

Impressions of Poland



Iris Sanderson Jones traveled the backroads, observing the lifestyle of independent-minded Poles

As we drive south of Warsaw, towards Czeszowa and Cracow, we pass quickly into a country scene. This is rich farmland, green with pasture and cabbage crops, where a cluster of farm buildings or a village make a skyline against distant trees.

Occasionally we see a tractor on a cooperative farm, but most of the farms are small and support only horse-drawn ploughs. Seventy-five percent of the farmland in Poland is privately owned, but 50 hectares (a little more than 100 acres) is the maximum size that can be privately owned, and most farms are 12 or even six hectares.

In one field, a man and a woman work in a pile of potatoes beside a horse cart, with a brick house in the far background. She laughs at us and we take her picture, loading the potatoes into a basket and transferring them to a plastic sack.

Farmers who raise crops near Warsaw are some of the richest people in Poland. They can earn up to a million zloties a year, which is \$33,000 on the official exchange and much more at the black market exchange rate.

OUR GUIDE Ella, a warm and sophisticated city girl in a suit and high-heeled shoes, chided us for photographing only old-fashioned rural scenes. "You should take pictures of the tractors and the steel mills too," she said, "or your readers will

think that Poland has nothing but horse-drawn carts."

We are on our way to the historic town of Czeszowa (pronounced ches-ta-hova) and the Chapel of the Black Madonna. The chapel is in the great fortress called Jasna Gora, built by Hungarian monks in the 14th century, and rebuilt in gothic, renaissance and baroque styles in the six centuries that followed.

The painting of the Black Madonna is believed by its worshippers to have been painted on a table owned by the holy family.

This is just an ordinary day at Jasna Gola, not a feast day, but worshippers and pilgrims fill all the spaces in sight of the altar of the Black Madonna. The old women often have tears on their faces.

The Pope and 30,000 pilgrims were here in 1979. This year 50,000 pilgrims walked from Warsaw and 20,000 from Lublin during the annual pilgrimage.

Poland is 95 percent Catholic, in spite of 35 years of Communist discouragement. Catholicism is growing even stronger now thanks to the Pope's visit last year and to the new nationally broadcast radio messages demanded by the strikers this year.

Polish life is full of legends and stories, the best of which is personified every day by a trumpeter in Cracow. He plays the trumpet every hour on the hour, 24 hours a day, from the four corner windows of the Church of the Virgin Mary, which is circled

by a golden crown high above the Cracow Market Square.

THE TRUMPETER commemorates another young trumpeter who was shot by an arrow in the throat while blowing a warning of impending attack. The trumpet song, now played every day on Polish national radio, ends on an abruptly cut-off musical note now just as it did originally.

The trumpet makes haunting early morning

sounds over the market square. A woman in high-heeled shoes, an old man with a cane and a boy with a school bag move across the square, circling the flower stalls being set up under the cathedral spire.

The three most important tourist sights in this beautiful, ancient city are the Wawel Palace, the 14th century university once attended by Copernicus and the 700-year-old salt mines, which descend through nine levels to a depth of 342 meters.

Photos
by
Micky
Jones



travel log
Iris Jones
contributing travel editor

*What to know
before you go*

Travelers always collect important little bits of information that are not mentioned in the guide books. Take duty potpies, for example. That's what we called the public toilets in Poland. The tradition, which travelers seldom know in advance, is to place a restroom attendant somewhere near the public toilet. Her small coin dish may or may not have a sign reading two zloties. But two zloties is the price of a public restroom in Poland and the

attendant will chase you with a clenched fist if you don't pay it, sign or not.

Another basic little bit of information that might be helpful to you is about accommodations in Poland. ORBIS, the state travel organization, runs many of the best hotels; others are private.

The top-rated ORBIS hotels, such as the Victoria Intercontinental in Warsaw, costs about \$80 a night single. The next best, like the Forum, costs about \$50. There are also town hotels,

ORBIS and private, with the bathroom down the hall, costing about 200 zloties — roughly six dollars. Motels on highways cost about \$10.

Lone travelers, especially hitchhikers, will find a most unusual program in Poland: organized hitchhiking. It was arranged because there are not enough cars to go around.

Hitchhikers register at the local office, where they are given an official sign and a book of coupons. A hitchhiker

holds his sign up as he stands beside the road and gives a coupon to the driver who picks him up.

The driver knows by this that his passenger is registered and can be found in case of trouble, so the driver doesn't worry about being robbed or otherwise harmed.

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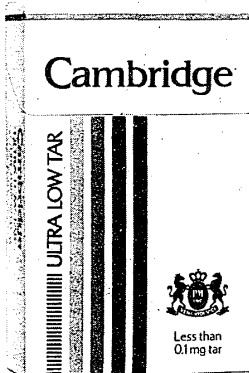


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