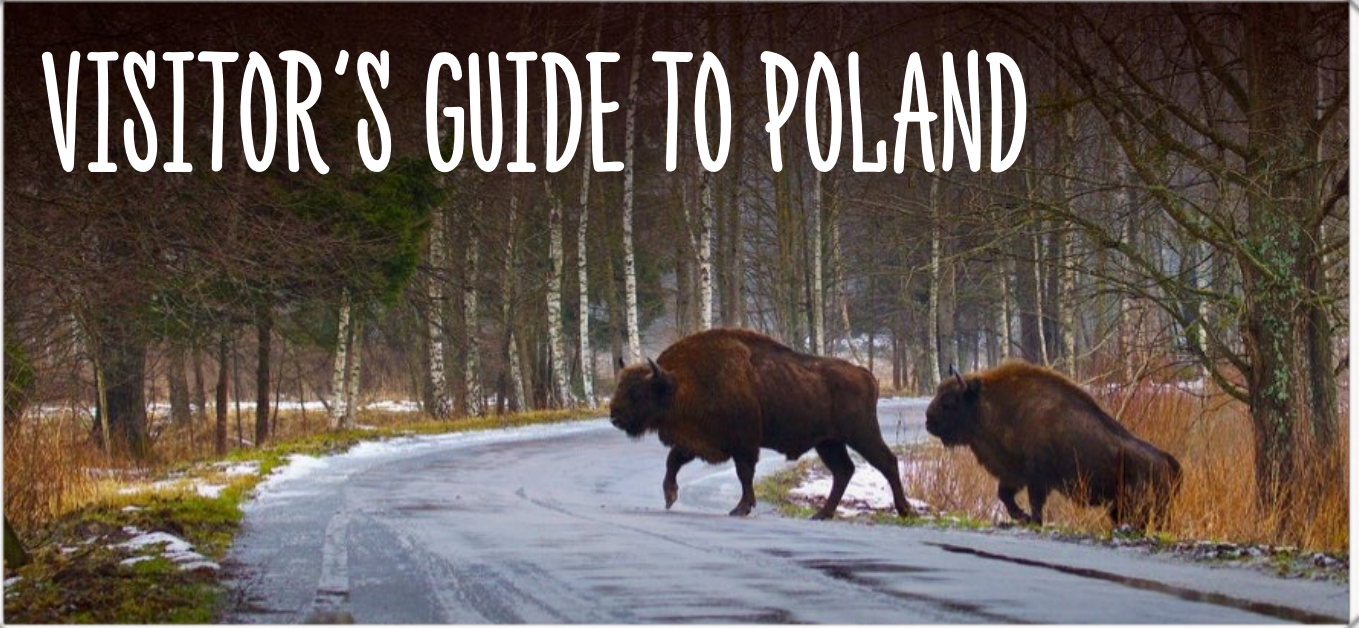


VISITOR'S GUIDE TO POLAND



HOW TO GET TO POLAND

VISAS

Poland is a member of the **European Union** and has joined the **Schengen** area. Visitors from the EU states, Norway, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, USA, Kanada, Australia, New Zealand, Israel, Iceland, Japan and several other countries can visit freely for up to 3 months.

For citizens of many other countries a Polish or Schengen visa is required. Please consult a Polish Embassy in your country when planning to visit.

DUAL NATIONALS

Under Polish law, a Polish passport holder must be treated as a Polish national while in Poland, even if he or she holds another country's passport. The Polish authorities, therefore require dual nationals to enter and exit Poland on a Polish passport. Check with the Polish Embassy if in doubt.

Recent information on visiting Poland and Polish Embassy addresses worldwide are always available at: www.msz.gov.pl

AIRPLANE

A plane to Warszawa is probably the easiest way to get here. Warszawa has two airports:

1. Warsaw Chopin Airport Okęcie WAW – near the city, for majority of flights, www.lotnisko-chopina.pl

2. Warszawa Modlin WMI – ca. 30 km away from the town, for budget airlines, www.modlinairport.pl

Other main airports in Poland are:

- Kraków KRK, www.krakowairport.pl
- Gdańsk GDN, www.airport.gdansk.pl
- Katowice KTW, www.katowice-airport.com
- Wrocław WRO, airport.wroclaw.pl
- Poznań POZ, www.airport-poznan.com.pl
- Rzeszów RZE, www.rzeszowairport.pl
- Łódź LCJ, www.airport.lodz.pl

TRAIN

Train is another good option. Journey from Berlin to Warszawa takes only 5 hrs and from Vienna – 8 hrs. Train is also the quickest and most comfortable way to transfer through Poland, see below. To search for train connections in Poland and buy tickets online visit rozklad-pkp.pl

TIME

Poland time zone is Central European (CET) which is 1 hour ahead of Western European (WET or GMT), 9 hours ahead of US Pacific (PST) and 6 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST).

Poland follows the European summer daylight saving time and clocks go forward one hour at the end of March and an hour back at the end of October.

TRAVELLING IN POLAND

TRAIN

Train is probably the quickest and most comfortable way to travel through Poland. Major cities have train connections every hour or so and the stations are always centrally located. To search for train connections in Poland and buy tickets online visit rozkład-pkp.pl. Many cities have multiple train stations. The main and central one is always called GŁÓWNY or CENTRALNA.

PUBLIC BUSES

Public bus transport between different cities and in the countryside can be tricky to use. There are a number of private bus companies and many of them use separate bus stations. There is a website www.e-podroznik.pl trying to gather all that with mostly good and reliable results but you would still have to know which bus stations to choose and where these different stations are. We have no experience with buying bus tickets online there.

Polski Bus www.polskibus.com is probably the most recognised company offering connections between major cities and a secure online booking.

LOCAL TRAVEL

Underground/subway is only found in Warszawa, and is called **metro**. It is a fairly new one and there are two main lines with plenty of stops. Quick and reliable, not too crowded.

Trams are usually the second choice for they are usually quicker than busses, especially in crowded cities with intensive traffic like Warszawa or Kraków.

City busses are popular even in very small towns. They are usually quite reliable.

Public transport tickets must be validated at the start of a journey. You will be fined on the spot if you are travelling with an invalid ticket, usually between 100 and 200 PLN (€25 to €50). You can buy tickets at most newspaper stands and kiosks with a sign reading *bilety* or ticket machines distributed at bus stops.

If you think you may qualify for a discounted fare (eg. student or older person) always double-check the rules as some cheaper fares may only be available to Polish nationals. You'll be fined if you travel with a reduced fare ticket that you're not entitled to.

In many cities you can buy a day, 3 days or a week travel ticket which is always a better (cheaper) choice if you plan to stay for longer.

There is a public transport website: jakdojade.pl with timetables and a decent journey planner for several large cities in Poland. They also have a smartphone app.

TAXIS

Taxis are fairly cheap as for western standards. As of 2015, the starting fees are up to 8 PLN and rates circulate around 2 PLN/km.

Unregulated taxi drivers operate at the Warsaw airports and elsewhere. They commonly overcharge. Only use official taxis, which have the name and telephone number of the taxi company on the side of the door and on the top of the taxi. They will also show a rate card on the window of the vehicle. Taxis with a crest but no company name are not officially registered taxis.

SAFETY AND SECURITY

CRIME

Most visitors to Poland experience no difficulties.

However, you should be alert to the possibility of street crime and petty theft, and that foreigners may appear to be lucrative targets. Therefore it is always recommended to keep valuables and cash out of sight, especially in crowded areas and tourist spots where pickpockets and bag snatchers operate. Never leave your bags unattended.

There is a higher risk of robbery at main rail stations and on all train services, especially overnight sleeper trains. You are most at risk while boarding and leaving trains.

Be careful with leaving drinks or food unattended and beware of accepting drinks from casual acquaintances. There have been a small number of reports of drinks being spiked and visitors having their valuables stolen.

TERRORISM

Generally, there is a low threat from terrorism in Poland, but you should be aware of the global risk of indiscriminate terrorist attacks which could be in public places, including in places frequented by expatriates and foreign travellers.

ROAD TRAVEL

Driving on Polish roads can be hazardous. Local driving standards are poor: speed limits, traffic lights and road signs are often ignored, speeding and risky overtaking is common and some drivers don't indicate before manoeuvring.

Be prepared for diversions due to numerous roadworks.

Poland is a major east-west transit route for heavy vehicles. There are few dual carriageways and even main roads between major towns and cities can be narrow and poorly surfaced. Streetlights, even in major cities, are weak.

A system of toll collection is in place on selected sections of motorways, expressways and national roads. You can use cash or cards to pay the toll charge.

According to EU law, driving licences issued by any EU member state are mutually recognised in other EU member states. It is a legal requirement to carry a driving licence, ID, original vehicle-registration papers, ownership documents and insurance papers at all times. You will need to present these documents if you are stopped by the police and when crossing non-Schengen borders. This also applies to rental vehicles. If you do not have these papers the police may impound your vehicle and charge you for this. All vehicles driven on public roads in Poland must meet local technical requirements.

It is mandatory to have your lights on at day time, all year round.

Safety equipment for cars should include a fire-extinguisher and a warning triangle.

Seat belts must always be used in both front and back seats.

Using a mobile phone while driving (unless hands free) is banned.

Maximum allowed blood alcohol content is < 0,2 g/l. If you drive and have been drinking (even a single unit of alcohol) you can be charged and they are very strict about it now.

If you break Polish driving laws you should be prepared to pay an on the spot fine in cash in Polish currency to the police. Foreigners who are settled in Poland and have a permanent address may be fined with a credit ticket that can be paid later.

Pedestrians and cyclists must wear a reflective item between dusk and dawn when outside a built-up area, regardless of the weather. Anyone hit by a car or a bike when not wearing a reflective item is liable to be held responsible for the accident. Police may impose fines on those not wearing reflective items.

See also **Local laws and customs** section below.

WILDLIFE

When visiting the forests and marshes of north eastern Poland on your own, you are at a minor risk of being attacked by **bison, wild boar or elk (moose)**. Most of the time, however, these ani-

mals are very shy and would avoid any contact with people. They must feel threatened to attack. Generally it is safe to watch them when you keep a secure distance and don't come closer than 50 m.

We do have **brown bears, wolves and lynxes** in Poland and while bears can be dangerous, wolves and lynxes are rarely a real threat to people. **Brown bears** occupy the mountainous forests in southern Poland. Most of the time, they must feel threatened to attack (especially females with young) and there have been just a few cases in Poland of bears attacking people. Generally they avoid contact with humans in the first place. **Wolves** are very shy and healthy animals in Poland always avoid contact with people. Specimens infected with rabies occasionally occur but otherwise most other wolf attacks on people were reported from Asia, where wolves had been deprived of all the natural prey. **Lynxes** do not attack people and healthy animals pose no real threat.

We have several species of amphibians and reptiles in Poland but only one - **European adder** *Vipera berus* can be dangerous to people. Relatively speaking, bites from this species are not highly dangerous and very occasionally are life threatening. Nevertheless, professional medical help should always be sought as soon as possible after any bite.

There are no venomous spiders or scorpions in Poland.

Mosquitoes are disease free but ticks may carry tick-borne encephalitis and lyme disease. Your best protection is proper long sleeved clothing and removing the ticks from your clothing and skin each evening. You should always seek professional medical assistance if you suspect anything suspicious.

HEALTH

In general, medical facilities in Poland are of an equivalent standard to those in western Europe. Private medical facilities are comparatively inexpensive and of a good standard. Polish doctors and nurses are well qualified but English is not always widely spoken and you may face communication difficulties.

If you're visiting Poland you should get a free **European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)** (ec.europa.eu/social) before leaving home. The EHIC isn't a substitute for medical and travel insurance, but it entitles you to state provided medical treatment that may become necessary during your trip. Any treatment provided is on the same terms as Polish nationals. The EHIC won't cover

medical repatriation, ongoing medical treatment or non-urgent treatment, so you should make sure you have adequate travel insurance and accessible funds to cover the cost of any medical treatment and repatriation.

Tick-borne encephalitis and lyme disease are common, especially in forested areas during the summer.

If you need emergency medical assistance during your trip, dial **112** and ask for an ambulance. If you are referred to a medical facility for treatment you should contact your insurance/medical assistance company immediately.

MONEY

CASH

The currency in Poland is the Złoty, abbreviated as **zł** or **PLN** and sometimes **PLZ**.

Other currencies are generally not accepted. Some agro-tourist farms, local guides and souvenir stands would probably accept **Euros** but don't expect it every time and everywhere.

An increasing number of shops and cafes in touristy places now accept **Euros** but the exchange rates are usually unfavourable so paying with a card or carrying polish cash are often better options.

It's generally not possible to exchange Scottish or Northern Irish bank notes in Poland.

CASH MACHINES

There are now many cash machines in most of the towns so it's easy to get cash, even in the rural areas.

CREDIT / DEBIT CARD

You can pay with your **Visa** or **Maestro/MasterCard** cards at all petrol stations, hotels, restaurants, large shops in cities and even many small shops in towns. In the small villages it is not so common and cash is often needed.

LOCAL LAWS AND CUSTOMS

ALCOHOL

Polish police take a strict approach to public drunkenness. You are **not allowed** to consume alcohol in public places and fines may be imposed. If you are found to be drunk in a public place you may be taken to a drying out clinic where a doctor or nurse will medically assess you. You will not be released until you have

sobered up and this may require an overnight stay. You will have to pay for the cost of the stay.

The drink-drive alcohol in blood limit in Poland is 0.2 g/l. **Driving a car under the influence of alcohol or drugs is strictly prohibited and is punishable by up to 2 years in prison.** Likewise cycling on public roads under the influence of alcohol or drugs can result in prosecution.

Polish beer is usually very strong (5-6% alcohol and above) so even one large beer easily gets you above the drink-drive limit. The best rule applied by most Polish nationals here is having no alcohol at all when you drive.

TRAFFIC

Jay-walking is an offence. You should cross only at recognised crossing points. If caught by the police you may be fined.

Some of the traffic lights may seem weird. For example when turning right, you may see a **green arrow beside the red light**. This means you may turn in the direction of the arrow provided that you shall stop before the traffic lights and shall not cause an obstruction to other participants (cars and pedestrians).

OPENING HOURS

Opening hours are not uniform across the country and there are no fixed rules here. Generally most groceries would be open on Saturdays and many would still be open on Sundays but usually for a shorter time. Some safe hours to visit on weekdays (they are often much broader) would be:

- shopping malls: 10 - 21
- groceries: 7 - 19
- restaurants: 12 - 21

Many shops would be closed on national holiday and there are a number of them in a year.

There is no time limit on selling alcohol and there are an increasing number of 24/7 shops selling mainly alcohol. You must be 18 years of age to buy cigarettes or alcohol and you may be asked to show your ID at the counter if you look young.

POST STAMPS & CARDS

You can get postcards at many souvenir stands etc. but none of these places would sell post stamps. To get those you need to visit a post office which is *Poczta Polska* in Polish. Don't always expect that a foreign language is spoken there but you should be able to communicate easily to get the stamps. You can then leave the letters or postcards at the counter or use a red coloured post box.

ACCOMMODATION

Hotels tend to respond to emails well but many of the smaller places like guesthouses or B&B places may take a long time to respond or even not reply at all.

When booking accommodation in Poland using known third party services like booking.com is a good choice.

The real bed & breakfast is not so common in Poland. You will see many signs saying *noclegi*, *wolne pokoje*, *rooms for rent* or *zimmer frei*, sometimes also *agroturystyka*. Most of the time they all mean you can rent a room but no breakfast is included. Many of these places would additionally offer food (breakfast and dinners), but many won't offer any food at all so make sure what you book in advance.

Camping is only allowed at marked camping sites. Most of them are private and offer some facilities like bathrooms but many are actually quite basic and you should be prepared for low standards.

Camping wild out in the countryside, state forest or National Parks is forbidden.

EATING AND DRINKING

Polish food is very good, usually made from fresh produce. We are certainly meat eaters, not shunning from the fatty cuts. Pork and poultry are most popular. Soups are also a very Polish dish and while we do like our broth and borsch, many other soups are a full meal in itself.

BREAKFAST

Breakfasts tend to be very hearty and often consist of fried or scrambled eggs, boiled or fried sausage, cold cuts, cheese, tomatoes and bread. A sweet version consisting of cheese/jam filled pancakes or *racuchy* (pancakes with apples) is also quite common.

LUNCH AND DINNER

Traditionally the main meal of the day would be eaten between 2 and 4 p.m. (Polish: *obiad*) and followed by a small supper in the evening (Polish: *kolacja*). While the western lunch and dinner routine has gained popularity, the traditional timing is still kept up on weekends, festivals and family gatherings.

Some typical traditional Polish lunch and dinner dishes would be:

- **flaki** - tripe soup
- **żurek** - sour rye soup with egg and sausage

- **barszcz** - clear borsch
- **pierogi** - traditional dumplings that can be filled with meat, potatoes and cottage cheese, cabbage and mushrooms, seasonal fruit
- **schabowy** - pork breaded cutlet (schnitzel), traditionally served with potatoes and hot cabbage/sauerkraut
- **mielony** - minced meat cutlet, traditionally served with potatoes and hot beetroots
- **placki ziemniaczane** - potato pancakes
- **bigos** - cabbage/sauerkraut and meat stew
- **kaszanka** - blood sausage
- **kielbasa** - a Polish word for sausage; it is very common and there are an unlimited number of varieties, mostly made of pork. Some of the most popular are:
 - **biała** - white sausage
 - **kabanos** - dry and thin sausage
 - **krakowska** - dry and thick sausage
 - **zwycajna** - literally means *common*, the most common sausage

EATING OUT

There are a growing number of restaurants and bars now everywhere, especially in tourist places. Most of them would have an English translation of the menu and waiters would usually speak basic English, at least. Even the most conservative restaurants have a few vegetarian dishes available on the menu.

Eating out is still quite cheap as for western standards with great meals often available for under €10.

When staying at some of the large towns, make sure you visit *bar mleczny* - a communist and student style self service food bar offering traditional Polish food in very low prices.

DRINKS

Tea and coffee are both very popular. The traditional Polish way to serve tea is with a slice of lemon. Coffee is always served black unless you ask for milk on a side.

Beer is a common beverage but the most typical kind is just a plain lager with 5-6% alc. or more. There are an increasing number of micro breweries coming up now in the recent years offering wonderful brews of lager, porter, weissbier and ale. Unfortunately these can usually be found only in specialised shops and pubs.

Apple cider has never been very popular. In fact it has been absent from our cuisine until very recently. A few Polish varieties can now be found in some shops and bars.

Wine is fairly new to Polish tables, too. Polish wine is now being made in a few locations (literally) but it's very difficult to find. What you can get in most shops and restaurants is a large selection of wines from all over the world.

Vodka is certainly a traditional Polish beverage. It's made of rye and potatoes and there are a huge number of brands and varieties. Clear one is probably still the most common, certainly the most traditional. There are also many kinds of flavoured vodkas and a few traditional brands of those would be:

- **żubrówka** - famous herbal vodka with bison grass
- **krupnik** - honey vodka
- **gorzka żołądkowa** - bitter and sweet vodka
- **wiśniówka** - cherry vodka

IMPORTANT LINKS

- **Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs**
rules for entering Poland, list of Polish Embassies
www.msz.gov.pl
- **European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)**
ec.europa.eu/social

IMPORTANT PHRASES

hello - cześć (very informal)
good day - dzień dobry
good evening - dobry wieczór
good bye - do widzenia
thank you - dziękuję
please - proszę
excuse me/I am sorry - przepraszam
airport - lotnisko
railway station - dworzec kolejowy, PKP
bus station - dworzec autobusowy
bus stop - przystanek (autobusowy)
camping ground - pole namiotowe

SOURCES & INFO

- our own irreplaceable experience
- www.gov.uk
- www.msz.gov.pl

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