

WroSlo

To Wrocław and beyond

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Essential information before your trip

This book was written with readers from Slovenia in mind. But I think it might be useful for anyone who lives quite a long way from Wrocław. It's about 600 kilometres as the crow flies from Ljubljana. 1,5 hour by plane to Warsaw (Warszawa) and then 4 hours by train to Wrocław. Or without plane: about 10 hours of driving. Is it worth making such journey and staying here few days?

If you know what you're looking for, the answer is yes. You can combine a visit to Wrocław nicely with exploring the region. Or even treat it as a stopover on your way further afield – perhaps to the Baltic Sea (a cold sea with sandy beaches) or to one of the nearby capitals: Warsaw, Berlin or Prague. It's easy to get there from here. And I'll try to tell you a bit about Wrocław. It's my city.

What is there to do in Wrocław?

The best thing about exploring cities is wandering around at your own pace, taking your time. Wrocław won't disappoint you this way. You can stroll around here for hours on end. Take photos of the details of the century-old townhouses (there are around 6,000 of them in the city), stop off at restaurants, sit by the river (there are five flowing through the city), visit museums and art galleries, have a picnic in a park clearing, go canoeing, or catch a concert. And while you're at it, see some interesting sights. Pop into the largest zoo in this part of Europe, or meet the lamplighter lighting the gas lanterns on Ostrów Tumski. There are plenty of places to cycle (you can hire a bike there) and plenty of places to go for a beer in the evening.

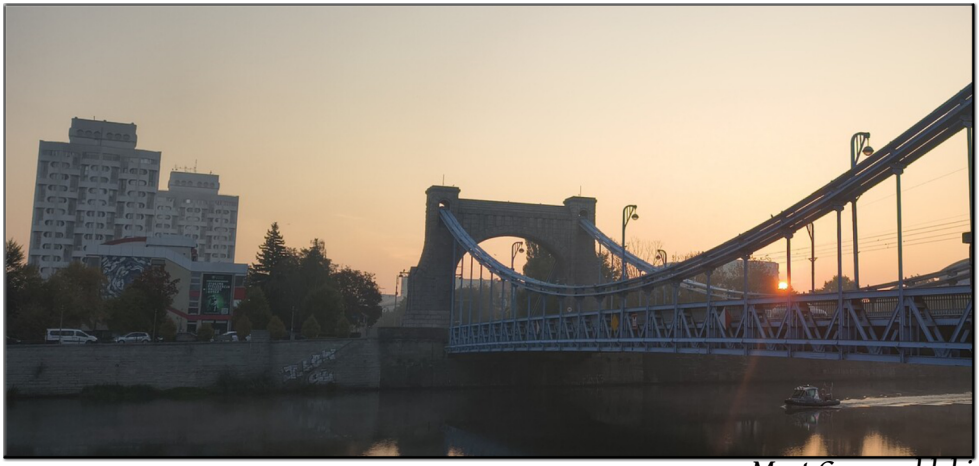
Many tourists visit Wrocław in December – they come specifically for the local Christmas market, which is often compared to Vienna's. I recommend this city above all during the warmer, greener months – roughly from the second half of April to the end of September. September can be very practical in terms of public transport. It's running as normal (though slightly less frequently during the summer holidays), but it's not yet overcrowded, as the students (there are over 110,000 of them studying in Wrocław) won't arrive until October.

Wrocław is the fourth most popular city in Poland among tourists (after Warsaw, Kraków and Gdańsk). Among foreign visitors, our neighbours – the Czechs and Germans – make up the largest group. There are also increasing numbers of British visitors, who generally highlight the good value for money. You'll also hear Ukrainian spoken on the streets. But in this case, it's mostly not tourists, but locals. Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, around 100,000 war refugees found shelter in Wrocław and the surrounding municipalities. And they're integrating into the local community. The adults work, the children go to school. We also have a Korean diaspora of several thousand – mainly employees of Korean corporations that have factories here, such as LG, who have come to Lower Silesia with their families.

End of digression. What's there to see here? Well, let's take it one by one.

Iconic buildings – Grunwaldzki Bridge, the Old Town Hall and the Centennial Hall

Built in 1910, the Imperial Bridge (now known as **Most Grunwaldzki**) is neither the largest nor the oldest in the city. But it is the coolest. It looks fabulous in the morning mist. It also has an interesting design. It is the only suspension bridge in the world whose suspension cables are made not of steel cables, but of flat metal plates.



Most Grunwaldzki

As you might guess, every now and then some genius decides to climb up these metal sheets to the pylon. I wouldn't recommend it – adventures like that usually end up at the police station. And the bridge looks good enough from the pavement.

One of the city's legends is linked to the Grunwaldzki Bridge. It was May 1951 or 1952. It was before midday. The water level in the river was low, and the clearance under the bridge was slightly greater than usual. At one point, a small aeroplane flew in from the direction of Wrocław University of Technology. It descended, skimming almost to the river's surface. For a moment, it vanished beneath the bridge. Passers-by froze in amazement. But the plane was already on the other side. It was already climbing back up... This story was recounted at the beginning of the 21st century by a Wrocław journalist, Wanda Dybalska. Her journalistic investigation led her to Stanisław Maksymowicz – one of the country's finest aerobatic pilots, and later an academic lecturer in Wrocław. Was it he who flew under the Grunwaldzki Bridge? – Maksymowicz never openly admitted to it.

The Old Town Hall (Stary Ratusz) on Wrocław's Market Square is a stunning late-Gothic building. It once housed the city council (today, councillors meet in the New Town Hall, on the other side of the Market Square); today, it is home to the Museum of Bourgeois Art.



Stary Ratusz

One of the rooms displays, amongst other things, busts of famous Wrocław residents. These include the physicist and mathematician Max Born, the architect Carl Gotthard Langhans, the doctor Ludwik Hirszfeld (to whom we owe the blood group classifications: 0, A, B and AB) and Wanda Rutkiewicz – a mountaineer and the first woman in the world to climb K2. The museum is, of course, open to visitors.



On the Town Hall facade, it's worth taking a look at the sculptures – many of them depict amusing scenes. And the clocks. There are two of them. One is on the tower (it has four clock faces), the other on the east facade. I think I like the latter best. Its face (featuring a smiling sun) dates from the 16th century, whilst the mechanism is from the 19th century. A museum employee winds it up every day. And the clock keeps going. It may not be the epitome of accuracy. It has only one hand. But it works.

A pleasant curiosity also awaits in the town hall cellars. Here you'll find one of the oldest restaurants on the continent – the Piwnica Świdnicka, which has been in operation since 1273. Its name comes from the town of Świdnica (60 km from Wrocław). In the Middle Ages, Świdnica beer was considered the best in Silesia. Is that still the case? – You'd have to try it for yourselves. Świdnica beer, brewed according to a reconstructed old recipe, is sometimes available here.



Ratusz

It is produced in small quantities; at Piwnica Świdnicka, they tap it roughly every six months, and it is then available while stocks last.

The slogan "the oldest restaurant in Europe" should, of course, be taken with a pinch of salt. I've already seen three such places. Each in a different city, and each claiming to be the oldest. But Piwnica Świdnicka is well worth a visit regardless. This place undoubtedly has its own unique atmosphere.

The Centennial Hall (Hala Stulecia). European cities once had a tradition of flexing their economic muscles through innovative buildings, often built to accompany international exhibitions. Paris treated itself to the Eiffel Tower in 1889, Brussels to the Atomium in 1958, and Wrocław to the Centennial Hall in 1913.



Hala Stulecia and Iglica

The Centennial Hall is undoubtedly one of Wrocław's landmarks. This monumental, proto-modernist building is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. At the time of its construction, it was the largest dome in the world. It became the most famous work of architect Max Berg. The Hall is, of course, open to visitors. (You may recognise this interior if you've watched "The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes".) Concerts, fairs and various other events are also held beneath its dome.

Its name refers to the centenary of Frederick Wilhelm III's proclamation to the people, calling for resistance against the occupier (Prussia was then forced to acknowledge its subordination to

Napoleonic France). After 1945, for many years it was known to Poles as the People's Hall (older residents of Wrocław often still refer to it as such today). In 2006, following its inclusion on the UNESCO list, the historic name was reinstated. https://halastulecia.pl/en/for-visitors/

It's worth stopping here for a while and having a wander around the area.

- The Centennial Hall is situated on the edge of Szczytnicki Park. This English-style park was established here in the 18th century, built around a natural woodland area. It covers over 83 hectares of greenery, full of picturesque spots.



Park Szczytnicki

- On the north side of the Hall stands a large, ivy-covered pergola (especially beautiful in autumn), surrounding a vast basin with a multimedia fountain. It has over 800 light points, 300 water nozzles and 3 fire nozzles. Its shows are free of charge. You can watch them from spring to autumn. The evening shows (longer and more spectacular than those during the day) are particularly popular – from 6.00 pm to 9.00 pm on the hour and at 9.40 pm.
- The Four Domes Pavilion, located next to the Centennial Hall at 1 Wystawowa Street, houses a museum of contemporary art. The building was designed by Hans Poelzig and forms part of the Centennial Hall complex, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. https://mnwr.pl/en/category/branches/the-four-domes-pavilion/
- The 90.3-metre-high Iglica (the Spire) standing in front of the main entrance to the Centennial Hall is the newest historical structure on the site. It was built in 1948 for the Recovered

Territories Exhibition. Once a month (always on a weekend), you can find a flea market beneath the Spire.



Hala Stulecia and Pergola

- To the north of the Pergola lies the Japanese Garden. Streams, ponds, waterfalls, stone-paved paths and hundreds of plant species, all arranged in accordance with the principles of oriental garden design. It is a truly charming place. I once overheard a comment from one of the tourists there. "You don't need Photoshop here," she said, delighted. And she was right. The garden is open from 1 April to 31 October. https://zzm.wroc.pl/obiektyzzmcp/ogrod-japonski-we-wroclawiu/

Slovenian heritage and traces in Wrocław

Not everyone may be aware of this, but Ljubljana and Wrocław were part of the same country for over 200 years. In 1526, the Silesian city became (along with the whole of Bohemia) part of the Habsburg Monarchy. Slovenians and Silesians has the same monarch until 1742, when Prussia took control of most of Silesia.

One of the traces of this shared history is the figure of Franz Engelbert Barbo von Waxenstein, a Catholic clergyman from Ljubljana. Between 1704 and 1706, he served as auxiliary bishop in Wrocław. Here, he became involved in the beatification process of Czesław Odrowąż.

Blessed Czesław (Pope Clement XI finally approved his cult in 1713) is said to have performed a miracle during the Mongol invasion of 1241.

He prayed so fervently that a luminous sphere appeared above his head, which scared off the invaders. Contemporary researchers interpret the mention of the luminous sphere as suggesting that the Mongols may have used gunpowder near Wrocław, a substance unknown to Europeans at the time.



Blessed Czesław Chapel

Be that as it may, during the Habsburg reign in the 18th century, Czesław became the subject of a cult. And this is thanks, among others, to Barbo von Waxenstein. Do visit St Adalbert's Church (2 Dominikański Square) in Wrocław. There you will find the beautiful Baroque chapel of Blessed Czesław.

Three unassuming little books in the collection of the Ossolineum in Wrocław also tell an interesting story. These are „Slovenske pésmi krajnskiga naróda", published in 1839, collected and edited by Emil Korytko.

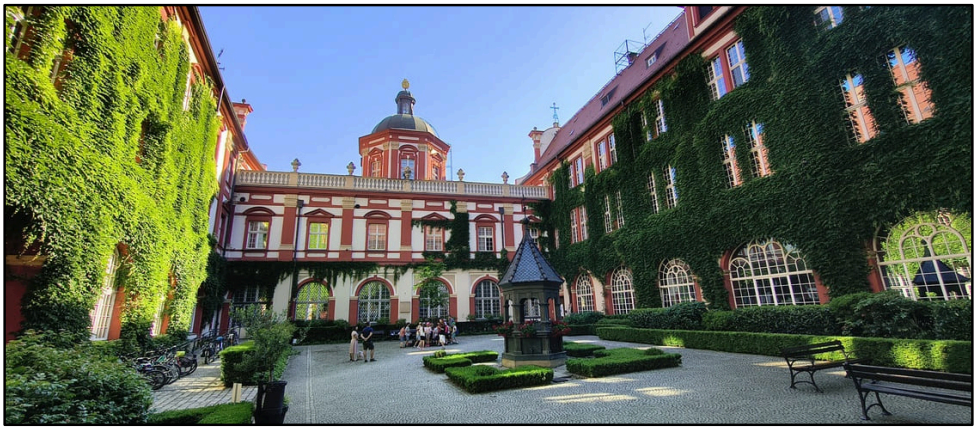


Emil Korytko was a Polish nobleman from Lviv who was arrested by the Austrian authorities for his involvement in printing banned literature. In 1836, he was sent into exile to the furthest corner of the empire – Ljubljana. There, Korytko undertook pioneering ethnographic research, collecting Slovenian songs. These were published in Ljubljana in 1839. Individual copies of these books found their way into the Lviv library. How did they end up in Wrocław? In 1945, the victorious powers shifted Poland's borders westwards. Polish

Lviv (Lwów) found itself in the Soviet Union, and German Breslau became polish Wrocław. A significant portion of the Ossolineum Library's collection from Lviv was transferred to Wrocław after the war. And among them were, among other things, three volumes of historical Slovenian songs.

It wasn't just books from Lviv that found their way to the city on the Oder. Several thousand Lviv residents also arrived here, as well as some Polish works of art – such as the Panorama of Racławice and the statue of Fredro. I'll tell you more about them a little later.

Do pop into the Ossolineum (37 Szewska Street) when you have a spare moment. As well as the library and publishing house, there is an interesting museum and a courtyard of exceptional beauty.



the courtyyard of the Ossolineum

The period of the Second World War is also the story of a certain Slovenian boy. He might have been 10 or 12 years old. During the German occupation, his parents were deported deep into the Reich. To Wrocław. Here he saw things that no child should ever have to witness. Years later, when he was a grown man, he wrote a book in which we find elements of Wrocław's topography. That boy was Peter Božic, one of Slovenia's known writers.

This story is virtually unknown here. In 2026, I wrote about it on a local website, probably for the first time in Poland. ("Oceta Vincenca smrt" has never been translated into Polish.) If you'd like to follow in Peter Božic's footsteps around the city, I have two tips. The author didn't quite remember the name of the street where the tenement house described in the book stood. It was actually Lehmgrubenstrasse, now Gliniana Street. The numbering has also changed since then. The

building at Lehmgrubenstrasse 159 is now Gliniana 59. That tenement house no longer exists. It burned down in 1945. In its place stands a modern-day infill building (of rather unremarkable appearance). But the world that young Peter saw still partly exists. The streets, the tenement houses, and even the nearby school building – which still serves as a school today. Who knows, perhaps he studied there... - From the biographical references I have come across, it appears that he continued his education in Wrocław.



The old school at Gliniana Street

The world described in his book has surreal elements; I am aware of that. However, too many details correspond to the topography of Wrocław in the 1940s. He didn't make it up; he was here and saw it all.

The Wrocław episode in the history of Peter Božic's family is part of a larger story. During the war, the Germans held over 50,000 forced labourers in this city. They were people of at least a dozen nationalities. Poles, French, Italians, English, Czechs, Hungarians, Ukrainians, Russians, Swedes, Greeks, Spaniards... And also citizens of Yugoslavia. There were children among them. Like Peter, who arrived here with his parents on a transport from Slovenia. After the capitulation of the Third Reich and the liberation of the concentration camps, some of the former forced labourers (mainly Poles) remained in Wrocław. Now in a different country, as free people.

There is no shortage of Slovenian stories in modern-day Wrocław either. Every basketball fan in our city knows, for example, who Andrej Urlep is. The Slovenian coach led the local team for several seasons and won the Polish championship with them five times (in 1998, 1999, 2001,

2002 and 2022). Wrocław's footballers also currently have a coach from Slovenia. Since 2024, the local football team WKS Śląsk Wrocław has been led by Ante Simundza, a coach from Maribor. He arrived at a difficult time for the team. He has a reputation as a disciplined professional, respected by the players. I have also heard (though I have not yet had the chance to verify this) that some Wrocław restaurants have recently started serving excellent Slovenian wines. They are imported here by Boris Grahor – a thoroughly charming man, the owner of what is probably Poland's first shop specialising in Slovenian wine, located in Oława near Wrocław.

Last but not least – the Angelus Award for Goran Vojnovic. The city of Wrocław has been awarding the Angelus literary prize since 2006. Every year, the award recognises works of prose published in Polish and written by authors from Central Europe. The name of the award refers to Angelus Silesius – a German-speaking Wrocław poet of the Baroque era. (The city awards poets the Silesius prize and prose writers the Angelus prize.)

In 2020, Goran Vojnovic was named the winner of the Angelus. He received the statuette and 150,000 zlotys for his book „My Yugoslavia", published in Polish by SEDNO Academic Publishing House.

In 2011, „Katarina, the Peacock and the Jesuit" by Drago Jancar was also nominated for the Angelus.

Wrocław's parks

The city has dozens of parks of various sizes, covering a total area of over 660 hectares of green space. The best known (and arguably the most beautiful) is Szczytnicki Park (over 83 hectares) next to the Centennial Hall. It is home to over 450 species of trees and shrubs. - It is sometimes referred to as the largest open-air arboretum in Poland – according to the Wrocław Municipal Greenery Authority. Here you will find monumental oaks, rhododendrons blooming spectacularly in May, and charming little bridges spanning shallow canals and sections of the old riverbed. You can spread out a picnic blanket in a clearing here, or rest on a bench in the shade of the trees. It's great fun to discover fragments of the past hidden amongst the greenery. Here you'll find old stone drinking troughs, a somewhat forgotten century-old tower, and even a small wooden church – now deconsecrated, it hosts art

exhibitions and intimate concerts.



Park Szczytnicki

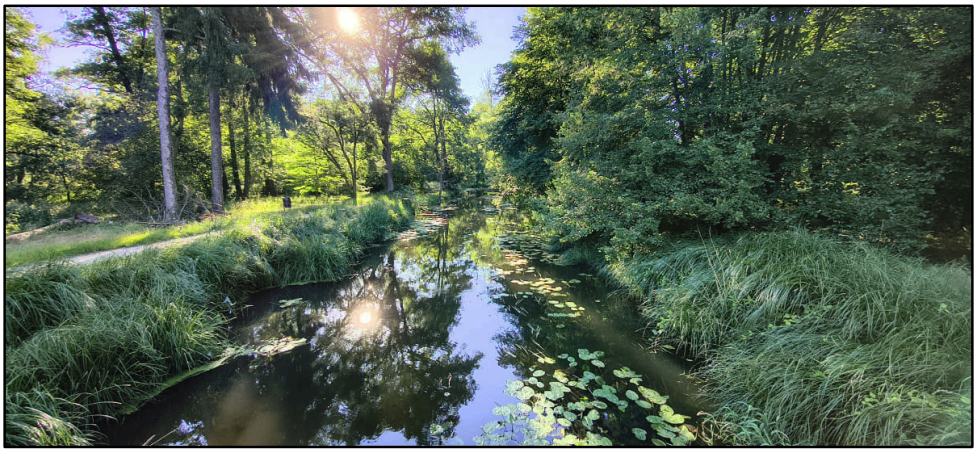
Wandering through the park, you can reach the Olympic Stadium. It is a large, historic sports complex. Contrary to its name, it has never hosted the Olympics. However, there was a time when architects were also awarded at the Olympic Games... During the 1932 Games in Los Angeles, Wrocław architect Richard Konwiarz received a bronze medal in the sports architecture category for his design. And that is where the stadium's current name comes from: Olympic. Today, it is used by, amongst others, the Sparta Wrocław speedway team and the Panthers Wrocław American football team.



small wooden church in Park Szczytnicki

Among my favourite parks in Wrocław are Park Wschodni (situated on a bend in the River Oława; it's lovely to sit there by the water, listen to the frogs and watch the waterfowl) and the small Park Złotnicki (in

spring, there are exquisite carpets of wildflowers, plus archaeological remains – the ruins of an ancient settlement and a medieval fortification). And, of course, Biskupiński Park, which I feel most at home in. Perhaps it's the proximity of the River Oder and the humidity in the air, or perhaps some other phenomenon I don't understand – but the branches of the oak trees growing here sometimes scatter the sun's rays in a truly magical way.



Park Wschodni

Wrocław classics: the Old Town and the area around the Centennial Hall

The area around the Centennial Hall

I've already told you a bit about the Centennial Hall. So here I'll just add a few more details. There are some great places in the area that are well worth a visit.

- Wrocław Zoo (south of the Centennial Hall, across the street) is one of the largest and most fascinating zoos in this part of Europe. You can easily spend a good few hours here. One of the most popular attractions is the Africarium – the world's first aquarium dedicated to the fauna of a single continent: Africa. The most impressive feature is the glass tunnel, where you can watch fish swimming overhead. https://zoo.wroclaw.pl/
- The WuWa Estate. This is one of the most interesting modernist

housing estates in Poland. It was built in 1929. There are no crowds here (everyone is visiting the zoo), but there is some fascinating architecture. It's worth starting your visit at the InfoWuWA cafe – a cafe with a tourist information desk at 2 Tramwajowa Street (one short tram stop further on from the Centennial Hall and the zoo).



InfoWuWa cafe

- On Tramwajowa Street, right next to WuWa Cafe, there is also a historic tram depot. It houses a music club, workshops run by several craftspeople, and a community garden. Various markets and events are held at weekends in the halls of the former depot. It's an interesting place with an industrial, somewhat austere atmosphere.
- Hydropolis. It's a bit further on, across the Oder, but it's well worth a visit. At 17 Na Grobli Street, in a 19th-century building that once housed the municipal waterworks, there is a multimedia and interactive educational centre dedicated to water. If you type into a search engine: "what to do in Wrocław with children when it's raining", Hydropolis will be one of the suggestions. But older visitors will also find something interesting here. I recommend it not just in rainy weather. If you leave the zoo via the back exit and cross the footbridge over the river, it's about a 600-metre walk to Hydropolis. https://hydropolis.pl/
- Hydropolis is close to Polinka – a cable car that takes you across the Oder. It was built for students of the University of

Technology to shorten the journey from the main campus (on the north bank) to the Faculty of Geotechnical Engineering (on the south bank of the river). But anyone can use it. Tickets are purchased on site from a ticket machine. https://pwr.edu.pl/en/polinka



Polinka

The Old Town. You can explore it at a leisurely pace in 2–3 days

The Market Square. This is where the heart of the city beats. And this is likely where you'll head first upon arriving in Wrocław. It is one of the largest and most beautiful Old Town market squares in this part of Europe. It was laid out in the 13th century by the Silesian Duke Henry the Bearded.



Rynek (Market Square)

Take note of a few buildings and sites.

- The late-Gothic Town Hall from the 15th century, one of the best-preserved in Poland. It houses the Museum of Bourgeois Art, which is open to visitors.
- The statue of Count Aleksander Fredro, by Leonardo Marconi. The Count was a playwright and soldier. He is considered the father of Polish comedy. For generations of Wrocław residents, it has become a meeting point (when you arrange to meet someone in the Market Square, it is usually either "by the pillory" or "by Fredro"). The monument originally stood in Lviv. In 1945, however, Lviv came to lie within the borders of the Soviet Union. The communist authorities agreed to hand over to Poland certain works of art from Lviv associated with Polish culture. And so, in 1956, the count found his way to Wrocław.



Fredro monument

- Connected by an arcade, the delicate medieval townhouses known as Jaś and Małgosia. This used to be the entrance to the churchyard. They were built to muffle the noise coming from the market in the Market Square.
- St Elizabeth's Garrison Church (behind Jaś and Małgosia). It's well worth climbing its tower to see the Old Town from above. The area around the Market Square is a great starting point for exploring the city's other hidden corners.
- In the cellars of the Old Town Hall, you'll find Piwnica Świdnicka – one of Europe's oldest restaurants, in operation since 1273. At

Rynek Ratusz 2, you'll find Spiż. This is the iconic, first restaurant microbrewery in Poland, established in 1992.

- In 2023, the Krupa Art Foundation, a private contemporary art gallery receiving rave reviews, opened in the building at Rynek 27/28. https://krupaartfoundation.pl/
- Świdnicka Street, leading away from the Market Square, is the main thoroughfare of the Old Town. Passing historic buildings such as the opera house, the Monopol Hotel and the Renoma department store (the pre-war Wertheim) along the way, you will reach the junction with Piłsudskiego Street, where the Monument to the Anonymous Passer-by stands – one of the most interesting sculptures in Wrocław. If you turn left onto Piłsudskiego, after a few minutes you will reach the Main Railway Station.



Anonymus Passer-by monument

- Adjacent to the Market Square is a second square – Solny Square. In the past, salt was traded here; today, Wrocław's florists have their stalls here. In the centre of the square, you'll find a strange, slightly twisted obelisk. It symbolises a flame. It was here in 1453 that the town's inhabitants, swayed by the fiery sermons of the inquisitor Jan Kapistran, burned their own luxury goods at the stake.
  Take a look around the square. The pastel-coloured townhouses resemble those in Italy. (Although the streets in Wrocław are much wider. As my son says – we have townhouses as colourful as in Italy and streets as wide as in Austria). Here you can go underground and visit a World War II shelter. Or have a coffee

sitting at a table in a charming, ivy-covered courtyard (look for it as you pass through the gate of tenement house no. 14)



Plac Solny (Solny Square)

But returning to the Market Square for a moment: twice a year, large fairs are held here: the Midsummer Fair in June and the Christmas Fair in December.

Szewska Street. If, like me, you enjoy turning down a side street when visiting a new city, be sure to pop into Szewska Street. It's quieter and less crowded here than in the Market Square itself. It's worth coming here if only for the Kameleon (Szewska 6/7).



Kameleon

This modernist department store, built in 1928, is one of the buildings that has earned Wrocław a place in the annals of world architecture. It was designed by the Berlin architect Erich Mendelsohn. Imagine what it

looked like before the Second World War, when the lights were left on in the building at night and special curtains were hung in the windows. The facade glowed then with rows of windows.

- Near St Mary Magdalene's Church (also on Szewska Street), you may come across a flea market on some weekends. And if you look up, you'll find the "highest bridge in Silesia". This is how the Penitents' Bridge (Mostek Pokutnic), which connects the two church towers, is sometimes referred to (you can go up there!).
- Walking north along Szewska Street, towards the Ossolineum and the University, you'll pass an antique bookshop with a sculpture of a cat perched on the windowsill. That's Dante. Dante the cat lived in the bookshop and regularly lounged in the window display. He was a favourite with locals and tourists alike. To this day, he also has his own Facebook profile, followed by 10,000 people. He died in 2016 at the age of 16. A few months later, a monument was erected in his honour...



Dante

- Do pop into the Ossolineum (it's a charming old library, academic publishing house and museum all in one), and if you're short on time – at least take a look at its delightful courtyard. https://www.ossolineum.pl/

The University of Wrocław. About 100 metres from the Ossolineum, you will come across the imposing Baroque main building of the University of Wrocław. The university, originally known as the Leopoldine Academy, was founded in 1702 by Emperor Leopold I of Habsburg. It was initially run by the Jesuits. In 1811, the Prussian

authorities merged it with the Viadrina in Frankfurt, creating the state-run, secular University of Wrocław. In 1945, the borders changed once again, and the German university was transformed into a Polish one.

- Take a look at the fountain featuring a Fencer (Szermierz), standing in front of the University. The fencer is one of the most famous works by the sculptor Hugo Lederer, who was born in Znojmo, Czech Republic. Legend has it that while in Wrocław, Lederer lost everything he had in a card game one day. He left the bar naked, with only his sword remaining. This is precisely how he depicted the Wrocław student in his sculpture. Partly as a warning, partly with a touch of humour...
  That sword, it must be admitted, sometimes goes missing. It is the most frequently stolen (as a "souvenir") bladed weapon in Poland. In most cases, this ends with the arrest of perpetrators who are not entirely sober (there is CCTV here) and a hefty fine.



Szermierz (fencer) - again with no sword...

- The Aula Leopoldina, located within the university building, is one of the most beautiful Baroque halls in the world. It was built between 1728 and 1732 and named in honour of Emperor Leopold I. https://muzeum.uni.wroc.pl/plan-zwiedzania/aula-leopoldina/
- The University building is crowned by the Mathematical Tower (which you can climb – another interesting vantage point!). In the 18th century, an astronomical observatory was established there. Johann Gottfried Galle, the discoverer of Neptune, among other celestial bodies, worked here for 45 years. The observatory

was closed at the beginning of the 20th century due to the city's smog and its lights, which made observation impossible. The 17th meridian is marked on the tower's floor – the gutter symbolising it has survived to this day. Interestingly, the people of Wrocław in the past made a mistake. In reality, the 17th meridian runs about 5 kilometres further on, crossing Wrocław's Millennium Bridge. https://muzeum.uni.wroc.pl/plan-zwiedzania/wieza-matematyczna/

Ostrów Tumski. This is the former cathedral island and the oldest, historic part of the city. (Although it has not been an island for over 200 years.) In the 10th century, a small fortified settlement was built on the island. Archaeologists still disagree as to whether it was built by the Czech Premyslids, the Polish Piasts, or perhaps the local silesian tribe (Ślężanie). The Latin name of the city, Wratislavia, is, however, usually associated with the Czech prince Wratislaw I (888–921).

- It is well worth visiting the Gothic Cathedral of St John the Baptist (the patron saint of Wrocław) from the 13th/14th century. Good news for those craving panoramic views – here, too, you can climb the church tower.



Ostrów Tumski (Catherdral Island)

- The gas lanterns on Ostrów Tumski are lit and extinguished daily by Poland's only lamplighter. You can meet him at sunrise or in the evening. In winter, the evening round begins around 6.20 pm; in summer, not until just before 9.00 pm.
- The building at 12 St. Martin's Street houses the entrance to the

underground passages of the former Piast ducal castle. The underground passages were opened to the public in 2024.

- The Church of the Holy Cross and St Bartholomew is a unique building. It comprises two medieval churches – the lower and upper churches – enclosed within a single Gothic structure. Franz Engelbert Barbo von Waxenstein, a native of Ljubljana, served here.



Ostrów Tumski by night. The Church of the Holy Cross is on left side.

- Adjacent to Ostrów Tumski is the Botanical Garden of the University of Wrocław. Covering an area of 7.4 hectares, it is home to 7,500 species of plants. It is absolutely beautiful here in spring, summer and autumn.
- The small Archdiocesan Museum (Muzeum Archidiecezjalne) at 16 Cathedral Square houses a real treasure: Lucas Cranach the Elder's 'Madonna under the Fir Trees' from 1510. Also kept here is the 13th-century Henryków Book, inscribed on UNESCO's "Memory of the World" register, which contains the first recorded sentence in Polish.
- A nice view of Ostrów Tumski unfolds from the Ceglarski Bastion, situated on the other side of the river. (It is a relic of the city's old fortifications.) To get there, you need to walk to the nearest bridge. From the bridge, turn onto Dunikowski Boulevard.

Dunikowski Boulevard (Bulwar Dunikowskiego). This is one of the best spots in Wrocław for sitting by the river. You can also board a cruise boat on the Oder here, and during the spring and summer

months you'll find food trucks and food stalls. Nearby attractions:

- The Market Hall from the early 20th century. Nice architecture, fresh fruit and vegetables, regional and other produce.



Hala Targowa (Market Hall)

- Ceglarski Bastion (Bastion Ceglarski) – the ruins of a 16th-century bastion. The hill offers a good view of Ostrów Tumski with the cathedral. At the foot of the bastion, on its southern side, art fairs are often held, featuring works by students from the nearby Academy of Fine Arts.
- Gondola Bay (Zatoka Gondoli) – a picturesque cove where you can hire a canoe, a rowing boat or a quiet motorboat.



Panorama Racławicka

- The Racławice Panorama (Panorama Racławicka). A huge battle

scene, housed in a rotunda built specifically for it. In the 19th century, panoramas were the equivalent of 3D cinema. Thanks to appropriate painting and scenographic techniques, they transported the viewer into another reality. The Wrocław Panorama remains impressive to this day. In 2025, it was visited by over 491,000 people. The painting depicts the Battle of Racławice, which the Poles fought against the Russians in 1794. For many decades, the communist authorities did not allow it to be displayed, as the subject was politically sensitive. The painting was originally exhibited in Lviv.



Bastion Sakwowy

The Sakwowy Bastion (Bastion Sakwowy) on Piotra Skargi Street is the most interesting stop along the Old Town Promenade, which runs alongside the city moat. When Wrocław was captured by Napoleon's troops in 1808, orders were given to demolish its fortifications. A promenade was laid out where the old city walls once stood. On the hill concealing the remains of the former bastion, a stylish colonnade, a fountain, restaurants and cafés have since appeared. In the second half of the 20th century, the area fell into disrepair and lost some of its charm. The city renovated and refurbished the area again in 2024. You can stop for a coffee or a bite to eat and look out over Wrocław from above before continuing on your way. The Bastion is located just 800 metres from the Main Railway Station (Wrocław Główny). It is even closer to Dominikański Square (Plac Dominikański), which is a major transport hub. Near Dominikański Square, it is worth visiting St. Adalbert's Church (kościół św. Wojciecha) with the chapel of Blessed

Czesław.

Where have all these dwarves come from?

The city is famous, among other things, for... dwarves. Over the last 20 years, hundreds of small bronze dwarf figurines have appeared all over the city. You can find them in some truly surprising places. Children love them. Thanks to the search for dwarves, exploring the city becomes an exciting experience for the little ones too. Why are there so many of them here?

Let's go back in time a little.

In the mid-1980s, Poland was a bleak, economically stagnant country, kept in check by the military. Martial Law (1981–1983), imposed by General Wojciech Jaruzelski, may well have saved the country from Soviet intervention. But the damage was done. The army had been used against its own people. The atmosphere therefore resembled life under occupation: with hopes for change crushed by tanks, with fear, and with people retreating into their private lives. With a daily struggle for basic consumer goods, as items in short supply included, for example, toilet paper, meat, sugar, coffee and fuel. The shop shelves were bare, and when goods were finally delivered to a shop, huge queues would form. It was difficult to buy washing powder or nappies for children. Not to mention decent shoes.

Of course, the black market flourished. You had to be resourceful and find ways to get hold of various things. Just like during the occupation. Everyone had to „kombinować". Interestingly, the Polish word „kombinować" apparently has no equivalent in most languages (it means sth close to finding creative solution, sometimes on the edge of honesty; knowing that word is important to understand Poland).

For me, that time represents the world of early childhood. But in the memories of people from my parents' generation, talk of the hopelessness and stagnation of the 1980s keeps coming up like a mantra.

And then, on the wall of a transformer station in the Biskupin estate in Wrocław, a little dwarf appeared. Soon there were many more of them around the city. The game went like this: the authorities would paint over anti-government graffiti on the walls. On the painted-over patch, an invisible hand would draw a dwarf. The dwarf soon became a

symbol of the anti-communist movement born in Wrocław, known as the Orange Alternative (Pomarańczowa Alternatywa).

Young people – often wearing orange dwarf hats – soon began to take to the streets. But they didn't do it the way their parents had. Instead of a protest, it was a happening. Instead of fighting the police, there was satire. On the anniversary of the October Revolution, they drove a cardboard replica of the cruiser Aurora into Wrocław's Market Square. On another occasion, they organised "Secret Agent Day". Everyone turned up wearing black sunglasses and with their collars turned up. They checked each other's ID, jotting down details in their notebooks. They exchanged secret signals. Legend has it that even one bewildered militiaman allowed himself to be checked.



One of the dwarves in Wrocław

Or take this story. One sweltering summer's day, they turned up on Świdnicka Street, wearing T-shirts with letters painted on them. One person represented one letter. They lined up to spell out „precz z upałami" (literally - down with the heat). Every now and then, the letter 'u' would get lost in the crowd. (I don't know if this joke makes sense in other Slavic languages, but "pały" was the term used for regime militiamen back then.)

Their performance was based on the assumption that the authorities would intervene. The idea was for them to intervene in an absurd situation. To become part of the performance.

- Did you take part in an illegal meeting of dwarves?

That question was actually asked once.

In December 1987, news even spread through the global media that

Santa Claus had been arrested in Wrocław. Thirty orange Santas and ten Snow Maidens were detained at the time. After being loaded into police vans, they started handing out sweets to the militiamen...

The Orange Alternative was simply having a laugh. Because when you start laughing, fear ceases to be paralysing.

The movement grew in strength month by month. On 1 June 1987, Children's Day, 10,000 dwarves marched through the streets of Wrocław. It was the first major demonstration since martial law had been lifted against which the authorities did not use force. Something was beginning to crack in the city on the Oder. Two years later, communism fell in Poland.

To pay tribute to Wrocław's dwarfs, in 2000 the local branch of Gazeta Wyborcza newspaper erected a bronze dwarf on Świdnicka Street. It stands on the tip of a raised thumb, at the junction with Kazimierza Wielkiego Street. This is where the Orange Alternative's happenings most often began.

Since then, hundreds of dwarves figurines have appeared around the town. You can even pick up a dwarf map at the tourist information point in the Market Square. Tourists take photos of them, whilst children hunt for them outdoors and have great fun doing so. To spot some of the dwarves, you sometimes need binoculars (one is perched on a chimney, another in the window of the water tower, and yet another on the Penitents' Bridge, which connects the two towers of St Mary Magdalene's Church – though the latter can also be seen up close). Sometimes you need a bit of... luck. One of the dwarves has perched on the roof of a tram and is just pottering about Wrocław... Anyway, go and look for them yourselves. :)



Dwarves orchestra nearby National Music Forum

Of course, these modern dwarves are a somewhat commercialised affair. But they're also quite democratic. They're erected and funded by companies, institutions, and even private individuals. If you'd like to put up your own dwarf in Wrocław, all you need is the consent and willingness of the landowner. No additional permits are required. Then you just need to find a sculptor who will design and create such a figure – and commission them to do so. There are 8 craftsmen who specialise in this. And that's all. That's why there are already hundreds of dwarves in this city.

You only find things like this in Wrocław

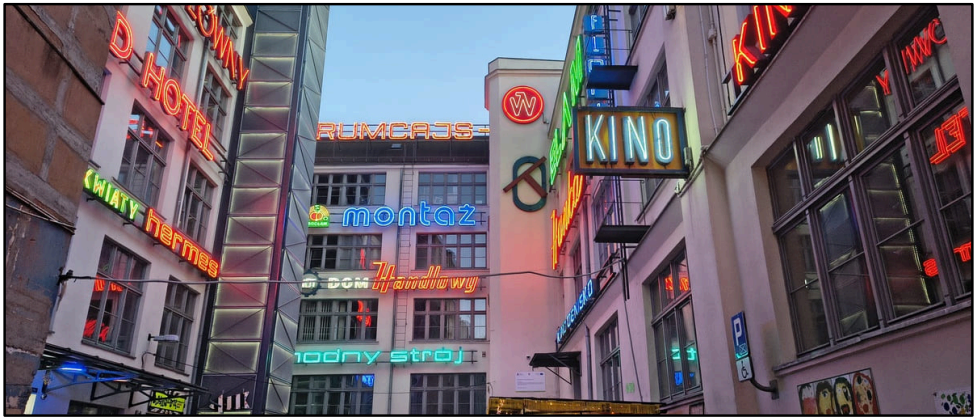
Of course, the city isn't just about historic sites and traditional attractions, the likes of which you'll find anywhere in the world. There are a few things in Wrocław that undoubtedly give it its unique local character.

- **WRO-TA** – the Wrocław Tourist Lines. During the spring and summer season, you can take a ride around the city on a vintage tram or bus every weekend. These meticulously restored vehicles have various owners. These include non-governmental organisations, the City of Wrocław, the Municipal Transport Company (MPK), and even private enthusiasts. Since 2022, they have been transporting tourists and residents under a single banner. Standard public transport tickets are valid.



vintage tram in Wrocław

- **The Polonaise for Fredro** (Polonez dla Fredry). Around 100 days before their A-level exams, which mark the end of secondary school, final-year secondary school pupils dance the Polonaise (the Polish national dance). The Polonaise for Fredro – at the monument to Aleksander Fredro in the Market Square. It has now become a tradition. If you happen to be in Wrocław in January or February, you may come across young people dancing in a long, colourful procession by the Fredro monument. Wish them luck in their exams!
- **"Hey Joe" and the World Guitar Record** (Gitarowy Rekord Świata). Every year on 1 May, thousands of people with guitars gather in Wrocław's Market Square. They play Jimi Hendrix's "Hey Joe" together, attempting once again to break the world guitar record. The city is then full of guitarists. In the afternoon and evening, concerts take place in the Market Square. https://heyjoe.pl/
- **The Neon Courtyard** (Podwórko Neonów) at 46 Ruska Street is a place well worth a visit after dark. Old, disused neon signs from almost all over the city have been collected here. They have been repaired and are now a delight to behold. The collection is privately owned, but the city subsidises their insurance and maintenance. You have to admit – after dark, they create a real „wow" effect. It's hard to find a more Instagram-worthy spot.



Neon Courtyard at Ruska Street

- **Kinomural**. Every autumn in Wrocław, Kinomural takes place. For two days, colourful animations are projected onto the façades of selected tenement houses. Artists from all over the

world take part in the project. It all happens, of course, after dark. And the courtyards and streets (often completely non-touristy corners of the city) become, for a moment, the stage for something beautiful.https://kinomural.com/

Restaurants: where to eat

It is said that the local food scene has been coming into its own in recent years. The best proof of this is Wrocław's debut in the famous Michelin Guide in 2025. As many as 22 Wrocław restaurants were featured in it. Its editor, Michelin's Rooksana Hossenally, lists five places in Europe where you can eat well in 2026: Venice in Italy, the Czech Republic (outside Prague), the Italian Dolomites, Wrocław in Poland and the Amalfi Coast in Italy. And in 2026, Wrocław received its first two Michelin stars.

The Michelin-starred restaurants in Wrocław are:

- Baba – Nożownicza 1b, head chef: Beata Śniechowska
- Most – Księcia Witolda 1/1, head chef: Łukasz Budzik.



Best coffee outside the city centre is in Mała Czarna

Wrocław restaurants with a Bib Gourmand distinction (best value for money):

- in 2025 – Baba, IDA kuchnia i wino, Tarasowa.
- in 2026 – IDA kuchnia i wino, Pijalni Wino & Bistro, Tarasowa.

Michelin Recommendation (not yet a „star", but a distinction for high quality standards):

- in 2025 – Acquario, Campo, dinette, Gustaw, Korill180, La

Maddalena, Lwia Brama², Martim, Mercado Tapas Bistro, Między Mostami, Młoda Polska, Monopol, Most, Nafta Neo Bistro, OKWineBar, Przystań & Marina, Warsztat Food & Garden, Wierzbowa 15, Wrocławska.

- in 2026 – Acquario, Arche Klasztor, Campo Modern Grill, dinette, Gustaw, Korill180, La Maddalena, Lwia Brama², Martim, Mercado Tapas Bistro, Mercado Nuevo, Między Mostami, Milo, Młoda Polska, Monopol, Nafta Neo Bistro, ODRé, OK Restauracja, Przystań & Marina, Stacja Breslau, Usta Usta Wrocław, Warsztat Food & Garden, Wierzbowa 15.

You'll find hundreds of restaurants, bars and eateries in the city, all offering a wide variety of dishes. I'm not exactly a regular at restaurants, but I'll tell you one thing: don't leave Wrocław without trying polish pierogi. They're served in plenty of places. My favourite spot for pierogi is the Kombinat bar on Plac Solny. The bar is not far from the office where I work, and the pierogi are tasty and affordable.



Lody Roma at Nadodrze district

In my opinion, the best ice cream in the city is in the Nadodrze district, at the old Roma ice cream parlour at 5 Rydygiera Street. It's north of the Old Town, within walking distance. There are plenty of old tenement houses in the area, and you'll also find cosy cafés and craft shops there.

For a quick bite: pączki, precle and Żabka shops

Sometimes you fancy a quick bite to eat without necessarily sitting down in a restaurant. When in Poland, you simply must try the local doughnuts (pączki). These are round, sweet pastries made from fried yeast dough and filled in various ways. In the centre of Wrocław, you can find them in many patisseries and bakeries.

The most traditional pączki are those topped with icing. Believe it or not, it's almost impossible to eat one without licking your fingers. But overall – they're absolutely delicious. A tip for vegetarians: this isn't a vegetarian dish; good pączki are fried in lard.

Pretzels (precle) are a popular snack in Wrocław. Both traditional or filled varieties and served warm. The trend was started by Pan Precel – a small, local Wrocław-based company. Initially, they sold pretzels by delivering them to office buildings at lunchtime. Over time, the pretzels also began to be sold in small shops in the city centre. A few years later, rival outlets selling pretzels from the Romanian chain Luca also appeared in the city. Both are tasty. Just the thing to grab and have a quick bite.



Pan Precel

Another phenomenon you need to know about in Poland is the Żabka chain. These are small convenience stores, operated on a franchise basis. Żabkas are literally everywhere. As well as basic groceries, you can get a hot dog, coffee or hot chocolate there. The value for money is acceptable. Accessibility – throughout the city, in every neighbourhood.

Places you might want to check out if you're staying here a few days longer

In the Partynice district (which is actually quite a long way from the historic centre) there's a **horse racing track**. Horse racing isn't exactly a popular sport; I'd even say it's very niche. Suffice it to say that there are only three such tracks in the whole of Poland. One in Warsaw (but you'll find everything there; it's the only real metropolis in the country), one by the sea in Sopot, and one right here in Wrocław. The track in Wrocław is historic. It survived the Second World War virtually unscathed. The racing season here begins in April and runs until autumn. Admission to most races is free, and they are held at weekends. It is definitely „something a bit different". Ladies' Day, held every year in June, is an absolutely picturesque event. The horses are merely a backdrop on this day; it is a day of retro-style elegance. The ladies arrive in dresses and stylish hats, and the gentlemen accompanying them in tailcoats and frock coats. The photographers from our editorial team, although they sometimes turn their noses up at being sent to Partynice on a daily basis (because it's far, because it takes a long time, etc.), actually really do like Ladies' Day. The photos turn out beautifully. https://www.torpartynice.pl/

Water parks, swimming pools. And a fishing spot. I was going to mention them when talking about the fountains. Because you're not allowed to swim in the fountains in Wrocław. But there are places designed specifically for that purpose. Among them are three quite pleasant water parks. One large near the city centre at 99 Borowska Street (Aquapark Wrocław) and two smaller ones, located in more outlying residential areas: Aquapark Zakrzów (29 Wilanowska Street) and Aquapark Brochów (10 Polna Street). You can swim here all year round. There are also several smaller pools and open-air swimming areas open during the summer season (Morskie Oko, the Orbita summer swimming pool and Glinianki). At Glinianki (next to the Tarczyński Arena football stadium), there are also ponds for anglers. You can fish there without any unnecessary formalities (no fishing licence is required).

- Aquapark Wrocław https://aquapark.wroc.pl/en
- Glinianki https://spartan.wroc.pl/glinianki/

The National Forum of Music (Narodowe Forum Muzyki). If you're staying in Wrocław for a few extra days, you might fancy popping in here. The building isn't particularly impressive from the outside (at least not to me). But it has excellent acoustics and hosts some great concerts. In 2023, the NFM received the International Classical Music Awards 2023 – for its artistic activities and outstanding architectural and acoustic design. Choose concerts in the Main Hall, as these are the most impressive. Even if you're not a huge music lover. https://www.nfm.wroclaw.pl/ .

The History Centre Zajezdnia (Centrum Historii Zajezdnia) at 184 Grabiszyńska Street is a former bus depot that has been converted into an intriguing museum showcasing the recent history of Wrocław (since 1945). https://zajezdnia.org/en/home/

Don't do these things here

The list of things you shouldn't do isn't very long, but knowing it can save you a lot of trouble. I've already mentioned that you shouldn't bathe in the local fountains. You also shouldn't smoke at public transport stops or in restaurants. If you fancy a smoke whilst in a restaurant, you'll have to step outside for a moment. In many cases, there are ashtrays outside.

Drinking alcohol in public places is also prohibited. In restaurant gardens – of course, by all means, you can do it. On a park bench – not necessarily.

But the most important thing you mustn't do in Wrocław is to urinate in the moat. Not because it's rude. Because it could kill you. Seriously. Almost every year, the emergency services pull a drowned person out of the city moat or out of the Oder. The victims are usually drunk tourists who, on their way back from a party and ignoring the barriers, decide to relieve themselves in the moat. The banks of the city moat are steep. It's easy to fall in, and hard to climb out. Especially after a few drinks. The situation is similar on the banks of the Oder in the Old Town. So if any of your friends get the daft idea of peeing into the moat – just stop him.

A brief history of the city

- In Roman times, the area now known as Wrocław was inhabited by the Vandals. During the Migration Period, this East Germanic people were forced to flee en masse from the Huns. (These were the same Vandals who, in 439, founded a kingdom in North Africa and, in 455, together with the descendants of the Carthaginians, captured and sacked Rome.) In the centuries that followed, the Slavs began to occupy their place in Central Europe.
- On the middle Odra, in the area covering present-day Wrocław, there existed a small tribal state of the Silesians in the 9th century. Historical sources state that in 845 the Silesians had 15 strongholds. They probably recognised the suzerainty of Great Moravia. Following the collapse of the Great Moravian Empire, the Silesians came under the influence of Bohemia. The name Wrocław (Latin: Wratislavia) is thought to derive from the name of the Bohemian prince Vratislav I, who lived at the turn of the 9th and 10th centuries.



Medieval jail courtyard at Więzienna Street

- Around 985–990, Wrocław, along with the entire region, became part of a young, expanding state whose capital lay just 100 kilometres to the north. A few years later, this state would be named Poland.
- In the year 1000, Wrocław became the seat of a bishopric.
- In 1138, the period of Poland's fragmentation began. For the next 200 years or so, Wrocław was to be the capital of the

independent Duchy of Silesia. The rulers of the Silesian Piast dynasty carried out an intensive colonisation campaign. They brought in German and Walloon settlers, founded towns, built mines and developed trade. Silesia became the richest and most developed of the Polish duchies. However, the Silesian Piasts fought with mixed fortunes, dividing territories among members of the dynasty into ever smaller duchies and gradually losing their significance.



Old Town in Wrocław

- In 1335, Henryk VI, the last of the Wrocław Piasts, died without issue. Under the terms of a succession agreement concluded earlier, his duchy became part of the Kingdom of Bohemia. Despite a few turbulent twists and turns, it remained so until the 18th century. Indeed, the black Silesian eagle still features on the Bohemian coat of arms to this day.
- In 1526, the Habsburgs began their reign in Bohemia, and consequently in Wrocław as well. Surrounded by the Habsburgs' mighty fortifications, the city managed to avoid major destruction during the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648), which ravaged this part of Europe. In the 16th century, the course of the Oder became a linguistic border. South of it, most inhabitants already spoke German; to the north, they still spoke Polish. The local Slavic dialect (now extinct), known as Wasserpolnisch, differed significantly from modern Polish. The range of Slavic dialects would continue to shrink with each

generation.

- In 1702, the Leopoldine Academy was founded – the first institution of higher education in Wrocław. Its traditions are continued to this day by the University of Wrocław.
- Between 1740 and 1763, the three Silesian Wars were fought, as a result of which almost the whole of Silesia, including Wrocław, was conquered by prussian forces. A civilisational shift was on the horizon. Prussia was Protestant (the Habsburg Monarchy was Catholic), centralised and militarised. It would bring with it modern administration, education and industry. And also – nascent nationalism.



Former stock exchange building. Prussian times, 19th century.

- Wrocław was not spared by the Napoleonic Wars. In 1807, following three weeks of artillery bombardment, French troops captured the city. In many respects, this marked another turning point. Firstly, the victors ordered the demolition of the city walls. In the long run, this proved to be a blessing in disguise. The previously overcrowded provincial town suddenly gained space and began to expand rapidly. Secondly, the war with France (in which Prussia is essentially the defensive party, fighting for freedom against the invader) becomes an important symbol. It is to mark the centenary of the royal proclamation to the people, calling for a fight against the enemy, that the Centennial Hall is built in Wrocław. (Interestingly, for modern-day Wrocław residents, the Napoleonic episode is a source of cognitive dissonance. For Poles, Napoleon was a liberator. For

most of our city's former inhabitants, he was an occupier. Count Fredro, whose statue you will find in the Market Square, was apparently in Wrocław as a soldier. A soldier in Napoleon's army.)

- In the 19th century, Wrocław developed rapidly. Townhouses and public buildings, schools, hospitals, railway stations and railway lines were constructed. City parks were established. Prussia was growing in power. In 1871, it completed the conquest of most German states and proclaimed the unified German Empire.



tenemant houses at Piastowska Street, dating from the German Empire.

- The city avoided destruction during the First World War as it was situated far from the front line. However, the borders around it were changing. Czechoslovakia emerged in the south of Silesia. To the north and east – Poland. After 1918, most of the Poles in Breslau (the German name for Wrocław), who at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries made up around 8 percent of the population, emigrated to Poland. The city became a bastion of German culture extending eastwards.
- Wrocław experienced rapid growth until 1929. However, the global financial crash plunged its inhabitants into poverty. Radical movements gained strength. The Nazis achieved strong results in the elections.
- During the Second World War, the city was severely damaged. The Germans, retreating before the Soviet army, declared it a fortress (Festung Breslau) and ordered it to be defended to the

end. The siege and assault lasted almost three months. Festung Breslau surrendered on 6 May 1945. Two days later, Berlin surrendered. In Wrocław, around 70 percent of the buildings were destroyed.

- The victorious powers decided to move Poland's borders westwards and to resettle the German population. Wrocław came under Polish administration. Polish settlers began to arrive in the sea of rubble into which the city on the Oder had been transformed.
- The city's reconstruction took decades. The communist authorities were initially very supportive of the effort. In 1948, they organised a propaganda exhibition in Wrocław entitled "The Recovered Territories", showcasing the successes of post-war reconstruction and the integration of the western territories with the rest of the country. That was the end of their favourable treatment. In 1949, a mass operation began to remove demolition bricks from Wrocław. Between 1949 and 1954, an entire city – Nowa Huta (now a district of Kraków) – was built near Kraków using bricks from Wrocław. State propaganda convinced the residents that the bricks were being sent to rebuild Warsaw, which had been destroyed during the war. The demolition operations were accompanied by the slogan: "the whole nation is building its capital".



"We forgive and ask for forgiveness" monument at Ostrów Tumski

- "We forgive and ask for forgiveness" – these famous words were written in 1965 in a letter from Polish bishops to German

bishops. The initiative came from Wrocław Cardinal Bolesław Kominek. They are regarded as the first significant impetus towards Polish-German reconciliation after the war.

- In the 1980s, Wrocław became one of the key centres of the anti-communist opposition. (See – that explains all the dwarves here.)
- In 1997, the city was hit by a catastrophic flood, dubbed the „flood of the millennium". The residents found themselves in an unequal battle against the elements. The flood became a defining experience for a generation. The series „Wielka Woda" (The Great Flood), which you can watch on Netflix, tells its story in a vivid way.
- In the 21st century, this rapidly developing city is gradually emerging from the shadows. In 2012, it co-hosted the UEFA Euro 2012 football tournament, and in 2016 it was named European Capital of Culture. As a major academic and economic hub, as well as a pleasant city in which to live, Wrocław attracts investment and new residents.



24.02.2022 - the day Russia attacked Ukraine. People supporting Ukraine, Wrocław Market Square

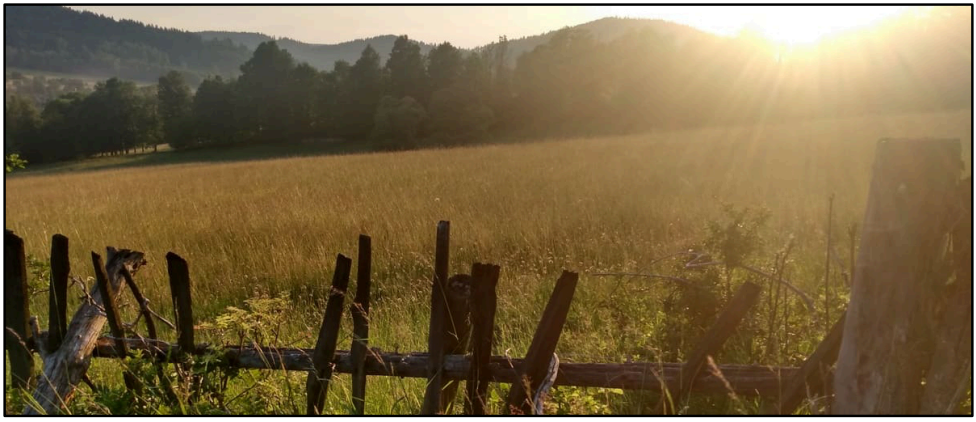
- In 2022, following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, around 100,000 refugees from Ukraine arrived in Wrocław. Most of them still live here today, and Polish is not the only language heard on the streets. (The total population of Wrocław in 2023 was estimated by the city authorities at 893,000. This figure also includes around 100,000 university students, most of whom leave the city during the summer holidays.)

What to do with the second half of the holiday?

When I spent a two-week holiday in Slovenia with my family, we stayed for a few days in three different places – so that we could explore various corners of that part of the world at our leisure. I think you might want to do something similar when travelling towards Poland.

Mountains or not, Sudety are to fall in love

The **Sudetes mountains** (**Sudety**) is an ancient mountain range, lying partly in Poland and partly in the Czech Republic. Most of the mountain resorts and small towns on the Polish side of the border can be reached by car from Wrocław in 2–2.5 hours. If you like Slovenia's Snežnik, you should also enjoy the Sudeten Śnieżnik (1,423 metres).



Sudety, Kłodzko region

There are plenty of hiking trails here, beautiful forests and mountain huts. The Sudetes are a paradise for geology enthusiasts. They have a varied geological structure and many interesting rock formations (such as the Błędne Skały in Poland, the Czech Skalné Mìsto, polish Szczeliniec Wielki or the Organy Wielisławskie). You can collect minerals here (if you know how to look for them), including agates, amethysts, rock crystals, chrysoprases and much more. These mountains are also not yet overrun by tourists, so if you set off through their lower ranges on a weekday (not at the weekend), you can hike for hours and hardly meet anyone on the trail.

And of course, „**beer not bear**". Sorry, but I just had to write that.

Once, whilst hiking with my son in the Julian Alps, we wondered how we could describe Wrocław and Lower Silesia to someone who lives in such a beautiful part of the world as Slovenia. We had various ideas. Some more, some less tongue-in-cheek. One of them was “beer not bear” and concerned hiking in the Sudetes. - Because there are no bears here, but there’s plenty of good beer. In my humble opinion, Czech beer is the best on the continent (on the Polish side of the border in Sudety mountains, you can get it in almost any grocery shop).



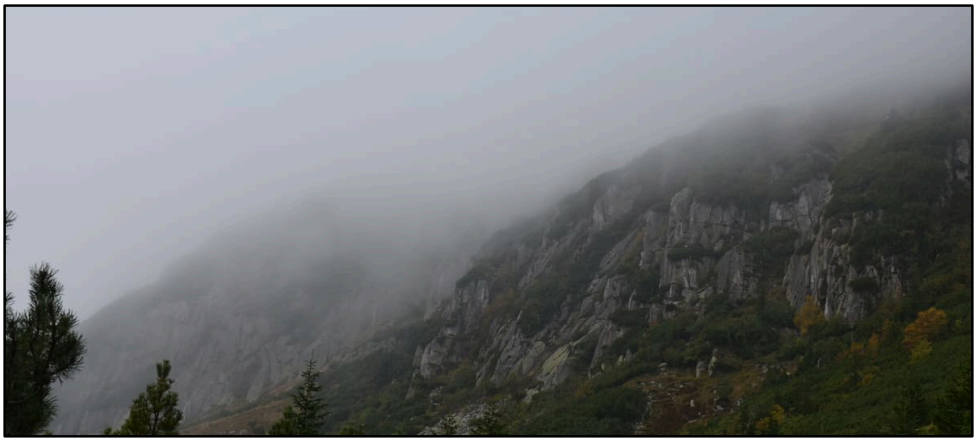
Sudety, Kłodzko region, view from Śnieżnik

And although from a Slovenian perspective, the Sudety are probably still just hills, don’t underestimate them. On the summit of Śnieżka (1,603 metres), winds of over 100 km/h are quite common, and snow lies there for over 170 days a year. In 2004, winds on Śnieżka reached 234 km/h. The same is true of Śnieżnik and other higher peaks. These are mountains with a harsh climate, and sudden changes in the weather can be dangerous here. Always check the weather forecast before heading into the mountains.

I suggest starting your journey through Sudety in **Bardo**. In this small town there is an interesting basilica, consecrated by the Slovenian bishop Franz Englebert Barbo von Waxenstein. The town is situated on the road from Wrocław towards the Kłodzko region – one of the most popular tourist destinations in the Sudetes. **Kłodzko region** is a good place to stay few days.

And for introverts who love the mountains, I have one tip: **Bielice**. – It’s the end of the world in Lower Silesia. This is where the road ends, where mobile phone coverage drops out; there’s just forest, a stream

and low but steep mountains. It's the perfect place to escape civilisation.



Karkonosze, the highest mountain range in Sudety

Another great place to spend a few days in the mountains here is the Karkonosze region with Karpacz resort. But be warned: it's more geared towards tourists and gets rather crowded.

Baltic coast. Yes, it's worth to drive next 500 kilometres

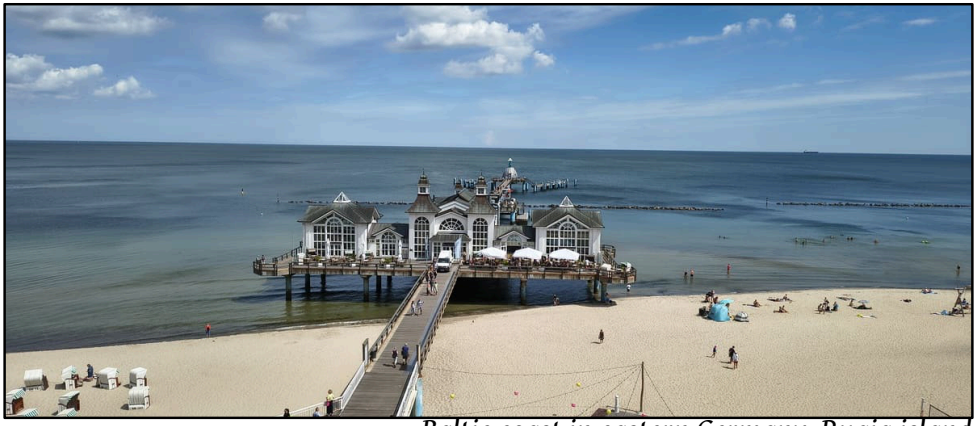
The best thing about it is the sandy beaches. There are loads of them, and you can walk for miles along them (the longest beach is 12 km). You won't find that in Slovenia nor Croatia.



Baltic coast in Poland

In summer, the Polish coast does, of course, get a bit crowded. People from all over Poland come here on holiday, and in recent years, more

and more Czechs too. Most people head to the Baltic to catch some sun, but you can also go hiking here. The red hiking trail running along the coast is over 360 kilometres long. Nice towns away from the hustle and bustle of the city include, for example, the neighbouring towns of Pogorzelica and Niechorze (4 kilometres of beach). The Tri-City – Gdańsk, Gdynia and Sopot – is also well worth a visit.



Baltic coast in eastern Germany, Rugia island

And if you're willing to pay a bit more to avoid tacky souvenir stalls spoiling the view (there are loads of them along the Polish coast in high season, even more than in Croatia, where its visible too), choose a small seaside town on the German side of the border. For example at Rugia island (Rügen).

Three capitals for a city break

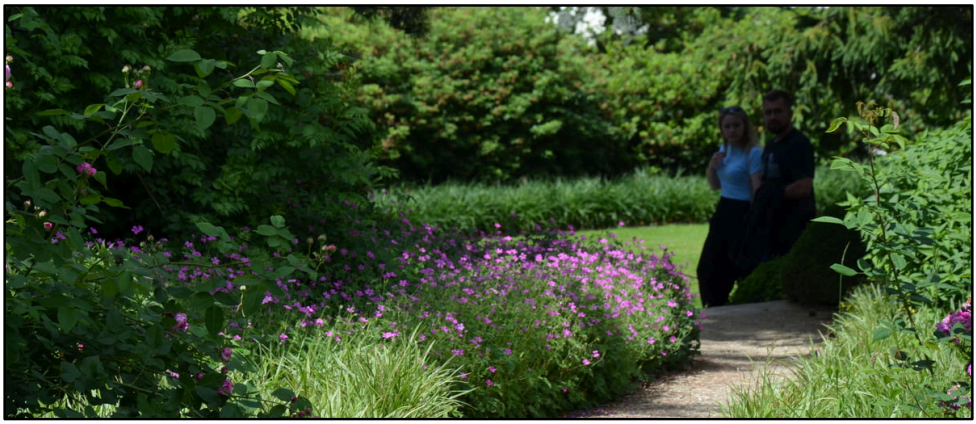
Wrocław has the great advantage as a location on the map that three capital cities are nearby: **Warsaw, Berlin and Prague**. It takes about four hours to drive to each of these cities from Wrocław. So it's not a particularly tiring journey. And I don't think any of these cities need much promoting. There's just one downside to ending your holiday this way. You might forget all about Wrocław...

Cool places near Wrocław

If you're planning to do a bit of touring around Lower Silesia, ask uncle Google about these places:

- Książ Castle (Zamek Książ) – the largest castle not only in the

region, but in the whole of western Poland. Nice gardens;
- Srebrna Góra Fortress (Twierdza Srebrna Góra) – beautifully restored remains of the largest mountain fortress in Europe (from the Prussian era);
- Wojsławice Arboretum (Arboretum Wojsławice) – a botanical paradise where you can escape the hustle and bustle of the city (in June, the ticket price includes all-you-can-eat sweet cherries. Old, local varieties of sweet cherry grow here in a large orchard on top of the hill);



Arboretum Wojsławice

- The Milicz Ponds (Stawy Milickie) – a haven for wild birds and a paradise for nature photographers. You can also go cycling here or canoe down the Barycz River;
- The Church of Peace (Kościół Pokoju): one in Świdnica (a UNESCO World Heritage Site), second one in Jawor (a UNESCO World Heritage Site);
- The Cistercian Abbey in Lubiąż (Opactwo Cystersów w Lubiążu) – a huge Baroque abbey from the Habsburg era, on the outskirts of a small town;
- The Osówka Underground City (Podziemne Miasto Osówka) – underground facilities from the Second World War, where the Germans established arms factories;
- The Old Mine in Wałbrzych (Stara Kopalnia w Wałbrzychu) – a disused coal mine, now a modern museum;
- The Wena Motor Museum (Muzeum Motoryzacji Wena) in Oława – the largest motor museum in Poland, situated in a small town near Wrocław;

Useful phone numbers and information

Public transport in Wrocław isn't exactly lightning fast, but you can get practically anywhere using it. There's always a bus or tram stop somewhere nearby. You can buy tickets on board. Simply select the appropriate ticket (single-journey or time-based, e.g. for 15 or 30 minutes) on the ticket validator and pay by card. Don't be surprised if you don't receive a printed paper ticket. It is stored on your payment card. In the event of a ticket inspection, the inspector will scan the ticket from your payment card.

The app https://jakdojade.pl/wroclaw is very useful. Just enter your starting point and destination, and it will suggest available connections.

- **MPK Wrocław Lost Property Office** (if you lose something on a tram or bus): tel. +48 798 085 431 (Monday to Friday, 7.30 am – 3.30 pm).
- **MPK Wrocław Passenger Service Office:** +48 71 308 50 30 (Monday to Friday 7.00–21.00, weekends 8.00–16.00).

Wrocław City Bike (Wrocławski Rower Miejski). There are over 2,000 bikes available to hire in Wrocław. You register via the app, pick up a bike from one of the 240 stations and off you go. The first 20 minutes are free. The next 40 minutes cost 3 zlotys. Each subsequent hour started costs 6 zlotys. You must return the bike to one of the stations. You can find details at https://wroclawskirower.pl/en/ .

- **Emergency number:** 112
- **Police:** 997
- **Fire Brigade:** 998
- **Ambulance Service:** 999
- **Municipal Police:** 986
- **WOPR (water rescue emergency number)**: 601 100 100
- **City Lost Property Office**: 71 376 08 96 (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday – 8.00–14.00, Wednesday 8.30–16.00)
- **WroMigrant (information point for migrants)**: Przejście Dialogu, 19 Świdnicka Street, tel. 71 772 49 50, 538 579 555 (Monday to Friday, 9.00–17.00)
- **Missing child**: 116 000 (24 hours a day, free call)

24-hour A&E departments in hospitals:

- Dolnośląski Szpital Specjalistyczny im. Marciniaka – Gen. Augusta Emila Fieldorfa 2, tel. 71 306 43 00, 71 306 43 20
- Wojewódzki Szpital Specjalistyczny – ul. Kamieńskiego 73a, tel. 71 327 03 68
- Uniwersytecki Szpital Kliniczny we Wrocławiu – ul. Borowska 213, tel. 71 733 29 64
- Wojskowy Szpital Kliniczny z Poliklinika SP ZOZ we Wrocławiu – ul. Rudolfa Weigla 5, tel. 261 660 130
- A&E for children: Dolnośląski Szpital Specjalistyczny im. Marciniaka - Gen. Augusta Emila Fieldorfa 2, tel: 71 306 43 14

Tourist Information

- Tourist Information Centre 71 344 31 11 (Monday to Friday, 9.00 am–7.00 pm)
- Lower Silesia Tourist Information 71 793 97 22
- Do also visit **https://visitwroclaw.eu/en/** – there is plenty of information about the city in English.

Taxis in Wrocław

There are many taxi companies operating in the city. Examples include:

- Mini Taxi – tel. 196 26
- Radio Taxi Serc – tel. 71 196 29
- Ryba Taxi – tel. 713 067 067

You can check whether a taxi is licensed by entering its side number or registration number into a special search engine: https://www.wroclaw.pl/komunikacja/taxi-wroclaw .

Things I'd missed before, so they are here

Historic townhouses. You'll probably notice that many of them have between 4 and 6 floors. Most of them are higher than those in other cities in this part of Europe. This is because Wrocław was very densely populated at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Best places to see them are Stare Miasto (old town), Ołbin, Nadodrze and Przedmieście Oławskie districts. Stare Miasto and Nadodrze (north of the old town) are the most tourist-friendly. Ołbin and Przedmieście Oławskie are less

„made”. Przedmieście Oławskie in the 1990s had a reputation as a rough neighbourhood. It was called „Trójkąt” (Triangle, from the Bermuda Triangle, where you can disappear. You or your wallet.) Now there is much more safe than before. But I still prefer this part of city in a daylight.



One of Old Town townhouses

Activities for kids. We got two extraordinary playgrounds: Park Mamuta (mammoth park) at Oporów district (nearby Ślęza river) and Średniowieczny Wrocław (medieval Wrocław) at Park Tysiąclecia (millenium park) at Nowy Dwór district. Both outside the city centre - not to be found in official tourist guides. Take kids to ZOO and Hydropolis too. Do pop into Kolejkowo – really big railway model. Yo'll find it at Sky Tower building (highest building in Wrocław, with caffe and views at the last floor). Take your time at the water park (Aquapark Wrocław - they’ve got some really big slides). Encourage the children to look out for dwarves whilst exploring the town. There’s plenty to do here for a few days.

The author. Hi, my name is Maciej Wołodko. Born in 1980. Wrocław citizen in third generation, editor at a local website. Thanks for reading this book. I wrote it, as they say, in my spare time. Using photos from my mobile, taken whilst going about my daily life in the city. I didn't spend a single euro on it. So - its free for personal, non-commercial use. I can imagine second edition of WroSlo: with pictures from professional photographers, with good translation into Slovenian, with professional DTP. In that case, it could be commercial. But let the first electronic WroSlo edition stay something personal, and not for sale.



Who are we? I've told you many things about Wrocław, bu not enough about people who are living here. We are migrants. Some half of us came here three or four generations ago. Some of us came here later, maybe even three or four days ago. (Wrocław is, after Warsaw, the second most popular city in Poland for people to move to.) We don't have a local dialect, we speak standard literary Polish. We have embraced the history of this land as our own. History of our homeland and history of our state, are two different stories. In Wrocław, we know how to live with some dissonance in our minds. And I think - we are still looking for, building our identity. Small step by small step, generation after generation.

Letters. I do apologise if I've misspelt any Slovenian place names or surnames. I don't speak Slovenian. I couldn't find proper font with Polish and Slovenian letters too.

Coach Simundza. I've been editing this ebook for so long that Simundza is no longer the WKS coach. A coach's job can be a real rollercoaster ride. I'm keeping my fingers crossed for him. For me, this is a sign that it's high time to publish this (e)book.

An Italian military cemetery, a reminder of the Battle of the Soca. This autumn, I came across a small Italian military cemetery in Wrocław that I had never seen before. Around a thousand soldiers are buried here, most of whom took part in the Battle of the Soca.



Italian military cemetery in Wrocław

Those laid to rest here were taken prisoner and sent to camps in Germany, where they died. Between 1927 and 1928, they were buried together at the military cemetery in Breslau. Among the names on the gravestones, I saw some associated with the Veneto region and the Italian-Slovenian borderlands: Furlan, Gomba, Zoppas, Drago, Ciman...



Bortolo Furlan grave

So... It's another place in Wrocław linked to Slovenian history. (Oporów district, tram line 4, last stop.)

05.11.2026, winter is coming to Wrocław

Rynek (main town square) in the morning mist. The last few days of peace and quiet here. Chistmas market, sub-zero temperatures and thousands of visitors are on their way.



Main towne square in the morning mist, autumn.

As an introvert, I'm really enjoying this view. I hope you will find moments and places here that you can enjoy too. :)