**Poland**

Welcome to Poland, where you are greeted with a hearty handshake and a meaningful hello. As you look around one thing becomes very clear, the word Poland fits the country perfectly. The word polska comes from the word "pole" which means open field. The country appears to be a vast, prairie-like expanse, flat except for the mountains in the southwest. Poland is located in Central Europe with its only shoreline to the north, formed by the Baltic Sea. You will find Germany to the west, Lithuania to the northeast, Belarus and Ukraine to the east, and the Czech Republic and Slovakia to the south. The country is mostly part of the Great European Plain, and north of the Polish Plateau is the lowlands of clay and sand. The Baltic Sea coast is flat, containing numerous lagoons, and patches of tundra.

Much like its contemporaries, Poland has a continental climate with severe winters and mild summers. Rainfall occurs during the summer months with a range of precipitation between 20 and 48 inches.

The current population of Poland is 38,385,616 with an average of 317 people per square mile. The female population is expected to live 76 years, and 68 for the men. People in the urban setting account for almost 62%, while there are 38% in the rural community.

Polish is the official language of the thirty-eight million people living in Poland. Polish is a Slavic language and belongs to the West Slavic subgroup, which also includes; Czech, Slovak, Cassubian, and the now extinct Polobian. The Slavic languages are more similar to each other than the Romance languages. Dialect variations correspond to historical and geographical regions in Poland. The main dialects include; Wielkopolska in the west, Malopolska in the southeast, Mazovia in the northeast, and Silesia in the south central.
Retaining a 98% literacy rate, Poland enjoys a strong school system. All education is free. The education structure is as follows: At the end of a six-year primary school (age 13), a general obligatory competence test with no selective function is taken. At the end of a three-year lower secondary school (age 16), a general obligatory exam is planned. At the end of a three-year upper secondary school (age 19), or two-year vocational school (age 20), a general non-compulsory exam may be taken. This entitles students to enter higher education. The Ministry of National Education administers the higher education system. Coordination in these activities of the higher schools and supervising the higher schools subordinated to them. The Ministry of National Education determines the minimum programs the schools can have.

There are numerous landmarks in this country that is rich in heritage, but only one can hold the flag at the top of the hill, Auschwitz. If the name Auschwitz were not forever associated with the executions of Polish heroes, and the systematic gassing of the Jews, most people would consider the Auschwitz I camp to be a pleasant, tree-shaded, campus-like setting with mellow brick buildings reminiscent of Harvard. Only the guard tower at the end of the street reminds us that this is not a college campus. If the word landmark is designated for something that will be the measuring stick for time, the words outside Auschwitz II are it. “Never forget the past, so, as it may never happen again.”

Poland is a very flat country and with no natural barriers, it was repeatedly fought over and destroyed many times. This has led Poland to have a deep and painful history. Following are ten of the more important events (in chronological order): AD: 966- Prince Mieszko adopts Christianity, traditional date of origin of the Polish state; 1025- Boleslaw I is recognized as the first king of Poland; 1500-1600- the "Golden Age" of Poland; political stability, prosperity, and cultural activity; 1543- Copernicus publishes treatise defining heliocentric universe; 1914-1918
With $4.312 billion to help jumpstart the new free market economy, Poland stands out as one of the not successful and open transition economies in Eastern Europe. Importing $11 billion worth of goods shows Poland still requires goods from other countries. Its main trading partners are Germany, Russia, Italy, France, and Great Britain. Poland has a GDP real growth rate of 3% and inflation rate of 2.5%. The currency used in Poland is the Zlotych. This is a 50 Zlotych.

If you love food, and your lineage is German or Slavic, you will love Polish food. Everything is home cooked, soup, vegetables, and thick broth for meats. The meat is cooked in the thick broth to add flavor or sometimes to hide some flavor. Meats are rarely grilled, but will be breaded and basted. The soups can range from thick and hearty to light and flavorful. Potatoes still make up a portion of the diet.

In light of Warsaw's hopes for EU entry, Poland's antiquated and inefficient farming industry urgently needs a drastic overhaul. However, if restructuring is to succeed, then the infrastructure in Poland's rural regions will have to undergo extensive development in order to provide the population with employment alternatives. Not surprisingly, the consensus between political parties that is necessary to implement such a delicate plan is now in sight. From the air, Poland's national boundary is easily identifiable. During the flight over from the Czech Republic, sprawling expanses of arable land are suddenly replaced by a rag-rug of smaller fields. One of the main problems of Polish agriculture becomes immediately clear: small, carved-up farms can hardly offer an adequate living to the entire one-quarter of the population which (according to official statistics), is employed in the agricultural sector but which brings in only six percent of the country's GDP. Warsaw's vehement striving for EU entry also brings up
another problem. Poland is lagging strikingly behind in terms of productivity, not only in comparison with the European Union, but also with respect to the other transition countries of Central Europe, such as Hungary and the Czech Republic. Little wonder Polish farmers are fighting tooth and nail against increasing pressure to compete with cheap foreign imports.

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