

EXPLORE!

BEST SELLER

Highlights of Poland to Lithuania
22 days

Poland - Trip code KWR



Highlights of Poland to Lithuania

Explore the historical highlights of Poland, Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania on this three week holiday. We travel mostly between the cities by train, passing through glorious countryside, before immersing ourselves in medieval buildings, historical squares, chic pavement cafes and micro-breweries. We also discover the impressive UNESCO-Listed Wieliczka Salt Mines and Nesvizh and Mir Castles, have the opportunity to visit Auschwitz and see the many monasteries and catacombs at Lavra. In the health resort of Druskininkai we'll have the opportunity to relax and go on lakeside walks, hire a bike or soak in one of 20 different bath houses.

Trip highlights

- ★ **Walking tours** - Discover historic Krakow, Warsaw, Wroclaw, Lviv, Lutsk, Kiev, Minsk and Vilnius
- ★ **Wieliczka Salt Mines** - Marvel at the amazing salt sculptures and impressive ballroom
- ★ **Nesvizh and Mir Castles** - Visit these two impressive UNESCO World Heritage Sites
- ★ **Druskininkai** - Chance to go on lakeside walks, hire a bike or visit one of 20 bath houses
- ★ **Lavra** - Explore this ornately decorated monastic complex best known for its expansive catacombs

ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

Standard

Our standard, mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service, often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en suite facilities.

TRIP PACE:**Moderate**

Moderate pace tours are ideal if you want a holiday which combines exciting activities and experiences with plenty of time to relax and unwind. Typically you'll be active and busy for part of the day but then also have time to rest and recharge your batteries.

GROUP SIZE:**12 - 18**

Maximum group size ranges from between 6 to 20 people, depending on the type of trip, the transport and accommodation used and activities included. We rarely have groups that are smaller than five or six people and the average is 12 people plus an Explore leader.

Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

DAY 1 - Join trip Warsaw

Arrive in Warsaw-Chopin Airport and then check-in to our hotel. Poland's capital is a wonderfully dynamic and modern city, but reminders of its turbulent history are easy to uncover. After World War II around 85% of its buildings were left in ruins; however, the city has been impressively rebuilt and restored to its former glory with the Old Town or Stare Miasto as its centrepiece. Buskers, street artists and open air cafes give the area a unique energy and atmosphere, making a visit that little bit more special.



Accommodation: Hotel MDM (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 2 - Explore Warsaw Old Town; chance to visit Wilanow Palace

This morning we head out on foot to explore the Old Town district. With cobblestone streets, historic squares and Gothic churches, it's easy to understand why the Old Town is top of every visitor's 'must see' list. We take in all the main sites including the 17th century rust red Royal Castle and the Lazienki Palace or 'palace on the water' with its attractive architecture and lush gardens.

There are several options for your free afternoon; Warsaw has plenty to keep you occupied if you wish to continue exploring the city centre independently. Alternatively, you can visit the splendid 17th century Wilanow Palace, often referred to as the 'Polish Versailles', or the fascinating Museum of the History of Polish Jews, which was voted as the European Museum of the Year in 2016. Another popular choice is the Warsaw 1944 Rising Museum, which is a tribute to the local residents who fought for their independence against German occupation. One of the exhibits here features a replica of a Liberator B-24J bomber aircraft.



Accommodation: Hotel MDM (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 3 - Train to Wroclaw; afternoon city tour and gnome spotting

The morning train takes us to the 'Venice of Poland', Wroclaw, a charming old city built on 12 islands surrounded by canals and rivers. More than 120 bridges link the islands which are adorned with delightful buildings reflecting the city's past. You'll see Bohemian, Hungarian, Austrian, Prussian and German influences as the city has been coveted by all of these empires throughout its long history. Keep your eyes peeled and after a while you'll start to notice something popping up in doorways, alleyways and on street corners; perhaps Wroclaw's most famous inhabitants, Gnomes! An important part of Polish folk law they also became associated with the protest movements of the 1980's and a symbol of resistance to communist control.



Accommodation: Piast Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 4 - Free time in Wroclaw; option to visit the Panorama of Raclawice

Today you'll have free time in Wroclaw or you may choose to visit the Panorama of Raclawice, an enormous circular painting (more than 100 metre long) depicting the battle of Raclawice. Wroclaw is home to many small and quirky bars and micro-breweries so there are plenty of options available to quench your thirst after a day spent exploring.

Further afield you might like to join an excursion to the historic city of Zagan, which was formerly the German city of Sagan and home to the prisoner of war camp for captured allied airmen, which is famous as the location of 'The Great Escape'. It will take either 2 hours by minibus or 2.5 hours by train per way to get there. Whilst here you might like to visit the 13th century Augustine monastery and library which houses many old books and globes and is known for its whispering gallery and unusual acoustics. Alternatively you could visit the castle which was previously owned by the wealthy Bohemian Lobkowitz family or spend time discovering the charming Old Town and climb to the top of the Post-Evangelical Church Tower to get the best views over the streets below.

Instead you might like to visit Ksiaz Castle and Landscape Park, which is best known for its stunning Rococo architecture. It will take either 1 hour by minibus or by train per way to reach here. If we travel by train then we will pass near to the location of the reputed 'gold train' site where many people believe a train packed with Nazi gold from World War II was hidden in a secret tunnel that has yet to be found. At the castle you can either visit just the main fort or also the World War II tunnels which formed part of the Nazi 'Riese' complex. This 13th century castle was home to the powerful Hochbergs family, but in 1941 it was confiscated by the Nazi's and received significant damage during this time, but they also created a network of mysterious tunnel under the castle. The castle was fully restored in the 1950's to its former grandeur and today you can explore many of the rooms, terraces and gardens.



Accommodation: Piast Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 5 - Train to Krakow; explore the beautiful Old Town square

This morning's train journey sees us arriving in Krakow, Poland's capital until 1596 and still its most charming city. Dating from the 13th century, Krakow is a picture-postcard city of narrow streets, grand buildings and al-fresco cafes just begging to be explored. In the afternoon we begin to uncover the city's delights with a visit to the fabulous Rynek Glowny, Europe's largest medieval square. The square is still now very much at the heart of Krakow local life. Quirky town houses and historic buildings adorn the square with the most famous being the Sukiennice, a vast cloth hall where goods would have been sold in Medieval times, which is still in use now as a covered market. Inside you'll find vendors peddling a multitude of local wares from wooden toys to beautiful amber jewellery.



Accommodation: Hotel Vienna House Easy (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 6 - Discover the Wieliczka Salt Mines and Krakow Old Town

We start today by visiting the Wieliczka Salt Mines, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, by local train (the journey takes us around 20 minutes each way). At up to 300 metres underground we'll see a 400 year old chapel, a subterranean salt lake and chambers large enough to take the Eiffel Tower! The Chapel of Saint Kinga is the mines most spectacular feature and we will no doubt be amazed by what can be sculpted from salt. Please note that there are 350 steps down into the mine at the beginning of the tour and then a further 450 on the route through the various corridors and 20 chambers visited. The temperature underground can be much cooler than on the surface, so be sure to bring a jumper.

Back in Krakow later this afternoon we head out on foot with a local guide to explore the delightful Old Town; another UNESCO World Heritage Site! and the only major Polish city to escape the war unscathed. Many of the streets are still very much as they were hundreds of years ago with historic buildings and elegant frontages. Overlooking all this is the fairy-tale Wawel Castle and Wawel Cathedral, where past kings and queens rest in peace. We will go inside the castle which houses exquisite treasures collected by the monarchy of Poland over the years.

This evening you will have the opportunity to join a cooking class at a local restaurant where the chef will show you how to create a tantalising polish speciality.



Accommodation: Hotel Vienna House Easy (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 7 - Chance to go to Auschwitz; visit the Kazimierz District and try traditional Jewish food

This morning is free for you to discover more of Krakow or you may choose to join an optional excursion to Oswiecim, the site of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camp; an eerie and haunting place that drives home the terrible atrocities which took place here during World War II.

This afternoon we visit the UNESCO listed Jewish Podgorze District, the location of the Jewish Ghetto in World War II and the setting for the film 'Schindler's List'. Along the way we will grab a 'zapiekanka', an open faced toasted baguette sandwich, which is a popular local fast food option. Whilst in this area you'll have the opportunity to visit the Old Synagogue, Schindler's Factory and the Museum of Jewish Life, which provide fascinating insights into the life of Krakow Jews and the war years.

In the evening we commiserate the end of a great tour with a traditional Jewish dinner accompanied by Klezmer music with its expressive melodies, said to be reminiscent of the human voice. Following dinner, if you wish to join them, your Explore Leader will take you to a few local bars and pubs to give you the chance to try the typical Polish beers and the extensive local vodka varieties.



Accommodation: Hotel Vienna House Easy (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast & Dinner

DAY 8 - Free day in Krakow; chance to walk to Liban Quarry

Today we'll meet the passengers and our new Explore Leader for the Krakow to Kiev section of our trip. Later on this afternoon your Explore Leader will be taking the new arrivals on an orientation tour of Krakow's main sights that you are welcome to join or alternatively you have the whole day free to use as you please.

For something that is a bit out of the ordinary you may like to take a walk to Liban Quarry, which is one of the least visited spots around the city centre. Here you'll find an abandoned replica of the Nazi's Plaszow Labour Camp that was built for Steven Spielberg's film 'Schindler's List' in 1992. It was constructed from the original blueprints from the actual camp and the quarry is just a few hundred metres from where it was located. The inmates of Plaszow worked in this quarry and were sadly also murdered here. It's a 25 minute walk from Krakow's Jewish District to Podgorski Nowy Cemetery and from there you follow the south eastern wall of the graveyard and there is a walkway down to the site.



Accommodation: Hotel Kazimierz III (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 9 - Free day in Krakow; chance for shopping in the Cloth Hall

Today is free for you to explore more of Krakow. You may choose to go shopping for keepsakes at the stalls and shops in the beautiful old Cloth Hall or to go upstairs to the Krakow National Museum, which houses a collection of 19th century Polish art. Whilst here you could also grab a coffee in the stylish Art Nouveau Noworolski's Cafe. Under your feet beneath the Main Square you'll find the Rynek Underground Exhibition which display artefacts from Medieval Krakow including coins, tools and figurines. Alternatively Czartoryskis is the oldest museum in the country and is home to a priceless collection of art, handicrafts and ancient memorabilia. The Jagiellonian University Botanical Gardens opened in 1873 and you can see over 5,000 different plant species in its gardens and greenhouses. A bit further outside of the city centre you could take a taxi to the Polish Aviation Museum, which houses a range of aircraft dating from 1910 up to the present day.



Accommodation: Hotel Kazimierz III (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 10 - Early morning bus to Lviv; walking tour of Lviv including the old quarter

This morning we depart our hotel at about 6.40am to transfer to the bus station to board our public bus for Lviv which departs at 7.30am and arrives in Lviv at 2.50pm. The public bus is modern and comfortable and there will be two restroom/refreshment stops made along the way and we'll also be given a packed breakfast to have on the bus. After being transferred to our hotel to check-in we will go on a guided walking tour. We discover the history and stunning architecture of the old quarter and along the way we will see the old market square of Ploshcha Rynok, the ornately carved exterior of Boyim Chapel, the Dominican Church and Monastery and the Citadel Inn. The inn was originally built in 1850 as a circular red fort that during World War II became a Nazi concentration camp and was known as the 'Tower of Death', but today it is now remarkably been turned into a five star hotel! We'll also see the Old Rus Quarter of the city and the High Castle, which affords great views over the city below. Lviv is home to not just one, but three different cathedrals; there's the Latin Cathedral, Armenian Cathedral and Saint George's Cathedral and they all vary greatly in style.

Lviv is the perfect spot for relaxing. In amongst the cobbled streets with their pretty red roofed buildings and tucked away courtyards you will find a variety of good cafes, bars and restaurants. Ukraine also is well known for its dumplings, which are called 'varenyky' and come with a range of different fillings such as cabbage or cheese or sweeter varieties like cherry. One dining option is the Dim Legend Restaurant that is spread over seven small floors and a roof terrace and each floor is decorated with a different theme telling the city's history through the ages. Whilst in Ukraine you should try 'nastoyanka', which is a local liqueur made from honey and herbs and comes in a selection of fruit flavours and even horse radish!



Accommodation: George Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available

DAY 11 - Free day in Lviv; chance to join a chocolate making master class

Today is free for you to further explore this picturesque city. Lviv is well known for both its beer and chocolate, so today you may choose to visit the Brewery Museum or join a chocolate making masterclass.

The Brewery Museum takes you on a journey through Ukraine and the World's beer making history and explains the differences. There will of course be the chance to try an assortment of locally brewed beers too. Next to the museum is the Robert Doms Beer House, which is a large Medieval style beer hall and restaurant where you can sample more of the local brew and perhaps their speciality dish of pork ribs in beer marinade.

At the chocolate making masterclass you can learn all about how chocolate is made and try your hand at making your own chocolate master pieces with advice from a professional chocolatier. Apparently chocolate has been produced in the city since the Middle Ages and in the 19th century it was exported to aristocracy throughout Europe. Today there is a huge variety of different flavoured chocolates, ice cream, milkshakes, cakes and more to tempt you.

Alternatively you might like to go back to some of the places we saw on our tour yesterday and venture inside or perhaps to visit Lychakiv Cemetery. This burial ground is a protected historical monument and believe it or not is one of the most popular attractions to visit in the city. Established in 1786 by the Austro-Hungarians, there are grave markers here written in Ukrainian, Russian, German, Polish, Armenian and Latin, which show how the city's rulers have changed throughout its history. In amongst the elaborately carved tombs there are also communal graves for soldiers and freedom fighters and simple communist graves. Sadly during the Soviet era the graveyard was used as a dumping ground and only reopened in 2005 after being restored.



Accommodation: George Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available

DAY 12 - Drive to Zhytomyr via the pretty town of Lutsk and the Tunnel of Love

This morning we will begin our drive to our overnight stop in Zhytomyr. Along the way we visit the town of Lutsk and our Explore Leader will take us on a walking tour of the main highlights. Competing with Lviv, on the beauty front, Lutsk is definitely worth exploring. The Soviet architecture of the modern town actually works here with its large squares and wide avenues, but of course the main attraction is the town's conserved historic centre. The maze of cobbled streets are lined with carved churches and town houses showcasing Lutsk's Polish, Russian and Lithuanian architectural history. Here we'll also see Lutsk's very well preserved 14th century castle. After spending a few hours here we will drive on to Klevan to visit the 'Tunnel of Love'. Along a three kilometre stretch of railway track leading to a factory the trees have all grown up around it forming a green corridor that has gained the name of the 'Tunnel of Love' due to the lovers that come here and make a wish for their future that is said to then come true.

We drive on to Zhytomyr, where our Explore Leader will take us on an orientation tour. The city has a number of picturesque churches including the majestic Cathedral of the Transfiguration, but it is also in touch with its Soviet past with rickety old trolley buses rattling past tower blocks, war memorials and numerous parks and public gardens including Gagarin Park. The city is one of the greenest in Ukraine and lies on the banks of the Teterev River and is surrounded by rocky hills and dense ancient forests.



Accommodation: Reikartz Zhytomyr (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 13 - Visit the fascinating Museum of Astronautics; walking tour Kiev

This morning before leaving Zhytomyr we will visit its most famous attraction, the Sergei Korolev Museum of Astronautics. Sergei Korolev was a scientist and engineer who helped founder the Soviet space and rocket programme and he was born here in Zhytomyr. The museum is in two sections, the first of which is a memorial to Sergei and tells the story of his life and work. The main section of the museum tracks the history of the cosmonautics development and it has a number of exhibits about space travel, including a capsule that was donated by NASA that has soil on it from where it landed on the moon.

We then drive to Kiev, Ukraine's capital city, which is situated on the banks of the River Dnipro. This afternoon we will go on a guided walking tour of this ancient city, which has been inhabited for almost 2000 years and was once the capital of the Kievan Rus State, from which all later Russian states were descended. Although Ukrainian nationalism is stronger than ever, you will still hear Russian spoken here today. During our tour we will see the onion domed exterior of Santa Sophia Cathedral, the Golden Gate which was once the main entrance to the city, Saint Andrews Baroque Church and Mother Motherland, an over 100 metre high statue to honour the heroes of the Soviet Union.



Accommodation: Hotel Rus (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 14 - Metro to the monasteries and catacombs at Lavra; free afternoon in Kiev

Today we will begin by taking the metro to Arsenalna, which is the deepest station in the world. We continue by metro to the Lavra Historical and Cultural Reserve and visit the remarkable 'Monastery of the Caves' founded in AD 1051, where the labyrinths provide all the natural conditions needed for mummification. We take a guided tour of the caves and have time in either the Museum of Miniatures or the Museum Of Historical Treasures and the Holy Trinity Church.

This afternoon is free for you to further explore Kiev. A short distance from the Cultural Reserve you might like to visit the Museum of the Great Patriotic War, which is one of the largest museums in Ukraine and tells the story of the German-Soviet War in iconic and Brutalist style. It has over 300,000 items on display and the memorials here are spread over 25 acres.

Or for something a little lighter, you may choose to take a relaxing boat trip along the Dnieper River or visit Mezhyhirya, which consists of a very large park and houses that all formerly belonged to President Viktor Yanukovych. After the revolution this park was opened to the public, so that now you can witness how luxurious his life was when he was in power.



Accommodation: Hotel Rus (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 15 - Free day in Kiev; chance to visit the Chernobyl Museum

Today we'll meet the passengers and our new Explore Leader for the Kiev to Vilnius section of our trip and we have the rest of the day free to further discover the capital. You could visit the Chernobyl Museum where the exhibits are designed to teach us of the scope of the nuclear disaster and to ensure that the lessons learnt from this terrible accident aren't forgotten. Alternatively you could go to the Pinchuk Art Centre that exhibits an ever changing selection of contemporary art from renowned international artists. Or for more traditional fine art you could visit the National Art Museum of Ukraine. For something very Ukrainian there's the Ivan Honchar Museum which was created to help preserve the culture and traditions of the nation. Outside the city you could join an excursion to Pirogov Open-Air Museum of Wooden Architecture, which is about 40 minutes' drive from the city. Set on the banks of Lake Myachino you will be able to see a variety of old Ukrainian village houses, chapels and churches that have been preserved to display how people used to live.



Accommodation: Hotel Rus (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 16 - Free day in Kiev; night train to Minsk, Belarus

This morning our Explore Leader will be taking the new arrivals on an orientation tour of Kiev's main sights that you are welcome to join or alternatively you have the day free to use as you please.

You could go shopping at the Bessarabsky Bazaar where you'll find a wide variety of delicious foods on sale or stroll down Sculpture Alley filled with brightly coloured contemporary sculpture by Avraam Miletsky. You might choose to travel by public transport out of the city centre to the Museum of Folk Architecture and Life of Ukraine or Pyrohiv as it's also known. At this open air ethnographical village you'll find over 300 examples of architecture from throughout Ukraine including wooden windmills and also a selection of musical instruments, clothing and furniture.

Later this evening we will transfer to Kiev Railway Station and board the overnight train to Minsk, Belarus. Our accommodation will be in four-berth compartments with bedding provided. You'll need to keep your passport handy for when we cross the border.



Accommodation: Overnight Train from Kiev to Minsk



Simple Overnight Train

DAY 17 - Walking tour of Minsk; chance to visit Stalin Line Military Museum

Our train arrives this morning in Belarus's capital city of Minsk. On arrival we head to a local restaurant where we have breakfast before taking a guided walking tour. Set on the banks of the Svislach River, the city was first settled by the Early East Slavs back in the 9th century AD. Trinity Suburb is one of oldest and most picturesque areas, which is perfect for strolling in, and Victory Square is the most famous part of the city and features a memorial to the fallen heroes of World War II. During our tour we will see the oldest building in the city, the Orthodox Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, the Catholic Cathedral, and Trinity Suburb before heading to the more modern part. Here we stroll down Independence Avenue and the Avenue Winners and see Minsk's unusual Central Library building. There'll be the option for you to go inside, as it's the tallest building in the city, it affords good views.

This afternoon is free for you to further explore the city or you might like to join an excursion to the Stalin Line Open-Air Military Museum, which is a short drive from the city. The Stalin Line was a chain of fortified defences consisting of over 4,000 pill boxes that covered around 1,200 kilometres to form a barrier against the Germans during World War II. The idea behind the museum is to absorb the visitor into the history of the times and as well as displaying many of the pill boxes there is a range of military equipment dating from World War II up to the start of the 1990's.

This evening you are free for dinner and popular dishes in Belarus include 'machanka' a hearty pork stew and 'draniki' which are thick potato pancakes. 'Krambambula' is a traditional Belarusian liquor, which is similar to mead and flavoured with spices and honey. At the Food Republic Restaurant Complex in Minsk's old town you'll find food shops and 10 different restaurants to choose from or there a number of Stolle Restaurants in the city, which are famous for their variety of savoury and sweet pies that you can either eat in or take away. Pie fillings include meat and egg, salmon, lemon, cabbage and many more.



Accommodation: Hotel Tourist (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 18 - Excursion to the beautiful UNESCO listed Nesvizh and Mir Castles

Today we drive out of the city and head for two of Belarus's best known attractions. Firstly we visit the impressive UNESCO World Heritage Site of Nesvizh Castle, which has been home to the Radswill Family for over 400 years. The fortresses construction began in 1584, but it's been extended and changed over the years and now features a mix of Renaissance, Baroque, Rococo, Classicism and Neo-Gothic architecture. The estate also contains the largest landscape gardens in Europe and a number of ornamental lakes.

Next we drive on to the beautiful Mir Castle, which is also UNESCO listed. Creation of the fort began at the end of the 15th century and again a number of different architectural styles can be seen. The castle is one of the most splendid in Europe and was reopened to the public in 2010 after being extensively restored to its former glories.

Later this afternoon we return to Minsk where you have the evening free.



Accommodation: Hotel Tourist (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 19 - Visit Hrodna en route to the Lithuanian spa town of Druskininkai

This morning we leave Minsk and start our journey towards the border with Lithuania. Along the way we will visit Hrodna, which is home to one of the largest Catholic populations in Belarus. The city is filled with a wonderful collection of Medieval and Baroque architecture, including the impressive Cathedral of Saint Francis Xavier and the unique Church of Saints Boris and Gleb; the only surviving example of Black Ruthenian architecture left in the area. Our Explore Leader will take us on a walking tour to see these sights and also the Corpus Christi Church, Choral Synagogue, German Lutheran Church, old and new castles and the Soviet area.

Following our visit we drive on to Druskininkai where we have the rest of the day free. Druskininkai is a spa town on the Nemunas River in the south of Lithuania. It's been a popular spa resort since the 19th century and this afternoon you have the chance to visit the Druskininku Gydykla Spa where there are a number of mud and herbal baths and mineral water treatments available to try. Or you may prefer to enjoy one of the lakeside walks or hire a bike to discover more. The town is also home to a cable car and an aqua park where you can experience 20 different bath houses, which are each equipped according to different worldwide traditions, such as Russian and Japanese baths.



Accommodation: Best Baltic Druskininkai Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 20 - See unique wooden carvings at Antanas Cesnulis Sculpture Park; arrive in Vilnius

We have some free time this morning to enjoy the facilities at Druskininkai, before we begin our drive at around 11am to Lithuania's capital city, Vilnius. Our first stop along the way is at the Antanas Cesnulis Sculpture Park where the sculptor himself and his wife will take us on a guided tour to see his unique wood-carved creations set within a park that runs alongside the Ratnycele River. We'll see a traditional Lithuanian windmill, carved crucifixes and among many others his sculptures of the Life of a Man and Tree, Egle - the Queen of Grass Snakes and the Most Important Moment in Life.

Our next stop will be in Trakai where we can admire the view of the red brick Trakai Castle set on an island in Lake Galve. Trakai is the former capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and this splendid castle dates back to the 14th century. Whilst here there'll be time for you to buy lunch at a Kibinai restaurant. Kibinai is a traditional type of Lithuania pastry which were created by the Karaites ethnic minority that made Trakai their home. They're very tasty and usually filled with mutton and onion.

We drive on to Vilnius where we have the rest of the evening free to relax.



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 21 - Walking tour of Vilnius; chance to visit the KGB Museum

The Catholic influence on Vilnius is very evident from the numerous Baroque churches. By the turn of the last century, Vilnius also had an 80,000-strong Jewish community. However, at the end of World War II, it had been completely decimated. During our morning guided walking tour of the capital, we visit the ancient university founded by the Jesuits - a centre of the Counter Reformation and a source of Lithuanian culture. We also see the cathedral and Church of the Dawn. In the newer part of Vilnius lies the main shopping street with the opera, cafes and parliament building. We will visit the self-proclaimed Republic of Uzupis which is a unique bohemian and artistic district in the city. It's one of the oldest areas, dating back to the 16th century and used to be one of the poorest. During Soviet times it quickly gained notoriety as the roughest part of the city, but when Lithuania became independent again in 1991 the artists moved in and now it regularly hosts fashion festivals, poetry readings, art exhibits and concerts. Lastly we will take a short drive up the Hill of Three Crosses to admire the view. Whilst here you will also have the opportunity to visit the Gediminas Castle Tower.

This afternoon is free for you to relax and further explore the city or perhaps to visit the KGB Museum. The museum is located in the former KGB Headquarters and features exhibits documenting the crimes that were planned and committed from this very spot during Soviet rule. The displays also show you how the Lithuanians fought back to re-claim their independence. You'll be able to see the inner prison cells and solitary confinement rooms that were kept hidden by the KGB offices that surround them. They have been preserved in the same condition as when the headquarters closed in 1991.

 Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 22 - Trip ends in Vilnius, Lithuania

Trip ends at our hotel in Vilnius after breakfast.

 Meals Provided: Breakfast



What's included?



Included meals

Breakfast: 21
Dinner: 1



Transport

Bus
Train



Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader
Driver(s)
Local Guide(s)



Accommodation

18 nights standard hotel
1 nights simple overnight train

Trip information

Country information

Poland

Climate

Poland has a temperate, changeable climate. September and October are cooler and gradually become damper until late November when temperatures fall below freezing with snowfall, particularly in mountainous areas. Cold temperatures last through to March, but are tolerable. Snow can lie for up to three months in the mountains.

Time difference to GMT

+1

Plugs

2 Pin Round

Religion

Roman Catholic

Language

Polish

Budgeting and packing

Optional activities

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations. Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

A selection of optional activities are listed below to help you budget for your holiday. Whilst the trip price you pay before you travel includes a great selection of highlights, we have also built in free time to allow you the flexibility to choose from a carefully selected range of additional excursions and activities or take time to relax, the choice is yours. At certain destinations along the way there may be several options to choose from and it may not be possible to fit all the activities in; your Explore Leader will be able to give advice on which are the most suitable for you.

Warsaw:

Wilanow Palace visit operates on day 2 and entry is PLN 25.00 per person.

Museum of History of Polish Jews visit operates on day 2 and entry is PLN 25.00 per person.

Warsaw 1944 Rising Museum visit operates on day 2 and entry is PLN 18.00 per person.

Wroclaw:

Panorama of Raclawice visit operates on day 4 and entry is PLN 30.00.

Zagan excursion operates on day 4 and return transport by train is PLN 80-100.00 per person, which takes around 2.5 hours or alternatively transport by road takes around 2 hours and an 18 seater minibus is €295.00 per group or a 12 seater minibus is €210.00 per group. Entrance to the Augustine Monastery is PLN 18.00 per person. Lobkowitz Castle entrance is PLN 7.00 per person and if you would like a guided tour this can be arranged for PLN 100.00 per group and to climb the tower to the viewing platform is an additional PLN 5.00 per person.

Ksiaz Castle and Landscape Park excursion operates on day 4 and return transport by train is PLN 45 per person, which takes around 1 hour or alternatively transport by road also takes around 1 hour and an 18 seater minibus is €165.00 per group or a 12 seater minibus is €140.00 per group. Ksiaz Castle entrance is PLN 30.00 per person or it's PLN 50.00 per person if you'd like to visit the Nazi tunnel complex as well.

Krakow:

Cooking lesson on day 6 at a local restaurant or in our hotel restaurant where an English speaking chef will instruct us on how to make a Polish speciality is €35.00 per person (duration 2.5 hours).

Excursion to Auschwitz by bus operates on day 7 and includes entrance and guiding in English for PLN 155.00 per person.

On day 7 whilst in the Podgorze District you can visit the Old Jewish Synagogue for PLN 10.00 per person, Schindler's Factory for PLN 24.00 per person or the Museum of Jewish Life for PLN 16.00 per person.

Lviv:

Lytschkiv Cemetery operates on day 11 for about 2 hours and includes a local guide, 420 UAH per person (minimum 5 passengers).

Brewing Museum operates on day 11 and entrance including local guide is 700 UAH per person (duration approximately 2 hours).

Chocolate Master Class operates on day 11 and entrance including local guide is 420 UAH per person (minimum 5 passengers, duration approximately 1.5 hours). This needs to be pre-booked at the start of your trip with your Explore Leader.

Kiev:

Chernobyl Museum visit operates on day 15 and entrance is 20 UAH per person and a guided tour is 520 UAH per group (for 1-10 passengers).

Pirogov Open-Air Museum of Wooden Architecture excursion operates on day 15 and includes transport, local guide and entrance fee for 700 UAH per person.

Museum of the Great Patriotic War operates on day 15 and entrance is 50 UAH per person plus 315 UAH per group for a museum guide.

Boat trip on the Dnieper River on day 15 is 193 UAH per person.

Tour to Mezhygiria on day 15 including transport, local guide and entrance fee from 840 UAH per person (minimum 4 passengers).

Minsk:

Central Library visit operates on day 17 and entry is €5.00 per person.

Stalin Line Open-Air Military Museum excursion operates on day 17 and is €9.00 per person.

Druskininkai:

At the Drudkininku Gydykla Spa on day 19 prices will be dependent on which treatments are available. Your Explore Leader will be able to advice of the treatment options and prices.

On day 19 you can take the cable car for €3.00 per person one way or €5.00 per person return.

The Aqua Park operates on day 19 and entry is between €10-23.00 per person.

On day 19 you can hire a bike to cycle around the lake. Your Explore Leader will be able to advice of the options and prices available locally. Bike helmets are not provided so we would recommend bringing your own with you.

Vilnius:

KGB Museum operates on day 21 and entry is €6.00 per person.

Gediminas Castle Tower operates on day 21 and entry is €5.00 per person.

Please note that all optional excursions listed above are subject to change and availability and they may not all be possible to offer on every departure date.

Clothing

July and August are the hottest months and lightweight cotton clothing is best. During spring and autumn temperatures can be lower or drop during the evenings and there is also a stronger possibility of rain, although light rainwear may be needed at any time of year. A warm fleece/jacket is recommended for cooler evenings.

Footwear

We recommend taking comfortable walking shoes for exploring and trainers or sandals for relaxing.

Luggage

20kg

Luggage: On tour

One main piece of baggage and a day pack. Remember you are expected to carry your own luggage so don't overload yourself.

This trip includes train journeys with short walks and/or stairs between platforms, stations and accommodation, so for this reason please take care to make sure you can comfortably carry your own luggage throughout the trip.

Equipment

We advise taking a water bottle for our included walks, sun glasses, sunscreen and a sun hat are all essential. You may find it useful to carry an umbrella in case of showers, especially if you're travelling in spring or autumn. In case of emergency we also recommend that you carry a torch with spare batteries and sufficient medical supplies including a first aid kit and several days extra supply of any specific prescription medications that you require. You may find a head torch handy for on the overnight train journeys. Most importantly don't forget your camera.

Please note that in many of the museums larger bags will need to be placed in a locker and there may be an additional charge for taking photographs whilst inside.

Tipping

Explore leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Explore Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Local crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognised part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. Accordingly please allow £45.00 for tipping.

In order to make things easier for you, the Explore Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the trip.

Country Information

Poland

Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch price

£8

Dinner price

£18.00 - 22.00

Beer price

£1.50 - 3.00

Water price

£0.8

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Polish Zloty2

Recommended Currency For Exchange

British Pounds Sterling, US Dollars and Euros are all accepted at exchange offices and banks2

Where To Exchange

Most major towns - your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival

ATM Availability

Available in all major cities

Credit Card Acceptance

Credit cards are widely accepted in all major cities

Travellers Cheques

Easily exchanged

Transport, Accommodation & Meals

Transport Information

Bus, Train

Accommodation notes

Booking a Single Room

All of our group tours are planned and operated on a twin-share basis, meaning that the standard cost is based either on individual travellers sharing accommodation with another group member of the same sex, or people who book together sharing accommodation. Please refer to the tour notes where the single room option availability is detailed on a night by night basis for this tour, and the price for the available nights is detailed on the dates & prices tab by departure date. For Self-Guided trips the Single Room supplement offers the option of a single room each and is charged per person. The Single Room supplement also applies to the third person in a party of three that will be accommodated in a single room.

Please note that the majority of hotels in Poland don't have air-conditioning.

For the overnight train journey we will use sleeper carriages with four bunk beds with bedding provided (two beds on floor level and two above) per compartment and with a shared toilet and wash basin in each carriage. There are no shower facilities on board. Luggage is stored under the bottom bunk beds and above the cabin door for the top bunks. There is the possibility that you will be sharing with non-Explore clients in the same cabin. There is no air-conditioning on board and it's not always possible to open the windows, so we recommend light weight bed clothes. You can experience authentic rail travel with the local people and it's a great way of getting from place to place during the night, so you maximise on the amount of time you have in each city during the day to explore. Take snacks, drinks, toilet roll, hand sanitiser and an open mind with you for maximum enjoyment.

Our hotel in Minsk is conveniently located just a few minutes' walk from the Partyzanskaya Metro Station and it's a 15-20 minute journey into the very centre of the city. Close to our hotel is the Belarus Department Store where you may like to browse for local products such as textiles. The area around the hotel is dominated by locals including a large tractor manufacturing base which employs an astonishing 17,000 people. They are extremely proud of their tractor production and so there are monuments to the tractor and even children's parks with tractor shaped toys. The hotel and the surrounding area have a very Soviet layout and give us a glimpse into what normal life is like in the city. The hotel is tall and offers great views from the higher floors.

Essential Information

FCO Advice

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice [click here](#).

For more information from Explore about travel advice, [click here](#)

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Price Guarantee

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

Visa and Passport Information

Poland: Visas not required by citizens of the UK, Australian, New Zealand, US and Canadian. Other nationalities should consult the relevant consulate.

Ukraine: UK, Canadian and US citizens do not require a visa. Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office. In addition you will be required to carry a photocopy of your passport with you at all times in Ukraine for ID purposes.

Belarus: Entry visas are required for UK citizens and need to be applied for in advance. A tourist voucher is required as part of your application and Explore will request this on your behalf. This is received and sent to you from 4- 6 weeks before departure.

Lithuania: Visas are not required by UK, Australian, New Zealand, US and Canadian citizens.

It is essential that you provide Explore with the correct passport information at the time of booking, as this will be required in order to pre-book any applicable train tickets. Corrections and amendments will incur additional charges, so please double check that the information we have for you is up to date and correct, this includes your passport number, full name as per passport (including middle names), date of birth and place of birth; if customers renew or reissue their passports from the details initially given to Explore, train tickets must be cancelled and purchased again, which involves extra costs and may result in customers being in differing train carriages to the rest of the group. If you intend to renew your passport please let Explore know at the point of booking and please ensure that you have the new passport no later than 8 weeks prior to travel.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, with the correct validity for your chosen destination.

Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our [Essential Information](#) and [Booking Conditions](#).

Transfers

[Find out more about Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions before you book.](#)

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Polar, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer [click here](#)

Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. The cost of many of our Polar Voyages will exceed the capped amount covered by standard insurance premiums and you

will be required to pay an additional premium to cover the full value of your trip. Please ensure that you are covered for the full amount of your holiday cost, as insufficient cover could invalidate a claim under the policy. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom. Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. Read more about them here.

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Included activities

This trip is designed to show you the highlights of four amazing countries over three weeks. We will be using a range of public transport as well as charter buses to get around and will do most of our exploring on foot in each place visited. Please therefore pack light to ensure you can lift your bag and bring comfy walking shoes.

Non refundable permits

Poland

Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against tetanus, polio and hepatitis A. Tickborne encephalitis is recommended by some medical sources if travelling in certain areas of Europe, at specific times of the year. Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at [Explore Travel Health](#) and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.
