



Polish

Phrasebook & Dictionary

A light gray horizontal line that spans the width of the page, ending in a stylized, curved, speech-bubble-like shape on the right side.

make the most of this phrasebook ...

Anyone can speak another language! It's all about confidence. Don't worry if you can't remember your school language lessons or if you've never learnt a language before. Even if you learn the very basics (on the inside front cover of this book), your travel experience will be the better for it. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain when the locals hear you making an effort.

finding things in this book

For easy navigation, this book is in sections. The Basics chapters are the ones you'll thumb through time and again. The Practical section covers basic travel situations like catching transport and finding a bed. The Social section gives you conversational phrases, pick-up lines, the ability to express opinions – so you can get to know people. Food has a section all of its own: gourmets and vegetarians are covered and local dishes feature. Safe Travel equips you with health and police phrases, just in case. Remember the colours of each section and you'll find everything easily; or use the comprehensive Index. Otherwise, check the two-way traveller's Dictionary for the word you need.

being understood

Throughout this book you'll see coloured phrases on each page. They're phonetic guides to help you pronounce the language. Start with them to get a feel for how the language sounds. The pronunciation chapter in Basics will explain more, but you can be confident that if you read the coloured phrase, you'll be understood. As you become familiar with the spoken language, move on to using the actual text in the language which will help you perfect your pronunciation.

communication tips

Body language, ways of doing things, sense of humour – all have a role to play in every culture. 'Local talk' boxes show you common ways of saying things, or everyday language to drop into conversation. 'Listen for ...' boxes supply the phrases you may hear. They start with the script (so a local can find the phrase they want and point it out to you) and then lead in to the phonetic guide and the English translation.

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polish



- official language
- generally understood (areas are approximate only)
- minority language



For more details, see the **introduction**.

Ask most English speakers what they know about Polish and they will most likely dismiss it as an unpronounceable language. Who could pronounce an apparently vowel-less word like *szczyt* (meaning 'peak'), for example? To be put off by this unfairly gained reputation, however, would be to miss out on a rich and rewarding language. The mother tongue of illustrious personalities such as Copernicus, Chopin, Joseph Conrad, Marie Curie and Pope John Paul II has a fascinating and turbulent past and symbolises the resilience of the Polish people in the face of domination and adversity.

The story of Polish begins with the arrival of the Polish tribes who occupied the basins of the Oder and Vistula rivers in the 6th century AD. These tribes spoke a range of West Slavic dialects, which over time evolved into Polish. The closest living relatives of Polish are Czech and Slovak, which also belong to the wider West Slavic family of languages.

Polish reached the apex of its influence during the era of the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth, which was formed in 1569

at a glance ...

language name:

Polish

name in language:

język polski *jen-zik pol-skee*

language family: Slavic

key country: Poland

approximate number of speakers: 45 million

close relatives:

Czech, Slovak

donations to English:

horde, mazurka, vodka

and lasted until 1795. The Commonwealth covered a swath of territory from what are now Poland and Lithuania, through to Belarus, Ukraine and Latvia and part of Western Russia. Polish became a *lingua franca* throughout much of Central and Eastern Europe at this time due to the Commonwealth's political, cultural, scientific and military might.

When Poland was wiped off the map of Europe from 1795 to 1918 after three

successive partitions in the second half of the 18th century (when it was carved up between Russia, Austria and Prussia), the language suffered attempts at both Germanisation and Russification. Later, after WWII, Poland became a satellite state of the Soviet Union and it came under the renewed influence of Russian. Polish showed impressive resistance in the face of this oppression. The language not only survived but enriched itself by borrowing many words from both Russian and German. The works of Poland's greatest literary figures who wrote in exile – the Romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz, and, during Communist rule, the Nobel Prize winner Czesław Miłosz – are testament to this fact.

Today Poland is linguistically one of the most homogeneous countries in Europe – over 95% of the population speaks Polish as their first language. There are significant Polish-speaking minorities in the western border areas of Ukraine, Belarus and in southern Lithuania, with smaller populations in other neighbouring countries.

Getting acquainted with Polish is easy. It's not difficult to pronounce and the coloured pronunciation guides in this book are designed to help you say any Polish word with ease. This book gives you all the practical phrases you need to get by, as well as all the fun, spontaneous phrases that will lead to a better understanding of Poland and its people. Local knowledge, new relationships and a sense of satisfaction are on the tip of your tongue. So don't just stand there – say something!

abbreviations used in this book

a	adjective	loc	locative
acc	accusative	m	masculine
adv	adverb	m pers pl	masculine personal
dat	dative		plural
f	feminine	n	neuter
gen	genitive	nom	nominative
general pl	general plural	perf	perfective
imp	imperfective	pl	plural
inf	informal	pol	polite
inst	instrumental	sg	singular
lit	literal	v	verb
	translation	voc	vocative

BASICS > pronunciation

wymowa

Although written Polish may seem a bit intimidating, with its apparent excess of consonants, pronouncing Polish isn't hard at all. Many of the sounds also exist in English and each Polish letter is generally pronounced the same way wherever it occurs. If you listen carefully to native speakers and follow the coloured pronunciation guides in this phrasebook, you'll easily get your message across.



vowel sounds

Polish vowels and diphthongs (vowel combinations) are quite similar to those found in English. Vowels are generally pronounced short, giving them a 'clipped' quality.

symbol	english equivalent	polish example	transliteration
a	cut	<i>tak</i>	tak
ai	aisle	<i>tutaj</i>	too-tai
e	get	<i>bez</i>	bes
ee	feet	<i>wino</i>	vee-no
ey	they	<i>kolejka</i>	ko-ley-ka
i	bit	<i>czy</i>	chi
o	not	<i>woda</i>	vo-da
oo	put	<i>zakupy, mój</i>	za-koo-pi, mooy
ow	cow	<i>migdał</i>	meeg-dow
oy	toy	<i>ojciec</i>	oy-chets

nasal vowel sounds

One distinctive feature of Polish (which it shares with French) is nasal vowels. Nasal vowel sounds are pronounced as though you're trying to force the air out of your nose rather than your mouth. It's easier than it sounds! English also has something similar to nasal vowels – when you say 'sing' in English the 'i' is nasalised by the 'ng'. Nasal vowels are indicated in written Polish by the little hooks under the *ę* and *ɛ*. Depending upon the letters that follow these vowels, they're pronounced with either an **m** or an **n** sound following the vowel.

symbol	english equivalent	polish example	transliteration
em	like the 'e' in 'get' plus nasal consonant sound	wstęp	fstepm
en		mięso	myen-so
om	like the 'o' in 'not' plus nasal consonant sound	kąpiel	kom-pyel
on		wąsy	von-si



consonant sounds

Most Polish consonant sounds are also found in English, with the exception of the **kh** sound (which is pronounced as in the Scottish word 'loch') and the rolled **r** sound. Consonants are sometimes grouped together without vowels between them where in English you'd expect one, as in the word *pszczoła* **pshcho-wa** (bee). With a bit of practice these 'consonant clusters' will roll off your tongue with ease. The apostrophe is used in transliterations (as in the word *kwiecień* **kfye·chen'**) to show that the consonant before it is produced with a soft **y** sound.