

THE BATTLE FOR POLAND: WWII TO SOLIDARITY

A Tour of Northern Poland

Gdańsk • Westerplatte • Stutthof • Wolf's Lair • Mikołajki • Warsaw

August 30 - September 6, 2024



Gdańsk

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Dear Friend of The National WWII Museum,

On September 1, 1939, the German ship *Schleswig-Holstein* opened fire on the Polish garrison at Westerplatte. The shots from the battleship's 15-inch guns started a worldwide conflict that would kill millions, destroy some of the planet's oldest and most treasured cities, and reshape the future. Poland had long served as a buffer between competing powers to the east and west, and in 1939, found itself between two brutal dictators who had agreed to their own spheres of control. As Germany invaded Poland from the west, the Soviet Red Army advanced from the east.

Poland's leadership fled and set up a government-in-exile in London, but the Poles never stopped fighting. Polish airmen made up a significant part of the Royal Air Force. There were Poles in Montecassino working their way toward Rome. There were Poles in Normandy, holding on to a crucial hill blocking the German retreat from the Falaise Pocket. And back in Warsaw, Polish citizens battled against Nazi oppression in the Warsaw Uprising.

Throughout the 20th century, Poland's fate was often defined by battles. Poland was liberated from Nazi occupation in 1945, but at an enormous cost to the country's people, cities, and infrastructure. And although the Germans were gone, the Soviets remained. Poland would suffer under a Communist dictatorship until the 1990s, fighting fierce political and social battles against their oppressive government until the dissolution of the Communist regime was achieved, in great part, by Lech Wałęsa and the Solidarity movement.

Poland has seen a remarkable resurgence over the last few decades. Visitors from abroad are amazed at the vibrancy of the country and local people. Join our carefully curated tour and immerse yourself in the battlefields, museums, and memorials that make Poland such an important and sought-after world destination for historical travel. We are proud to offer this extraordinary, one-of-a-kind itinerary that balances powerful experiences, exclusive access, and thoughtfully planned free time to rest and enjoy this brave, beautiful country and its people.



Stephen J. Watson

President & CEO of The National WWII Museum



Poland in World War II

A TIMELINE OF EVENTS

September 1, 1939

Westerplatte, Poland

Nazi Germany invades Poland and fires the first shots of World War II in Europe.



1939

January 15, 1940

Kraków, Poland

Oskar Schindler opens his factory where he will go on to save more than a thousand Jews.



May 20, 1940

Oświęcim, Poland

Auschwitz is established by the SS and was initially populated with Polish political prisoners. The camp eventually becomes a site of mass extermination of European Jewry.



July 30, 1941

London, England

The Sikorski-Mayski Agreement frees Polish POWs held in Soviet camps, enlisting them to fight the Nazis on the Eastern Front.

April 19, 1943

Warsaw, Poland

Jewish resistance to Nazi police and SS leads to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. In response, the Nazis kill 13,000 and ship those remaining to concentration camps.



1943

July 20, 1944

East Prussia, Germany

An assassination attempt on Hitler fails at the fortified command post known as "Wolf's Lair."



1944

August 1, 1944

Warsaw, Poland

As Soviet forces near Warsaw, Polish freedom fighters take up arms, thus beginning the Warsaw Uprising.



May 8-9, 1945

Berlin, Germany

At an estate in the Karlshorst neighborhood, German Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel officially surrenders Germany's armed forces.



January 19, 1947

Poland

Parliamentary elections characterized by violence and persecution of opponents give full governing power to the communist Polish Workers Party.



July 4 & 18, 1989

Poland

Parliamentary elections result in a victory for Solidarity and spell the end for the communist Polish United Workers Party.



August 31, 1980

Gdańsk, Poland

The Gdańsk Agreement legitimizes the Solidarity movement that would ultimately undermine the communist government.

November 1989

Berlin, Germany

The fall of the Berlin Wall, a pivotal event in world history, marks the beginning of the fall of communism in Europe.

1989



Featured MUSEUMS & GALLERIES

Poland is home to some of the world's most inspiring museums. Included in this tour are various engaging exhibitions designed to teach the turbulent history, culture, and stories that impacted generations.



WARSAW, POLAND Żabiński Villa

In 1929, Jan Żabiński co-founded the Warsaw Zoo and served as its director. Following the German invasion in September 1939, Żabiński's duties grew to include supervision of Warsaw's public parks. This duty allowed him and his wife access to the Warsaw Ghetto. The Żabińskis worked to assist numerous Jews in escaping Warsaw, utilizing their own home and the buildings and enclosures at the zoo as hiding places. Jan Żabiński and his wife Antonina are honored on the Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem, a list of non-Jews who took great risks to save Jews during the Holocaust. The villa of Jan Żabiński is now preserved as a museum.



KRAKÓW, POLAND Rynek Underground

Located under Kraków's market square, the Rynek Underground takes visitors back to Medieval Kraków. Using special effects blended with the preserved streets, scenes of Kraków's history appear as visitors walk through the 4,000-square-meter (43,000-square-foot) space. One of the highlights is a 693 kg (1,500 lb) piece of lead referred to as the "loaf." During the Medieval period, this chunk of lead was used as a weight to measure bulk trades.



WARSAW, POLAND Pawiak Prison

Build in 1834, Pawiak Prison held political prisoners and criminals during Warsaw's time as a part of the Russian Empire through the end of WWI. After the German invasion in 1939, the Gestapo took control of Pawiak. More than 100,000 inmates passed through the prison, and 37,000 are reported to have died in the prison or on its grounds. Others were sent to concentration camps. In July 1944, an attempted jailbreak failed. Weeks later, the Warsaw Uprising began, and the prison became a command post for the Germans. The buildings were later abandoned and much of the complex was destroyed before the end of August 1944. Several prison cells remain along with an interpretive museum located in a basement.

Historical Perspective

WESTERPLATTE

By September 1939, signs of war signaled throughout the world. Japan's ambitions in China, Italy's conquest in Ethiopia, and Germany's territorial demands in Europe set the stage for the larger battles to come. Poland's leaders watched the world abandon Czechoslovakia at the negotiating table when Hitler demanded Czech territory. Taking steps to avoid a similar fate, Poland joined a military alliance with Britain and France in March 1939. Any attack on Poland would result in Germany going to war on two fronts.

Danzig proved to be the main point of contention between Germany and Poland prior to the outbreak of war. At the start of World War I, Danzig was part of the German Empire. Following Germany's defeat in World War I, Poland's borders shifted to the west, but Danzig did not transfer to Poland. With a population that



Adolf Hitler reviewing the battleship SMS *Schleswig-Holstein*, Hamburg, Germany, 1936.

was 90% German, Danzig became a free city. Feeling a connection to the citizens of Danzig, Germany petitioned Poland for a new highway across a Polish corridor to connect the Germans in both places. The population of Danzig began to emphasize their German ethnicity through politics.

In the 1930s, the Nazi Party in Danzig was growing rapidly. Citizens of Danzig resented the new Polish city of Gdynia to the north and felt that the Poles were shifting business and money away from Danzig. The Danzig Senate followed many of the policies laid out by Nazi Germany, including the Nuremberg Race Laws. The Polish government felt that giving Germany easy access to Danzig would lead to increasing demands for territory from Hitler.

In August 1939, both sides prepared for conflict. Poland constructed fortifications and stationed sentries near Danzig. The German battleship SMS *Schleswig-Holstein* sailed into Danzig Harbor under the guise of a courtesy call on August 25. A series of false flag operations undertaken by Nazi Germany in late August led to the *Schleswig-Holstein* firing on a Polish garrison on the Westerplatte Peninsula. The first rounds hit just before 5:00 a.m. on September 1, 1939.

After the first shots, German marines ran from the *Schleswig-Holstein* and encountered an ambush by the Poles. After 30 minutes of action, the Germans withdrew. The *Schleswig-Holstein* fired for several more hours as the Germans regrouped. A second German attack failed to breach the Polish defenses. For the next six days, the Germans bombarded the Polish positions with naval, artillery, and air attacks. The Poles continued to resist the Germans in Westerplatte, even as the Germans were on the outskirts of Warsaw. On September 7, 1939, Polish Major Henryk Sucharski surrendered the garrison to the Germans.



Historical Perspective

THE KATYN MASSACRE

Ten days before the German invasion of Poland and the start of World War II in Europe, Germany and the Soviet Union formalized a non-aggression pact. Embedded within the agreement was a partition of Poland. The Soviet Union would gain control of eastern Poland, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland. Nazi Germany would control western Poland, Lithuania, and Danzig. Free from the threat of Soviet intervention, Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. The Red Army invaded Poland from the east on September 17, 1939. Poland's sovereignty was gone. The future of the Poles was now in the hands of two brutal dictators. During the initial invasion, the Germans and Soviets captured thousands of



The discovery of the mass graves in the Katyn Forest by the German *Wehrmacht* in February 1943.

Poles and sent them to various prisons and POW camps. Stalin, always paranoid and suspicious, knew there would be resistance to his regime, so he acted quickly against the Polish military prisoners. In March 1940, Stalin, along with five other members of the Politburo, ordered the execution of 25,000 prisoners.

Over the next two months, the Soviets executed tens of thousands of Polish prisoners and buried them in mass graves. The shootings took place in various areas; however, these executions became synonymous with the Katyn Forest where a German officer discovered the first mass grave in 1943. The Nazis would then seize on the Katyn Massacre as a way to grow mistrust among the Allies.

Questions about the missing began in June 1941 during Operation Barbarossa when the Soviets and the Poles agreed to combat the Germans together. Polish General Władysław Anders, recently freed from prison, was assembling a force to counter the German advance. Anders asked the Soviets where he could find his fellow Polish officers. Stalin assured both Anders and Polish Prime Minister Władysław Sikorski that all of the Polish captives had previously been set free. Their whereabouts were simply unknown.

By 1943, the German gains in the east were crumbling, but Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels used the Katyn Massacre as an opportunity to wedge a divide between Poland, the Western Allies, and the Soviet Union. Goebbels gave strict instructions to broadcast the Katyn Massacre everywhere in Germany, and did so for weeks. The massacre was a useful opportunity to show the German people the horrors of the Bolsheviks while making Western Allies guilty by association.

Stalin vehemently denied the execution claims. Both Winston Churchill and Franklin Delano Roosevelt felt that the more important issue was not the relationship between the Poles and the Soviets, but instead the relationship between the Western Allies and the Soviet Union. Sikorski met with Churchill privately to share proof that Stalin had ordered the executions. Churchill believed in the capacity of the Soviets to murder the Polish prisoners but assured Stalin that he would oppose any investigation into the killings. On the American side, Navy Lieutenant Commander George Earle produced a report that claimed that the Soviets were responsible for the Katyn Massacre, but President Roosevelt rejected the report and declared that Germany was responsible for the executions. There was a war to win, and the common enemy was Hitler.

The Katyn Massacre was a low point in Poland's history, but the country would endure more executions, ethnic cleansings, and massacres before the end of World War II. After the war, the Poles adjusted to an existence as a puppet state dominated by the Soviet Union. Under Soviet influence, responsibility for the Katyn Massacre still fell to Germany. For over four decades, the Poles suffered behind the Iron Curtain before they threw off their Communist government and transitioned to democracy. In 1990, the crumbling Soviet Union announced that its own forces carried out the killings. In 2010, the Russian Parliament officially condemned Stalin and his government for the Katyn Massacre.

Spotlight On

ANNA WALENTYNOWICZ

Anna Walentynowicz was born in Ukraine in 1929. During World War II, she worked as a maid starting when she was only 10 years old. After the war, she moved to Poland and began working at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk. She was admired for her hard work, earning awards for helping to surpass quotas. By the 1970s, however, Walentynowicz became disillusioned with the Communist regime. She found corruption in the higher levels of the factory hierarchy, and she was punished for disclosing it.

Walentynowicz sought change, and began distributing independent newspapers at the shipyard. She joined a trade union, the WZZ, headed by Lech Wałęsa. The management of the shipyard felt threatened by WZZ, and used Walentynowicz as an example. In August 1980, with just 5 months before her retirement, the shipyard fired Anna Walentynowicz.

The firing led to a strike by the shipyard workers. After three days of striking, shipyard management gave in to some demands, and Lech Wałęsa called an end to the strike. Two weeks later, the Gdańsk Agreement gave approval to independent trade unions, a major step in the weakening of Poland's Communist Party. When the new Solidarity union formed, Walentynowicz described its motto in this way: "Your problems are also my problems. We must extend our friendship and strengthen our solidarity."

Walentynowicz remained a key figure in Poland in the 1980s, and she was named "Woman of the Year" by the Netherlands in 1981. As the political environment in Poland changed, however, Walentynowicz grew dissatisfied with Solidarity and broke from the union. She faced persecution from the government throughout the decade. A devout Catholic, Walentynowicz developed a strong friendship with Pope John Paul II. In 2005, she traveled to Washington, D.C., to receive the Truman-Reagan Medal of Freedom.

Anna Walentynowicz died in a plane crash in 2010 on her way to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Katyn Massacre.



Anna Walentynowicz



TOUR ITINERARY

FRIDAY, AUGUST 30, 2024

Day 1: Arrivals

Arrive at Gdańsk Lech Wałęsa Airport (GDN) and transfer to the Hilton Gdańsk Hotel. Explore Gdańsk at your leisure this afternoon before a welcome dinner and tour preview with the group.

Accommodations: Hilton Gdańsk (R,D)

SATURDAY, AUGUST 31, 2024

Day 2: Solidarity

Explore the postwar history of Poland with a visit to the European Solidarity Center. During World War II, Polish troops fought with distinction throughout the Western and Eastern Fronts. However, the end of the war saw the country fall under the domination of the communist Soviet Union. For the next thirty years, Gdańsk became a hotbed of resistance to Soviet decrees, culminating in a 1980 strike in the Lenin Shipyards under the leadership of Lech Wałęsa. The recognition of this strike led to the growing Solidarity movement, which eventually sparked negotiations with the Communist government of Poland. In 1990, elections resulted in a new Polish government led by a Solidarity coalition. Today, lunch is at your leisure in the beachside resort of Sopot, featuring the world's largest wooden pier. After exploring this picturesque resort, return to Gdańsk for an evening of independent exploration and dining.

Accommodations: Hilton Gdańsk (B)

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 2024

Day 3: The First Shots in Europe

Poland's maritime city on the Baltic Sea, Gdańsk was first mentioned in historical documents in 997. In its millennium of existence, this venerable port city has changed hands numerous times—the prize in a long game of tug-of-war between Germany and Poland. This morning, visit Westerplatte, the place where the Germans fired the first shots of what became World War II. Explore the Museum of the Second World War, then enjoy lunch on your own in the area. This afternoon, guests may choose to take an optional excursion to Stutthof, the first Nazi concentration camp established outside of Germany's prewar borders, or enjoy free time and an evening at leisure.

Accommodations: Hilton Gdańsk (B)

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 2024

Day 4: Wolf's Lair

Today, venture southeast to the Wolf's Lair, the English name for Hitler's secret, fortified Eastern Front command post *Wolfsschanze*. The failed 1944 assassination attempt on Hitler, portrayed in the 2008 movie *Valkyrie* (starring Tom Cruise) took place within the concrete complex. After lunch with the group, visit the German command-and-control center at Mamerki. Virtually untouched since the war, this huge bunker complex is where many of the major decisions for conducting the war on the Eastern Front were made. Spend the evening in the resort town of Mikołajki with dinner included.

Accommodations: Hotel Mikołajki (B, L, D)





Warsaw Uprising Monument

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 2024

Day 5: Warsaw

Travel to Poland's beautiful capital city, Warsaw. Arrive at Old Town Square and enjoy time for exploration and an independent lunch. Set out on a guided walking tour this afternoon, beginning at the 1944 Warsaw Uprising Monument. Unveiled in 1989, the monument commemorates the valiant and tragic attempt of the Polish Resistance to take back the city of Warsaw from Nazi troops before the Soviet Army entered the city. This evening, attend a reception prior to a concert featuring the music of famous Polish composer Frederic Chopin.

Accommodations: Hotel Bristol (B, R)

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 2024

Day 6: Uprising

The Polish people are famous for their courage and determination. Spend the morning honoring those who fought to liberate Poland at several sites of remembrance, including Pawiak Prison, the Katyn Museum, and the former Gestapo headquarters. In the afternoon, explore the famous Warsaw Uprising Museum. Opened in 2004 on the 60th anniversary of the beginning of the Warsaw Uprising, this museum includes a collection of almost 1,000 photographs taken by photographer and Olympian athlete Eugeniusz Lokajski, who documented the uprising before he was killed in an artillery attack.

Accommodations: Hotel Bristol (B)

Itinerary Map

Legend

- 3 Overnight Stays
- Tour Stops
- Flight not Included

Poland



THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2024

Day 7: The Royal Route

Journey to stops along the Royal Route on your final day in beautiful, rejuvenated Warsaw. This historic route connects the Royal Palace to the Wilanów Castle, and formerly stretched all the way from Warsaw to Kraków. Today, the Royal Route features some of Warsaw's most iconic buildings, including the Presidential Palace, St. Anna's Church, and the University of Warsaw. Along the way, spot the famous sculpture of Prince Józef Poniatowski, a Polish hero who served alongside Napoleon's forces. The original sculpture by Danish artist Bertel Thorvaldsen was destroyed during World War II, but Denmark donated a new one after the war. Reminisce on your journey through northern Poland at a farewell reception and dinner this evening.

Accommodations: Hotel Bristol (B, R, D)

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 2024

Day 8: Departures

Bid farewell to Poland this morning and transfer to Warsaw Chopin Airport (WAW) for individual flights back to the United States or your next destination. (B)



Warsaw Old Town

HOTELS



Hilton Gdańsk

Overlooking the Motława River in the picturesque Old Town of Gdańsk, the Hilton Gdańsk hotel offers guests the perfect base to visit and explore this popular Polish city. This Gdańsk hotel boasts stylish riverside dining at Mercato Restaurant and unique High 5 Terrace Bar, the highest bar in the Old Town, with contemporary urban beach and terrace with a pool area.

Hotel Mikołajki

Inspired by its picturesque natural surroundings on Bird Island, rooms are designed with comfort and convenience in mind, and include air-conditioning, wireless internet, minibar, coffee maker, and spa-quality bathroom amenities. The spa facilities include a relaxation area and a signature Sauna World with incredible views of Mikołajskie Lake.



Hotel Bristol Warsaw

This distinctive hotel is located just steps from the Presidential Palace, the Royal Castle, Old Town Square, Praga, and many other attractions in the capital. With art-deco inspired interiors, guests enjoy two on-site restaurants and bars, Bristol Spa and Fitness, and impeccable service.

TOUR INCLUSIONS

- Exclusive itinerary designed by The National WWII Museum
- Special access to sites not offered on other tours
- Full-time logistical Tour Manager
- Expert local guides
- Round-trip airport transfers (when arriving and departing on scheduled group tour dates)
- Luxury five-star and deluxe four-star accommodations throughout the journey
- Private, first-class air-conditioned motor coach transportation
- Personal listening devices on all included touring
- Included gratuities to guides, drivers, porters, and servers
- 7 Breakfasts (B), 1 Lunch (L), 3 Dinners (D), and 3 Receptions (R)
- Beer, house wine, and soft drinks with included lunches and dinners
- Personalized luggage tags and name badge

Pricing

~~\$5,999~~ \$5,499* double occupancy
~~\$7,499~~ \$6,999* single occupancy

\$229 taxes and fees per person are additional

**When booked by December 31, 2023*



View the terms and conditions by scanning the QR code above with your smart phone camera.

Contact

For a comprehensive listing of all tour offerings and early booking discount opportunities,

Visit: ww2museumtours.org

Email: travel@nationalww2museum.org

Call: 1-877-813-3329 x 257



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T R A V E L

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