Poland

Poland, officially the Republic of Poland, is a country located in Central Europe.

Poland is the 9th largest country in Europe by land area. The country area is 312,685 sq km. It shares a border with seven countries: Russia, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Germany. It also has a coast line along the Baltic Sea.

With a population of approximately 38.5 million inhabitants, Poland has the eighth-largest population in Europe and the fifth-largest in the European Union.

The capital city of Poland is Warsaw. It is also the country’s largest city. Other major cities include Kraków, Łódź, Wrocław, Poznań, Gdańsk, and Szczecin.
Flag

The National Flag of Poland consists of two horizontal stripes of equal width, the upper one white and the lower one red.

A variant of the flag with the national coat of arms in the middle of the white fess is legally reserved for official use abroad and at sea.

The two colours, white and red, are defined in the Polish constitution as the national colours.

The national flag was officially adopted in 1919. Since 2004, Polish Flag Day is celebrated on 2 May.
Population

People from Poland are Polish (adjective). They are also identified as Poles (noun).

14.83% of people living in Poland are aged 0-14 years.
9.8% of people living in Poland are aged 15-24 years.
43.33% of people living in Poland are aged 25-54 years.
13.32% of people living in Poland are aged 55-64 years.
18.72% of people living in Poland are aged 65 years and over.
City Life

60% of the population in Poland live in towns and cities.

Warsaw is the capital city of Poland, and it is also the biggest city in the country.

The population is concentrated in the southern area around Krakow and the central area around Warsaw and Lodz, with an extension to the northern coastal city of Gdansk.

In order of population the biggest cities in Poland are:

- Warsaw (capital) - 1,790,000,000
- Kraków - 769,000
- Łódź - 696,700
- Wrocław - 638,700
- Poznań - 540,400
- Gdańsk - 582,200
- Szczecin - 404,500

Can you find these cities on the map?

Choose one of these cities to find out more about.
Architecture

Created through its complex history, Poland has a mixture of architectural styles including stunning medieval architecture, remnants of WWII and its devastation, and castles and palaces in every corner of the country.

Krakow. One of the oldest cities in Poland, Krakow was already inhabited back in the 7th century. Luckily the city escaped most of the WWII destruction that fell on other Polish cities, therefore Krakow’s Old Town centre still retains its stunning medieval architecture.

The Wavel Castle and the historic district of Kazimierz — also known as the Old Jewish Quarter - are found in Krakow.

Warsaw. Poland's capital was left in ruins after WWII — almost 85 percent of its buildings had been destroyed. Once the war ended, the city embarked on a massive effort to reconstruct its historic centre using the original plans. As a result, the Baroque and Renaissance merchant houses you see today are perfect replicas of the originals.
The Legend of Lech, Czech and Rus

Over a thousand years ago, there were three Slav brothers wandering with their tribes through the lands of forests and fields stretching between two large rivers, Oder in the west and Dnieper in the east, in search of the best place to settle.

One day, after months of weary travel, a beautiful sight appeared before their eyes: on a hill there stood a huge oak tree with a nest between its branches. From the nest a mighty white eagle soared into the sky. Lech was amazed by the view and considered it as a sign from the gods for him and his people. He decided to settle there and chose the white eagle with its wings spread wide against the sunset sky for their emblem. Soon they built a town which they called Gniezno (a “nest” in the Slavic language). The town became the capital of their nation and the first capital of Poland.

Then the three brothers separated: Czech decided to go south and Rus chose the east where they started their own countries.
History

Poland has had a long and rich history. Over the past thousand years the country has defended its freedom and sovereignty on numerous occasions. As a result, Poland’s borders have changed many times over the centuries. Its present borders were set after World War II ended in 1945.

Poland’s first civilization dates back to about 2000 B.C., but it was only in A.D. 966 that the region’s tribes united under the Slavic chief Mieszko, the first prince of Polska.

In the late 1500s, Poland and Lithuania joined together and formed a large, powerful commonwealth with elected kings. But by the late 1700s, Poland had been weakened by a series of wars with its neighbours. In 1795, it was conquered and divided up among Russia, Prussia (now Germany), and Austria. Poland did not exist as a country for the next 123 years.

In 1918, after World War I, Poland was restored as a country. But 21 years later, Germany and the Soviet Union attacked. Their plan was to divide Poland between them. This marked the beginning of World War II and led to nearly 45 years of Soviet occupation of the country.

In 1980, Polish workers began protesting communist rule under the union banner of ‘Solidarity’. In 1989, after nearly a decade of clashes between the government and Solidarity activists, democratic elections were held, and the country was renamed the Republic of Poland. In 1990, the Polish Communist Party was dissolved. Poland joined the European Union (EU) in May 2004.
National Symbol

Poland's national symbol is the White Eagle.

It is represented on the national coat of arms. It is a stylized white eagle with a golden beak and talons, and wearing a golden crown, on a red shield.

According to legend, the White Eagle emblem originated when Poland's legendary founder Lech saw a white eagle's nest. When he looked at the bird, a ray of sunshine from the red setting sun fell on its wings, so they appeared tipped with gold, the rest of the eagle was pure white. He was delighted and decided to settle there and placed the eagle on his emblem. He also named the place Gniezdo (currently Gniezno) from the Polish word gniazdo ("nest").
The Tatra Mountains, part of the Carpathian mountain chain in eastern Europe, create a natural border between Slovakia and Poland. Both Slovak and Polish sides are protected as national parkland and are popular destinations for winter and summer sports.

The peak of Rysy in the Tatra Mountains is the highest point in Poland at 2,499m (8,199ft). Outside of this mountain range most of Poland is very flat.

The Tatras are home to a variety of wildlife including the Tatra chamois, marmot, lynx and bears.
National Days

Constitution Day – 3rd May
Constitution Day is a Polish national and public holiday. The holiday celebrates the declaration of the Constitution of 3 May 1791. Festivities date back to the Duchy of Warsaw early in the 19th century, but it became an official holiday only in 1919 in the Second Polish Republic.

Corpus Christi – 9th Thursday after Easter
Corpus Christi (Boże Ciało) is a Catholic feast celebrated as a public holiday in Poland. It is the day when the Catholic Church commemorates the practice of Holy Eucharist, or Communion. Large groups of people take part in outdoor processions in many villages, towns and cities in Poland. The processions include children dressed in white who scatter flower petals on the streets. Some of the procession’s participants stop to pray at temporary shrines. Many homes are decorated with religious icons during Corpus Christi.

Independence Day – 11th November
National Independence Day (Polish: Narodowe Święto Niepodległości) is a national day in Poland to commemorate the anniversary of the restoration of Poland’s sovereignty as the Second Polish Republic in 1918 from the German, Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires. Celebrations across the country will include firework displays, concerts and parades. It is also a time for family reunions. Independence Day is an official public holiday in Poland, so schools, banks, government offices, and most private businesses are closed.
Religion

Although there is no official religion in Poland, it is one of the most religious countries in Europe. Poland is also one of the most Catholic countries in the world with the Roman Catholic Church as the biggest church in Poland. In a 2015 census 92.9% of the population identified themselves as Roman Catholic.

Roman Catholicism is very important in the lives of many Poles, and the Catholic Church in Poland enjoys social prestige and political influence. Its members regard it as a central part of Polish heritage and culture.

The rest of the population consists mainly of Eastern Orthodox, various Protestant churches and Jehovah’s Witnesses. There are about 55,000 Greek Catholics in Poland. Other religions practiced in Poland, by less than 0.1% of the population, include Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism.
Money - Złoty

The Polish złoty is the official currency of Poland. It is pronounced zwo-ti. The word złoty is a masculine form of the Polish adjective 'golden.'

The złoty is subdivided into 100 grosz (gr).

As a result of inflation in the early 1990s, the currency underwent redenomination. Thus, on 1 January 1995, 10,000 old złoty (PLZ) became one new złoty (PLN). Since then, the currency has been relatively stable.

Though Poland is a member of the European Union, nearly 60% of Poles are strongly against replacing the złoty with the euro.
Traditional Costume

National costumes of Poland (Polish: stroje ludowe) vary by region. They are not worn in daily life but at folk festivals, folk weddings, religious holidays, harvest festivals and other special occasions. The costumes may reflect region and sometimes social or marital status.
Agnieszka Radwanska

In 2012, Radwanska starred at Wimbledon to become the first Polish player in the modern era to reach the final of a Grand Slam. She lost the match to American Serena Williams.

Over her tennis career she won 20 career singles titles, two doubles titles, and achieved a career-high singles ranking of world No. 2 on 9 July 2012. She retired from professional tennis in November 2018.
Marie Curie

Born on 7 November 1867 in Warsaw, Marie Curie went on to become a physicist and chemist who conducted pioneering research on radioactivity.

She was a woman who made history and who changed the world. Marie Curie discovered a new element, radium, which it was found could be used to fight cancer. Working with physicist Henri Becquerel they developed the theory of "radioactivity"—a term she coined. During World War I she developed mobile radiography units to provide X-ray services to field hospitals.

She was the first woman to win a Nobel Prize, the first and the only woman to win the Nobel Prize twice, and the only person to win the Nobel Prize in two scientific fields. She was the first woman to become a professor at the University of Paris in 1906.
Pope John Paul II was the head of the Catholic Church and sovereign of the Vatican City State from 1978 until his death in 2005. He was the second-longest-serving pope in modern history.

He attempted to improve the Catholic Church's relations with Judaism, Islam, and the Eastern Orthodox Church.