

Itinerary for our August 2020 trip to Poland

Monday, August 24 -- Departure Day

Tuesday, August 25

- ❖ Arrival in **Gdansk**; transfer to our hotel

If we arrive in Gdansk on time, it may be a little too early to check into our hotel, so on the way to the hotel we will already begin our tour... we will make our first stop – at the **Gdansk Ship Yard** (formerly known as “Vladimir Lenin Ship Yard”). This is where the workers’ liberation movements began, and the “Solidarity Union” was born. This was the “*beginning of the end*” of the communist system in Europe. A monument was erected there – to commemorate those who fought, those who died, and those who survived... simply saying those to whom we owe our freedom today. Next to the main monument, you will see all kinds of smaller plaques dedicated to people who either risked or lost their lives in the struggle for freedom of Poland, Eastern Europe, and beyond. The fact that WE (citizens of the US of A, and of the rest of the world) can now freely walk around this place, can freely tour Poland, and all of Eastern Europe, we owe it in part to those people. The Berlin Wall... fell AFTER all those events, AND only as a RESULT of those events.

- ❖ Transfer to our hotel; free time in the Old Town; opportunity to exchange money and just “find your way around”, or just rest.
- ❖ 5:30 PM: Dinner together
- ❖ **Our FIRST Night in Gdansk – Hanza Hotel**

Wednesday, August 26

- ❖ 9:30 – 12:30 Tour of the Old Town. Our tour guide will meet us in the hotel, and take us on a little tour of the city; she will give us some info about what we will be looking at ☺ ; we will see some of the “**highlights**” of Gdansk – the “River Walk”, the “Crane” (a medieval structure that was used to load and unload cargo on ships at the port of Gdansk), Medieval Granaries, Historic Gates (leading merchants from the port into the city), Long Market Street, Town Hall, the Well of King Neptune, St. Mary’s Church – the third largest brick church in the world, the Armory, the medieval “House of Torture”, etc. Gdansk is a fun city. It was first mentioned in historic documents in year 999, but it did not receive it’s “city rights” until the year 1235. It was annexed by the Kingdom of Prussia in 1793 (during the Second Partition of Poland), and it became part of the German Empire. After

World War I, Gdansk became an “independent city”, and only after World War II it returned to Poland, having been badly destroyed during the liberation campaign in 1944/1945 (mainly by the Red Army’s artillery). Interestingly enough, as the Germans considered Gdansk *their* city, Gdansk suffered little destruction during the beginning of war. It was destroyed badly later on, towards the end of the war. Rebuilt after the war, it was further beautifully renovated for the celebration of its millennium, in 1980’s and 1990’s.

- ❖ Enjoy some free time for shopping and site seeing; free time
- ❖ Dinner on our own today
- ❖ **Second Night in Gdansk**

Thursday, August 27 Optional All Day Tour. The reason it is “optional” is that you may choose to stay in Gdansk, and do some things on your own.

You may be interested in some of the museums (*European Solidarity Center – which we saw the day before by the Ship Yard and the monument – may be a point of interest*), or some other highlights of the city. We will come back to Gdansk at the end of the day. IF the weather is “beach weather”, you may also consider going to the beach resort of Sopot, or any of the beaches around Gdansk (taxi or Uber ride).

You may consider a round trip by boat to Sopot (it is a beautiful beach resort with its famous pier). The boats (the regular white fleet and the “pirate boats” for the most part take you on a one hour round trip tour of the port of Gdansk – to Westerplatte and back; but there are a couple of boats that also go to Sopot (about 1 hour each way).

- ❖ We leave the hotel for **Westerplatte**, where the first shots of WW II were fired. Not too many people realize that World War II started right in this place. It was not quite 5:00 AM on September 01, 1939 when a German battleship Schleswig-Holstein opened fire on the Polish military station of Westerplatte. A battleship with its turrets and cannons, and over 4,000 German ground troops against 185 Polish soldiers trying to defend the small piece of Poland. After 7 days, the Polish surrendered, having lost 15 of their companions.
- ❖ We continue to **Malbork**, and make a stop at the Castle of the Teutonic Knights (XIII century). This is one of many fortresses that the Knights built in the region – to protect themselves and their interests. We make a “walk through” the grounds, take a few pictures, maybe get a snack, and continue on to Pelplin.

- ❖ Gothic Cathedral in **Pelplin**. This cathedral was under construction for almost 200 years. Just imagine, how many generations of people built it, and never saw it finished. Amazing. This is where “yours truly” entered the seminary and studied for 4 years to become a priest, and who eventually transferred from there for his “new adventure” in the US, in the Raleigh Diocese.
We will tour the cathedral, and hopefully they will treat us to an **organ concert**.
- ❖ Return to Gdansk; dinner together on our way back to Gdansk
- ❖ **Third night in Gdansk**

Friday, August 28

- ❖ **Arrivederci Gdansk. See you next time.** We are leaving for The Capital City of Warsaw. Enjoy the ride through the country site, in an ever changing scenery of Poland.
- ❖ Arrival in Warsaw; check-in, free time to explore the Old Town of Warsaw (eat, drink, shop, explore, be merry, make friends ☺)
- ❖ Dinner together in the Old Town; enjoy the rest of the night in the city or return to the hotel
- ❖ **Night in Warsaw – Hotel Sofitel Victoria: (011) 48. 22. 657.8130**

Saturday, August 29

- ❖ Leave the hotel for our guided tour of the Royal City of Warsaw – Royal Castle, Royal Lazienki Park, Old Town, New Town, etc. Warsaw, a city where “the old” mingles with “the new”; city of great history and culture, city that bled most during the war. Destroyed 3 times – in September of 1939 during the initial Nazi invasion and its bombing, then during the Warsaw Uprising in August of 1944, and finally in January of 1945 - during the liberation of the city. By then, however, there was not much to destroy... the city was completely in ruins. After the Warsaw Uprising, Hitler was so outraged at the people of Warsaw that he ordered a total destruction, a total demolition of the city once the uprising was defeated. What you see in Warsaw today, was the work of the entire nation after the war – to rebuild the capital, and make it beautiful again. We will visit the reconstructed and restored to its original splendor Royal Castle, Old Town, and head to the Royal Park of Lazienki...

- ❖ Royal Łazienki Park, which was a summer residence of some of the Polish kings, especially towards the end of the Polish monarchy. Łazienki Park can be translated as “Baths Park”. Indeed, it served not only as a summer residence for the kings, but also as a “spa” of a kind – with its pools, ponds, fresh air, and vegetation.

Originally designed in the 17th century, and then in the 18th century Łazienki was transformed by Poland's King Stanisław August into a setting for palaces, villas, classicist follies, and monuments. In 1918 it was officially designated a public park. Łazienki is visited by tourists from all over Poland and the world, and serves as a venue for music, the arts, and culture. The park is also home to peacocks and a large number of squirrels. The monument of Frederick Chopin is one of the points of interest in the park, as well as the “Palace on Water.”

- ❖ From the park we return to the Old Town, where we have free time for the rest of the day/evening.
- ❖ *If at any point today, you decide that you would rather do something on your own, you are perfectly free to do so. Sometimes people are interested in touring the Jewish Museum (museum of the Jewish Ghetto and the Warsaw Jews). As a group we will only make a short stop by the Jewish Monument and the museum, but we will NOT tour the museum.*
- ❖ *Dinner on our own (second and last for the trip)*
- ❖ **Second night in Warsaw**

Sunday, August 30

- ❖ Leaving for the mountains - Mountain Resort of Zakopane; known also as the “Winter Capital of Poland”
- ❖ Today is Sunday. On the way to Zakopane we stop in **Czestochowa**, the Shrine of the Black Madonna. We will celebrate **SUNDAY MASS at 1:00** (or as soon as we get there), and then have some free time to walk around and do some site seeing. The main “point of interest” is the Chapel of the Black Madonna, with its icon of the Black Madonna itself – Our Lady of Czestochowa. The chapel will be crowded with people, however; and so we may not have a very “prayerful

experience” in the chapel itself. We will, however, celebrate mass in a quiet chapel right next to the “main chapel” of the shrine.

- ❖ We have dinner at the nearby restaurant of Hotel Mercure’s restaurant. And we will continue on our way to the Mountain Resort of Zakopane. Now we are traveling through the southern part of Poland, going to the very south, the southernmost point of Poland – the town of Zakopane.
- ❖ Arrival in **Zakopane**, check-in
- ❖ **Night in Zakopane - Hotel Mercury Kasprowy**

Monday, August 31 *(Our mountain experience over the next two days will depend a lot on the weather; we may have to adjust and/or alter the following plan if the weather does not cooperate)*

- ❖ Visit to Krupowki Street, which is the main promenade in Zakopane, and we make our way to the lower station of a cable car that will take us to the top of Gubalowka Hill (some great views of the city and of the mountains from up there).
- ❖ You may choose not to do the trolley, and simply stay on Krupowki Street or at AWESOME flea market at the foot of Gubalowka Hill ☺ Enjoy some free time.
- ❖ We will be going (by local transportation) for Kuznice, which is the lower station of a gondola, that will take us to the top of Kasprowy Wierch (Mount Kasprowy Wierch). The road to Kuznice is closed to public traffic. Only local transportation is allowed to carry visitors to Kuznice, and to the gondola station. From there we take a ride on the gondola to the summit of Mount Kasprowy Wierch. You may need an extra layer of clothing as it is generally cool (or cold) on top on the mountain. We will have the most up-to-date weather report at that point.
- ❖ Return to Zakopane/hotel
- ❖ Dinner; free time in town, or simply return to the hotel. Our hotel has a nice SPA and pool – you may want to take advantage of it.
- ❖ **Night in Zakopane – Hotel Mercury Kasprowy**

Tuesday, September 01

- ❖ **OPTIONAL EXCURSION. Please read this paragraph carefully** This is an optional excursion, could be somewhat strenuous... If you do it, be prepared for some hiking.... We leave the hotel on the bus around 9:30, and travel for about 45 minutes, and then get on horse-drawn wagons that will take us into the heart of the Tatra Mountains National Park. The horses will take us for a 1- hour-long ride uphill into the park, and from there we have an about 1.5 mile uphill hike to Lake Morskie Oko. (Keep in mind, we have to return the same way, but downhill this time ☺). The road is paved, but it is uphill for the most part. The lake is surrounded by beautiful mountains that offer some great photo opportunities. We will give ourselves maybe 1.5 hours at the lake/lodge. There is a lodge there, which offers some great views of the lake and the mountains. You can get something to eat and drink at the lodge; you may also just rest and relax there. If you want to venture out **AND** are **surefooted**, and physically fit, you may want to hike around the lake (takes a solid hour), or just enjoy the lodge, which like I said, is right by the lake, and offers some great views of the lake and the mountains.
- ❖ *A few years ago, I described that road as “paved road, slightly up the hill.” Once we got to the lake (at the end of the hike) I almost got stoned, and ejected from the tour by some of our fellow travelers for using the phrase “slightly up the hill.” They claimed it was much more than “SLIGHTLY” up the hill. But the following year, when the next group came, I was acquitted of all charges. They did not find enough “grounds for conviction.” And they agreed with me – the road was “slightly” uphill (slightly more). Still, it is uphill.*
- ❖ *If you decide NOT to do this excursion, there are lots of other things you can do today. You may decide to stay in the hotel, use the spa, rest, enjoy the city... There is plenty to do in the city (shopping, local arts and crafts, etc.).*
- ❖ We return back to the horses, back to the bus, back to Zakopane.
- ❖ Regional Cultural Evening/Dinner at one of the regional inns
- ❖ Night in Zakopane – Hotel Mercury Kasprowy

Wednesday, September 02

- ❖ We leave for **Krakow**. As we are just about in Krakow, we make a visit to the Shrine of the Divine Mercy, and then continue on to The Salt Mine of Wieliczka.
- ❖ We will have our pre-paid admissions to the salt mine, and then we eat dinner at the nearby local restaurant. The salt mine is amazing. The tour of the mine takes about 2,5 hours, and it is amazing and breathtaking
- ❖ Dinner and fun at Halit Restaurant. We are in the Krakow region. Halit will treat us to another “cultural event” – different region from Zakopane, different culture, different music, different costumes... but still music and dance; we will eat, sing, dance, and be merry...
- ❖ We continue on to Krakow (to the city center) and check into our hotel.
- ❖ **Night in Krakow** – **Hotel Radisson Blue**

Thursday, September 03 -- Optional Day Tour. The highlights of the day are Auschwitz Museum and Wadowice – the birthplace of Pope John Paul II. If you would rather just stay in the city, you are free to do so. Quite a long (but doable) day.

- ❖ We leave for Auschwitz. We visit the WW II Museum of the Nazi Concentration Camp. Our tour is to begin right at 2:00. As you can probably imagine, this is not a “fun” visit. This is a place where between 1940 and 1944 about 1.3 mln people were put to death, most of them in gas chambers. About 90% of those killed were Jews. Not all those who were killed there died in gas chambers though. Many simply starved to death, or died of forced labor, diseases, individual executions, or medical experiments. Saint Maximilian Kolbe, a Polish Franciscan priest, was also put to death there by starvation/ lethal injection. Auschwitz is a “must see” place... but only once in your lifetime.
- ❖ We continue on to Wadowice, the birth town of Pope John Paul II. Visit to the “home” church of Pope John Paul II
- ❖ This is the home town of Karol Wojtyla, who later became better known as Pope John Paul II. He lived here as a child and youth. The Wojtyla family occupied a small apartment on the second floor of the house (today it is a museum) right next to the church. Unfortunately, we do not have time to tour the museum itself.

Will visit the church, maybe take some pictures by the very baptismal font where Karol Wojtyla was baptized, and continue on to our dinner.

- ❖ Dinner in Wadowice and return to Krakow. We should be back in Krakow
- ❖ Free time in Krakow; enjoy the rest of the night
- ❖ Night in Krakow – Hotel Radisson Blue

Friday, September 04

- ❖ In the morning... Explore the Old Town on your own (visit the many churches, historic sites, shops, arts and crafts; walk by the river, etc.). I believe Krakow is a "jewel" of Poland. One of very few Polish cities that were NOT destroyed in WW II. You may wonder why... Well, the president of the city knew that he had no chance to defend the city against the powerful Nazi army, and so he surrendered without fighting. That, as it turned out, was not a bad move. Today, we can admire Krakow in its original beauty.
- ❖ We meet our tour guide for a guided Tour of Historic Krakow. Just like everything else – the tour is optional 😊 but not too strenuous today.
- ❖ Dinner together in the Old Town
- ❖ Night in Krakow – Hotel Radisson Blue

Saturday, September 05

- ❖ Departure for the airport in Krakow. Our flight leaves at 9:40 AM. That means we have to be on the bus (and leave the parking lot) no later than 7:00 AM. Hopefully the hotel will have early breakfast for us.
- ❖ Leave for the US

We will have breakfast in our hotels each and every day of the trip.

Our hotels will either have an indoor swimming pool or a SPA (or both). So you if you think you may want to take advantage of it, bring your bathing suit with you.