

poland AND THE EAST

Poland is over 20 times the size of Northern Ireland with over 20 times the population, just under 40 million. Bordered by the Czech Republic and Slovakia to the south, Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine to the east, Russia and the Baltic Sea to the north, and Germany to the west, it is at the eastern end of the European Union.

Our tour takes us first on an interesting journey through the former East Germany, with overnights in Gotha and in Gorlitz on the Polish Border. Once in Poland we are based in the recently refurbished Wyspianski Hotel, in the heart of Krakow. From there we explore this well preserved medieval city, formerly the country's capital. The two highlights of this outstanding tour are undoubtedly our trip to the phenomenal Salt Mines at Wieliczka, just outside Krakow, and the haunting Auschwitz, an hour from the city.

We break our journey home with two nights in charming Dresden.

Day 1 Sunday

We leave Belfast for Scotland on the morning HSS and drive directly to Hull, on the east coast of England, where we take the overnight P&O ferry to Mainland Europe.

P&O Cruise ferry (cabins with facilities - all meals included)

Day 2 Monday

East Germany

Our journey today takes us through Holland, into the German province of Thuringia and the small town of Gotha - the area associated with Bach, Luther and Queen Victoria's Prince Albert. We stay at the Schlosspark Hotel, a favourite overnight stop with Ulsterbus travellers over the past few years.

Schlosspark, Gotha ★★★★★ (1 night)

Day 3 Tuesday

Colditz and the Polish Border

We continue east today, calling at Colditz, the famous WWII prisoner-of-war camp (involving a walking tour over some uneven ground, with a considerable number of steps). We travel on to the town of Gorlitz, right on the border, and our second hotel.

Mercur Parkhotel Gorlitz ★★★★★ (1 night)

Day 4 Wednesday

Lower Silesia and Wroclaw

After crossing into Poland this morning we travel through Lower Silesia - a historic 'voivodeship' (administration division or county) in Southern Poland, which borders the Czech Republic. We stop briefly in Wroclaw (pronounced Vrotslaf), the 'Polish Venice' - so called because of its many canals - and continue on to our final destination, Krakow.

Wyspianski, Krakow ★★★★★ (4 nights)

Day 5 Thursday

Krakow

This morning is spent getting to know beautiful Krakow with a guided tour. Having survived the war, it retains its charming medieval shape, focused around the central Market Square, the largest in Europe. In the middle of the square is the magnificent Cloth Hall.

The afternoon is free to explore. Krakow was formerly the Polish capital and an ancient centre of learning, with a university dating back to 1364. The castle and cathedral are located on majestic Wawell Hill, overlooking the river Vistula. To the south lies the Kazimierz district, the main cultural centre for Poland's Jewish community since the 16th century. It was devastated during the war, but today shows healthy signs of revival. Here we find Szeroka Street, where Schindler's List was filmed.





Day 6 Friday

Wieliczka Salt Mine

Once described as being "as remarkable as the pyramids and more useful!", today we visit the UNESCO world heritage site, Wieliczka Salt Mine. We take a guided tour through the rooms, passages and great chambers which make up the mine, including the stunning King's Chapel, a splendid underground "cathedral" - every feature carved out of solid salt. We will also stop at the multicoloured lake of the Erazm Baracz Chamber. There are lots of steps down, but a lift to bring you back up the 135 metres to the surface.

Day 7 Saturday

Auschwitz

It is perhaps fitting that we visit Auschwitz today, the Jewish Sabbath. Our guided tour of this infamous camp includes a film showing the liberation. You will also see the flower strewn Death Wall, the national memorials, the rail line, the chambers and the ovens of this notorious institution. A place that many want to see but few wish to return to.

Day 8 Sunday

Wooden Church of Peace

We begin our return journey today, calling briefly at perhaps the greatest timber-framed church ever built (a UNESCO World Heritage building), the "Church of Peace" at Swidnica. Later we cross into Germany, to Dresden, on the River Elbe.

Dorint Hotel, Dresden ★★★★★ (2 nights)

Day 9 Monday

Dresden

Dresden was a beautiful city before the infamous allied bombing of WWII. Thankfully it has been magnificently restored after being flattened during the war. Its geographical location, as well as its history and beauty demand that we spend an extra day here on our return journey.

We have a morning guided tour, concluding at the recently re-opened Frauenkirche Cathedral, inextricably linked with Coventry in World War II legend. We have the afternoon free.

Day 10 Tuesday

The Harz Mountains and Hildesheim

From Dresden we take the scenic route through the magnificent Harz Mountains to our final hotel, in Hildesheim.

Novotel Hildesheim ★★★★★ (1 night)

Day 11 Wednesday

We drive directly through Holland to Europoort, near Rotterdam, where we catch the overnight sailing back to England.

P&O Cruise ferry (cabins with facilities - all meals included)

Day 12 Thursday

The last leg of our tour takes us from Hull to Stranraer, from where we take the evening HSS back to Belfast.

Hotels

Schlosspark Hotel, Gotha ★★★★★

00 31 302977977
www.hotel-am-schlosspark.de



Mercure Parkhotel Gorlitz ★★★★★

00 49 35816620
www.mercure.com



Hotel Wyspianski, Krakow ★★★

00 48 124229500
www.hotel-wyspianski.pl



Dorint Hotel, Dresden ★★★★★

00 49 35149150
www.dorint-hotels.com



Novotel Hildesheim ★★★★★

00 49 512117170
www.accorhotels.com



Price Includes

- 3 & 4 star hotels
- Dinner, bed & breakfast
- Tour information pack
- Insurance
- Visits to Colditz; Wrocław; Wieliczka Salt Mine; Auschwitz; Church of Peace, Swidnica
- Guided tour of Krakow and Dresden

Dates

Depart	Return
Sun 6.30am	Thu 10.00pm
20 th Jul	31 st Jul

Prices

Adult £969 SC £949