

POLAND IN WORLD WAR II

Kraków, Auschwitz & Warsaw

April 16 – April 24, 2024



In collaboration with The National WWII Museum

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Dear Alumni Travelers,

We invite you to join an exceptionally unique educational travel program “Poland in World War II: Kraków, Auschwitz, and Warsaw,” with Michigan Alumni Travel in collaboration with The National WWII Museum. This poignant journey features a thoughtfully planned schedule that balances powerful experiences, beautiful sights, and free time to reflect. We will trace the history of Poland from the German invasion in 1939 to the fall of communism and the rejuvenation of Poland and its people. Our guests will travel from Kraków to Warsaw, exploring a powerful, carefully curated series of historical sites and museums along the way. Top local guides will immerse you in the stories and histories of the battlefields, museums, and memorials we will visit, and you will be amazed at the vibrancy of this country as you interact with the local people.

When Hitler and his followers launched the war by invading Poland on September 1, 1939, the people of Poland—especially the country’s heavy Jewish population—experienced immense suffering. Yet, from the unimaginable atrocities of the Holocaust to decades of Soviet oppression, the Polish people held strong in their push for freedom. World figures such as Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, and Pope John Paul II gave their support for a free Poland, bolstering the internal efforts of Lech Walesa, Witold Pilecki, and many others. In the past few decades, Poland has seen a remarkable resurgence.

For enthusiasts of the legacy of World War II, European history, Jewish heritage, and global politics, this tour is one not to miss!

Go Blue!

Michigan Alumni Travel Team

NOTE: The Alumni Travel program is a member benefit of the Alumni Association. Travelers, regardless of alumni status, must be a member to participate in our trips.

Poland in World War II

A TIMELINE OF EVENTS

September 1, 1939

Westerplatte, Poland

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



1939

January 15, 1940

Kraków, Poland

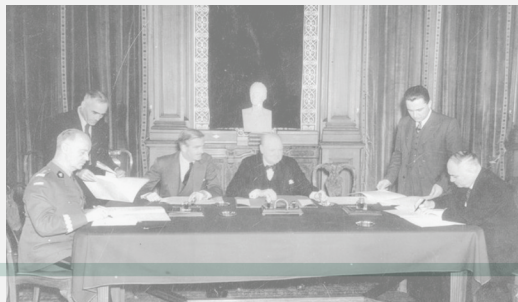
Oskar Schindler opens his factory where he will go on to save more than a thousand Jews.



May 20, 1940

Oświęcim, Poland

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



April 19, 1943

Warsaw, Poland

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



1943

July 20, 1944

East Prussia, Germany

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



1944

August 1, 1944

Warsaw, Poland

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



May 8-9, 1945

Berlin, Germany

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



January 19, 1947

Poland

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



July 4 & 18, 1989

Poland

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



August 31, 1980

Gdańsk, Poland

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

November 1989

Berlin, Germany

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

1989



Featured MUSEUMS & GALLERIES

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



WARSAW, POLAND

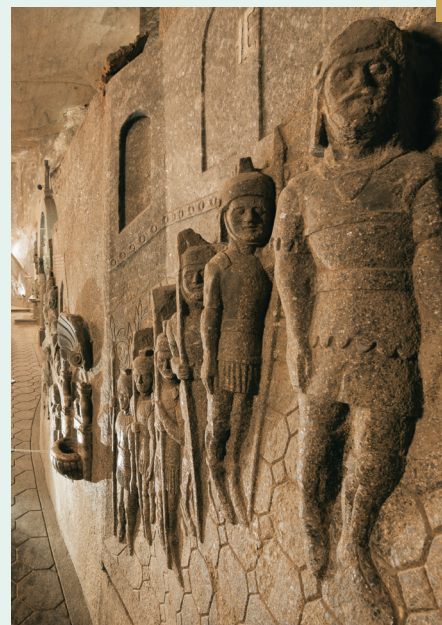
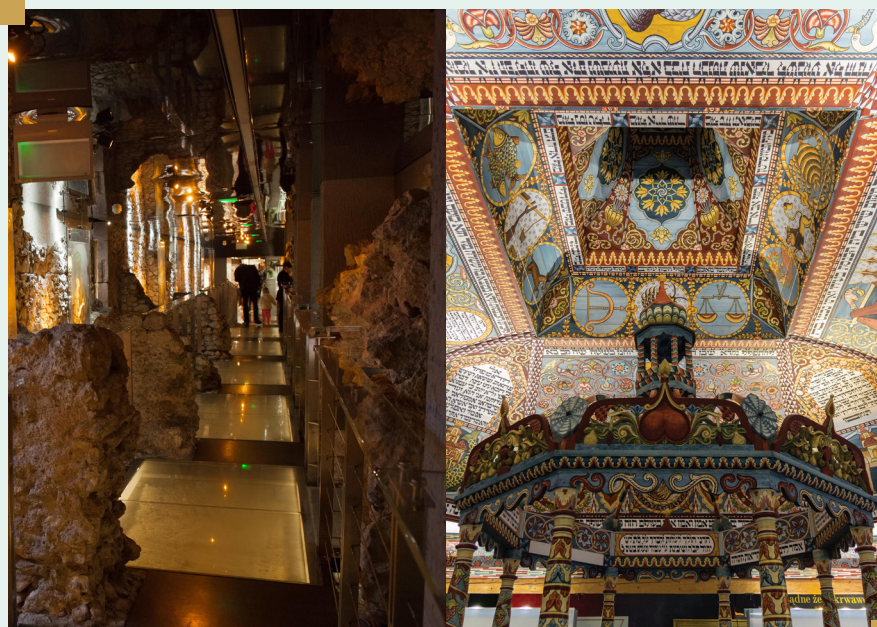
Żabiński Villa

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

KRAKÓW, POLAND

Rynek Underground

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



WIELICZKA, POLAND

Wieliczka Salt Mine

Already declared a UNESCO World Heritage site before the closing of the salt mining operation in 1996, the mines feature landscapes unseen anywhere else. Saline lakes, elaborate chambers, and the world's largest church built underground are a few of the highlights. In St. Kinga's Church, view the elaborate salt sculptures including that of Pope John Paul II. During World War II, the occupying Nazis constructed an armaments factory in the mines, but it never became operational.

OŚWIĘCIM, POLAND

Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum

Housed in the former Nazi concentration and extermination camp, the preservation of the original buildings and relics has long evoked controversy. Through international support, this museum takes collective and individual memories into account, along with the accompanying reflections and emotions of its many visitors.



WARSAW, POLAND

The POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews

The POLIN Museum is located in the area the Nazis turned into the Jewish ghetto during World War II. Beyond the main exhibition that presents the history of Polish Jews, POLIN Museum also functions as an educational center with rich cultural programs working closely with the community at large.

The Auschwitz Volunteer

WITOLD PILECKI

Polish military veteran Witold Pilecki undertook one of the most audacious missions of World War II. In August 1940, little was known about Auschwitz, which was thought to be an internment camp for political prisoners. On September 19, 1940, Pilecki, using a false name, intentionally allowed himself to be arrested during a round up in Warsaw and sent to Auschwitz.

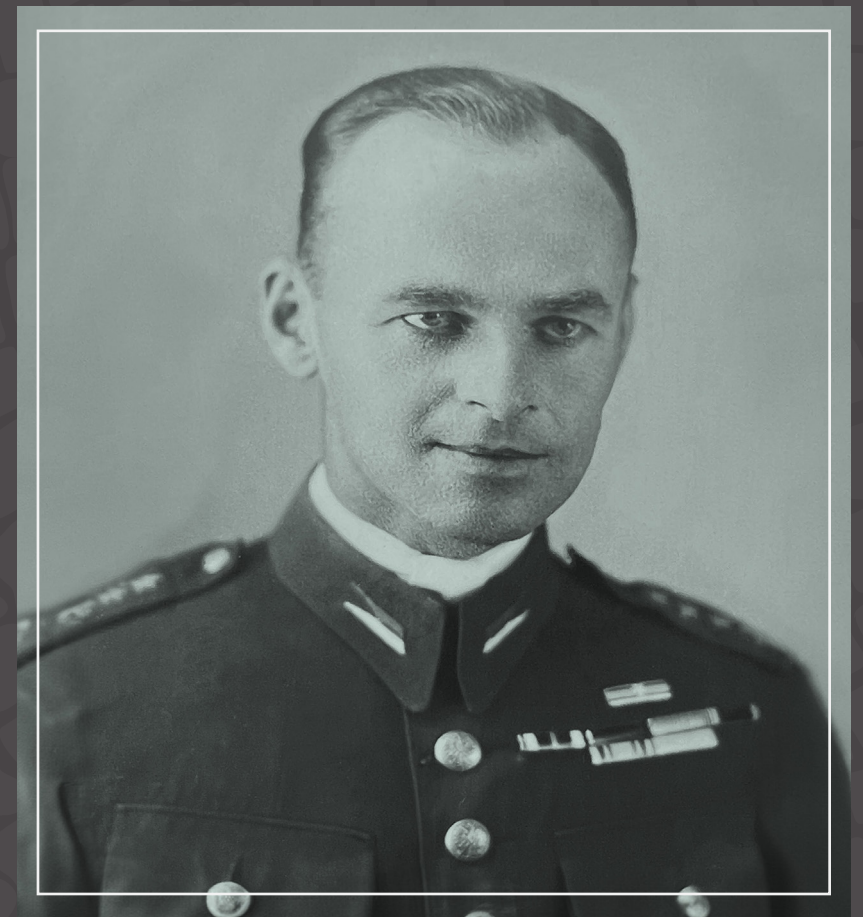
Once inside, Pilecki helped to organize a resistance movement inside the camp, the Związek Organizacji Wojskowej, (ZOW). The ZOW worked to smuggle resources into the camp and to disseminate information to the outside world. Sending messages with released or escaped inmates, the ZOW began to publicize the transition of Auschwitz from a prison camp to a death camp. A radio built from spare parts was in operation inside Auschwitz in 1942 until its use was halted to prevent German detection.



Monument of Rotmistrz Witold Pilecki march in Warsaw, Poland

Pilecki survived slave labor and a battle with pneumonia while inside Auschwitz. In August 1943, Pilecki escaped the camp during his shift at a bakery. Hiding in various safehouses in Poland, Pilecki eventually reached Warsaw where he began working on his report on the conditions inside the camp. He had hoped to spur action to liberate Auschwitz, but the Polish Home Army lacked the resources to successfully attack and hold the camp.

Following the war, Pilecki fought against the Soviet-controlled Communist regime in Poland. Working for Władysław Anders of the Polish Government in Exile, Pilecki gathered intelligence inside Poland. He changed his name and location frequently to avoid detection. He was captured on May 8, 1947, and sentenced to death on May 15, 1948, a sentence that was carried out two weeks later. Poland's Communist government hid the details of Pilecki's work inside Auschwitz which was not publicized until the 1990s.



Polish military veteran Witold Pilecki

Historical Perspective

THE KATYN MASSACRE

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

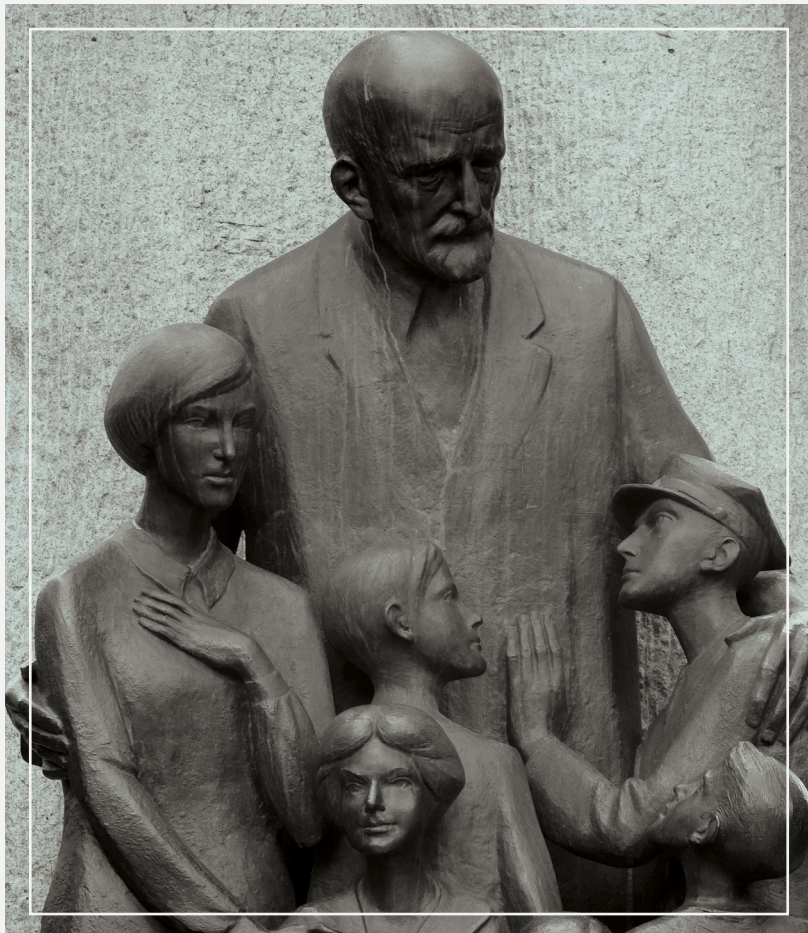
The Katyn Massacre was a low point in Poland's history, but the country would endure more executions, ethnic cleansings, and massacres before the end of World War II. After the war, the Poles adjusted to an existence as a puppet state dominated by the Soviet Union. Under Soviet influence, responsibility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

Spotlight On

JANUSZ KORCZAK

On August 5, 1942, one of the most horrific scenes of the Nazi's assault on Warsaw's Jewish population took place. A line of 200 orphan children, with their caretaker Janusz Korczak leading the way, marched out of the Warsaw Ghetto to the Treblinka Extermination Camp. For the 64-year-old Korczak, this was the fulfillment of his promise to never abandon the children in his care.

Janusz Korczak was born Henryk Goldsmit, but took on his new name during his burgeoning career as a writer. As a child, he experienced a prosperous family life, but he contemplated as early as the age of five that he "was bothered by the thought of what I could do that there should be no dirty, hungry, ragged children like the ones with whom I was not allowed to play in the yard."



Janusz Korczak Monument in Warsaw

As an adult, Korczak entered a life of service as a doctor, writer, and educator. In 1912, Korczak founded the Jewish orphanage *Dom Sierot*, a building he designed himself to promote his progressive educational ideals. Jewish orphans stayed for free and attended Polish public schools and Jewish Sabbath Schools. Many of the children Korczak cared for had come from rough backgrounds. Survival in the slums without parental figures had left them distrusting of authority and with many fears and anxieties. Korczak ran his orphanage upon a philosophy of mutual respect with the children, avoiding the rules and regulations that were more appropriate for a military barracks. He wrote that "too much worrying about one's own peace-and-quiet or convenience leads to a proliferation of orders and prohibitions that are only ostensibly issued for 'the good of the child.'"

After the Germans occupied Warsaw, life for the orphans was a constant struggle. Korczak moved the orphanage to several different addresses as the Ghetto boundaries narrowed. Sympathetic Poles tried to move Korczak to the "Aryan" side of Warsaw, but he refused to leave his children behind. When the Nazis came to place the children on the train bound for Treblinka, Korczak led them onto the train with his head held high. One eyewitness described the march as "a silent but organized protest against the murderers, a march like which no human eye had ever seen before."

A monument to Janusz Korczak and his children is located within the Warsaw Jewish Cemetery.





TOUR ITINERARY

TUESDAY, APRIL 16, 2024

Day 1: Arrivals into Kraków

Fly into Kraków John Paul II International Airport (KRK) and transfer to the Radisson Blu Krakow. Take advantage of the afternoon to visit Kraków's Old Town prior to this evening's welcome reception and dinner.

Accommodations: Radisson Blu Kraków (R, D)

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 17, 2024

Day 2: Auschwitz

Start the day with a visit to Oskar Schindler's factory, where Schindler was able to save over 1,000 Jews from the Płaszów forced labor camp, as portrayed in the film *Schindler's List*. Next, enjoy a walking tour of picturesque Kazimierz in Kraków's Old Town, followed by lunch. After lunch, we will drive 30 miles west of Kraków to the town of Oświęcim—better known to history by its German name, Auschwitz. The Nazis took over the town's former army barracks in 1940 and populated it with Polish political prisoners. As the war continued, the Nazis expanded and refined the camp, imprisoning Jews from all over Europe, and sometimes sending them on to nearby Birkenau. An afternoon touring the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum will be a deeply moving experience. An evening on your own allows reflection on today.

Accommodations: Radisson Blu Kraków (B, L)

THURSDAY, APRIL 18, 2024

Day 3: Kraków Old Town & Salt Mines

This morning's tour features Kraków's rich cultural history, including a walking tour through the Old Town featuring views of Wawel Castle. This magnificent city center features the largest market square in Europe. This afternoon's touring continues to the Wieliczka Salt Mine, a UNESCO World Heritage site that operated from the 13th century until 1996. During World War II, the Nazis constructed an underground armaments factory in the mine, but the Soviet offensive prevented the factory from becoming operational. The Salt Mine is a must-see for any visit to Kraków.

Accommodations: Radisson Blu Kraków (R, D)

FRIDAY, APRIL 19, 2024

Day 4: Kraków Underground

Kraków has long been an important trading center at the crossroads of Europe. Today's touring will take you beneath the city to explore recently uncovered artifacts showing life in Kraków through the centuries. The Rynek Underground Museum opened in 2010 and covers 43,000 square feet. An additional stop this morning will take us to the Czartoryski Museum, which houses Leonardo Da Vinci's *Lady with an Ermine*. During the German occupation, Nazi Governor-General Hans Frank hung the painting in his office at Wawel Castle. After lunch on your own, board a river cruise on the Vistula and enjoy an early evening cocktail reception.

Accommodations: Radisson Blu Kraków (B, R)



Auschwitz



Warsaw Old Town

SATURDAY, APRIL 20, 2024

Day 5: Warsaw & POLIN Museum

Board a train from Kraków to Warsaw this morning. Upon arrival in Warsaw, enjoy lunch at your leisure before a visit to the POLIN Museum. Opened in 2014, the POLIN Museum covers 1,000 years of Jewish history in Poland, which at one time had the largest Jewish population in the world. Through eight exhibition galleries, trace the history of Jews in Poland and their relations with the Polish government and neighboring countries through the words of scholars, merchants, rabbis, housewives, politicians, and more. In 2016, the POLIN Museum was named the European Museum of the Year.

Accommodations: Hotel Bristol Warsaw (B, D)

SUNDAY, APRIL 21, 2024

Day 6: Treblinka

Continue the exploration of Poland's Jewish history with a visit to the city's largest Jewish cemetery, with more than 250,000 people buried on the site. Many prominent leaders of Warsaw's Jewish community are buried here, including Marek Edelman, a leader of the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto. This afternoon, visit the site of the former Treblinka extermination camp. While Treblinka is now often referred to as one of the "forgotten camps," it was the second most lethal extermination camp of the Holocaust. Your tour will begin with a visit to the small museum that houses relics and artifacts discovered over the years, and it will end with a walk through the area that once held the camp's multiple gas chambers and the train depot where incoming prisoners arrived. You will have the chance to pause and reflect at a powerful memorial of stones representing the hundreds of thousands of victims who perished between July 1942 and July 1944 at Treblinka.

Accommodations: Hotel Bristol Warsaw (B)

Itinerary Map

Legend

- 3 Overnight Stays
- Tour Stops
- ✈ Flight not Included



MONDAY, APRIL 22, 2024

Day 7: Warsaw Reborn

Today's touring starts at the Żabiński Villa, otherwise known as the Zookeeper's Villa. During World War II, Jan Żabiński was director of the Warsaw Zoo; the Nazis additionally appointed him the superintendent of the city's public parks. Jan and his wife Antonina Żabińska used their positions to save Jews and escapees from the Warsaw Ghetto by hiding them in their own home and in the zoo. After lunch, spend your afternoon admiring Warsaw's rebirth at the beautiful Łazienki Park. Stroll along the Royal Route that links Warsaw Castle and Wilanów Palace before enjoying a Chopin concert and a farewell dinner.

Accommodations: Hotel Bristol Warsaw (B, L, D)

TUESDAY, APRIL 23, 2024

Day 8: Departures

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



Treblinka Memorial

HOTELS

Radisson Blu Kraków

Within walking distance of Market Square and St. Mary's Basilica, the Radisson Blu Hotel, Kraków, welcomes you with stylish interiors and conveniences like 24-hour room service and free high-speed, wireless internet. The hotel offers two on-site restaurants, a bar, a fitness center with a sauna, and a beauty studio.



Hotel Bristol Warsaw

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



TOUR INCLUSIONS

- Exclusive itinerary designed by The National WWII Museum
- Special access to sites not offered on other tours
- Full-time logistical Tour Manager
- Expert local guides
- Roundtrip airport transfers (when arriving and departing on scheduled group tour dates)
- Luxury five-star and deluxe four-star accommodations throughout the journey
- Private, first-class air-conditioned motor coach transportation
- Personal listening devices on all included touring
- Included gratuities to guides, drivers, porters, and servers
- 7 Breakfasts, 2 Lunches, 3 Dinners, and 2 Receptions
- Beer, house wine, and soft drinks with included lunches and dinners
- Personalized luggage tags and name badge

Pricing

~~\$5,999~~ \$5,499* double occupancy

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

\$229 taxes and fees per person are additional

**When booked by December 31, 2023*



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

Contact

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

Visit: ww2museumtours.org

Email: travel@nationalww2museum.org

Call: 1-877-813-3329 x 257



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