

# A list of World Cultural Heritage of Poland



## [Wieliczka - The world famous salt mine](#)

The underground tourist route leads through a labyrinth of galleries and caverns with unique sculptures, all carved in salt rock. St Kinga's Chapel at the depth of 101 meters is the most beautiful chamber, decorated with white crystal salt chandeliers and bas-relief sculptures made of grey salt rock. The mine also houses a sanatorium. The museum contains mining tools and documents related to the history of salt mining.



### [The castle of the Teutonic Order in Malbork](#)

The Malbork castle is the mightiest fortress of medieval Europe. The immense castle was started in the 13th century and built by the Teutonic Knights in stages. During the next century, when Malbork became the capital of the Order's state, the fortress was expanded considerably by the addition of the Great Refectory and the Grand Master's Palace. Very impressive are the red brick walls of the Middle and High Castles encompassed by defensive walls with towers and gates. In Malbork you can admire the art of medieval master-builders who created an ingenious system of central heating, very rare in the medieval times.

The castle's enormous size is best appraised from the banks of Nogat River. The majestic beauty of the stronghold and its remarkable power is awe inspiring. The Museum offers many attractions, including a number of exhibitions showing ancient arms, amber, porcelain and furniture, and handicrafts.

Another attraction is 'son et lumière' shows staged in the castle courtyards as well as night-time tours of the castle. Music is played in the castle halls and medieval style banquets are organised for the public. For some years a re-enactment event called 'The Siege of Malbork' has been organized on the last weekend of July.



### [Old City of Zamość - The Pearl of the Renaissance](#)

Zamość was designed to outshine the royal residence of Kraków that Jan Zamoyski greatly disliked. The whole project, including the construction of the town that was also a mighty fortress, was carried out within twenty years (1580- 1600). For his great plan, Zamoyski commissioned an Italian architect from Padua, Bernardo Morando, who became the author of all important buildings such as the palace, arsenal, collegiate church, town hall, and burgher houses in the market square.

Zamość is a unique urban and architectural complex, quite close to the idea of a ‘perfect city’. It is often referred to as the Pearl of the Renaissance as it features buildings of great beauty and historical value. The Old Town Square is dominated by a lofty town hall and lined with arcaded burgher houses. Some of them are richly decorated and those belonged to Armenian merchants. The mighty basilica contains outstanding art pieces. The Zamoyski Palace and the Academy, adapted to their current functions, have lost a lot of their former splendor. Very impressive are the former fortifications, in places seven meter thick, that surround the Old Town complex. The Old Town of Zamość is on UNESCO’s World Cultural Heritage List.

Tourists are attracted to Zamość by its historical monuments, peaceful ambience, cultural events, art galleries and cozy accommodations. Its location in southeastern Poland, far away from the main tourist routes, ensures true rest and relaxation. The attractiveness of its location is much enhanced by the picturesque Roztocze landscape, a real “pearl of nature” that is found in the neighborhood. Not far from Zamość is Lublin, a city known for the multitude of historical monuments.



## [Krakow - Magical City](#)

The Old Town, together with the Wawel Hill and the Kazimierz district, are on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The Medieval urban layout of the Old Town has not changed for centuries. Every visitor should see Europe's largest medieval market square with its Cloth Hall, St Mary's Church with its Gothic pentaptych altarpiece carved from limewood, Wawel Hill and its royal castle and the Wawel cathedral with its outstanding Renaissance chapel.

The medieval buildings of the Collegium Maius university with its unique collection of astronomical instruments, the Barbican, and St Florian's Gate is another gem worth visiting.

The Jewish quarter of Kazimierz features a wealth of Jewish heritage sites, including a 16th century cemetery and seven synagogues of which one is now the Jewish museum. Each summer the Jewish Culture Festival is held there, attracting followers of the Jewish culture from the whole world.

Also other cultural events held in Cracow each year attract thousands of visitors.

In the suburban town of Tyniec stands a Benedictine Abbey dating back to the 11th century.



## [Auschwitz - Birkenau Museum](#)

Auschwitz - Birkenau was the place of martyrdom of millions of people during World War II and the largest Nazi concentration camp in the German-occupied Europe. Here the Nazis were carrying out their genocidal plan of extermination of whole nations. According to historical investigations, 1.5 million people, among them a great number of Jews, were systematically starved, tortured and murdered in this camp.

The concentration camp named Auschwitz I was established in April 1940 on the outskirts of Oświęcim. The first transports came in June of the same year. After entering the site through the camp gate with the inscription "Arbeit Macht Frei" (Work Makes Free), the visitors tour prison blocks in which an exhibition of the Auschwitz- Birkenau State Museum was arranged. The display contains evidence of the genocide, including personal items taken from the victims as well as photographs and documents.

The main extermination center and the world's largest cemetery, Birkenau, was built in the suburbs of Oświęcim in 1942. Some barracks and ruins of the crematoria and gas chambers can be seen there today. The International Camp Victims Memorial was unveiled in 1967 to commemorate the murdered people. Many heads of state on official visits to Poland come here to pay homage to the victims of Nazi genocide.

## Historic Center of Warsaw



The meticulous reconstruction was carried out so well that it gained appreciation of the international community. Thus the historic city center of Warsaw was included in the list of the UNESCO world heritage sites. Although Warsaw's Old Market Square was entirely destroyed, it was rebuilt according to the original plans and the Old Town has retained much of its charm. Today, crowds of visitors flock to its cafes, restaurants and museums. Warsaw is not only the political, administrative, scientific and cultural centre of the country, it has also become the business centre for commercial activities between west and east. In 1996, Warsaw celebrated its 400th anniversary as the capital of Poland. Warsaw's historic centre is a major UNESCO listed World Heritage attraction.

### **What to see?**

At the centre of Warsaw, the Old Town is a must, with its beautiful Gothic churches, its defensive walls, its fairy tale Renaissance and Baroque facades and the traditional centre piece of Warsaw, the Market Square. The Old Town complex has been reconstructed as much as possible since the Second World War. Today, between the old houses and buildings and narrow streets, artists and craftsmen proudly exhibit their works. Of the countless restaurants and cafes of the Old Town, Kamienne Schodki, Krokodyl and the old Fukier wine cellar are among the most popular. Here we also find the house where Maria Skłodowska-Curie was born (No 16 Freta Street). It is no wonder that the Old City of Warsaw figures in the UNESCO Natural and Cultural World Heritage listing.

A walk along the Royal Route from the Old Town to Wilanow, the former residence of King Jan III Sobieski, is highly recommended. Starting with the reconstructed Royal Castle, the route passes in front of the beautiful English-style Lazienki park, with its miniature lakes and palace. Here, outdoor Chopin concerts are held in the summer and visitors can take gondola rides on the lakes. The route continues to the Wilanow Palace which is just outside the city.



### [Mużaków \(Muskauer\) Park - Landscape Formation](#)

The park stretches on both sides of Nysa Łużycka River, which is part of the natural border between Poland and German. The larger part of the park (over 1200 acres) is located on the Polish side, while the German part lies in the commune of Bad Muskau (Mużaków). Prince Hermann Pückler-Muskau, the leading expert and founder of German landscape parks, developed the park in the early 19th century. Inspired by English gardens, he transformed his family residence into an unusual parkland. It was skillfully arranged in the natural valley with the residential buildings erected on the slopes and high terraces, all surrounded by gardens featuring rich architectural and floral details.

Some buildings were designed by the well-known architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel Other artists and planners also contributed to the final result of the project. The group included the painter August Schirmer and the English landscape designer John Adey Repton. In order to create picturesque park scenery, an artificial river tributary was dug out.

Thanks to the careful preservation of the original parkland by the subsequent owners, such as Prince Frederick of the Netherlands, the Muskauer landscape retained its original character.

After WWII, the new Polish-German state border divided the Mużaków/Muskauer Landscape Park into two parts. The Polish and German authorities started the regeneration programme in the 1980s. The project has become a leading example of fruitful European cooperation in the conservation of common cultural heritage.



### [Churches of Peace in Jawor and Świdnica](#)

These are sacral buildings that transcend their religious function, and their architectural value is less important than the message that they carry.

The Protestant half-timber churches were erected in the mid-17th century, following the end of the Thirty Years' War that ravaged large parts of Europe. By signing the Peace Treaty of Westphalia (1648), the Emperor of Austria let the Protestants of Lower Silesia erect three 'churches of peace'. They were to commemorate the end of the war and hail peace that followed the devastating religious conflict.

Both temples were not supposed to be reminiscent of traditional churches. They were to be constructed with the use of low quality materials and located within the range of a cannonball from the city walls. And this is how two Europe's biggest wood-and-clay shingled constructions were built, each seating a few thousand people. With modestly looking outside walls, they both have rich baroque decorations inside.

The Church of Peace in Świdnica is located on the old Protestant cemetery, away from the oldest part of the city. The paintings covering the walls and ceiling depict visions of St John Evangelist described in the Apocalypse. They also represent coats-of-arms of the most prominent members of the church community as well as views of the local towns and residences.

The Church of Peace in Jawor (30 km from Świdnica) is also richly decorated with 180 paintings representing scenes from the Old and New Testaments as well as coats-of-arms of local families and guilds.

Both towns boast rich historical heritage. In the Middle Ages, Świdnica was the capital of an independent principality.





### [Centennial Hall in Wrocław](#)

The Centennial Hall is a multipurpose structure designed for exhibitions. It is based on a symmetrical quatrefoil form with extensive circular central space (65m diameter, 42m high). It can seat 6,000 people.

The Centennial Hall is a pioneering work of modern engineering and architecture, exhibiting important influences taking hold at the beginning of the 20th century. The design became a key reference in the later development of reinforced concrete structures.



## Wooden Churches in southern Małopolska

Some of these churches are several hundred years old. Six of them are listed as UNESCO's World Cultural Heritage sites. It was not famous architects who designed them - they are the work of local carpenters who used to live there throughout centuries.

The oldest church was built in the 15th-century church in Haczów. It is made of fir wood and roofed with wooden shingles. Fragments of wall paintings were uncovered in the interior.

Great artistic value is attributed to the shingle roofed church in Blizne. Erected at the turn of the 15th century, it also contains fragments of Gothic and Renaissance wall paintings. The harmonious silhouette of the church has an original, spire roof.

The church at Binarowa boasts a very precious wall painting depicting scenes from the New Testament and a 14th century figure of Madonna carved in wood.

Many unique paintings, sculptures and artistic objects can be admired in the 15th century church in Dębno.

The interior decorations of the church at Lipnica Murowana include precious wall paintings as well as baroque paintings and sculptures.

The Timber Architecture Route in the Małopolska region is a new tourist attraction. It is over 1500 kilometers long and features 232 timber constructions of historic value, among them 123 Roman-Catholic churches, 39 Orthodox churches, 25 rural and small town complexes, and 27 rural architecture museums that comprise 9 open air museums and 14 manors.



## Białowieża Forest - a miracle of nature

The unique value, not only for Poland, of the Białowieża National Park is recognized by UNESCO as part of the World Heritage and the World Biosphere Reserve.

This large expanse of the natural forest is located on Poland's eastern border and distributed roughly in halves between Poland and Belarus. The Belarusian part is also listed by UNESCO.

Białowieża is the only remaining original lowland forest in Europe, retaining much of its primeval landscape, plant and animal life. The Białowieża Forest, in part growing on swamps, is covered with mixed vegetation untouched by man. Oak, hornbeam, spruce and pine are the predominant species.

The most valuable section, about half of the forest, is strictly protected within the boundaries of the Białowieża National Park. This nature reserve can only be entered with a guide and toured on foot along signposted trails or more comfortably, by horse-drawn carriages.

Other places of interest in the national park include the Palace Park, the Natural History Museum and the Bison Reserve, where the rare species of forest animals are kept in large enclosures. The greatest attraction of the part is certainly a herd of bison, part of which is free to roam the neighboring forest area.

Approximately 100,000 tourists come to the Białowieża Forest each year. Most of them stay in the village of Białowieża, which has ample hospitality facilities to host individual tourists, conferences and incentive travel groups. The village is located in the very heart of the Białowieża Forest.

The Białowieża region has more attractions to offer, such as picturesque landscapes, multicultural rural communities with their folklore and original timber architecture.



## Kalwaria Zebrzydowska - passion plays

The church, monastery and the pilgrimage park of the Bernardine complex in Kalwaria Zebrzydowska is on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The Baroque church (17th century)



contains the revered painting of Our Lady of Kalwaria Zebrzydowska. The Calvary, the Way of the Cross, is lined with shrines, chapels and small churches and is picturesquely set among hills and valleys. The sanctuary is visited by approximately one million pilgrims each year. It is famous for its passion plays. The most important processions are held during the Holy Week (Easter) and on the Ascension Day.

## Medieval Town of Toruń

Thanks to the great astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus, the delicious Torun gingerbread the captivating atmosphere of one of Europe's most beautiful old towns, Toruń is widely known in Poland and far beyond its borders. Toruń's historic centre - a well preserved complex of medieval buildings and the original urban layout, in 1997 was included on UNESCO's World Heritage List.

A wealthy Hanseatic river port, Toruń was one of the most important commercial and cultural centers in central-east Europe. It still has magnificent Gothic buildings that testify to the city's greatness throughout history:

- One of the most imposing old town halls in northern Europe, today occupied by the regional museum ,
- The monumental Cathedral of St John the Baptist and St John the Evangelist with original interiors,
- St James' Church with Gothic murals and spectacular stellar vaults,
- St Mary's Church with richly adorned interiors of great historical value.

There are several eye-catching burgher houses with the superbly decorated Star House and the fine brick Gothic house where the great Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus was born, now housing the Copernicus Museum.

The medieval old town complex of Toruń includes ruins of the Teutonic Knights' castle, gates and towers of the long defensive city walls once protecting Toruń from the Vistula river side as well as many other buildings dating back to the medieval times.

Modern Toruń is a vibrant academic center with its Nicolaus Copernicus University and the site of a great number of attractive artistic events One of the many Toruń's tourist attractions is the high-tech planetarium.