

## **WARSAW HISTORY, POLAND:**

In Warsaw today, archaeological traces of several early Middle Age castles are found on the Vistula River, the oldest of which – originating in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries – were situated on what is known today as the area of Bródno. Slightly less aged is Jazdów, known as the home of the Prince's Castle. The city's history itself, however, is believed to have begun with the creation and development of Old Warsaw (Stara Warszawa), which was set on what is today known as the Old Town (Stare Miasto). Mazovian Prince Bolesław II brought prosperous traders to the Old Town, and his headquarters were based there, as well.

### **16<sup>th</sup> century – Warsaw, capital city of Poland**

In the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, Warsaw was included as part of the Kingdom of Poland. It's admittance brought the city many privileges and because of its central location, members of the Royal Court visited the city more and more often. It was here at this time that the Polish nobility chose their King during the country's first free elections. In 1596 – after a fire at the royal residence of Krakow's Wawel Castle – King Zygmunt III Waza moved the royal court and its main offices from Krakow to the newly-expanded castle in Warsaw. It's interesting that although Warsaw did not become the Polish capital by any official statement or decree, it acted from this point as a actual centre of the country, and the permanent seat of the royal residence. As a result, the city kept on developing and had significant population growth.

## The Partitions

Sadly, the country's growing political weakness led to tragic consequences – the neighbouring powers of the Republics of Russia, Prussia and Austria seized control of Polish territory, wiping Poland from the map of Europe for 123 years.

### 1) **1772- The first partition of Poland**

As a result of this partition, Poland lost about 1/3 of its total land mass, with Warsaw playing the role of a particularly tragic witness to these events: the capital hosted the partition meeting, where its invaders completed the division of its lands.

### 2) **1793- The second partition of Poland**

This was yet another division of the country, this time without the participation of Austria. As a result of a treaty between Catherine the Great and Fryderyk Wilhelm II, Prussian troops entered the country's Wielkopolska region, while Russia entered the country from the east. At this time, Warsaw saw the outbreak of a massive underground conspiracy, intended to restore Polish independence by force.

### 3) **1795- The third partition of Poland**

With the carrying out of this third and final partition, Poland was completely absorbed by Russia, Prussia and Austria, and erased from the map of Europe for 123 years. Part of the country's Mazovia region (including Warsaw, which was downgraded in status from the capital city to merely a provincial town), was placed in the hands of the Prussians, while the rest of Mazovia was given to Russia.

## The 20th Century - Two World Wars

### **November 11, 1918 - The Recovery of Independence**

The outbreak of World War I awakened the fierce independence of Warsaw society and led to a rebirth of very intense patriotic movements. The day that the war between Germany and members of the Entente ended was the formal beginning of the existence of an independent Second Republic of Poland (II Rzeczpospolita).

### **August 12-25, 1920 - Miracle on Warsaw's Vistula River**

The Miracle on the Vistula (Cud nad Wisłą), was the decisive battle of the Polish-Bolshevik war in 1920, and is recognised by historians as one of the milestone battles in world history. The Polish troops, led by Marshal Piłsudski, conquered the Red Army and helped to retain the independence of Poland. It also halted the relentless march of the Communist Revolution towards Western Europe.

### **The Twenties and Thirties**

The 1920s were a difficult time in the rebirth of the Polish state, but by the 1930s, Warsaw was a very beautiful and fashionable capital city, known as 'The Paris of the North'. The city boasted not only amazing sights, but also had wonderful modern architecture. On what was then Napoleon Square (new Plac Powstańców Warszawy) stood the city's first 'skyscraper', a 16-floor building which was the highest in the country. It hosted the headquarters of insurance company Prudential at that time. The construction of the main railway station began – it was by far the most modern station in Europe at the time - streets were covered with asphalt and a new airport was built in Okęcie. In 1938 the first television transmitter was placed on the roof of the Prudential building.

### **September 1, 1939 - The outbreak of World War II**

On September 9, Warsaw was attacked; its defences held from that day until September 28. The city's defeat was followed by a period of more than five years of German occupation, at which time numerous police and restrictions were placed in and on the city; many were highly symbolic (for example, Plac Piłsudskiego was renamed after Adolf Hitler in 1940). Acts of occupied terror were met with considerable resistance from residents of the city and Warsaw - as always during times of seige and captivity - became a major centre for the resistance movement, and the centre of the country's underground cultural life and scientific progress.

### **April 19, 1943 - The beginning of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising**

The Jewish Ghetto was created in 1940, and at one time, almost 500,000 people lived in this cramped space. In April of 1943, the Nazis started the 'final liquidation' of the district and its inhabitants, but a handful of unarmed and half-starved Jews launched a desperate resistance – this was the first urban uprising in occupied Europe. After a shockingly unevenly-matched series of battles, in mid-May the Germans managed to completely destroy all buildings in the Ghetto, symbolically blew up the community's Big Synagogue (Wielka Synagoga) and quashed the resistance.

### **August 1, 1944 - The beginning of the Warsaw Uprising**

This uprising lasted 63 days, and involved the general civilian population of the city, including women and children. After the brutal suppression of the resistance, the remaining population was exported to death camps and the Germans began a systematic, planned destruction of the entire city. The cultural losses of this time - including burned libraries and ravaged museum collections, the razing of religious temples and palaces, and the deliberate destruction of people's individual possessions - are still impossible to estimate. The uprising killed nearly 200,000 inhabitants of Warsaw, and 84% of the city's buildings were destroyed. The Nazis deliberately burned house after house, methodically moving from street to street, and especially valuable cultural buildings, such as the Royal Palace, were simply blown up.

## **1945 - The end of the War**

### **Post-War Warsaw**

The post-war years were a period of socialism, as well as the reconstruction of the country and its capital city. Rebuilding the city took place under the motto 'The whole nation is building its capital' ('Cały naród buduje swoją stolicę'); this phrase still appears on the building at the corner of Jerozolimskie Avenue and Nowy Świat Street (next to the Empik store). The following decades were a time of political transition that hugely affected the shape of modern Europe.

### **1945-1989 - Poland under Communism**

**1945-1947** - Rebuilding of Nowy Świat Street and Krakowskie Przedmieście Street

**1953-1958** - Reconstruction of the Old Town

**1955** - Completion of the Palace of Culture and Science

The Palace of Culture and Science (Pałac Kultury i Nauki) was a "gift from the Soviet nation to the Polish nation", but seeing as Poland was under Soviet occupation at the time, it was a gift that was impossible to refuse.

**1972-1975** - Construction of the Central Railway Station (Dworzec Centralny)

**1971-1977** - Reconstruction of the Royal Castle (Zamek Królewski)

**1979** - Pope John Paul II's first visit to Poland

During this visit, he celebrated the now-famous Holy Mass with the participation of 500,000 people at Piłsudski Square (known then as Victory Square – Plac Wolności).

**1980** - Warsaw's Old Town is added to the list of UNESCO's World Heritage Sites

**1980** - The birth of Solidarity (Solidarność)

The strikes at the northern shipyards led to the creation of Solidarność, a massive social movement which contributed to the overthrowing of Communism in Poland in 1989.

**December 13, 1981** - Martial Law

The imposition of martial law was an attempt to prevent social unrest and the spreading of the emerging democratic movement.

**1989** - Round Table Discussions

Talks between representatives of the Communist authorities, the Polish opposition and the Catholic Church; as a result of these talks, the political transition process began in Poland. Meetings took place in several locations, with the first and last being held in Namiestnikowski Palace on Krakowskie Przedmieście Street.

**June 4, 1989** - Elections

These were the first free elections to take place in Poland after World War II; the second round to determine final results was held on June 18.

**Entry into the 21st century...**

**1999** - Accession to NATO

**2004** - Polish accession to the European Union

**2010** - 200th anniversary of the birth of Fryderyk Chopin

**2011** - Polish Presidency of the European Union

**2012** - Warsaw will host the European Football Championships, Euro 2012



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