

Poland

religions, rites and traditions



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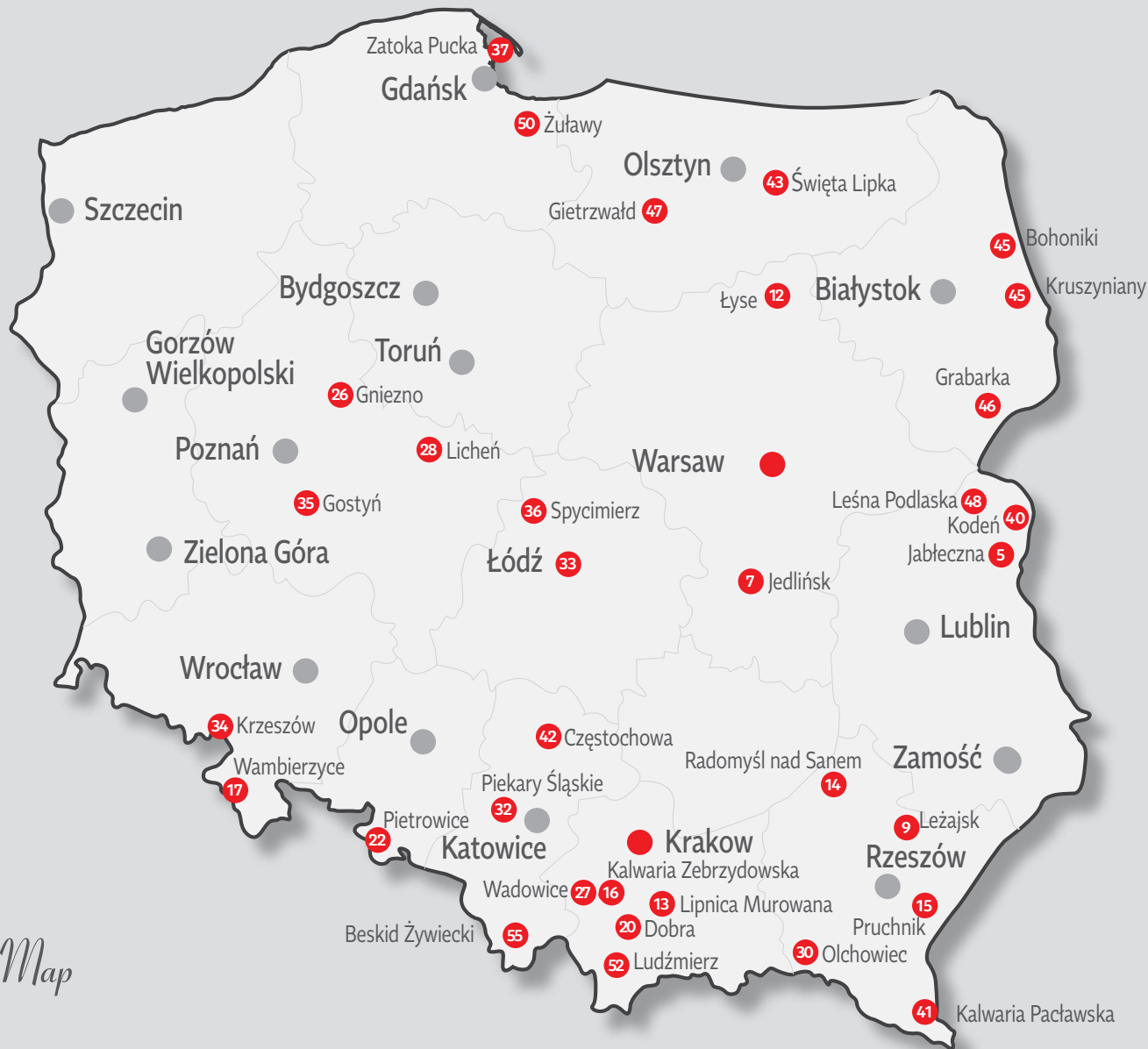


Introduction

There are few countries as beautiful as Poland. Big enough to accommodate sea, mountains, lakes, plains, primeval forests and large cities, it is compact and with an increasingly modern transport network it's becoming easier to travel between any two places in the country without a long boring journey. Added to this Poland has a continental climate with long warm summers, perfect for exploring the country's many attractions.

Poland places great importance in its unusually rich heritage, with roots that include the former great central European empire of *Rzeczpospolita*. This *Res Publica* – literally a “common cause”, was a true melting pot of cultures which absorbed many peoples, languages, religions and traditions. It accommodated Poles, Ruthenians, Jews, Germans, Lithuanians, Tatars, Karaites, Livonians and many other communities. Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Protestantism,

Judaism and Islam coexisted in a mostly peaceful, voluntary and harmonious manner. The diversity of languages within Poland was consolidated by official and church Latin. The *Rzeczpospolita* gave safe shelter to the oppressed and persecuted on many occasions. The Sephardi Jews expelled from Spain, the Mennonites who had been oppressed in the Low Countries and known in Poland as “*Olędrzy*”, and Old Believers who had to escape from Muscovy, all found safe harbour in Poland. Today this remarkable empire belongs to the distant past, but its rich traditions, diverse architecture, and complex customs remain, along with a calendar which is filled with an exciting mix of holidays and rituals. You are welcome to get to know Poland, whose huge blend of traditions is a wonderful achievement of multiculturalism – it is the combined work of many peoples over many centuries.



Map



List of contents

Warsaw – Cavalcade of the Magi	4
Jabłeczna – Jordan	5
Fat Thursday	6
Jedlińsk – Decapitation of Death	7
Ash Wednesday	8
Ohel of Elimelech of Leżajsk	9
Warsaw – Purim (Nożyk Synagogue)	10
Warsaw – Chydyz Tymbyłarnyn, or Karaite Passover	11
Łyse – Palm Sunday	12
Lipnica Murowana – Palm Sunday	13
Radomyśl nad Sanem – Turki	14
Pruchnik – burning of Judas	15
Kalwaria Zebrzydowska – Shrine of Christ's Passion and to Our Lady	16
Wambierzyce – reproduction of Jerusalem	17
Resurrection Mass	18
Easter breakfast	19
Wet Monday	20
Krakow – Emaus	21
Pietrowice – Easter Cavalcade	22
Misteria Paschalia Festival in Krakow	23
Krakow – the Sanctuary of Divine Mercy in Łagiewniki	24
Krakow – procession of St Stanislaus at Skalka	25
Gniezno – tomb of St Wojciech	26
Wadowice – canonisation of St John Paul II	27
Licheń Stary – Shrine to Our Lady	28
Remuh Synagogue and cemetery in Krakow	29

Olchowiec – Lemko kermesz	30
Krakow – Hanukkah	31
Piekary Śląskie – men's pilgrimage	32
Łódź of Four Cultures Festival	33
Krzeszów – Our Lady of Grace	34
Gostyń – Święta Góra – the feast of Mystical Rose	35
Spycimierz – flower carpets	36
Kashubian pilgrimages on fishing boats	37
Jewish Culture Festival in Krakow	38
Warsaw – Museum of the History of Polish Jews	39
Kodeń – Our Lady of Guadalupe	40
Kalwaria Pałacowska – Shrine to Christ's Passion and Our Lady	41
Częstochowa – Sanctuary of the Black Madonna on Jasna Góra	42
Święta Lipka – the feast of Our Lady of the Herbs	43
The Podlasie Tatar Trail	44
Kurban Bajrm – Bohoniki/Kruszyniany	45
Grabarka – pilgrimages to the holy mountain	46
Gietrzwałd – Shrine to Our Lady	47
Leśna Podlaska – Shrine to Our Lady	48
Warsaw – graves, pańska skórka – All Saints' Day	49
Żuławy – Mennonite cemetery	50
Andrzejki	51
Ludźmierz near Nowy Targ – The Feast of Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary	52
Christmas Eve	53
Jasieńka (Nativity plays)	54
Żywiec Beskids – carollers	55

Warsaw – Cavalcade of the Magi

The Day of the Epiphany, or the feast of the Three Magi, commemorates the event described in the Gospel of St Matthew when the three Magi (or wise men) from the East set off to Bethlehem led by a star to pay homage to the Baby Jesus. The three Magi, who were later given the names Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar, brought offerings of myrrh, frankincense and gold. After a 50-year interval the feast of the Epiphany was recently declared a public holiday again and as a result it has started to be celebrated with more pomp. In 2009 the Cavalcade of Magi related to the tradition of Nativity plays appeared on the streets of Warsaw for the first time. The procession is led by mounted Magi dressed in full costume and they are accompanied by children wearing colours corresponding to those worn by the Magi. A crowd of people follow wearing crowns on their heads; carols are sung, music is played and Nativity plays are performed. The number of people taking part is growing each year and the popularity of the Warsaw cavalcade has resulted in similar processions in other Polish cities.



6th January

CATHOLIC





19th January

ORTHODOX

Jabłeczna — Jordan

In the monastery of St Onuphrius in Jabłeczna in the Podlasie region, the ceremony of the Baptism of Our Lord, commonly known as *Jordan*, is celebrated every year. The holiday falls on the Day of the Epiphany according to the Eastern Orthodox liturgical calendar, which is the 19th of January in the Gregorian calendar. After a solemn Divine Liturgy, the procession of the faithful led by the celebrant wearing a mitre sets out from the church. The clergy carry icons, processional crosses and banners and the pilgrims head towards the nearby river. It is normally covered with ice so a priest hacks a hole in the form of the cross. He recites a prayer on the life-giving waters of baptism and rebirth and immerses three burning candles three times. He then breathes air onto the water three times, before immersing the gold cross three times. The faithful take the holy water in vessels to give to their sick relatives, as they believe in the water's miraculous powers.



Fat Thursday

On the last Thursday of the carnival people traditionally indulge in eating sweets and fatty food. Over-consuming before the start of Lent has been common practice for many centuries. On Fat Thursday a typical Polish table is dominated by *pączki* (doughnuts) and *faworki* (angel wings), also known as *chrusty*. According to superstition a person who fails to eat at least a single doughnut on that day will not have a successful life. In the past, doughnuts were made from yeast dough and fried in lard. They were not stuffed with jam or marmalade, but with more lard, back fat and even meat. In Lesser Poland there is a local legend on the origin of *Combrowy Czwartek* or *Babski Comber*, as the feast was also called. Comber, a 17th-century mayor of Krakow, was known for his meanness towards female stall-holders in the local market square. He died on Fat Thursday and the women started a great celebration with dancing and food.



Thursday before Lent

CATHOLIC





Jedlińsk – Decapitation of Death

The last days of the carnival, in old Polish tradition known as *Mięsopust*, or “farewell to meat”, abounded in numerous celebrations. An important element of the carnival festivities was the “beheading” of its main character as a sign of the beginning of the fast. The only place in Poland where this tradition has survived is in Jedlińsk near Radom, where on *Kusy Wtorek*, namely Devil’s Tuesday, which is the day before Ash Wednesday, the celebration of *Kusaki* still takes place. From the morning on and to accompaniment of musicians, men dressed as the devil, the mayor, a Jew, an old man and an old woman play their well-rehearsed roles. One of the characters is Death and he is caught and dragged to the market square. There Death is judged and sentenced to death by beheading. Following the execution, which is accompanied by a hellish roar, Death is placed in a coffin and paraded around Jedlińsk. Once the ‘official’ death certificate is issued by the parish priest, the participants begin their celebration of Shrove Tuesday, which lasts until midnight.

Tuesday before Lent

CATHOLIC



Ash Wednesday

On the first day of Lent, Ash Wednesday, the faithful are obliged to go to church to have their heads sprinkled with ash by a priest as a sign of penance and grief for their sins. The ritual is accompanied by words: "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return". On that day observant adults observe a strict fast, taking only one full meal during the day, while children traditionally abstain from meat. According to custom, the ash should originate from the palms blessed on Palm Sunday in the previous year. The evening that precedes Ash Wednesday marked the end of the carnival festivities and traditionally housewives would prepare sourdough for *zup* (a traditional Polish soup made from fermented bread or rye), which was the basic Lenten dish.



46 days before Easter

CATHOLIC





Jorcajt Elimelecha

JEWISH

Ohel of Elimelech of Leżajsk

Every year in Leżajsk, the ohel (resting place) of Tzaddik Elimelech, who lived in the 18th century, is visited by crowds of pilgrims from Israel and the United States. They come to a small chapel in the cemetery where the tomb is found. Jews of the priestly lineage do not pass through the gate, as they are forbidden to enter into contact with the dead. Others go to the ohel in two groups, males separated from females as they walk on opposite sides. Not all visitors can enter the tomb itself. Thousands of pilgrims gather around the building and peek through open windows. They pray separately, but together, and enter a state of religious ecstasy. Prayers continue without a break in the main room of the ohel as Jewish pilgrims bring their petitions written on pieces of paper (*kwitlech*). At the end of the holiday the floor of the ohel is covered with a layer of paper that is a few centimetres thick. After visiting the cemetery, the pilgrims go to a kosher canteen where social life flourishes. By the end of the feast music is usually playing and it provides accompaniment to popular Hasidic dances.



Warsaw — Purim (Nozyk Synagogue)

The joyful feast of Purim is celebrated by Jews to commemorate the change of fortune of the Chosen People that happened owing to Mordechai. He managed to deliver them from planned extermination by a Persian minister named Haman. According to tradition four mitzvas, or religious obligations, must be fulfilled on the day of Purim. These involve listening to the Book of Esther twice (when the name of Haman is read listeners do everything to howl the lector down by stamping their feet, clapping their hands and shaking rattles); giving alms that are sufficient to buy two meals; sending (but not giving personally) gifts for friends on the day preceding the feast; and taking part in a family feast. The dishes served on this occasion include cookies known as “Haman’s ears”, sweet “Haman’s pockets” filled with nuts and dried fruit and jam, as well as *challah* where the plaited layers are supposed to resemble the rope that had been prepared for Mordechai but which was eventually used to hang Haman. Purim is the only occasion when a religious Jew may drink alcohol. The feast is celebrated at the end of winter on the 14th day of the month of Adar; this usually falls in late February or early March.



14 adar

JEWISH



*Celebration of
Purim in the Nozyk
Synagogue
in Warsaw*

*to commemorate
the change of fortune
of the Chosen
People.*



Warsaw — Chydzý Tymbyłłarnyn, or Karaite Passover

Chydzý Tymbyłłarnyn is the first Karaite festival of a new religious year and it is celebrated to commemorate the Israelite departure from Egypt. It begins on the 15th day of the month of Artarych and lasts for 7 days. The celebrations start with a solemn supper. According to tradition no leavened bread or any fermented food may be eaten during those days; for this reason food is prepared specially for the festival. Before the festival housewives clean their kitchens from everything that is sour. In place of ordinary bread Karaites eat home-made timbil, or unleavened bread, in the form of flat, round cakes. The dough is traditionally made from wheat flour and water. Bread ovens were used to bake the bread in the old days, but today regular kitchen ovens are used. Other dishes served for the occasion include meat, usually lamb, goat, eggs roasted in salt and dishes from timbil flour (made from ground timbils).

www.karaimi.org



15 artarych-aj
march/april

KARAITE



Lyse – Palm Sunday

Palm Sunday commemorates Christ's triumphal entry to Jerusalem. It marks the end of Lent and the beginning of Holy Week, during which time the faithful prepare themselves to celebrate Easter. Christ's reception in Jerusalem was marked with palm branches from the fields, tossed onto the ground before him. To mark Palm Sunday colourful "palms", traditionally made from willow branches and decorated with evergreen plants, are brought into churches on that day. In the Kurpie region the traditional practice of plaiting great palms which resemble flower poles has survived. Palms whose height sometimes exceeds 6 metres are made of a pine branch (preferably a young tree) with attached colour flowers of crêpe paper and green branches from bilberry or juniper bushes, or from yew or common box. The tradition of these elaborate palm processions has survived in the two parishes of Łyse and Lipniki in the Kurpie region.



*Sunday
preceding Easter*

CATHOLIC



Lipnica Murowana — Palm Sunday

A unique festival takes place on the market square of Lipnica Murowana on Palm Sunday every year, where local people compete to produce the tallest plaited palm. The challenge of lifting such a large colourful structure, which reaches an average 20 metres, into a vertical position is a spectacle by itself. It has to be done carefully to avoid breaking the palm and the palm is supported by attaching it to nearby trees and buildings. The palms of Lipnica Murowana are made of willow canes and decorated with bulrush, juniper and lingonberry branches. The top of the palm is crowned with a *czub* (crest) made of colourful crêpe paper flowers, ribbons and branches. According to tradition it is believed that the height of the palm reflects the size and wealth of its owner's farm and that a person who fails to prepare a palm is likely to suffer from disease and misfortune.



*Sunday
preceding Easter*

CATHOLIC



Radomyśl nad Sanem – Turki

In Radomyśl nad Sanem, as well as in three other villages in the vicinity – Zaleszany, Giedlarowa and Żabno – Christ's tomb is guarded by unusually colourful guards on Good Friday. Just after the Way of the Cross has ended and before the traditional hymn of mourning "Gorzkie żale" is sung, the parish church is entered solemnly by young men who wear oriental uniforms. This ritual commemorates the events of 1684 when, according to the local legend, soldiers returning from the battlefield of Vienna unexpectedly entered the church during Good Friday services carrying loot and wearing the uniforms of the defeated Turkish troops. Welcomed as heroes, they were immediately deployed to stand guard by Christ's tomb. Nowadays the role of the costumed guards involves participating in the procession of Holy Saturday, assisting in the blessing of fire and taking part in the dawn Resurrection mass on Easter Sunday, after which the joyful Easter festivities begin.



Holy Week

CATHOLIC





Maundy Thursday

CATHOLIC

Pruchnik – burning of Judas

The custom known as “*judaszki*” is still practiced today in one town, Pruchnik, near Przemyśl, but it was once seen throughout Lesser Poland. The performance would mark the treason of Judas beginning in the evening of Maundy Thursday, and ending at noon on the next day. A large dummy made of straw and rags, which represented Judas, was judged and on Good Friday thrown from the church tower. It was then dragged around town and beaten numerous times. Eventually, the burning effigy was thrown into the river. Owing to aggression that was caused by “*judaszki*”, the Church banned the custom; only in Pruchnik a version of *judaszki* has survived. There, on the night of Maundy Thursday the dummy of Judas is hanged upon a tree near the church. 30 wooden clubs that represent 30 pieces of silver obtained from Herod for betraying Jesus are laid on the ground. The judgement takes place on the next day in front of the gate. After the sentence has been announced, the effigy is beaten with clubs and carried towards the river Mleczka where it is set on fire and drowned in the river.

*The Church
banned
the custom; only
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Kalwaria Zebrzydowska – Shrine of Christ's Passion and to Our Lady

The Passion play that takes place annually in Kalwaria Zebrzydowska is the most famous and the oldest performance of its kind anywhere in Poland. The authentic character of the dramatic performance evokes strong emotions among the audience. From Holy Wednesday onwards, crowds of the faithful follow a priest and a group of actors around the Stations of the Cross and participate in the various scenes of the Passion. The tradition of the Passion play dates back to the beginnings of the shrine, which was founded in 1602 by Mikołaj Zebrzydowski, the Grand Crown Marshal at the time. Zebrzydowski was well known for his piety and he commissioned a reconstruction of the original Calvary in Jerusalem, using accurate plans brought back from Jerusalem to allow the builders to create an accurate reconstruction in this Lesser Poland village. The shrine consists of 42 chapels, spread across the hills which surround the 17th-century walls of the local monastery, while the baroque church has the solemnly-venerated figure of Our Lady of Angels placed at the high altar.

The Mannerist Architectural and Park Landscape Complex and Pilgrimage Park of Kalwaria Zebrzydowska entered the UNESCO sites list.



Easter

CATHOLIC

www.kalwaria.eu





Good Friday

CATHOLIC

Wambierzyce — reproduction of Jerusalem

The history of the Silesian Jerusalem dates back to the Middle Ages. According to a folk legend dating from the 12th century, a blind man John of Ratna regained his eyesight in Wambierzyce, and saw the Mother of God. The image of the Virgin Mary that was carved according to the healed man's instruction was placed in a lime tree and a chapel was erected in the next century. The founder of the original Calvary complex was Daniel Paschazjusz von Osterberg. The first wooden chapels marking the Stations of the Cross were created in 1683. The buildings that have survived until today date mostly from the late 19th century, but the church is older: it was built in the 18th century. The Basilica is reached by a monumental stone staircase that is made of 57 steps: the 33 middle steps symbolise the years of Jesus' earthly life, 15 upper ones mark the years of Mary's life prior to her Divine Motherhood, and the 9 bottom ones correspond to the number of angelic choirs. The most interesting aspect of the shrine is the way in which it has been integrated with the buildings of the town, with chapels resembling everyday buildings blending in with regular houses. The streets of Wambierzyce serve modern-day traffic while at the same time imitating the lanes of old Jerusalem.

*In Wambierzyce
chapels resemble
everyday buildings
blending in with
regular houses,
and the streets
imitate the lanes
of old Jerusalem.*



Resurrection Mass

A solemn Mass followed by a procession takes place late on Easter Saturday at the end of the Easter Vigil, or at dawn on Easter Sunday. The joyous moment when the news of Christ's resurrection is announced was historically celebrated very noisily by firing canons, rifles and pistols. Nowadays firecrackers are used and church bells can be heard ringing far and wide. According to folk beliefs any person who has overslept and has not taken part in the solemn Mass is not allowed to eat the food blessed on Holy Saturday, and they will be unlucky in their life and will not enjoy protection from illness or other sorrows. The Easter procession sets out from the church during the latter part of the service. After Holy Communion, a priest transfers the Blessed Sacrament to the Sepulchre of Our Lord (typically established in the chapel of adoration). He then leads the procession with a monstrance, a special vessel used to carry the Blessed Sacrament, to the accompaniment of bells and singing. The congregation walks around the church one or three times and the hymn *Te Deum* (*Ciebie Boga wystawiamy*) is sung when the faithful return to the church.



Easter Sunday

CATHOLIC





Easter Sunday

CATHOLIC

Easter breakfast

Just as with *wigilia* on Christmas Eve, the celebration of Easter breakfast has become a family occasion enjoyed by believers and non-believers. The faithful usually take part in the Resurrection Mass, a solemn Easter Mass which takes place on the Saturday evening or Sunday morning. The tradition of letting off firecrackers during the Resurrection Mass as well as making other types of noise is slowly disappearing, but the custom of the prolonged joyous ringing of church bells is still alive.

According to Polish Christian tradition, the Easter breakfast starts with sharing a sliced hard-boiled egg while making wishes. The egg is taken out of the basket which has been blessed on Easter Saturday. On the Easter table there are other food items from the blessed basket as well as dyed Easter eggs, a custom mentioned as early as in the 13th century by Wincent Kadłubek. Traditional Easter soups include white borscht and sour rye soup with sausage. White sausage also appears among the main courses, as well as roasted ham, chicken and poultry rolls, ribs and tenderloins. There are many cakes and desserts, including traditional ones such as pascha, yeast cake, *mazurek*, cheesecake and poppy-seed cake.



Wet Monday

In Dobra near Limanowa the old tradition of *dziady śmigustne* continues today. Men dressed in straw start frolicking on the night from Sunday to Monday. They wander around the village mumbling, groaning, rattling, blowing tin horns and playing jokes on farmers. After the morning Mass they begin hunting innocent victims. No maiden will be spared from being poured with water and other people are equally likely to get soaked. The faces of the *dziady* (old men) are covered with fur masks, and in their hands they hold their weapons – wooden buckets. The tradition of *dziady śmigustne* is based on a legend of the unfortunate men who returned from Tatar captivity as prisoners of war. Their faces had been mutilated and their tongues cut off; dressed in straw they were left to wander around and beg for food. They found shelter in Dobra (Good) and that's how the village got its name.



Easter Monday

CATHOLIC





Easter Monday

CATHOLIC

Krakow – Emaus

Emaus in the Zwierzyniec district of Krakow is the most popular and the most colourful church fete in Poland. According to the Gospel of St Luke, Christ went to the village of Emmaus after his resurrection. On the way he met two disciples who did not recognise him. According to a custom that developed in Medieval Europe, every Easter Monday people would go outside the city walls to commemorate this. The first mention of the Krakow Emaus fete dates back to the 16th century. Previous residents of Krakow would also leave the city in a colourful procession after Mass, celebrated in the Norbertine convent church. At the square in front of the convent (at the junction of Emaus Street, St Bronisławy Street and Kościuszki Street) people began to set up church fete stalls with sweets (mainly gingerbread hearts) and wooden toys; later merry-go-rounds were added. Today handcrafted goods still can be found at the stalls, along with modern-day plastic products.



Pietrowice — Easter Cavalcade

The custom of mounted Easter processions is now only followed in Silesia; you can find them in Racibórz, Pietrowice Wielkie, Zawada Książęca, Sternalice, Ostropa, Bieńkowice and Biskupice. The cavalcade of Pietrowice, known as “the procession of a hundred horses”, takes place on Easter Monday. After the solemn Mass celebrated in the parish church the procession starts, led by three riders. One holds a cross, the second holds a figure of Risen Christ and the third leads the singing of hymns. They are followed by other participants, some of them in carriages and others on horseback. The procession heads towards the Church of the Holy Cross, two kilometres away, where a second service takes place. The procession returns along countryside roads and when the riders reach the first buildings they accelerate and the procession turns into a race.



Easter Monday

CATHOLIC





Easter

CHRISTIAN

Misteria Paschalia Festival in Krakow

Misteria Paschalia is one of the most important European festivals dedicated to early music. It is the result of the carefully thought out programme and cohesive idea of presenting music connected to the Holy Week and Easter, performed by acknowledged masters and outstanding interpreters of the historical trend. Thanks to the efforts of the organisers, a unique repertoire is presented here, in this new or especially prepared projects for Misteria Paschalia, e.g. Lachrimae Caravaggio and Jérusalem Jordi Savall, and the reconstruction made by Fabio Biondi of Francesco Nicola Fago's oratorio *Il faraone sommerso*. The concerts are held in several different venues: the Krakow Philharmonic, the Krakow's Old Market Square, St. Francis of Assisi's Church (and other churches in Krakow) and one special concert inside St. Kinga's Chapel, a UNESCO World Heritage site located deep underground in Wieliczka Salt Mine. Don't miss it.

www.biurofestivalowe.pl | www.misteriapaschalia.com

Concerts are held in several different venues, including St. Kinga's Chapel, a UNESCO World Heritage site located deep underground in Wieliczka Salt Mine.



Krakow – the Sanctuary of Divine Mercy in Łagiewniki

The chapel where St Faustina Kowalska prayed before the sacred picture of the Merciful Jesus was named a shrine in 1992. Pope John Paul II later called Łagiewniki the capital of worship of the Divine Mercy and he personally consecrated the new church erected between 1997 and 2002. A modern two-level basilica with an ellipsoid body and a 77-metre tower has been built. The miraculous image of Merciful Jesus is placed in the high altar, in the upper part. It is a copy of the proper painting by Eugeniusz Kazimirowski, which is kept in the Church of the Holy Spirit in Vilnius. The lower section of the church holds a central chapel housing the relics of St Faustina along with several side chapels. In a free-standing Chapel of Adoration, the wonderful stained glass windows that reach from the floor to the ceiling are designed to facilitate concentration.



Sunday after Easter

CATHOLIC



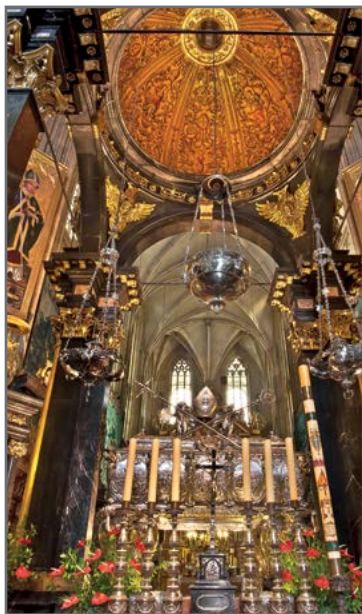


May

CATHOLIC

Krakow – procession of St Stanislaus at Skalka

The hill at Skalka was the place where St Stanislaus of Szczepanów was martyred by the knights of Bolesław the Bold in 1079. The hagiographic account of the bishop's life describes the miracle reintegration of his body. It was seen as a symbolic prophecy of reunion of the country. The remains of St Wojciech, the patron saint who shares patronage over Poland with St Stanislaus, are kept in Wawel, but every year on the Sunday in the week of the solemnity of St Stanislaus, a procession passes through the streets of Krakow with the relics of the saints. The Church of St Michael Archangel and Stanislaus was built between 1733 and 1751 and in the side altar dedicated to St Stanislaus there is a trunk where, according to legend, the martyr's body was quartered and a portion of the stairs were stained with his blood. The pond in the courtyard was timbered in the 17th century, and in the next century a figure of St Stanislaus was placed there and enclosed with a decorative gate. This is the so-called Holy Water Font of Poland which was visited by the monarchs on the day that preceded their coronation. The crypt below the church houses the National Pantheon which holds the remains of eminent Poles.



Gniezno — tomb of St Wojciech

The Cathedral of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Gniezno is the oldest shrine in Poland and it has been home to the relics of St Wojciech for over a thousand years. The saint is the patron of the country and was canonised in 999. The body of the first martyr bishop of Poland was brought back from Prussia by Bolesław the Brave. The relics are under a canopy in a beautiful reliquary dating back to 1662, where a silver coffin holds the remains of the saint in a 12th-century cedar box. The famous bronze doors of the cathedral, which are the largest Romanesque artefact in Poland, were cast in around 1175 during the reign of Mieszko the Old. They depict eighteen scenes of the life and the martyrdom of St Wojciech.



23rd April

CATHOLIC





27th April

CATHOLIC

Wadowice — canonisation of St John Paul II

The home town of St John Paul II is an important pilgrimage destination. Pilgrims head to the shrine of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, and the shrine of St Joseph, as well as to the museum dedicated to the Polish Pope. On the 20th of June 1920 Karol Wojtyła was baptised in the parish church at a beautiful baroque baptismal font. 79 years later he returned as Pope to crown the miraculous painting of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, in front of which he prayed as a child. In the shrine to St Joseph “Na Górcze”, under the custody of Barefoot Carmelites, there is a plaque that commemorates the fact that Karol Wojtyła received the scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. As a young man, the future Pope came to pray in front of image of St Joseph, the patron of the friars, which he also crowned personally in 2004. At the family home where Karol Wojtyła was born on the 18th of May 1920, by the Virgin Mary’s Offertory Minor Basilica, a biographical museum has been established.



Licheń Stary – Shrine to Our Lady

The Sanctuary of Our Lady of Sorrows of Licheń, the Queen of Poland surprises visitors with its size and modern architecture and is referred to by many as post-modernist due to the numerous influences from famous churches of the world. The story of the shrine dates back to the first half of the 19th century, when local cowherd Mikołaj Sikatka had an apparition of the Virgin Mary while he was praying in front of an image of Our Lady hung on a pine in the forest near Grąblin. According to the Virgin Mary's request a church was soon erected and the miraculous effigy was moved there. In the light of growing veneration of the image, the church soon turned out to be too small, but building a large shrine was not possible until the next century. The bold architectural design by Barbara Bielecka was implemented between 1994 and 2004. The form and interior are inspired by the Polish national style (incorporating ornamental elements with wheat field motif, Polish flowers and traditional clothes and ornaments). The miraculous image, crowned in 1967, depicts the sorrowful Virgin Mary with partially closed eyes.



*1st May – anniversary
of the first revelation*

CATHOLIC



*The miraculous
image, crowned
in 1967,
depicts
the sorrowful
Virgin Mary
with partially
closed eyes.*



Jorcajt Remu

JEWISH

Remuh Synagogue and cemetery in Krakow

On the eastern side of Szeroka Street in the centre of Krakow's Kazimierz quarter, the city's largest Jewish monuments can be found. This is the Remuh Synagogue and cemetery, dating back to the second half of the 16th century. The cemetery was founded in 1551 and holds the remains of eminent representatives of the Jewish community: rabbis, scholars and doctors. Two designs of gravestones can be seen: unique trapezoid shaped sarcophagi and tombstones in the form of stand-alone slabs. Jewish pilgrimages from Israel and the United States visit the grave of Moses Isserles, a Rabbi of Krakow who was known as The Rema (1525–1572). He authored the commentary to the code of everyday Jewish life, *Shulchan Aruch*. Each religious Ashkenazi Jew lives according to the rules found in the text.



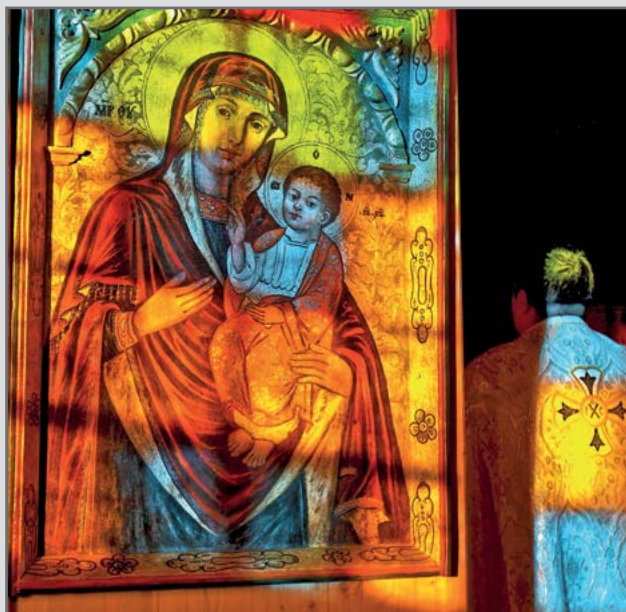
Olchowiec — Lemko kermesz

Every year in May a Greek Catholic church fete known as *kermesz* takes place in Olchowiec, a village in the Low Beskids that has long had a population made up mainly of Lemko people. Services are celebrated in a small wooden church of Translation of the Relics of St Nicolas from Myra to Bari. On the first day of the feast a service is also held in the nearby cemetery. Joyful festivities begin after the first religious ceremonies with an evening bonfire, where a band plays Lemko tunes and everybody sings. On the second day Lemko exiles, mainly from Lower Silesia, come to the solemn Divine Liturgy. Afterwards the celebration moves to the square in front of the fire station with a stage for artistic performances and food stalls. Until now the *kermesz* has not been commercialised and it successfully fulfils its social role, which is particularly important for a minority group which had been dispersed during a time of persecution.



May

EASTERN ORTHODOX





25 *kislew*

JEWISH

Krakow — Hanukkah

Hanukkah, which in English translates as Renovation or Consecration, is known as the Festival of Lights. It is celebrated for 8 days following the 25th day of the month of Kislev, according to the Hebrew calendar. The feast commemorates victory of the Maccabees over the army of Hellenistic Syria and the resumption of worship in the Temple. Over a period of eight days oil lamps or candles are lit on a special candelabrum known as a menorah, adding one light each day. The custom commemorates a miracle that occurred after the restoration of the Temple. The menorah burned for eight days, though the amount of ritually-purified oil had not been sufficient for even half a day. According to custom Hanukkah dishes should be fried in olive oil or vegetable oil; in Poland potato pancakes were traditionally eaten. Children receive gifts for the occasion and these used to be small amounts of cash, the so-called *chanuke geld*, or Hanukkah money; today the custom is similar to that of giving Christmas presents.

*On Hanukkah
Day, children
receive gifts for
the occasion
— small amounts
of cash called
chanuke geld.*



Piekary Śląskie — men's pilgrimage

Pilgrimages to the miraculous image of Our Lady of Piekary Śląskie date back to the 17th century. The effigy in the local church became well known thanks to the story that the Virgin Mary had interceded when she heard the prayers of the residents of Tarnowskie Góry who had fallen victim to a plague. The miraculous properties of the icon were confirmed by the church hierarchy after a dangerous epidemic in Bohemia had ceased, apparently due to the presence of the effigy in that country. Our Lady of Piekary Śląskie is visited every year by the so-called class pilgrimages, segregated by gender according to the local practice. Females come to the shrine on the first Sunday following the 15th of August while males visit on the last Sunday of May. The Calvary of Piekary (*Kalwaria Piekarska*), also within the shrine area, is visited by worshippers during their pilgrimage.



Last Sunday of May

CATHOLIC





June

MULTICULTURAL

Łódź of Four Cultures Festival

Poland's largest interdisciplinary cultural project which idea refers to the coexistence of four cultures in the nineteenth-century Łódź. The traces of the mixture of Polish, Jewish, German and Russian influences are evident in every corner of Łódź, present in the very tissue of the city and the mentality of people, and history.

The festival's aims are to show the way to the peaceful coexistence of many nations and reinforce the cultural ties between Poland and other countries. Music, theatre, circus, film and visual arts are the bridge between cultures. The festival consists of a series of concerts, exhibitions, spectacles, reviews and panel discussions held in the Old Market, Schiller's Passage, European Institute, the "Łódź Kaliska" Pub, as well as in some other places of the city of Łódź. The Four Cultures Festival is held annually, at the turn of August and September.

www.centrumdialogu.com | www.4kultury.pl



Krzeszów — Our Lady of Grace

The Krzeszów shrine certainly deserves the title of the European Pearl of Baroque. The outstanding Basilica of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a work by the most celebrated Silesian artists such as Neunherz, Brokoff and Dorazil, is not only a place which is important for those paying homage to the Virgin Mary, but also holds the mausoleum of the medieval Dukes of Świdnica, who were part of the Piast dynasty. The structure of the shrine has an impressive facade which is richly decorated with sculptures and characteristic corrugated lines. Towers reaching above 70 metres are crowned with gigantic tented roofs, more than 23 metres tall. The miraculous image of Our Lady of Grace, placed in the high altar, shows the Virgin Mary with the Infant Jesus, holding a Gospel scroll. The image probably originates from the 15th century, although the first information on the image dates back to the 14th century. It is a small picture (60 x 37.5 cm) and it has been enhanced by placing it within a silver decorative frame under a gold canopy, from which a colourful fabric has been draped. Many pilgrims visit the shrine on feasts associated with the Virgin Mary, especially around the 13th to 15th August.



*2nd June, anniversary
of the coronation of the icon*

CATHOLIC





25th June

CATHOLIC

Gostyń – Święta Góra – the feast of Mystical Rose

Święta Góra in Gostyń is one of the most famous shrines to the Virgin Mary in the Greater Poland region. The hill, 1.5km from the town, was a place of worship even in heathen times. The first Christian chapel was built here in the 15th century. It housed an image of Our Lady with the Infant Jesus bearing a rose in his hand, with a panorama of Gostyń in the background. The shrine grew owing to Adam Konarzewski, a local magnate who financed the construction of the church in the latter half of the 17th century in gratitude for what he believed to be a miraculous return to health. He also contributed to the foundation of the first Polish Congregation of the Oratory of St Philip Neri. Konarzewski did not live to see the construction of the church completed as he died from the injuries he suffered when he fell from the scaffoldings. His vow to the Virgin Mary was fulfilled by his widow, Zofia née Opalińska, who involved Italian architects in the project. The magnificent Baroque church is distinguished by an impressive dome, one of the largest in Poland.

The magnificent Baroque church is distinguished by an impressive dome, one of the largest in Poland.



Spycimierz — flower carpets

On the day of Corpus Christi the people of Spycimierz get up at the crack of dawn. According to tradition they lay beautiful carpets of flowers for the holiday procession. To create the two-kilometre composition which surrounds the village, a 120cm-wide central belt has to be marked up first, then matrices and templates have to be laid, and finally these are filled with plants and flowers. Colourful sand and stones make up the background for the motifs. These can be flowers, hearts, religious symbols, inscriptions and sometimes even entire characters. The flower carpet creates a marvellous backdrop for the afternoon procession, and the folk costumes worn by the ladies and the young girls who spread flowers add beauty to the event.



Corpus Christi

CATHOLIC





Ca. 28th June

CATHOLIC

Kashubian pilgrimages on fishing boats

The Maritime Pilgrimage of Fishermen, which has been taking place on the Gulf of Puck since 1981, is the only Polish pilgrimage of its kind. It takes place on the 28th of June to celebrate the feast of St Peter and St Paul, the patron saints of the parish church in Puck. On that morning a few dozen fishing boats, yachts and other vessels, all decorated with flowers, sail on the gulf. The fishermen of Puck meet their colleagues from Kuźnica and after a common prayer on the sea they sail together to the small port by the church of St Peter and St Paul, where a solemn Mass is celebrated. Occasionally there are fishing boat pilgrimages to Swarzewo on the coast of the Gulf of Puck and these used to take place on a regular basis. The church situated there is an important centre of Marian devotion due to a miraculous figurine of the Virgin Mary Queen of the Polish Sea, also known as the Patroness of Fishermen. Two church fetes are celebrated in Swarzewo: Our Lady of the Prairies on the Sunday after the 16th of July and the Birthday of Our Lady on the Sunday after the 8th of September.



Jewish Culture Festival in Krakow

One of the most interesting and greatest Jewish festivals worldwide organized since 1988 in Kazimierz – district of Krakow that for centuries has been religious, cultural and scientific center of this nation. Every year the most prominent representatives of Jewish culture and art (mainly from United States, Israel and Europe) meet people from all over the world who are fascinated by the unique customs and culture. All participants have fun and get to know each other through movies, dance, literature, exhibitions, lectures, meetings with authors, music and traditional kosher cuisine. Exhibitions and vernissages allow visitors to explore the work of the most respected artists such as Felix Muszyński. Theater performances show the audience the richness of Jewish tradition (such as “Fiddler on the Roof”). The visitors have also a chance to learn traditional Jewish dance (freylachs, horas, bulgar) or listen to Klezmer music (unique melodies of the classic weddings from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries). The festival culminates in a unique concert “Shalom on Szeroka Street”, also called the Jewish Woodstock.

www.jewishfestival.pl



June/July

JEWISH





All year

JEWISH

jewishmuseum.org.pl/en

Warsaw – Museum of the History of Polish Jews

The Museum of the History of Polish Jews is the largest contemporary cultural institution dedicated to Jewish affairs. It is situated in Muranów – at the very heart of the former Jewish district. The idea was initiated by the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland. Once it had been popularised in Poland and abroad, design works commenced in 1995. In 2005, the institution was officially founded under the honorary auspices of the President of the Republic of Poland. In 2012, the museum building designed by Rainer Mahlamäki, a Finnish architect from Lahdelma & Mahlamäki Oy designer studio in Helsinki, was opened to the public. The spectacular facility, awarded with numerous prizes for architecture, has the form of a glass cube with concrete interiors made of steel pipes coated with concrete. What impresses in particular is the high hall resembling a ravine, which should invoke crossing the Red Sea by Jews. The museum is addressed to the Polish public, as well as to over 100,000 Jews who come to Poland each year to search for their roots. It is intended not only to promote Jewish culture in Poland, but also to open a new chapter in our relations, marked by empathy and understanding.



Kodeń – Our Lady of Guadalupe

The history of Our Lady of Kodeń, the Mother of Unity is related to a surprising story from the 17th century. The miraculous effigy of Our Lady of Kodeń, which is venerated in Kodeń was stolen by the local magnate Mikołaj Sapieha from a private chapel of the Pope in 1631. Sapieha's plan was to create a shrine in Kodeń that would compete with the Gate of Dawn in Vilnius. He ignored the resulting ex-communication and the Pope's attempts at regaining the icon by way of negotiation; he eventually was granted forgiveness. The painting came from Spain and is known there as *Madonna de Guadalupe*. It depicts Virgin Mary with Infant Jesus, carrying a sceptre and dressed in a royal robe, and with a gigantic aureole in the background. In the Middle Ages a legend arose that claimed that the author of the icon was none other than St Augustine. He was supposed to have painted an image of the Virgin Mary that had previously been sculpted by St Luke.



2nd July

CATHOLIC





Easter; 13th August

CATHOLIC

Kalwaria Pałacowska – Shrine to Christ's Passion and Our Lady

The shrine in Kalwaria Pałacowska, sometimes referred to as the Jerusalem of the East, was created in the 18th century as a Calvary complex. While none of the 28 chapels, created thanks to the work of Andrzej Maksymilian Fredro, are still standing today, the annual pilgrimages on the Path of the Passion of Our Lord have survived. Devotion to the Virgin Mary at the site has grown equally strong with the passage of time, due to the miraculous powers attributed to an image of Our Lady. It is said that the figure was miraculously saved and brought to the Przemyśl area from the monastery in Kamieniec Podolski, where it had been desecrated by the Turks. The Paths of Our Lady become the scene for the Marian services marking the Funeral and Assumption of Our Lady on the 13th of August.



Częstochowa – Sanctuary of the Black Madonna on Jasna Góra

The most important shrine to the Virgin Mary in Poland is crowded with pilgrims, particularly on 14th and 15th August when pilgrimages from all around Poland arrive. Millions of pilgrims come to Jasna Góra every year to pray in front of the miraculous image of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa. Częstochowa is not only a place of veneration of the Virgin Mary, but also a national symbol renowned for the defence during the Swedish Deluge. The image of the Virgin Mary, crowned as the Queen of Poland on the 8th of September 1717, had been brought by Duke Vladislaus of Opole from Bełz in 1348. The painting depicts the Virgin Mary with Infant Jesus painted according to Byzantine convention known as *Hodegetria*. The characteristic cuts on the cheek were for centuries regarded as evidence of desecration by the Hussites in 1430. According to the recent research however, these marks should be considered an integral part of the icon. Another legend associated with the image points to St Luke as the author of the work; he is supposed to have painted it on boards from a table that belonged to the Virgin Mary.



15th August

CATHOLIC



Święta Lipka – the feast of Our Lady of the Herbs

Święta Lipka, situated on the border of Warmia and Masuria, was known as a pilgrimage destination as early as the 14th century. The beginnings of the shrine are related to the legend of the miraculous release of a prisoner who had been unjustly sentenced to death. The convict reportedly sculpted a figurine of the Virgin Mary as he waited for his execution and prayed continuously. After he regained freedom, he hung it on the first tree by the road to Reszel. Soon people began coming in front of the image suspended on the lime tree and were granted other blessings. The 17th-century Basilica of the Visitation is an outstanding example of Vilnius Baroque style. There are two objects of veneration: the sculpture of the Heavenly Mother on the lime tree which has been placed in a niche in the façade, and the painting of Our Lady of Snows, known as *Świętolipska* in the high altar. The trunk of the “holy” lime tree is situated on the left hand side. The shrine is visited by a great number of the faithful on the feast of Our Lady of the Herbs on the 15th of August.



15th August

CATHOLIC



The Podlasie Tatar Trail

The Podlasie Tatar Trail links several villages and towns associated with the culture and religion of Muslim Tatars. The route is divided into two parts: the Big Tatar Trail (54 km – marked in green) and the Small Tatar Trail (19 km – marked in blue). The highlights of the trail are: two mosques (still in operation), Tatars' cemetery (Mizars), Orthodox church of St Alexander Nevsky, the neoclassical St Anthony Catholic Church in Sokolka. In Kruszyniany the tourists can make a stop in a Tatar farm, spend night in Tatar yurt, or have a taste of traditional Tatar dishes, which received many awards in various culinary competitions. Each year in August the Festival of the Culture and Traditions of the Polish Tatars is organized. It consists of culinary, dance, horseback riding and archery workshops.

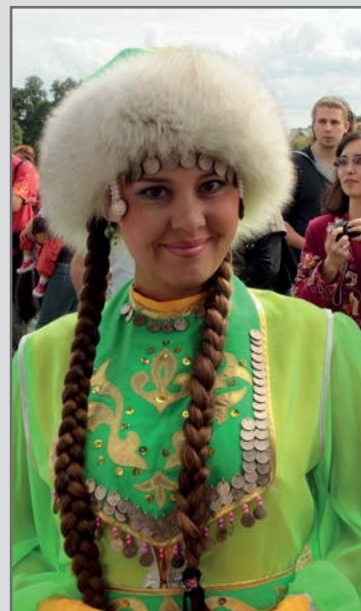
One of the main assets of the Tatar Trail are good accommodation facilities and tourist infrastructure including bike, kayak and quad rental services and horse riding centre. Visitors have also a possibility to go on a trip with a guide, or participate in culinary workshop organized by local farmer's wives' association.

www.szlaktatarski.pl



Ramadan Bajram

MUSLIM





End of Ramadan

MUSLIM

Kurban Bajram – Bohoniki/Kruszyniany

Once a year, Tatars from all around Poland come to a small village of Bohoniki in Podlasie for their most important holiday, *Kurban Bayram* – the Feast of the Sacrifice (Arab Id al-Adha). It is celebrated at the end of Ramadan to commemorate Abraham's sacrifice of his son Ishmail to God. Muslims consider Ishmail, son of Abraham and his slave Hagar, the forefather of all Arabs, just as Jews believe they descend from the younger son Isaac. Four days of celebrations are filled with religious ceremonies which take place in a small wooden mosque, accompanied by abundant feasts. Traditional Tatar dishes are served. The most important part of the ceremony is the ritual slaughter of an ox. This follows the solemn morning prayers which commemorate the sacrifice that Abraham was commanded by God to offer, and His grace as He ordered him to replace Ishmail with a lamb. After the skin has been removed, the meat is divided among the faithful.



Grabarka — pilgrimages to the holy mountain

Pilgrims from Poland and Eastern Europe come to the Holy Mountain of Grabarka for the feast of Spas Izbawnik, celebrated at the site on the day of the Transfiguration of Our Lord. Pilgrims pray continuously for two days and one night. Some walk to the top on their knees and then observe the ritual of making three circuits of the mountain in this position. Each person carries a cross which is placed in the ground in Grabarka. Some crosses are small and wooden while others are metal and a few metres in length. The crosses are traditionally decorated with a cloth or flowers and colourful ribbons, with petitions often carved onto them. Water is collected from a spring at the foot of the mountain. Those who are ill use the water to wash the ailing parts of the body, as they believe in its healing power. The wet handkerchiefs used during bathing are then left as a sign of the abandonment of suffering. The nuns who take care of Grabarka collect the handkerchiefs afterwards and burn them on a stake. Holy water is then carried home by the pilgrims in bottles.



August

EASTERN ORTHODOX



Gietrzwałd – Shrine to Our Lady; the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

The shrine in Gietrzwałd is famous as the only site of Marian apparitions approved by the Church in Poland. In 1877, between the 27th of June and the 16th of September, the Virgin Mary appeared several times to two girls, 13-year-old Justyna Szafrzyńska and 12-year-old Barbara Samulowska. According to their testimony, Our Lady asked them to say the Rosary; she also prophesied the end of religious conflicts in Warmia and blessed the spring that was there. A chapel was erected on the spot indicated by the visionaries, and a sculpture of the Virgin Mary was brought from Munich. The veneration of Our Lady had developed in Gietrzwałd before the apparitions. The local parish church holds a special painting of Our Lady of Gietrzwałd, which depicts the Mother of God and the Infant Jesus covered with a silver robe; their heads are adorned with crowns. Today pilgrims take water from a nearby spring as they believe in its healing power. The most important holiday at the shrine is the Birthday of Our Lady, the 8th of September.



8th September

CATHOLIC



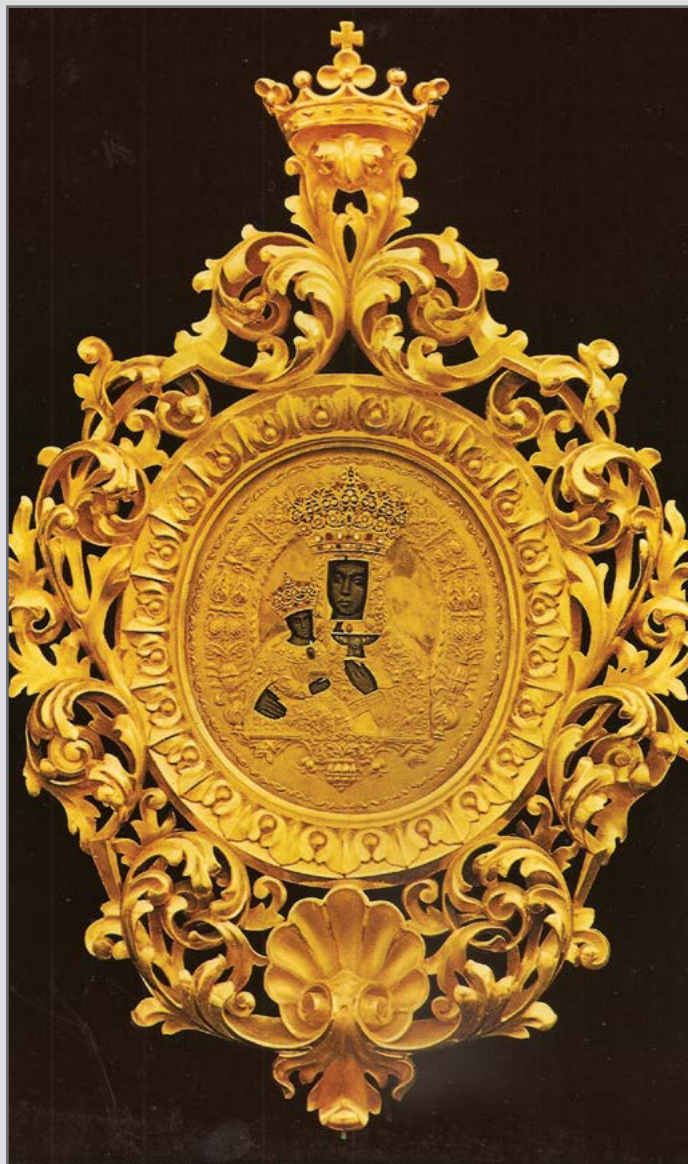
Leśna Podlaska – Shrine to Our Lady

The shrine of Our Lady of Leśna, the Patroness of Podlasie, is located next to the Monastery of the Pauline Fathers in Leśna Podlaska. The object of veneration is the effigy of the Virgin Mary in the form of a relief. It depicts the Virgin Mary with the Infant Jesus on her right arm. The legend of the miraculous appearance of the image dates back to the late 17th century, when two shepherd boys found it on a tree. It did not take long for the joyful news to spread in the area and the place started to be visited by pilgrims. In 1700, the bishop of Lusk and Brest gave his consent to the public veneration of the image. It was crowned by Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński in 1963. On the last Saturday of each month it is visited by pilgrims who come on foot from Biała Podlaska. The shrine is the place of the annual festival of Marian hymns which takes place in May.



26th September

CATHOLIC





1st November

CATHOLIC

Warsaw — graves, pańska skórka — All Saints' Day

The Feast of All Saints has been celebrated on the 1st of November since the 9th century. This tradition derives from the medieval custom of honouring the martyrs who sacrificed their life for the faith. The 2nd of November is All Souls' Day in the Catholic calendar and is the day when all the departed are remembered. People visit tombs of their relatives to burn candles and lay flowers. The custom is derived from *dziady*, a heathen holiday when the dead were said to join the living. It was believed that the souls that came to the world at that time should be given food and drink, and so groats, honey, *kutia* (a boiled grain dish) and even vodka were placed on graves. Feasts for the occasion also took place in homes, where some food would be left on the floor for the souls that wander. Nowadays in some regions of Poland, Belarus and Ukraine symbolic tokens of food are still carried to the graves. Around All Saints' Day *pańska skórka* (lord's skin), which is a homemade pink and white sweet wrapped in paper, is sold near the cemeteries of Warsaw. Such a custom was also preserved in other parts of Poland; *miodek turecki* (Turkish honey) is sold in Krakow, and *szczyпка* (slover) in Lublin.

All Souls'
Day people visit
tombs of their
relatives to burn
candles and lay
flowers.



Żuławy – Mennonite cemetery

Shortly after the Mennonite community was founded in 1539, these people had to flee persecution in the Netherlands. A large group found shelter in Żuławy Wiślane and the area was from then on known as "Little Holland". Characteristic Dutch houses, two churches (in Jezioro and Rogata) and cemeteries are the remaining traces of their presence. The cemeteries are preserved in particularly good condition, considering that they were typically located at a distance from the villages. The largest Mennonite graveyard is in the town of Stogi near Malbork; here around 90 tombstones dating back to the 19th and early 20th century have survived. They are vertical rectangular slabs crowned with tympana and bearing carved inscriptions. Religious symbols can be seen on the tombstones.



All year

PROTESTANT



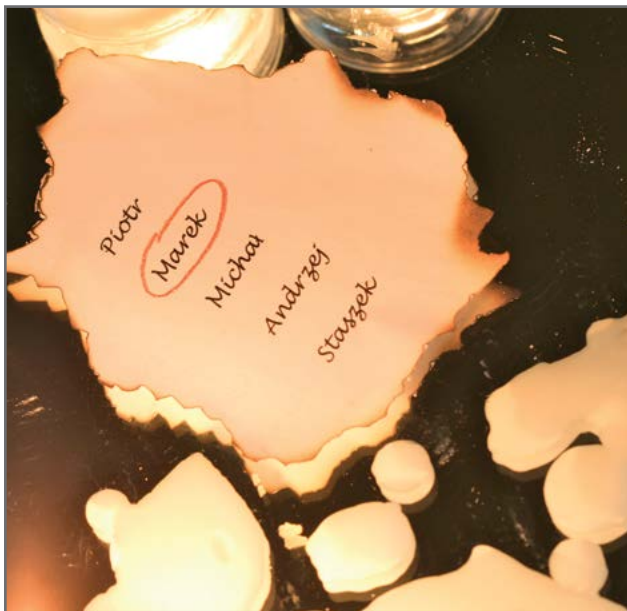


29th November

CATHOLIC

Andrzejki

Andrzejki, namely a traditional evening of fortune-telling, takes place on the night of the 29th of November, on the eve St Andrew's Day. The celebration precedes the forthcoming Advent season and it falls at the beginning of the liturgical year. The custom of *Andrzejki* is known to have been practiced in Poland as early as the 16th century. Initially it was mainly concerned with marriage and the fortune-telling was reserved exclusively for unmarried girls. The method of fortune-telling on the night of *Andrzejki* varies according to local habits. In the past, lead used to be cast onto water, while nowadays wax is used. Shapes that were obtained would serve as the basis of the fortune that would be predicted. Dreams on that night are supposed to come true and in a dream on the night of *Andrzejki* it is said that a girl can see the face of her future husband. Tradition also says that a future husband's reflection can be seen in the water in a well.



Ludźmierz near Nowy Targ – The Feast of Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

The Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Ludźmierz is believed to be the oldest one in Podhale. According to tradition, the parish was founded in 1234 and the shrine was created due to the venerated figurine of Our Lady of Ludźmierz, known as *Gaździna Podhala* (the Shepherdess of Podhale). A memorable incident occurred during the coronation of the miraculous effigy in 1963. At the time of blessing the sceptre fell out of the Virgin's hand, but fortunately it was caught by the then bishop, Karol Wojtyła. It was later seen as a prophecy that he would later be elected as a Pope. The figure is covered in a veil for the night, and its veiling and unveiling are accompanied by solemn hymns that have been specifically composed for the occasion. The shrine has a Rosary Garden which is made up of 20 chapels. There is an annual two-day church fete which takes place on the 14th and 15th of August. On the first day an evening service to Our Lady of Częstochowa (*Apel Jasnogórski*) is celebrated and it is followed by a procession with candles in honour of the Virgin Mary. There is then a Mass at midnight which involves the blessing of herbs.



8th December

CATHOLIC





24th December

CATHOLIC

Christmas Eve

Christmas Eve Supper, known as *wigilia*, is one of the most longstanding and widely cherished of Polish rituals. In the vast majority of homes, both among believers or non-believers, a formal meal is celebrated and served on the table which is covered with a white tablecloth. Hay is traditionally placed under the cloth covering the table and an extra empty place is set for an unexpected visitor. Custom dictates that there should be twelve dishes, just like the Twelve Apostles, and that the celebration should start when the first star appears. The most eagerly anticipated part of Christmas Eve, both for children and adults, is quite naturally the exchange of presents.

There are many customs and institutions related to the entire Christmas period. They include caroling or carol singing, as well as the singing of melodious seasonal songs called *pastorałki*. Traditional Nativity plays are held and the art of building Christmas cribs continues to this day, especially in the South of Poland – the Krakow cribs are particularly famous. Maybe only the custom of Christmas fortune-telling, which in the past was considered as determining the course of events for the entire coming year, has not survived.



Jaselka (Nativity plays)

The tradition of performing Christmas Nativity plays in Poland dates back at least as far as the 16th century. The name originates from old Polish word “*jasło*”, meaning “a crib”. The Nativity plays originate from the medieval plays first performed in 1223 in the Italian town of Greccio by St Francis of Assisi. In addition to the well-known biblical characters of Mary, Joseph, baby Jesus, the three kings and Herod, St Francis introduced an ox and a donkey into the shed, with prior approval from Pope Honorius. From the beginning the nativity plays have included the history of Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem and Herod’s plot. After some time static figurines were replaced with puppets, which would be voiced. Over time nativity plays were written to reflect local dialects, most often by anonymous individuals. The nativity play performed in Krakow is believed to be the most traditional one. Its scenario was written down in the early 20th century by local poet Lucjan Rydel, in his work entitled *Betlejem Polskie*, or Polish Bethlehem.



After Christmas

CATHOLIC





Żywiec Beskids – carollers

The folk custom of carolling or carol singing has survived until today in many rural parts of the country. Noisy groups of carollers in traditional costumers wander from home to home, usually between Boxing Day and the feast of the Epiphany on the 6th of January. In exchange for good wishes and doorstep performances of music, song, dance and comedy, the carollers receive gifts from their hosts. These may be Christmas treats or small amounts of money. The most popular characters for carollers to play are the devil, the grim reaper, shepherds and the three wise men. Some dress as old men or women, while animal masks are also used depicting goats, bears, horses, or the *turoń*, a mythical horned beast the. Traditionally carollers try to scare people and at the same time make them cry with laughter.

In the Beskid Mountains carollers are called *położnicy* and every year they compete in the “Żywieckie Gody” contest. Groups of carollers from the Żywiecki Beskids and Silesian Beskids take part in what is considered the oldest and the largest caroller competition. A jury marks the groups on the quality of their costumes and masks, but most of all on their performing skills.

After Christmas

CATHOLIC



Publisher:

Polska Organizacja Turystyczna/Polish Tourist Organisation

ul. Chałubińskiego 8

00-613 Warszawa

e-mail: pot@pot.gov.pl

phone: +(4822) 536 70 70

www.pot.gov.pl

Writer: Adam Dylewski

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Branches of the Polish Tourist Organisation Abroad



• AUSTRIA	• Vienna	tel. +(43-1) 524 71 91 12	fax 524 71 91 20	www.polen.travel	info.at@polen.travel
• BELGIUM	• Brussels	tel. +(32-2) 740 06 20	fax 742 37 35	www.polen.travel	info.be@polen.travel
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