

King Zygmunt's Column overlooks Warsaw's Castle Square.



Chopin, was also among the greatest of pianists.



St. Dominic's Fair takes over Gdańsk in August.

# Poland Parties!

## Na zdrowie! It's Chopin's 200th Birthday.

**PIROGIES AND MAZURKAS**, grand palaces and leafy parks, great music and dramatic architecture, and an indomitable spirit have combined to make Poland Central Europe's essential destination.

The nation is blessed with rich, wide plains (under an even wider sky), through which rolls the mighty **Visula**. The river originates in the majestic **Tatras**, and links three of Poland's largest cities—**Warsaw**, **Kraków** and **Gdańsk**—on its way to the **Baltic Sea**.

Like a phoenix, Poland rose from the ashes of World War II (followed by almost 50 years of Soviet domination) to become today's vibrant democracy and a vital bridge between East and West.

**CHOPIN'S YEAR:** From **Nicolaus Copernicus**, giant of Renaissance astronomy, to **Tadeusz Kościuszko**, **Jan Paderewski**, and **Pope John Paul II**, Poles have had a wide impact on science, art and history.

But this year's party is for composer **Fryderyk Chopin**, born 200 years ago in **Zelazowa Wola**, 25 miles west of Warsaw. The story of how he refined the mazurka and polonaise into staples of classical music is

told in his family home, and in the just-reopened museum in Warsaw bearing his name. Celebratory high points will include the May 9 premiere of Chopin, a new ballet by **Patrice Bart**, at Warsaw's grand **Teatr Wielki**, and the **Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition** in October. For details, go to <http://en.Chopin.nifc.pl>.

**WARSAW** used centuries-old plans, early photos and period paintings to rebuild its war-demolished **Old Town** with its **Castle** and **Market** squares, **Royal Palace**, Gothic **St. John's Cathedral** and colorful narrow-fronted tenement houses.

Glorious additions are the excellent restaurants (try the fabulous **U Kucharzy** and order the duck) and the stunning **Le Regina**

**Hotel** (also with a superb kitchen). Museums abound, including the **Warsaw Rising Museum**, which graphically follows the searing war years; the **University Library**; and the home of radium-discoverer Marie Curie. A Sunday Chopin concert in **Lazienki Park** is a must (and it's free).

**KRAKÓW**, which miraculously escaped damage during the war, protects its **Old Town** with a ring of parkland. Stroll to the central square, the largest plaza in all Europe and the heart of



the city. Have a coffee and do some people-watching before visiting **Jagiellonian University** where both Copernicus and Pope John Paul II studied, and the **Museum Czartoryski** to see **Da Vinci's** great "Lady with an Ermine." Take the **Royal Route** to **Wawel Hill**, centuries-long residence of Polish kings, with its magnificent Renaissance chapel.

Kraków's **Kazimiere** is the best-preserved Jewish quarter in Europe. Although virtually all the Jews you meet are visitors, the seven synagogues are in-tact and a dozen Jewish restaurants are busy. The neighborhood combines hip artistic studios with ancient cemeteries and Klezmer concerts. Coming up is the annual **Jewish Cultural Festival**, which draws followers from around the world, June 26-July 4.

A tour of **Auschwitz**, less than an hour's drive from Kraków, is one of life's most sobering experiences. The **Wieliczka Salt Mine**, the only mine in the world working continuously since the Middle Ages, is a must-see.

**GDAŃSK** is the port at the mouth of the Vistula where the regime-toppling **Solidarity** movement was born. Streets are lined with historic monuments and little shops overflow with magnificent amber jewelry. Board a pleasure boat near the medieval **Zuraw** cargo crane for a day cruise along the Baltic coast. ■

—Roberta Graff

For information on all of Poland, go to [www.Poland.travel](http://www.Poland.travel).

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