

# Travel



ALIK KEPLICZ/ASSOCIATED PRESS/FILE 2004

The center square of Warsaw's Old Town features a mermaid fountain, sidewalk cafes, street musicians, and souvenir shops.

## Warsaw looks back, ahead

### Polish city proves vibrant, affordable

By Beth D'Addono  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

WARSAW — When Danuta Mieloch wants an upscale, energetic getaway from her busy Rescue Rittenhouse spa business in Philadelphia, she doesn't jet off to London or Paris. She heads to Warsaw, the capital of her native Poland. "It's the most happening place in Eastern Europe, and Americans don't really know about it," said Mieloch, who came to America 15 years ago. "The bars and restaurants are fabulous, the shopping is great, and the city is very young and vibrant. And best of all, for Americans, it's still very affordable."

At least for now, until Poland, one of the newest members of the European Union, adopts the euro, sometime around 2009. The zloty to dollar exchange is about three to one, making sightseeing, shopping, and dining a real bargain.

At first glance, there's nothing particularly picturesque about Warsaw, a city of 1.6 million residents located near the center of Poland. But the fact that Warsaw is growing and changing quickly, as evidenced by a gaggle of cranes dominating the downtown skyline, is evidence of the indomitable Polish spirit. The country's most modern city bears a tragic past. The city's darkest days came during the World War II Nazi occupation, when its Jewish and Polish citizens were slaughtered, an

estimated 800,000 residents in all, almost two out of every three Varsovians. The final indignity was the city's razing by the Germans and the Russians, leaving it virtually uninhabitable, as depicted in the chilling final scene of the movie "The Pianist." Put another way, 70 years ago, Warsaw was a thriving European capital. Sixty years ago, it was a pile of rubble. What stands today, and what the city promises to become, is worth seeing.

The city that the Poles rebuilt is a study in contrasts. Grim, gray Soviet-style architecture is gradually giving way to more modern design. Old Town, home to the King's Palace, was restored to a version of its former glory, a must-see for visitors. And new hotels, restaurants, shopping malls, and boutiques beckon.

"My first trip to Warsaw was in 1997," said Bob Moran, who travels from Philadelphia to Warsaw several times a year for his pharmaceutical-related business Plexus Ventures. "The change in Warsaw has been absolutely unbelievable since then. It was very much a Soviet-dominated, drab place. Today, it's modern, there's an energy in the air. I view Warsaw as the financial capital of Eastern Europe. The change has been astounding."

While Warsaw grapples with all of the growing pains of an evolving city, including gridlock traffic downtown that makes public transportation essential, visiting this city is key to understanding Poland's past, and its future.

For a weekend visit, everything you'll want to see is on the west bank of the Vistula River. If you arrive by train, there's no missing the city's most prominent land-

mark, the Palace of Culture, a spired building "gifted" to the Polish people by Stalin in the early 1950s. Don't take time to tour the inside, since there's nothing too noteworthy. On a clear day, though, take the elevator to the 30th-floor terrace for a wonderful view of Old Town (\$5).

Depending on your interests, you can explore Jewish history, the Warsaw Uprising, or Polish royalty or visit a museum dedicated to one of Poland's most famous sons, Chopin.

If you want to connect with the city's Jewish heritage, take a taxi to the site of the former Jewish ghetto, once home to 380,000 Jews. Only 300 Warsaw Jews survived the Nazi extermination campaign. Begin at Ghetto Heroes Square (plac Bohaterow Getta), the heart of the former ghetto, with its center monument to the fallen heroes. Follow the Path of Remembrance along Zamenhofa (named for a hero), marked by a series of black stone monuments, charting events of the uprising. Across Stawki street you'll see the Umschlagplatz monument, shaped like a cattle car, to mark the spot where the Nazis transferred Jews onto trains bound for Treblinka or Auschwitz. One of the only remaining Jewish sites is the turn-of-the-century Nozykow synagogue, the only one that survived the Nazi occupation.

Another taxi or tram ride will deliver you to the relatively new Warsaw Uprising museum, a chronicle of the city's war resisters that includes written commentary in English, personal stories of everyday people who became heroes, and even a simulated sewer, which you climb through, as many civilians did to escape

the Germans. There were two uprisings in Warsaw, the ghetto uprising, in April 1943, when the Jews fought back against the Nazis, and the Warsaw Uprising, when 30,000 Polish resisters launched an attack on their Nazi oppressors. This defiance infuriated Hitler, who systematically obliterated Warsaw by bombing, while the Soviets waited on the other side of the Vistula to "liberate" and occupy the city. This struggle for freedom remains one of Warsaw's proudest hours.

Give yourself time to wander through Warsaw's reconstructed Old Town, with its large center square, sidewalk cafes, street musicians, and souvenir shops. Notice the mermaid fountain in the center. The mermaid is an important national symbol. Legend has it she lived in the Vistula River and protected the Polish people. The pink King's Palace, home to Poland's last monarch, dominates the skyline and is the start of the Royal Way.

For shopping, strolling, and people-watching, walk along the wide Nowy Swiat (which means New World), Warsaw's version of the Champs Elysees, lined with smart boutiques and trendy restaurants and cafes.

At night, Warsaw's downtown district comes alive with bars, lounges, jazz clubs, restaurants, and discos hosting a well-heeled group of young locals and international visitors. It's yet another sign that this historic city is regaining its place as an important European capital.

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### Warsaw itinerary

#### FRIDAY

**5 p.m. Check in**  
*Boutique Bed & Breakfast*  
ul. Smolna 14 m.7  
48-22-829-4801  
<http://bedandbreakfast.pl>  
Settle into one of the comfortable apartments at this beautifully renovated building in the heart of Old Town. Free Internet. \$80-\$115.

**7 p.m. Dinner**  
*Restauracja Przy Zamku*  
Plac Zamkowy 15/19  
48-22-831-0259  
[www.restauracjaprzyzamku.pl](http://www.restauracjaprzyzamku.pl)  
Excellent service and an elegant take on traditional Polish cuisine are complemented by panoramic views of the beautiful Zamek Krolewski (Royal Castle). \$10-\$25.

**9:30 p.m. Live jazz**  
*Klub Tygmont*  
ul. Mazowiecka 6/8  
48-22-828-3409  
[www.tygmont.com.pl](http://www.tygmont.com.pl)  
Live jazz, funk, soul, and big band. Admission \$3-\$5, depending on the act.

#### SATURDAY

**10 a.m. Morning stroll**  
Shop in Old Town or hop a tourist trolley (\$5.75) for a 30-minute ride that begins and ends at the Royal Castle. Visit the castle (\$5.75).

**12:30 p.m. Tuck into pierogis**  
*U Hopfera*  
Krakowskie Przedmiescie 53  
48-22-828-7352  
A casual little eatery offering more than a dozen kinds of Polish dumplings, stuffed with everything from mushrooms to chocolate, \$5-\$11.

**1:30 p.m. Tour some more**  
Walk up the Royal Way, which runs along Krakowskie Przedmiescie and down Nowy Swiat, a chic shopping avenue. Stop at the Church of the Holy Cross (Kosciol Sw. Krzyza, across from the statue of Copernicus), where the heart of a local son, composer Fryderyk Chopin, is buried. (The rest of him is in Paris.)

**3 p.m. Park visit**  
Walk or take a bus (116, 180, 195, 503) to Lazienki Park, at the end of the Royal Way. Built by Poland's last king as a summer residence, this sprawling park includes an iconic monument to Chopin.

**7 p.m. Dinner**  
*Ninety-Nine*  
ul. Jan Pawla II 23  
48-22-620-1999  
[www.restaurant99.com](http://www.restaurant99.com)  
Called one of the 10 hippest restaurants in Europe by Wall Street Journal Europe, it has a pricey (for Poland) international menu.

#### SUNDAY

**10 a.m. A little history**  
*The Warsaw Rising Museum*  
ul. Grzybowska 79  
48-22-539-7901  
[www.1944.pl](http://www.1944.pl)  
Housed in a restored red brick electrical plant, this is a must for anyone interested in World War II history and the military. The exhibits tell the harrowing, chronological story of the uprising. \$1.25. You'll need to take a taxi or public transport.

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### A taste of what's on

**Hockey with the Montréal Canadiens**  
November 2005 to April 2006  
Bell Centre  
The National Hockey League's Montréal Canadiens, 24-time winners of the Stanley Cup, play their home games at the Bell Centre.

**Catherine the Great: Art for the Empire Masterpieces from the Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg**  
February 2 to May 7, 2006  
The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

**Anselm Kiefer**  
February 11 to April 30, 2006  
Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal

**MONTRÉAL HIGH LIGHTS Festival**  
February 16 to 26, 2006  
Several Montréal locations

**And then there was light**  
Permanent event  
Notre-Dame Basilica of Montréal

**Sense of the City**  
October 26, 2005, to September 10, 2006  
Canadian Centre for Architecture