

Understand Poland

POLAND TODAY388

Poland is hailed as the most successful of the post-communist transition countries, even as it copes with growing regional inequality and immigration concerns.

HISTORY390

Polish history is one long roller-coaster ride up the biggest hills, only to plunge to the depths – and rise again.

JEWISH HERITAGE.....405

Poland was once home to Europe's largest Jewish population until the Nazi German occupation of WWII, and interest in this important heritage is budding once more.

THE ARTS409

Poland has an especially rich tradition in literature and film, with no fewer than four Nobel Prizes for literature as well as several giants of postwar cinema.

LANDSCAPE & WILDLIFE 414

Poland is a rural country at heart, and fields, rivers, mountains and lots and lots of lakes mark the landscape and the national psyche.

Poland Today

Poland is feeling pretty good about itself these days. It was the only European country to emerge from the Great Recession of the past decade without experiencing a downturn, and a quarter century after the fall of communism, it's the acknowledged winner in the transition to democracy. That said, Poland faces new challenges, including coping with emerging regional disparities in income and opportunity.

Best on Film

Katyń (Andrzej Wajda; 2007) Moving depiction of a WWII massacre in the Katyń Forest.

Ida (Paweł Pawlikowski; 2013) A young nun-in-waiting discovers her family's hidden history; 2015 Oscar winner.

The Pianist (Roman Polański; 2002) Highly acclaimed film about life in Warsaw's WWII Jewish ghetto.

Best in Print

The Polish Officer (Alan Furst) Gripping spy novel set in Poland on the eve of WWII.

God's Playground: A History of Poland (Norman Davies) Highly readable two-volume set that covers 1000 years of Polish history.

The Painted Bird (Jerzy Kosiński) Page-turner on the travails of an orphan boy on the run during WWII.

Survival in Auschwitz (Primo Levi) Classic of Holocaust literature that hasn't lost a drop of impact.

Will Poland Ever Adopt the Euro?

When Poland joined the EU in 2004, it was taken for granted that the zloty would soon be a thing of the past. Indeed, it wasn't long ago that relatively early euro-adopters in central and eastern Europe – such as Slovenia and Slovakia – were praised for being ahead of regional-currency laggards including the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland.

Enthusiasm for the euro began to fade during Europe's 'Great Recession' from 2008–11, when countries with their own currencies, such as Poland, appeared to fare better than countries using the euro. These countries could manipulate their interest rates and currencies to blunt the effects of falling output and demand. Greece's well-documented perils with the euro in 2015 tarnished any lustre left on those shiny euro coins.

Don't expect a euro in Poland any time soon – that's the conventional wisdom in Warsaw. President Andrzej Duda, who took office in 2015 for a five-year term, is a staunch conservative. Duda's foreign affairs adviser has said there will be no euro without a national referendum. Given the currency's poor reputation, such a vote would be unlikely to pass.

Transition Accomplished

Ever since the fall of communism in 1989, there's been a friendly rivalry between former ex-communist countries (including Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary) to see which could complete the transition to democracy and a market-based economy most successfully. The Czech Republic had a head start: it was the Eastern bloc's leading economy during the Cold War.

The consensus among many, including the European Commission, is that Poland has emerged as the