



Understand Poland

POLAND TODAY380

Poland finds itself at the centre of Europe, hosting the continent's biggest football tournament and presiding over the European Union.

HISTORY382

Polish history is one long roller-coaster ride up the biggest hill, only to plunge – and rise – again. It's a riveting read.

JEWISH HERITAGE.398

Poland was home to Europe's largest Jewish population until WWII. Now interest in that heritage is budding once more.

THE ARTS402

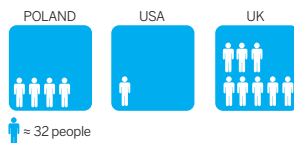
Poland can claim four Nobel Prizes for literature, not to mention some giants of postwar cinema. We name names.

LANDSCAPE & WILDLIFE408

Poland's not just Kraków and Warsaw; there are mountains, fields, rivers and lots and lots (and lots) of lakes.



population per sq km



Poland Today

Recession? What Recession?

While much of the rest of the world struggles along through a lacklustre economic recovery following a whopper of a global recession in 2009 and 2010, Poland's economy continues to defy gravity.

Poland was one of the fastest-growing economies in the European Union in 2011, clipping along at around 4% growth, and was expected to slow only modestly in 2012 to around 3.6%, according to the International Monetary Fund. Indeed, the Polish central bank likes to boast Poland was the only country in the European Union whose economy didn't shrink during the recession. In fact, there was no recession.

It's a remarkable feat, especially to anyone who remembers the Polish economy under the bad old days of communism. Back then it was one of Europe's chronic basket cases, deeply in debt, racked by high inflation and with no prospects for improvement.

So what's underpinning the growth? At least part of it is good old-fashioned government stimulus, particularly the massive public investments the country is making to co-host the UEFA Euro 2012 football championship. It's not just new stadiums, but billions of euros of new roads, bridges, train lines and other infrastructure.

President of Europe

While Poland's politicians have had their ups and downs leading their country since the fall of communism, they seem to have had better luck in guiding the entire European Union. Poland assumed the EU's rotating six-month presidency on 1 July 2011, putting it in charge – temporarily at least – of the bloc's 27 member states.

The Polish presidency came at a time of unparalleled economic challenges facing the bloc, with the euro crisis, lingering economic

» GDP

(per head):
US\$19,700

» Inflation:

2.6% (2010)

» Unemployment:

9.4% (2011)

» Number of lakes:

9000

» Number of bison in the wild:

700

» Proportion of population who died in WWII:

20% (UK 0.9%;
USA 0.2%)

Top Films

Katyn (Andrzej Wajda) Moving depiction of the WWII massacre.

Amator (Krzysztof Kieślowski) Early Kieślowski effort on self-censorship under communism.

The Pianist (Roman Polański) Oscar-winning film about life in Warsaw's WWII Jewish ghetto.

Do and Don'ts

» Do flavour your beer with raspberry soda and drink it through a straw. OK don't.

» Don't wave your arms in a crowded restaurant to attract attention, but it's perfectly OK to fetch the menu yourself.

» Don't forget to say hello – *dzień dobry* – even to strangers.

» Do take flowers – or better, a bottle of vodka – when invited to someone's home.