

In the Groove:

Two Days in Gdańsk

The proud heart of the Baltic is beating stronger than ever these days. We shouldn't be surprised – with its many guises and owners Gdańsk has got used to being in the middle of things. From a trading base for the once-mighty Teutonic Knights to the birthplace of Solidarity and modern Poland, the city drips history. Today Gdańsk, with its painstakingly reconstructed Old Town and perfect location at the heart of the coast, is the showpiece of Poland's north. Buildings, boats, beaches and bars do their best to offer something for everyone, and when you tire of the compact centre there's still the rest of the Tri-City area to explore.

TEUTONIC TRAILS

Give over your first day to exploring the action-packed **Main Town**. This is the largest of Gdańsk's historical quarters and by far the richest architecturally.

Whether you're arriving into **Gdańsk Główny** Train Station or already settled in somewhere, start your wandering at the top of the Royal Way. For centuries this was the haunt of Polish kings, nobility and wealthy merchants, but in 1945 the road now called **ul Długa** (Long Street, though it's only 300m long) was a heap of smoking rubble. Today it's been restored to its original state and is one of the loveliest streets of any Baltic city. Stop at the **Uphagen's House** (ul Długa 12) to see its historic restored interior.

At the end of ul Długa you'll reach **Długi Targ** (the Long Market), the city's major tourist focus. Linger long enough here to pop into **Artus Court** (Długi Targ 43/44) – a 15th-century Gothic house so well known it's been given the ultimate accolade of having a brand of vodka named after it.

Go through the **Green Gate**, at the end of the Royal Way, to reach the **Motława River**. There was once a busy quay along here, crowded with hundreds of sailing ships loading or unloading their cargo. Today it's a popular promenade lined with cafés and art galleries. Dive into one of the rejuvenated waterfront cafés for lunch before doubling back to spend the afternoon exploring the alleys and old houses of the Main Town.

By now you can't have failed to notice **St Mary's Church**, looming over the heart of Old Gdańsk. It's the world's largest brick church and hosts a magnificent 15th-century astronomical clock. Be there at noon to see the clock put on a show.

Do dress for dinner. We suggest heading for **Restauracja Gdańska** (Św Ducha 16; ☎ 305 76 71) which boasts five banquet rooms and is crammed to the rafters with antiques. The upper-end traditional Polish cuisine is hard to beat anywhere in the city, and is sure to take you back to Gdańsk's Hanseatic heyday.

Post-dinner drinks on **ul Mariacka**, lined with cafés and fine terraced rows of burghers' houses, or at the open-air summer bars on waterfront **Długi Pobrzeże** will keep you entertained into the small hours.

SOLIDARITY, SOVIETS AND Sopot

How ambitious you are today depends on the night you've had before. To take a morning stroll around the **Shipyard** is to hear the clunking chains of Poland's history. It was here that the first signs of resistance were stamped out by Soviet forces in 1970; 10 years later Lech Walesa sowed the seeds of Solidarity and democracy for Poland.

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While here, you can't miss the 42m-high **Monument to Fallen Shipyard Workers**; learn more about Poland's turbulent recent history at the **Roads to Freedom exhibition** (ul Doki 1; www.fcs.org.pl).

Head back to the waterfront to pick up a boat to **Westerplatte**, preferably one that gives another view of the Shipyard on the way. Westerplatte is not only the place where the first shots of World War Two were fired, it also is unique in Gdańsk in that it has an unreconstructed Communist-era feel, dictated by the large Soviet-era monument at the tip of the peninsula.

Seaside **Sopot** is a great afternoon option, easily reached by boat or train. It's been Poland's most fashionable resort for nearly 200 years. The long, sandy beach, Molo pier and the pleasantly mobbed ul Bohaterów Monte Cassino promenade make it a great place for a holiday within a holiday.

For serious clubs and to rub shoulders with the Tri-City's beautiful people, aim for some of Sopot's legendary nightlife, more specifically superclub **ViVa** (Al Mamuszki 2; www.vivaclub.pl) and the more rough-and-ready **Siouxie 8** (ul Grunwaldzka 11).

If you'd rather return to Gdańsk for dinner, **Gospoda Pod Wielkim Młynem** (ul Na Piakach 1) is a sure-fire bet for summer, set in a garden on an island in the Radunia Canal. Hevelius Beer and Hungarian wine help the food down nicely.

Finish the night at one of Gdańsk's most eccentric dives. Buried in the basement round the back of the LOT building, **Latający Holender** (the Flying Dutchman; Waly Jagiellońskie 2/4) is one of the strangest places you'll find in Poland. The eponymous airman hanging above the bar's door sets the tone perfectly, ushering

you into an interior populated by weird creatures and Gothic contraptions.

And there you have Gdańsk – underrated, uncompromisingly itself and uniquely battered and blessed by time and geography. We think you'll be back.

SLEEPING

Budget:

Dizzy Daisy (www.hostel.pl; ☎ 301 3919) Unfancy student rooms in a great location with friendly staff; good value in a city with few budget options.

Midrange:

Dom Muzyka (www.dom-muzyka.pl; ☎ 300 9260) Endearingly quiet, comfortable and centrally-located central destination, inside the Academy of Music.

Top End:

Hotel Krolewski (www.hotelkrolewski.pl; ☎ 326 1111) The latest addition to Gdansk's luxury scene, housed in old granary: modern and charming at prices that would make Western hoteliers choke.

By Tom Hall

For the complete guide to Poland, including Gdańsk, grab a copy of Lonely Planet's *Poland* guide, available online at shop.lonelyplanet.com.

