

Warsaw

Warsaw (Warszawa in Polish) is the capital and the largest city of Poland. It lies in east-central Poland, on the Vistula River. The population of Warsaw is over 1,700,000 inhabitants.



WARSAWA

The earlier capitals of Poland were Gniezno in the 10th century and Cracow from the 11th to the end of the 16th century. Warsaw grew around a fort built in the 12th century, when the youngest son of King Boleslaw III set up his rule

in the surrounding region of Mazovia. Later Mazovia became part of the Polish Kingdom. Then, in 1569, King Sigismund III Vasa, because of Warsaw's central position, moved his court there and thus the town became Poland's capital. To honor him, his son King Wladislav IV, erected the 72 foot high Sigismund Column in the square outside the

Royal Castle.

Warsaw soon entered a stormy period in its history. In the 17th century it was captured by the Swedes. In the 18th century it was attacked by the Russians, later the Prussians. In 1815 the Tsar (emperor) of Russia became the King of Poland. The Poles unsuccessfully rebelled against the Russians.

In World War I, Warsaw was occupied by the Germans and recovered its position as the capital of the restored state of Poland in 1918.

In World War II most of Warsaw was destroyed. Mass arrests, street round-ups, deportations and executions lasted throughout the Nazi occupation. In 1943 the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising broke out. After its suppression the Jewish district was demolished.

The final act in the destruction of the city was the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, when the city's population fought heroically against the enemy. For 63 days powerfully armed forces including the SS (Hitler's private army), tank, artillery and air force divisions carried on a strong assault against the citizens. After their surrender, the entire Warsaw population was expelled and the city was destroyed systematically, house by house, street by street. Over 80 percent of Warsaw was in ruins. The losses at the hands of the Nazis were extensive

At the time of liberation, Warsaw was a scene of smoldering ruins. Despite this, the government of Poland made the decision to keep Warsaw as the capital. By the efforts of the whole nation, the city was rapidly rebuilt and reconstructed.

Warsaw had many beautiful buildings, including a magnificent Royal Palace and many other palaces built by Polish noblemen. Warsaw is also known for its beautiful churches. The beauty of Warsaw's architecture was recorded by the famous architectural painter Canaletto (1677-1768). His paintings were so accurate that the Poles used them to guide the rebuilding of the Old City. Warsaw has reconstructed its Royal Castle exactly as it was prior to World War II, and has restored palaces in Lazienki, Wilanow, and many other famous landmarks. The Grand Theater of Opera and Ballet was also rebuilt. Warsaw has modern housing developments and office buildings. New stores can be found in the heart of the city's main shopping district. The city's educational and research institutions include the University of Warsaw, many other higher educational institutions, and the headquarters of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

Numerous cultural events take place in the Polish capital. Each fall, the Festival of Contemporary Music attracts musicians from all of Europe. Every five years, young pianists from many parts of the world play in Warsaw's Frederic Chopin International Piano Competition.

Warsaw is an important center of Polish industry with steel mills, truck, tractor, and automobile factories (including FIAT), and electrical, chemical, and printing plants. Warsaw had always been famous for its small stores selling hand-made goods created by craftsmen and artisans.

Warsaw is the center of Poland's road and rail systems. It has a great river port at Zeran and the International Airport Okecie is a few miles from the downtown area.