

# HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW ABOUT POLAND?

Poland is the 9<sup>th</sup> largest country in Europe, and it ranks sixth in terms of population. The country shares borders with Germany, Slovakia, Czechia, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia. It has over 38 million inhabitants. There are also about twenty-one million people of Polish origin who are spread throughout the globe.

The word 'Polska' comes from the name of the Slavic tribe Polanie, which means 'people living in open fields'. Poland has 16 provinces, 23 national parks, tall mountains, lakes, the Baltic Sea coast, and a variety of beautiful landscapes.

Polish people are friendly, family-oriented, hospitable, and open-minded. They are also very resourceful and industrious: they are said to be one of the hardest-working nations in Europe. Poles value freedom and independence – sometimes they can be quite stubborn and rebellious. They also honour their traditions and religion.



The National Flag of Poland consists of two equal horizontal bands of white and red. The white colour represents the hope for peace for all the people of Poland. The red colour symbolizes the struggle for freedom over the centuries. Even though the flag was officially adopted in 1919, the red and white colours have been in use for centuries. Poland celebrates its Flag Day on May 2<sup>nd</sup>.

The white eagle is the symbol of Poland. Legend has it that once upon a time three brothers, Lech, Czech and Rus set out to look for a new place to live. Czech went south and became the founder of Czechia. Rus went east and became the founder of Russia. Lech went further north, and when he stopped to rest at the edge of a great forest, he spotted a large bird flying overhead. It was a beautiful white eagle and it landed on its nest in a large oak tree. Lech thought it was a good omen, and he decided to settle in that place. He built a settlement and called it Gniezno, the old Polish word for nest, and the noble bird became a symbol of the nation.



Gniezno was the first capital of Poland. The second one was Cracow. Warsaw, which is the capital of Poland today, became the capital city in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. According to one legend, Warsaw was built by Wars and Sawa, twins born to a poor fisherman who lived by the Vistula River. Another legend says that Wars was a fisherman and Sawa was a mermaid who guarded the city. Today, a mermaid with a sword and a shield is a symbol of Warsaw and there are mermaid monuments in the Old Town Square, and on the Vistula River.

During World War II, Warsaw was destroyed completely, but the city was rebuilt using old pictures and Bernardo Bellotto's detailed paintings. The Royal Castle in Warsaw was rebuilt in the 1970s, so it is probably the youngest royal castle in the world!



# NOVEMBER 11<sup>th</sup>

November 11<sup>th</sup> is Poland's Independence Day and a very important holiday.

The history of Poland started at the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> century when many local tribes united and formed one country. In 966, Prince Mieszko I adopted Christianity and this event is considered to mark the beginning of the Polish state. In 1025, Mieszko's son, Boleslaw the Brave, became the first king of Poland and during his reign he managed to form a powerful kingdom. The country became even bigger after a union with Lithuania in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and its territory extended from the Baltic Sea almost to the Black Sea. Unfortunately, by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the period of prosperity and stability ended because of internal conflicts that divided Poland and led to its fall.



A weak and divided kingdom was easy prey for its neighbours. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the country started losing its territories, and the first partition of Poland took place in 1772. The country started a series of reforms to improve the situation and adopted a modern constitution. Unfortunately, Poland was not strong enough to defend itself against its powerful enemies. In 1793, the second partition happened, and Poland's territory was further reduced. After the third partition, which took place in 1795, Poland disappeared from the map of Europe for more than one hundred and twenty years.

Even though the Polish state did not exist for such a long time, Polish people managed to preserve their language and national identity. The country regained its independence on November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1918, after the end of World War I.

## POLAND FUN FACTS

Do you know that the world's biggest castle is located in Poland? The Malbork castle was built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century by the Teutonic Order, or Krzyżacy in Polish. It was a masterpiece of medieval architecture and it even had central heating!



The Białowieża Primeval Forest in Poland is Europe's last ancient forest and home to 800 European bison, Europe's heaviest land animals.

Most people in the world celebrate birthdays but Poles also celebrate name days or imieniny. The days of all the names are listed in all calendars in Poland, so the name day is often more important than a birthday because everyone remembers about it!



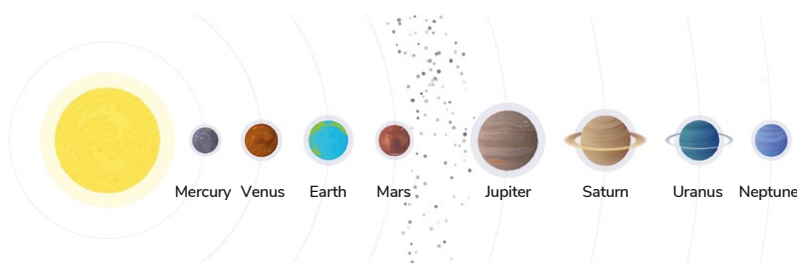
Polish people love mushrooming, which is a popular family activity in Poland. Many people know how to distinguish an edible mushroom from a poisonous one, but mistakes still happen.

One of Poland's most famous foods is pierogi or big dumplings filled with cheese, potatoes and fried onions, mushrooms and cabbage or fruit such as blueberries and strawberries. Polish people are also really fond of soup, especially chicken soup, żurek, a sour soup with potatoes and vegetables, and red borscht, made of beetroots.

Did you know that English has borrowed some words from Polish? One of them is 'spruce' and it comes from 'Prussia', or Prusy which is part of Poland today. How did it happen? When merchants from Prussia, who sold lumber in England, were asked where the wood had come from, they answered 'z Prus' which means 'from Prussia'. The phrase sounded like 'spruce' and eventually became the English name for this kind of tree. Other English words of Polish origin include pierogi, bigos, kielbasa, ogonek (as in 'ą' and 'ę').

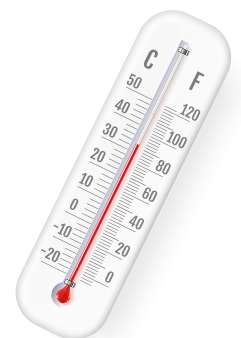


## FAMOUS POLES



**Mikołaj Kopernik**, also known as Nicolaus Copernicus, was a Renaissance mathematician, astronomer, scientist, and a doctor. He put forth the heliocentric theory which says that the Sun is in the centre of the Universe, and that the Earth revolves around the Sun. People say that 'he stopped the Sun and moved the Earth.' Copernicus is said to be the father of modern astronomy.

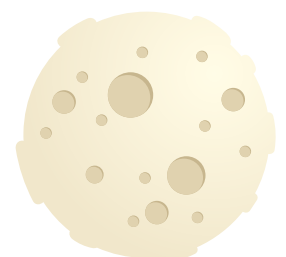
**Daniel Fahrenheit** was a physicist and inventor who was born in Gdansk in 1686. He invented the first mercury-based thermometer as well as the Fahrenheit scale, which uses the degree Fahrenheit (°F) as the unit. Even though the Fahrenheit scale was invented in Poland, the Celsius scale is used here. The Celsius scale, or centigrade scale, is based on the freezing point of water at 0°C and the boiling point of water at 100°C. The Fahrenheit scale is based on the freezing point of water at 32°F and the boiling point of water at 212°F. The United States uses the Fahrenheit scale as its official scale.



**Casimir the Great** was Poland's only king who went down in history as 'Great'. He reformed the army, established many towns, built many castles, founded Poland's oldest university in Cracow, and reunified the Kingdom of Poland which doubled in size under his rule. He is said to have found a Poland built in wood and to have left it built in stone.

**John III Sobieski** was a Polish king who ruled in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and went down in history as the Saviour of Vienna and Western European civilization. He managed to stop the great Turkish army during the Battle of Vienna in 1683. Sobieski's victory was one of the most important battles in European history because Turkey was a Muslim country and it forced the nations it conquered to convert to Islam.

**Jan Heweliusz** was a 17<sup>th</sup> century astronomer from Gdansk, who studied comets, catalogued the stars, and constructed some of first accurate maps of the moon's surface. In recognition of his scientific work, one of the moon's craters was named after him.



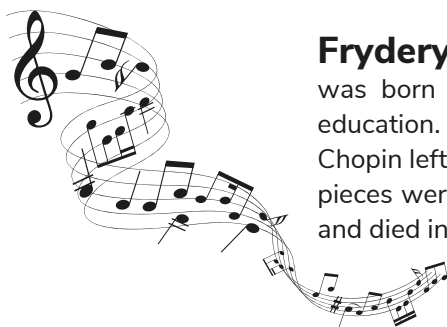


**Ignacy Łukasiewicz** was a Polish 19<sup>th</sup> century pharmacist, businessman and inventor. He built the world's first modern oil refinery. His achievements included the invention of the modern kerosene lamp and the introduction of the first modern streetlamp in Europe.

**Ludwik Zamenhoff** was a Polish-born Jew, a doctor and linguist, known for the invention of Esperanto, an artificial language that he hoped would make it possible for the people across the world to communicate. The grammar of Esperanto could be learned in just a few hours and the language was a mix of several languages including English, French, Spanish, German and Slavic languages. Unfortunately, the language never became widely popular.



**Tadeusz Kościuszko** was a great Polish patriot, national hero, and leader of the 'Kosciuszko insurrection' of 1794. He also fought and distinguished himself during the American War of Independence. Mount Kosciuszko, the tallest mountain peak in Australia, was named in his honour by Paweł Strzelecki, who was a Polish explorer.



**Fryderyk Chopin** was one of the greatest composers and pianists in the world. He was born in Żelazowa Wola and grew up in Warsaw where he completed his music education. He was a child prodigy and composed his first piece of music at the age of 7. Chopin left the country when he was 20 and spent most of his life in Paris. Many of his piano pieces were inspired by Polish folklore. Chopin suffered from poor health for most of his life and died in France of tuberculosis at the age of 39.

**Maria Skłodowska-Curie** was born in Warsaw and grew up in the Polish capital. She moved to Paris to study there because Polish universities did not accept women at that time. She was the first female to be made a professor at the University of Paris. She was the first female to win the Nobel Prize. She is also the only woman to win the Nobel Prize twice and is the only person to win it in two different sciences - chemistry and physics! She discovered the elements of Polonium, which was named after Poland, and Radium.



**Pope John Paul II** was born Karol Jozef Wojtyła in the small town of Wadowice in the south of Poland. He was the first pope since the 16<sup>th</sup> century that did not come from Italy. He preached that people should work for change in nonviolent ways and inspired many people in Poland to call for the end of communism. He was made a saint in 2014.



**Lech Wałęsa** was an electrician from Gdansk who at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century became the leader of the Solidarity movement that led Poland out of communism. He was the first democratically elected Polish President after the fall of communism, and he held the office between 1990 and 1995. Lech Wałęsa received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1983.

**Robert Lewandowski** is the most famous Polish football player in the world. He plays as a striker for Bayern Munich and is the captain of the Poland national team. He is considered one of the best strikers of all time.



# QUIZ TIME!



**1. How many provinces are there in Poland?**

- a. 12
- b. 14
- c. 16

**2. When does Poland celebrate its Flag Day?**

- a. on May 1<sup>st</sup>
- b. on May 2<sup>nd</sup>
- c. on May 3<sup>rd</sup>

**3. Lech Wałęsa was:**

- a. an electrician
- b. a lawyer
- c. a plumber

**4. What is the number of national parks in Poland?**

- a. 23
- b. 25
- c. 35

**5. When did the first partition of Poland take place?**

- a. in 1742
- b. in 1765
- c. in 1772

**6. Fryderyk Chopin died of:**

- a. tuberculosis
- b. pneumonia
- c. leukaemia

**7. What is the total number of Polish people in Poland and abroad?**

- a. about 38 million
- b. about 50 million
- c. about 56 million

**8. Casimir the Great is said to have found a Poland built in wood and to have left it built in:**

- a. brick
- b. concrete
- c. stone

**9. Maria Skłodowska-Curie discovered the elements of:**

- a. Polonium and Uranium
- b. Radium and Polonium
- c. Radon and Polonium

**10. When did Poland adopt Christianity?**

- a. in 900 AD
- b. in 966 AD
- c. in 1025 AD

**11. Which country uses the Fahrenheit scale as its official scale?**

- a. Great Britain
- b. Canada
- c. USA

**12. Mount Kosciuszko is located in:**

- a. Canada
- b. Australia
- c. USA

**13. What was the name of the first Polish king?**

- a. Mieszko I
- b. Boleslaw the Brave
- c. Casimir the Great

**14. John III Sobieski won the Battle of:**

- a. Grunwald
- b. Vienna
- c. Waterloo

**15. The Royal Castle in Warsaw was rebuilt in:**

- a. the 1950s
- b. the 1960s
- c. the 1970s

**16. How many neighbours does Poland have?**

- a. 5
- b. 6
- c. 7

**17. The artificial language created by Ludwik Zamenhoff was called:**

- a. Esperantan
- b. Esperienco
- c. Esperanto

**18. The kerosene lamp was invented by:**

- a. Jan Heweliusz
- b. Ignacy Łukasiewicz
- c. Paweł Strzelecki



# CROSSWORD



## Down

1. A coniferous tree whose name comes from Polish
2. A line separating two countries
3. Relating to the Middle Ages
4. The religion adopted by Mieszko I in 966.
6. An adjective describing a diligent and hard-working person
9. The disease Chopin died of
11. Red wildflowers that you can see in late spring and early summer
13. The mermaid of Warsaw holds a sword and a ...
14. The nickname of the first Polish king
15. The opposite of genuine or natural
16. A song used to represent a particular nation
18. A creature from legends and fairy tales, halfwoman, half-fish
22. Friendly and welcoming to visitors and guests
24. The second capital of Poland

## Across

5. The leader of the Catholic Church
7. Polonium, Radium and Uranium are examples of these
8. A purple vegetable used to make borscht
10. An extremely gifted child is a child ...
12. The plural form of 'bison'
17. Maria Skłodowska-Curie won the Nobel Prize in physics and ...
19. White birds with black wings that come to Poland in spring and make big nests for their chicks
20. An image that represents a nation
21. There are 16 of them in Poland
23. The noble bird on the Polish emblem
24. Blue flowers growing in fields of wheat and other grains
25. The official religion of Turkey
26. There were three of them and they took place in 1772, 1793 and 1795
27. When Lech saw a big white eagle, he thought it was a good ...