With over 42 museums, it's easy to learn about the history of Poland. Some top picks are; the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, the Warsaw Uprising Museum and the Museum of Warsaw.

10. The Wieliczka Salt Mine

Located within the metropolitan area of Krakow, the Wieliczka Salt Mine is one of the world's oldest salt mines.

The mine is 327 metres deep and has passages extending as far as 178 miles long. The impressive structure was excavated in the 13th century and produced household table salt until 2007.

The site is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and an official Polish Historic Monument. Exploring the cave is an immersive experience for anyone of any age, with stunning chapels and statues carved into the walls, interactive displays and educational sections to understand the history of mining and its geology.

11. Milk Bars

Although the name may be off-putting to lactose-intolerant tourists, milk bars have little to do with cows and their produce. Instead, milk bars, or bar mleczny, are traditional polish eateries offering canteen-style dining.

The establishments sprang up during the polish communist era, providing simple meals for minimal cost.

Visiting a milk bar is a great way to sample some traditional Polish cuisine in a relaxed setting, at an extremely affordable price, even costing as little as a dollar for a meal.

12. Polish Vodka

Although vodka can be found worldwide, Poland is one of the few countries that often serve their vodka neat, a.k.a without ice, water or mixer.

Vodka, or 'wodka' in Polish, originated from North and Eastern Europe, with mentions of it as early as 1405.

The spirit was initially used for medicinal purposes, but locals soon got a taste for the stuff and began refining the process to make the vodka we know today. Although it's not to everyone's taste, Polish vodka is said to be some of the best in the world.

13. Frederic Chopin

Frederic Francois Chopin (1810 - 1849) was a Polish composer and pianist. Initially a child prodigy from Warsaw, Chopin primarily created solo piano pieces and has received worldwide praise for his poetic genius.

His fame status, pioneering work, high-profile love life and early death made Chopin a true symbol of the Romantic era. Biographies, films and statues can be found in his honour, including the Fryderyk Chopin Institute in Warsaw, promoting his life and works.

14. Krakow

As the former capital of Poland, Krakow is one of the country's most popular tourist destinations.

The city is one of the few that wasn't destroyed during WWII and maintains some of the country's most beautiful historic architecture. Krakow provides a picture-perfect getaway for any holidaymaker, with many bars, restaurants, clubs and castles to enjoy.

The historic city is packed with charm, ancient architecture and, of course, history. For example, Wawel castle, an eclectic medieval castle built in the 16th century. The castle is Poland's first UNESCO World Heritage Site and has always held great significance to Polish people.

15. Amber

Poland is one of the biggest exporters of amber, the gorgeous golden gem often found in jewellery and art. Amber is, in short, formed through the process of trees producing resin, which fossilises into what we know today as amber.

Amber is precious to the people of Poland, even being known as 'The Gold of the North' or the 'Gem of the Baltic', as amber was washed up on the Baltic coasts.

You can find beautiful handcrafted pieces of amber jewellery, gems and furniture all over Poland, particularly in Gdansk's Old Town, where the artisans have worked with amber for centuries.

16. Białowieża Forest

The Białowieża Forest is yet another World Heritage site and the last ancient European forest. And as an ancient forest, the region is somewhat of an ecosystem time capsule of what the natural areas of Europe would have looked like in prehistoric times.

The forest is blooming with diversity, with flora and fauna stretching out for hundreds of square kilometres. For example, 900 free-roaming European bison inhabit the region, making up almost 25% of the total bison population worldwide.

The region also holds over 2000 bodies of water, making it one of Europe's great lake districts and a great place to go for a dip or kayak adventure.

17. The Witcher

You may have already heard of, or even read, the book series *The Witcher*, a series of six fantasy novels written by the Polish-born Andrzej Sapkowski.

The books have been a raging success in Poland and the rest of Europe, selling over 15 million copies.

Fun fact: Sapkowski based *The Witcher* on a Polish fairy tale and entered it into a short story competition where he only placed third. Although I'm sure the judges will regret that decision now.

The books have since been made into a television series on Netflix. The Franchise is ultimately regarded as Poland's most successful international brand.

18. Bigos

The hearty and wholesome dish, bigos, is often found at Polish Milk Bars. The dish, translated as 'hunter's stew', is comprised of chopped meat of any kind, stewed with sauerkraut and shredded fresh cabbage.

The comforting stew originates from Poland but is also popular in neighbouring nations, such as Lithuania and Belarus.

The more meat in a bigos dish, the better. Pork, chicken, goose, turkey, beef, you name it; the Polish will stew it. The stew can be served with a side of bread or, if you're lucky, inside a puff pastry shell or bread bowl.

19. Nicolaus Copernicus

Although Nicolaus Copernicus may not be a name you've heard of, you will have heard of his scientific theories.

Copernicus (1473- 1543) was a mathematician and astronomer who formulated the first model of the universe that placed the Sun at its centre, not the Earth.

Copernicus was an intellect on all counts, with a doctorate in canon law, and was an accomplished polygon, polymath, physician, governor and economist. His success wasn't limited to space, he also developed a quantity theory of money, a principal concept that's valued in economics to this day.

20. Kielbasa

If you've ever been to a Polish supermarket, you will quickly be able to glean their feelings about sausages. Spoiler alert: they really, really like sausages.

Kielbasa is a bracket term that is any meat sausage from Poland. The name has been adopted in American English, usually referring to U-shaped smoked sausages made of pork.

Kielbasa is common in many dishes, such as soup, bean dishes and stews, and simple platters of fried kielbasa topped with fried onions. They're pretty delicious.

21. Solidarity, Polish Trade Union

The 'Solidarosc', or 'solidarity' movement, was founded in 1980 and was the first independent union recognised by the Polish government. It was a highly successful union, with 10 million members, the largest union membership in the world.

Solidarity was initially organised as an industrial union, which grew into an anti-authoritarian social movement, campaigning for workers' rights and social change.

The union challenged the communist-ruled Eastern bloc, eventually achieving a peaceful end to Polish Communist rule in 1989. The movement spread ideas of anti-communism, and weakened the Communist governments throughout the Eastern Bloc.

FAQs (I'll do)

Outro

If you were curious about what Poland was famous for, it turns out, the answer is very long- Poland has a lot to shout about! From the breathtaking heights of the Tatra mountains to the rich history scattered all over the nation, Poland has something for everyone, including you!