

Couple share their 'Vision of Poland' on tour

By KEELY WYGONIK
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Ed and Jane Wojtan of Livonia have been leading tours to Poland every summer since 1993, and they never tire of it.

"We always see something new every time we go there," said Wojtan. "It's a beautiful country."

The Wojtans will share their "Vision of Poland," Aug. 21 to Sept. 4 on a cross country tour that includes stops in Warsaw, Czestochowa, Krakow, Zakopane, Wroclaw, Poznan and Gdansk.

Poland is a special place for them. "It's our heritage, and both sets of parents were born there," said Ed. Sometimes families are reunited on Ed's and Jane's tours.

"It makes the whole group happy when it happens," said Jane. "It's very exciting."

I share their enthusiasm. In 1997 while touring Poland with my church, I visited the village where my grandpa Bronislaw Kalecki was born. My aunt, overjoyed that relatives from the U.S. would stop to visit, insisted we go to church to thank God.

Visiting Poland can be an emotional experience. It's a fascinating country with a rich history. Poles have a reverence for their past, yet embrace the future.

"One thing I marvel at is that

If you go...

What: Ed and Jane Wojtan of Livonia are leading a tour to Poland, Monday, Aug. 21 to Monday, Sept. 4.

Cost: \$2,495 per person; (single room accommodation an additional \$340) includes round trip air transportation from Detroit or Chicago, first class hotel accommodations, air conditioned motor-coach transportation, most meals, sightseeing programs, services of English-speaking guides, hotel service charges and taxes. Call (734) 425-2727 for more information.

Travel guides: If you're planning a trip to Poland in the future, call 1-800-TO-POLAND for more information and travel brochures, or visit www.orbis-usa.com

from 1795 to 1918 Poland as a country did not exist, yet they managed to keep their language, customs and religious faith," said Ed. "You would never believe that there was a building in Warsaw that was not touched by war. The city has been rebuilt."

The Wojtans describe Poland as a unique combination of the old and the new. The old includes the Wawel Castle and Cathedral in Krakow. Krakow is home to one of Europe's largest medieval market places, and central Europe's second oldest university.

Warsaw, the capitol of the country, is a modern city that cherishes its past. Old Town, devastated during World War II, has been rebuilt and is home to many wonderful shops, restaurants and museums.

"I love the way they put their

storefronts together," said Jane. "They put a lot of imagination into it. They're very inviting. I love the architecture of the buildings too."

Poland is a modern country with all the conveniences of home, even McDonald's. There are new hotels with familiar names like Holiday Inn and Sheraton.

The Wojtans begin their tour in Warsaw. You'll visit the Old Town and Market Square, and the home and gardens of Frederick Chopin.

"A Chopin piano recital is included with the tour," said Ed. "It's at the Ostrogski Palace in Warsaw. It's an intimate audience, 100 to 150 people. Champagne is served at intermission."

From Warsaw you'll travel to Gdansk and stop at Malbork Castle, the largest castle of the Teutonic Knights that was severely damaged during the war. Some of the walls are 9-feet thick. The castle has been rebuilt, and it's fun to have your picture taken with one of the knights roaming about.

The Tri-Cities of Sopot, Gdynia and Gdansk are also a mixture of old and new. Gdansk is the hometown of Lech Walesa and birthplace of the Solidarity movement, which led to the liberation of Poland from communist rule.

On the way to the western cities of Poznan and Wroclaw, the tour will stop in the lovely city of Torun, birthplace of Nicolaus Copernicus.

Then it's off to Zakopane, a lovely resort area nestled in the Tatra Mountains on the southern border of Poland and Slovakia. You'll take a thrilling cable car ride to the top of the mountain where you may find snow even in August.

There's a great marketplace in Zakopane where you'll find everything from cheese to hand-knit sweaters and amber jewelry. In the evening, guests will enjoy dinner with highlander entertainment.

After resting in Zakopane, your tour will continue to the cities of Czestochowa and Oswiecim. Czestochowa is the



Marketplace: There are surprises around every corner in Krakow's Main Market Square, including musicians who entertain shoppers and sightseers.

location of the Pauline priests, and their monastery of Jasna Gora, the most hallowed place in Poland, home of the "Black Madonna" icon, which is credited with many miracles.

On the way back to Warsaw, the tour stops at Auschwitz and Birkenau, the largest of the Nazi concentration camps. "It is worthwhile to visit this historic place to keep in mind the atrocities committed against the many people who were sent to the gas chambers and the firing squads during World War II," said Ed.

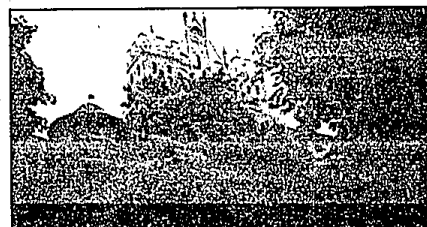
While touring the camps can be emotionally painful, they leave a lasting impression. You'll be forever mindful of the power of hate and prejudice.

Poland is a country of contrasts - old and new, happy and sad, colorful and drab. Visiting Poland is a trip of a lifetime, one that you'll never forget. Tell us about your summer



Contrasts: Poland is a contrast of old and new, from the medieval market square in Krakow to trendy boutiques like Estee Lauder in downtown Warsaw.

vacation. Send photos and stories, along with your destination recommendations, for consideration on our Travel page to Keely Wygonik, Observer Newspapers, 36261 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150. E-mail stories to kwygonik@oe.homecomm.net.



Castles: Nearly destroyed during World War II, Malbork Castle has been restored.



War: A tour guide at Malbork Castle explains the extensive damage the castle incurred.

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