

Pomerania



The diverse region of Pomerania (Pomorze) could be summarised by the three Bs – beaches, beer gardens and bricks. Although Poland isn't often regarded as a beach destination by outsiders, for the Poles this area is prime summer-holiday territory. The shores of the Baltic Sea are blessed with fine white sand, and during the warmer months you'll find its numerous seaside towns heavily populated by Polish and German visitors enjoying the sunshine on the sands, or seated in the beer gardens that materialise the moment the weather heats up.

The German connection isn't just recreational – Pomerania has switched hands between Germanic and Polish rulers many times over the centuries. The region's character is also tinged with influences from Swedes, Danes and other past invaders; and its magnificent eventful history is symbolised by the stunning historic city of Gdańsk.

This is where the bricks come in – the red bricks that comprise central Pomerania's wealth of Gothic architecture, an enduring legacy of its medieval conquerors. Castles, churches and ancient granaries loom large amid the region's well-worn towns and cities, lending it a distinctive visual identity. Every name on the map has its own architectural keepsake, and its areas of natural beauty provide even more reasons to visit.

With its unique mix of sea, sand and unforgettable historic sights, Pomerania is both very Polish and possessed of a character all its own. From its bustling major cities to its beachside villages and attractive inland towns, the region is a fascinating destination.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Strolling past the breathtaking historic buildings lining **Łługi Targ** in **Gdańsk** (opposite)
- Chilling out at a cool bar or café in sensational **Sopot** (p425)
- Following the astronomical footprints of Copernicus in **Frombork** (p453)
- Visiting the Teutonic past at **Malbork's castle** (p448)
- Munching gingerbread among the Gothic architecture of **Toruń** (p436)
- Having a dip in the Baltic (or a spa treatment) at **Kołobrzeg** (p462)
- Tramping up the shifting dunes of **Słowiński National Park** (p457)
- Absorbing the charms of **Chełmno's walled town** (p445)
- Taking a day trip on a ferry from **Elbląg** (p451)
- Going to **Hel** (p433) and back to meet a rare seal

■ POPULATION: 6.5 MILLION

■ AREA: 59,000 SQ KM



Getting There & Away

Gdańsk is the principal transport hub for the region, with its own international airport and connections to other Polish and European cities by road, rail, bus and boat. In the west, Szczecin offers easy access to Germany and western Poland.

GDAŃSK

pop 458,000

There's a special atmosphere about Gdańsk, a unique look and feel that's very different from that of other Polish cities. It could be something to do with its historic role as a port city, visited by and fought over by people from diverse nations. It's definitely connected to its distinctive architecture, which is strongly influenced by its historic maritime connections. And the knowledge that its stunning centre was rebuilt from rubble after the devastation of WWII is breathtaking and inspiring.

Whatever the source of its appeal, visitors are always delighted by the grand, elegant buildings of the Main Town district, and charmed by its decorative narrow side streets with their cafés and amber shops. Popular maritime pleasures include cruising downriver on a pleasure boat, or sipping a beverage at a dockside beer garden while admiring the mix of medieval and Renaissance rooftops on the skyline.

Though it's an old city with a tumultuous past, and the historic scars to prove it, 21st-century Gdańsk is a vibrant destination packed with diverse sights and entertainment options, and also makes a great base for journeys into the surrounding countryside.

HISTORY

Describing Gdańsk's past as 'eventful' would be a major understatement. The official history of the much fought-over city is counted from the year 997, when the Bohemian Bishop Adalbert arrived here from Gniezno and baptised the inhabitants. The settlement developed as a port over the following centuries, expanding northwards into what is today the Old Town. The German community then arrived from Lübeck in the early 13th century, the first in a succession of migrants, who crafted the town's cosmopolitan character.

In 1308 the Teutonic order (see boxed text, p451) seized Gdańsk and quickly turned it into a major trade centre, joining the Hanseatic League (see boxed text, p413) in 1361. In 1454 the locals decided on a spot of regime change, razing the Teutonic Knights' castle, and pledging allegiance to the Polish monarch instead.

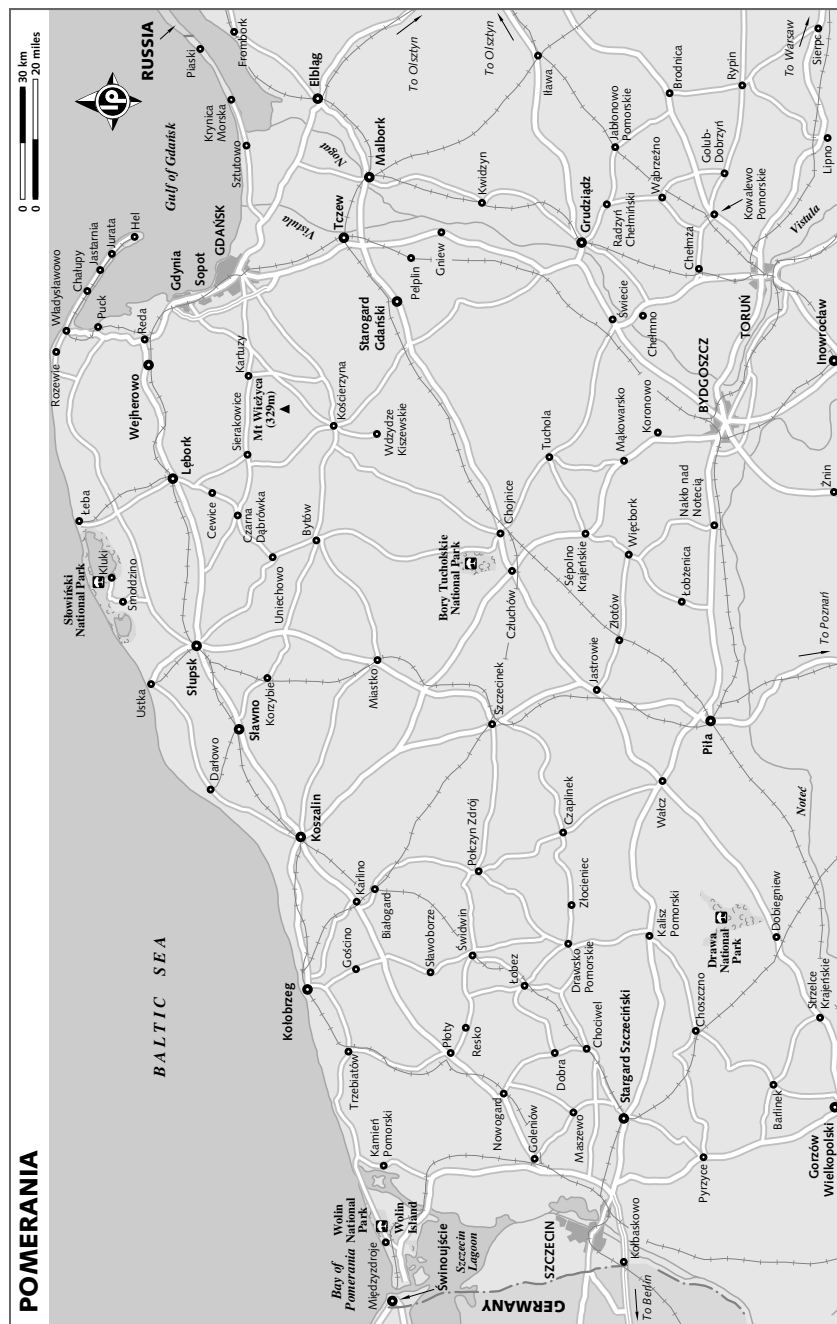
From here, the only way was up: by the mid-16th century, the successful trading city of 40,000 was Poland's largest city, and the most important trading centre in Central Europe. Legions of international traders joined the local German-Polish population, adding their own cultural influences to the city's unique blend.

Gdańsk was one of the very few Polish cities to withstand the Swedish Deluge of the 1650s, but the devastation of the surrounding area weakened its position, and in 1793 Prussia annexed the shrinking city. Just 14 years later, however, the Prussians were ousted by the Napoleonic army and its Polish allies.

It turned out to be a brief interlude – in 1815 the Congress of Vienna gave Gdańsk back to Prussia, which became part of Germany later in the century. In the years that followed, the Polish minority was systematically Germanised, the city's defences were reinforced and there was gradual but steady economic and industrial growth.

After Germany's defeat in WWI, the Treaty of Versailles granted the newly reformed Polish nation the so-called Polish Corridor, a strip of land stretching from Toruń to Gdańsk, providing the country with an outlet to the sea. Gdańsk itself was excluded and designated the Free City of Danzig, under the protection of the League of Nations. With the city having a German majority, however, the Polish population never had much political influence, and once Hitler came to power it was effectively a German port.

WWII started in Gdańsk when the German battleship *Schleswig-Holstein* fired the first shots on the Polish military post in Westerplatte. During the occupation of the city, the Nazis continued to use the local shipyards for building warships, with Poles as forced labour. The Russians arrived in March 1945; during the fierce battle the city centre virtually ceased to exist. The German residents fled, or died in the conflict. Their



SONS OF DANZIG

As a lively cultural and intellectual centre, Gdańsk has spawned some famous names over the years. Astronomer Johannes Hevelius (1611–87), who produced one of the first detailed maps of the moon's surface, was born, lived and worked here, and now has a tasty beer named after him. Also born here was Gabriel Daniel Fahrenheit (1686–1736), the inventor of the mercury thermometer.

Gdańsk was the birthplace of pessimist philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), who felt that irrational human behaviour was driven by a force he called the 'will to live'. German author Günter Grass (b 1927) is perhaps Gdańsk's most famous living son, best known for his first novel *The Tin Drum*. A novelist, dramatist and poet, Grass won the Nobel prize for literature in 1999 and still visits his home town regularly, though controversy was stirred in 2006 when it was revealed that the young Grass had briefly served with the German SS forces in WWII.

Gdańsk's most prominent Polish inhabitant is former president Lech Wałęsa, and the city maintains strong links with the Solidarity trade union, born here in 1980. Another famous local contemporary of Wałęsa was Jacek Kaczmarski (1957–2004), a poet and singer-songwriter whose fierce opposition to the communist regime led to his exile in the 1980s. His stirring lyrics are still remembered, despite his premature death from cancer.

place was taken by Polish newcomers, mainly from the territories lost to the Soviet Union in the east.

The complex reconstruction of the Main Town took over 20 years from 1949, though work on some interiors continued well into the 1990s. Nowhere else in Europe was such a large area of an historic city reconstructed from the ground up.

In December 1970 a huge strike broke in the shipyard and was 'pacified' by authorities as soon as the workers left the gates, leaving 44 dead. This was the second important challenge to the communist regime after that in Poznań in 1956 (see boxed text, p379). Gdańsk came to the fore again in 1980, when another popular protest paralysed the shipyard. This time it culminated in negotiations with the government and the foundation of Solidarity. Lech Wałęsa, the electrician who led the strike and subsequent talks, later became the first freely elected president in postwar Poland.

In the postcommunist era, Gdańsk has consolidated its role as the leading administrative and industrial city in Pomerania, with some diversification into high-tech products and processes; and tourism has increased enormously. In 1997 the city hosted a range of cultural events and architectural projects commemorating its millennium – a worthy celebration of a great historical survivor.

ORIENTATION

Most visitors arrive at Gdańsk Główny train station, on the edge of the Old Town and just a 10-minute walk to the heart of the historic

quarter. If you come by bus, you arrive just behind the train station. City buses and trams also operate on the outskirts of the centre, but don't go through it.

The city centre consists of three historic districts: the Main Town in the centre, the Old Town to the north, and the Old Suburb to the south. To the east of the Main Town, beyond the Motława River, are two island components of the historic city: Spichlerze Island, once crammed with over 300 granaries; and Ołowianka Island, connected to the Main Town by a daytime ferry. Beyond Spichlerze Island is the Lower Town district.

A string of suburbs runs north up the coast, linking Gdańsk with Sopot and Gdynia. The efficient SKM commuter train means it's easy to negotiate your way up and down the Tri-City.

Maps

Free maps of central Gdańsk can be obtained from the tourist offices and certain travel agencies. These usually include some detail on Sopot and Gdynia. For full-size commercial maps covering the whole Tri-City, go to the tourist offices or any of the bookshops in town; the Demart map of Gdańsk, Gdynia and Sopot is particularly useful as it contains clear details of city tram and bus routes, including stops.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Book Crossing Point (Map p408; ul Garncarska 30; ☎ 11am–8pm) Inside the doorway of the Lokomotywa

café, these shelves contain secondhand books that are available free of charge as long as you swap them with your own pre-read gems.

EMPIK Megastore (Map p408; ☎ 058 301 7244; ul Podwale Grodzkie 8; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 11am-8pm Sun)

English Unlimited (Map p408; ☎ 058 301 3373; ul Podmłyńska 10)

Księgarnia Muza (Map p408; ☎ 058 690 8002; ul Rajska 10) Inside the Madison Centre; stocks good range of maps.

Discount Cards

Pomeranian Tourist Card (Pomorska Karta Turystyczna; www.przystanekpomorze.pl) Discounts to attractions across the region; valid for 14 days (14zł).

Tri-City Tourist Card (Karta Turystyczna Trójmiasta; www.przystanekpomorze.pl) Discounts of 5% to 50% on sights, restaurants and boat trips; valid for three days (8zł).

Internet Access

Flisak (Map p408; ☎ 058 301 8562; ul Chlebnicka 9/10; per hr 4zł) In a downstairs pub-restaurant.

Jazz n' Java (Map p408; ☎ 058 305 3616; ul Tkacka 17/18; per hr 5zł; ☎ 10am-10pm)

Kawiarnia Internetowa (Map p408; ☎ 058 320 9230; Cinema City, ul Karmelicka 1; per hr 5zł; ☎ 9am-1am Mon-Sat, 9.30am-1am Sun) Free coffee over 30 minutes' access.

PTTK Tourist Office (Map p408; ☎ 058 301 9151; ul Długa 45; per hr 6.50zł; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun May-Sep, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri Oct-Apr)

Internet Resources

<http://guide.trojmiasto.pl> Detailed Tri-City tourist guide.

www.gdansk.pl Excellent city information site.

www.gdansk-life.com News, accommodation and events.

www.inyourpocket.com/city/gdansk.html Opinionated reviews of bars, restaurants and accommodation.

www.virtualtourist.com Gdańsk section contains a range of tips and comments posted by travellers.

Medical Services

Provincial Hospital (Map p407; ☎ 058 302 3031; ul Nowe Ogrody 1/6)

Swissmed (☎ 058 524 1584; www.swissmed.pl) clinic (Map p407; ul Skłodowskiej-Curie 5); hospital (Map p407; ul Wileńska 44) Private medical care.

Money

Bank Millennium Eastern Main Town (Map p408; Długi Targ 17/18); Western Main Town (Map p408; ul Wały Jagiellońskie 14/16)

Bank Pekao (Map p408; ul Garncarska 23)

PBK Bank (Map p408; ul Ogarna 116)

Post

Post office (Map p408; ul Długa 23/28)

Tourist Information

City tourist office (Map p408; Gdańska Organizacja Turystyczna; ☎ 058 301 4355; www.got.gdansk.pl; ul Heweliusza 27; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri)

PTTK Tourist Office (Map p408; ☎ 058 301 9151; www.pttk-gdansk.pl; ul Długa 45; ☎ 9am-7pm Jul-Aug, 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat & Sun May-Jun & Sep, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri Oct-Apr)

Tourist information booths Train station (Map p408; ☎ 058 301 9151; ul Podwale Grodzkie; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun Jul-Aug, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri Sep-Jun); Old Town (Map p408; ☎ 058 320 8512; ul Targ Rybny 6a; ☎ 10am-6pm Jul-Sep, 8am-4pm May-Jun); Oliwa (Map p407; ☎ 058 301 4818; ul Cysterów 5; ☎ 10am-6pm Jul-Sep); Airport (Map p407; ☎ 058 348 1368; ul Słowackiego 200; ☎ 8am-6pm Jun-Aug, 9am-5pm Sep-May)

Travel Agencies

Almatur (Map p408; ☎ 058 301 2931; Długi Targ 11)

Lauer (Map p408; www.lauer.com.pl; ☎ 058 305 8986; ul Piwna 22/23) Organises trips over the border to Kaliningrad in Russia.

Orbis Travel (www.orbistravel-gda.com.pl) Old Town (Map p408; ☎ 058 301 2132; Hotel Mercure Helvelius, ul Heweliusza 22); Main Town (Map p408; ☎ 058 301 4425; ul Podwale Staromiejskie 96/97)

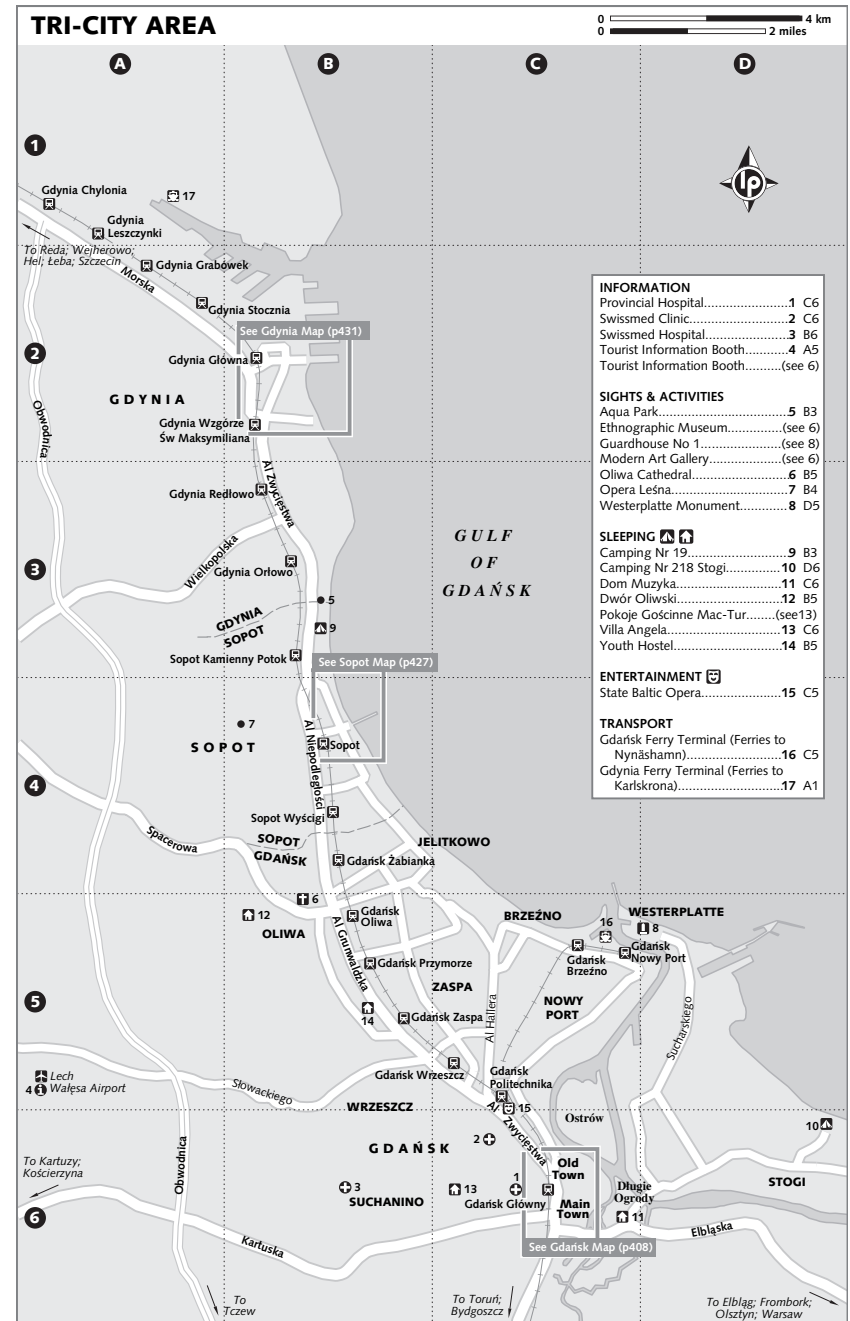
PTTK (Map p408; ☎ 058 301 6096; www.pttk-gdansk.pl; ul Długa 45) Above the tourist office; arranges foreign-language tours and other excursions.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

In general Gdańsk is perfectly safe, though pickpocketing can be a problem at busy times. Believe it or not, shady money-changers still hang around Długi Targ, Długie Pobrzeże and the train station offering foreigners marginally attractive rates; the mark-up's not that impressive, and it's not worth the chance of being ripped off. During the peak tourist season there's a noticeable police presence around the Main Town, which will either reassure or unsettle you, depending on your attitude to the sight of uniformed officers.

SIGHTS Main Town

Gdańsk's jewel in the crown is its Main Town (Główne Miasto; Map p408), which looks much as it did some 300 to 400 years ago, during the height of its prosperity. As the largest of the city's historic quarters, and the richest architecturally, it was the most carefully restored after WWII. Prussian additions





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Bank Millennium.....	2	B4
Bank Pekao.....	3	C5
Bank Millennium.....	3	C5
Bank Pekao.....	4	B4
Book Crossing Point.....	5	B3
City Tourist Office.....	6	C2
EMPIK.....	7	C5
EMPIK Megastore.....	8	A3
English Unlimited.....	9	B3
Flisak.....	10	C5
Jazz'n'Java.....	11	B5
Kawiarnia Internetowa.....	12	A3
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Lauer.....	13	B5
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PBK Bank.....	15	B5
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from the Partition period were airbrushed out of this remarkably impressive recreation, so the result is a snapshot of Gdańsk up to the end of the 18th century.

The town was originally laid out in the mid-14th century along a central axis consisting of ul Długa (Long St) and Długi Targ (Long Market). The latter was designed for trading, which would have taken place in the Rynek (Main Market Sq). This axis is also known as the Royal Way.

ROYAL WAY

Unrelated to the 'royal we' or even the royal wave, the Royal Way was the thoroughfare along which the Polish kings traditionally paraded during their periodic visits. Of the three Royal Ways in Poland (Warsaw, Kraków and Gdańsk), the Gdańsk one is the shortest – only

500m long – but it's architecturally perhaps the most refined.

The traditional entry point for kings was the **Upland Gate** (Brama Wyżynna; Map p408), at the western end of Royal Way. The gate was built in 1574 as part of the city's new fortifications, which were constructed outside the medieval walls to strengthen the system. The authorities weren't happy with the original structure, so in 1586 they commissioned a Flemish artist, Willem van den Block, to embellish it. It was covered with sandstone slabs and ornamented with three coats of arms: Prussia (with unicorns), Poland (with angels) and Gdańsk (with lions). Gdańsk's shield, invariably featuring heraldic lions, is on countless public buildings throughout the city.

Just behind the Upland Gate is a large 15th-century construction known as the **Foregate**

(Przedbramie; Map p408). It consists of the **Torture House** (Katownia) to the west and a high **Prison Tower** (Wieża Więzienna) to the east, linked to one another by two walls.

When the Upland Gate was built, the Foregate lost its defensive function and was turned into a jail. The Torture House then had an extra storey added as a court room and was topped with decorative Renaissance parapets. A gallows was built on the square to the north, where public executions of condemned foreigners were held (locals had the 'privilege' of being hanged on Długi Targ). The Foregate was used as a jail till the mid-19th century. It was damaged during WWII and the restoration that began in 1951 is still ongoing. Nowadays it's the home of the **Amber Museum** (Muzeum Bursztynu; Map p408; ☎ 058 767 9128; adult/concession 10/5zł, free Tue; 🕒 10am-3pm Tue, 11am-4pm Wed-Sun), wherein you can marvel at the history of Baltic gold (see boxed text, p423).

Further to the east is the **Golden Gate** (Złota Brama; Map p408). Designed by Abraham van den Block, son of the decorator of the Upland Gate, and built in 1612, it's a sort of triumphal arch ornamented with a double-storey colonnade and topped with eight allegorical statues. The four figures on the side of the Prison Tower represent Peace, Liberty, Wealth and Fame, for which Gdańsk was always struggling to achieve against foreign powers (sometimes including the Polish kings). The sculptures on the opposite side symbolise the burghers' virtues: Wisdom, Piety, Justice and Concord. Today's figures are postwar copies of the 1648 originals.

Adjoining the gate to the north is the **Court of the Fraternity of St George** (Dwór Bractwa św Jerzego; Map p408), a good example of late-Gothic secular architecture, dating from the 1490s. The roof is topped with a 16th-century octagonal tower, with St George and the Dragon on the spire (the 1556 original is in Gdańsk's National Museum).

Once you pass the Golden Gate, you are on the gently curving **ul Długa**, one of the loveliest streets in Poland, which, despite its name, is only 300m long. In 1945 it was just a heap of smoking rubble. Stop at the **Uphagens' House** (Dom Uphagena; Map p408; ☎ 058 301 2371; ul Długa 12; adult/concession 8/4zł, free Tue; 🕒 10am-3pm Tue, 10am-4pm Wed-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun) to see the restored historic interior, a collection of sumptuously decorated rooms with period furniture from the 18th century. As you pass beyond the

kitchen, take a minute to browse the family tree and history of the Uphagen family, outlined in English.

TOWN HALL

As you reach the eastern end of ul Długa, look up to the pinnacle of the **town hall** (Map p408). This tall slim tower, the highest in Gdańsk (81.5m), has a life-sized gilded figure of King Zygmunt II August on top – a reward for his generosity in granting privileges to the city.

The town hall has both Gothic and Renaissance elements. The first building was reputedly put up in the 1330s, but it grew and changed until the end of the 16th century. In 1945 it was almost completely burnt out and the authorities were on the point of demolishing the ruin, which was eventually saved thanks to local protests.

After serving as a municipal seat for over half a millennium, it today houses the **Historical Museum of Gdańsk** (Muzeum Historii Miasta Gdańska; Map p408; ☎ 058 301 4871; ul Długa 47; adult/concession 8/4zł, free Tue; 🕒 10am-3pm Tue, 10am-4pm Wed-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun). Enter the building by twin flights of balustraded stairs and go through an ornate Baroque doorway (1766), which is topped by the city's coat of arms guarded by two lions that, unusually, are both looking toward the Golden Gate, supposedly awaiting the arrival of the king. The doorway was the final addition to the external decoration of the building.

Inside are several rooms decked out in period decoration, either original or re-created from old drawings, engravings and photographs. The showpiece is the **Red Room** (Sala Czerwona), done up in Dutch mannerist style from the end of the 16th century, which was once the setting for the town council's debates. There's a large, richly carved fireplace (1593) and a marvellous portal (1596), but your eyes will immediately be attracted to the ornamented ceiling – 25 paintings dominated by the oval centrepiece entitled *The Glorification of the Unity of Gdańsk with Poland*. The painter, Isaac van den Block, yet another member of the Flemish family of artists, incorporated various themes in the painting, from everyday scenes to the panorama of Gdańsk on the top of the triumphal arch. All the room's decoration is authentic; it was dismantled in 1942 and hidden outside Gdańsk.

The 2nd floor houses exhibitions related to Gdańsk's history, including photos of the destruction of 1945. From here you can enter the **tower** (admission 4zł; 🕒 10am-4pm Wed-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun) for great views across the city.

DŁUGI TARG

Packed with buskers, street stalls and restaurants, Długi Targ (Long Market) was once the main city market and is now the major focus for visitors.

According to legend, the **Neptune Fountain** (Fontana Neptuna; Map p408), next to the town hall, once gushed forth with the trademark Gdańsk liqueur, Goldwasser. As the story goes, it spurted out of the trident one merry night and Neptune found himself endangered by crowds of drunken locals. Perhaps that's why, in 1634, the fountain was fenced off with a wrought-iron barrier. The bronze statue itself was the work of another Flemish artist, Peter Husen; it was made between 1606 and 1613 and is the oldest secular monument in Poland. A menagerie of stone sea creatures was added in the 1750s during the restoration of the fountain.

The nearby 1618 **Golden House** (Złota Kamiennica; Map p408), designed by Johan Voigt, has the richest façade in the city. In the friezes between storeys are 12 elaborately carved scenes interspersed with busts of famous historical figures, including two Polish kings. The four statues waving to you from the balustrade at the top are Cleopatra, Oedipus, Achilles and Antigone.

The Long Market is flanked from the east by the **Green Gate** (Zielona Brama; Map p408), marking the end of the Royal Way. It was built in the 1560s on the site of a medieval defensive gate and was supposed to be the residence of the kings. But they never stayed in what turned out to be a cold and uncomfortable lodge; they preferred the houses nearby, particularly those opposite the Artus Court.

ARTUS COURT

Not many houses have a brand of vodka named after them, but the **Artus Court** (Dwór Artusa; Map p408; ☎ 058 346 3358; Długi Targ 43/44; adult/concession 8/4zł, free Tue; 🕒 10am-3pm Tue, 10am-4pm Wed-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun) behind the Neptune fountain is perhaps the single best-known house in Gdańsk. The court has been an essential stop for passing luminaries ever since its earliest days, and a photo display in the entrance

shows an enviable selection of famous visitors, from King Henry IV of England to a host of contemporary presidents.

Built at the end of the 15th century, the court was given its monumental façade by Abraham van den Block in the 1610s. Inside there's a huge hall, topped by a Gothic vault supported on four slim granite columns, decorated with hunting murals and dominated by a vast painting depicting the Battle of Grunwald. There are also large models of masted sailing ships suspended from its ceiling! Wealthy local merchants used the building as a communal guildhall, holding meetings, banquets and general revelries in the lavishly decorated interior.

Like most of the centre, the court was comprehensively destroyed in WWII, but has been painstakingly restored from old photographs and historical records, recapturing at least a glimpse of its remarkable past. The hall is still the undisputed centrepiece, but the adjoining chambers hold historical artefacts and some exquisite pieces of classic Danzig furniture in the dark-wood style synonymous with the city's golden age.

The plainly renovated upper floors hold a selection of historical exhibits, including a photographic 'simulacrum' of how the great hall would have looked at its peak – even in two dimensions it's a breathtaking space, filled from top to bottom with paintings, models and stuffed animals.

One unique feature of the interior is its giant Renaissance **tiled stove**, standing in the corner of the hall and almost touching the ceiling. It's reputedly the highest tiled stove in Europe. Looking like a five-tier tower, 10.65m high, the stove is also lavishly ornamented, with a wealth of decoration portraying, among other things, rulers, allegorical figures and coats of arms. Built in 1546 by George Stelzener, the stove survived virtually unchanged until 1943, when local conservators dismantled the upper part and hid it outside the city. The fragments were collected after the war, and after a long and complex restoration, the stove was eventually put together and revealed to the public in 1995. It contains 520 tiles, 437 of which are original.

WATERFRONT

Beyond the Green Gate is the Motława River. There once was a busy quay along here, crowded with hundreds of sailing ships

loading and unloading their cargo, which was stored either in the cellars of the burghers' houses in town or in the granaries on the other side of the river, on Spichlerze Island. Today it's a popular tourist promenade lined with cafés, art galleries and souvenir shops.

In medieval times, the parallel east–west streets of the Main Town all had defensive gates at their riverfront ends. Some of them still exist, though most were altered in later periods. Walking north along Długie Pobrzeże (literally, Long Waterfront), you first get to the **Bread Gate** (Brama Chlebnicka; Map p408), at the end of ul Chlebnicka. It was built around 1450, still under the Teutonic order, as shown by the original city coat of arms consisting of two crosses. The crown was added by King Kazimierz Jagiellończyk in 1457, when Gdańsk was incorporated into the kingdom.

Enter the gate and walk a few steps to see the palatial **House Under the Angels** (Dom Pod Aniołami; Map p408), which is also known as the English House (Dom Angielski) after the nationality of the merchants who owned it in the 17th century. At that time it was the largest burgher's house in Gdańsk. Today it's a student dorm, which says a lot about changing standards!

At No 14 stands the late-Gothic **Schlieff House** (Map p408) of 1520. It's a replica built after the emperor of Prussia, Friedrich Wilhelm III, fell in love with its predecessor in the 1820s and had it taken apart brick by brick and rebuilt in Brandenburg. The original is in Potsdam, near Berlin.

The tiny ul Grząska will take you to **ul Mariacka**, the most atmospheric of all the streets in Gdańsk and unique in Poland. It was reconstructed after the war, almost from the ground up, with the utmost piety on the basis of old documents and illustrations, and every detail found in the rubble was incorporated. It looks amazingly authentic. It's the only street with a complete row of terraces, which gives it enormous charm, and is a trendy place lined with shops selling amber jewellery. You'll also find some of the best stalls here during the Dominican Fair (p418).

The street ends at **St Mary's Gate** (Brama Mariacka; Map p408), similar to the Bread Gate but constructed later, as you'll see from its coats of arms. Next to it is the fair-sized Renaissance **House of the Naturalists' Society** (Dom Towarzystwa Przyrodniczego; Map p408), which houses the **Archaeological Museum**

(Muzeum Archeologiczne; Map p408; ☎ 058 301 5031; ul Mariacka 25/26; adult/concession 5/4zł, free Sat; ☎ 9am–5pm Jul–Aug, 9am–4pm Tue, Thu & Fri, 10am–5pm Wed, 10am–4pm Sat & Sun Sep–Jun). The extensive collection stresses the Polish cultural and ethnic roots of the region; if you haven't had your fill of views elsewhere, you can also go to the top of the building's **tower** (admission 2zł; ☎ 8am–4pm Mon, 10am–5pm Tue–Sun).

GDAŃSK CRANE & CENTRAL MARITIME MUSEUM

Back on the waterfront, just beyond the modest **Gate of the Holy Spirit** (Brama Św Ducha; Map p408), is the conspicuous and world-renowned **Gdańsk Crane** (Żuraw Gdański; Map p408; ☎ 058 301 5311; ul Szeroka 67/68; adult/concession 6/4zł; ☎ 10am–6pm Mon–Fri, 10.30am–6.30pm Sat & Sun Jul–Aug, 10am–4pm Tue–Fri, 10.30am–4.30pm Sat & Sun Sep–Jun). Built in the mid-15th century as the biggest double-towered gate on the waterfront, it also served to move heavy cargoes directly onto or off the vessels. For this purpose two large wheels – 5m in diameter – were installed as a hoist with a rope wound around the axle; it was put in motion by people 'walking' along the inner circumference of the wheels as a treadmill. It could hoist loads of up to 2000kg, making it the biggest crane in medieval Europe. At the beginning of the 17th century another set of wheels was added higher up, for installing masts.

The crane suffered considerable damage in 1945 but was carefully rebuilt; it's the only fully restored relic of its kind in the world, and is administered by the Central Maritime Museum. The interior has exhibits relating to the history of shipping, plus a collection of shells, corals and other marine life, and there's English commentary available via laminated sheets. You can also climb up into the section overlooking the water and have a closer look at the hoisting gear.

Next door to the crane, the main annexe of the **Central Maritime Museum** (Centralne Muzeum Morskie; Map p408; ☎ 058 320 3358; www.cmm.pl; ul Szeroka 67/68; adult/concession 6/4zł; ☎ 10am–6pm Jul–Aug, 10am–4pm Tue–Sun Sep–Jun) is a featureless modern building displaying traditional rowing and sailing boats from various countries: there's a Venetian gondola as a centrepiece in the foyer. English captioning is at its most minimal here.

The museum continues in three reconstructed **granaries** (Map p408; ☎ 058 301 8611; ul

IN A LEAGUE OF ITS OWN

It wasn't easy being a merchant in the Middle Ages, without the benefit of chambers of commerce or Rotary Clubs, and very little respect from the ruling classes. Travelling salesmen were seen as easy pickings by local lords, paying heavy tolls as they moved from province to province in Central Europe. Taking to the sea wasn't much better, as merchants' slow-moving boats were subject to attack by pirates.

The answer to their problems was to band together in the Hanseatic League, a group of trading ports that formed in the late 13th century and wielded unprecedented economic power. The Hansa (from a German word for 'association') was centred on Germany, making good use of its central location, with members also scattered throughout Scandinavia, across the Baltic to Russia, and west to the Netherlands. The League also had trading posts in cities like London and Venice. As a result, it could trade wax from Russia with items from English or Dutch manufacturers, or Swedish minerals with fruit from the Mediterranean.

The League took a far more muscular approach than that of today's business councils. It bribed rulers, built lighthouses and led expeditions against pirates, and on one memorable occasion raised an armed force that defeated the Danish military in 1368.

At its height the League had over a hundred members, including major cities now within Poland such as Danzig (Gdańsk), Stettin (Szczecin), Thorn (Toruń) and Elbing (Elbląg).

But it was all downhill from there. As it had no standing army and no government beyond irregular assemblies of city representatives, the League was unable to withstand the rise of the new nation states of the 15th century, and the shift of trade to Atlantic ports after the discovery of the New World. Its assembly met for the last time in 1669, and its membership had been reduced to the core cities of Hamburg, Bremen and Lübeck by the time of its final disintegration in 1863.

The memory of the League lives on, however, in the **New Hanse** (www.hanse.org), founded in 1980 and bringing together the former Hansa member cities in a body promoting cultural cooperation and civic pride.

Ołowianka 9/13; adult/concession 6/4zł) just across the Motława, on Ołowianka Island. The museum's own ferry service shuttles between the crane and the island. The exhibits illustrate the history of Polish seafaring from the earliest times to the present and include models of old sailing warships and ports, a 9th-century dugout, navigation instruments, ships' artillery, flags and the like. An interesting exhibit is a collection of salvaged items from the *General Carleton*, a British ship that disappeared mysteriously in the Baltic in 1785. In 1995 Polish scuba divers happened upon the wreck, and the museum's later excavation turned up the ship's bell with its name engraved, thus solving the mystery.

Offshore, there's the **MS Soldek** (Map p408; adult/concession 6/4zł; ☎ 10am–6pm Jul–Aug, 10am–3.30pm Sep–Jun), a museum ship moored in front of the granaries. Once you're on board and past the fairly dull introductory video, you can test the limits of your claustrophobia and vertigo in the lower and higher sections of the vessel.

Set aside three hours to visit all the sites – there's a lot to see. Combined entry to all four sections, including the crane, costs

15/9zł for adult/concession tickets; tours in English and other languages cost 20zł to 40zł, depending on numbers.

ST MARY'S CHURCH

Set right in the middle of the Main Town, **St Mary's Church** (Bazylika Mariacka; Map p408) is believed to be the largest old brick church in the world. It's 105m long and 66m wide at the transept, and its massive squat tower is 78m high. About 25,000 people can be easily accommodated into its 5000-sq-metre (0.5-hectare) interior. It's a fascinating building to look at even from a few streets away, as its weathered red brickwork looms in a somewhat sinister manner over the much smaller, more thoroughly redecorated buildings at its feet.

The church was begun in 1343 and reached its present gigantic size in 1502. It served as the parish church for the Catholic congregation until the Reformation blew into Gdańsk, and it passed to the Protestants in 1572, to be used by them until WWII.

The church didn't escape the destruction of 1945; half of the vault collapsed and the

interior was largely burnt out. Fortunately, the most valuable works of art had been removed and hidden before the battle front arrived. They were brought back after a long and complex reconstruction.

The church's elephantine size is arresting and you feel even more antlike when you enter the building. Illuminated with natural light passing through 37 large windows (the biggest is 127 sq metres in area) the three-naved, whitewashed interior, topped by an intricate Gothic vault, is astonishingly bright and spacious. It was originally covered with frescoes, the sparse remains of which are visible in the far right corner. Imagine the impact the church must have made on medieval worshippers.

On first sight, the church looks almost empty, but walk around its 30-odd chapels to discover how many outstanding works of art have been accumulated. In the floor alone, there are about 300 tombstones. In the chapel at the back of the left (northern) aisle is a replica of Memling's *The Last Judgment* – the original is in the National Museum. Note the extraordinary Baroque organ.

The high altar boasts a Gothic polyptych from the 1510s, with the Coronation of the Virgin depicted in its central panel. Large as it is, it's a miniature in this vast space. The same applies to the 4m crucifix high up on the rood beam. Directly below it is a lofty wooden sacarium from 1482, elaborately carved in the shape of a tower.

One object that does stand out, in terms both of its size and rarity, is the 15th-century **astronomical clock**, placed in the northern transept. Another attraction of the church is its **tower** (adult/concession 3/1.50zł; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 1-5.30pm Sun), offering a sweeping bird's-eye view from its tiny viewing platform, 405 steps above.

ROYAL CHAPEL

Just to the north of St Mary's Church, and completely overshadowed by its massive neighbour, sits the small **Royal Chapel** (Kaplica Królewska; Map p408), which is squeezed between two houses. The only Baroque church in old Gdańsk, it was built between 1678 and 1681 to fulfil the last will of the primate of Poland of the time, Andrzej Olszowski.

The chapel was designed by famous royal architect Tylman van Gameren. Its façade is its more attractive feature, and bears the coats

of arms of Poland, Lithuania and King Jan III Sobieski (the founder of the chapel).

GREAT ARSENAL

To the west of St Mary's Church, ul Piwna (Beer St) ends at the **Great Arsenal** (Wielka Zbrojownia; Map p408). This being Gdańsk, even such an apparently prosaic building as an armoury is an architectural gem. It's the work of Antoon van Opberghen, built at the beginning of the 17th century and, like most of Gdańsk's architecture, clearly shows the influence of the Low Countries. The main eastern façade, framed within two side towers, is floridly decorated and guarded by figures of soldiers on the top. Military motifs predominate, and the city's coat of arms guards the doorways. A small stone structure rather like a well, in the middle of the façade, is the lift that was used for hoisting heavy ammunition from the basement. Above it stands Athena, goddess of warfare.

The armoury is now home to a decidedly nonmartial supermarket. Walk through to the Coal Market (Targ Węglowy) square on the opposite side, to see the western façade – though not as heavily ornamented as the eastern one, it's a fine composition that looks like four burghers' houses.

Slightly to the south, toward the Foregate, is a curious metal sculpture known as the **Millennium Tree**. It was erected in 1997 to commemorate Gdańsk's thousandth anniversary.

NORTHERN MAIN TOWN

The main attraction of this sector is **St Nicholas' Church** (Bazylika Św Mikołaja; Map p408), one of the oldest in town. It was built by the Dominican order on its arrival from Kraków in 1227, but only reached its final shape at the end of the 15th century. Amazingly, it was the only central church to escape damage in WWII – according to one story the attacking Russian soldiers deliberately avoided shelling it, due to Orthodox believers' high regard for St Nicholas. Unlike most of the other Gothic churches in the city, the interior of St Nick's is very richly decorated. The magnificent late-Renaissance high altar of 1647 first catches the eye, followed by the imposing Baroque organ made a century later. Don't miss the bronze rosary chandelier (1617), which features the Virgin and Child carved in wood, hanging in the nave in front of the entrance to the chancel.

Just behind the church is the large **Market Hall** (Hala Targowa; Map p408; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat May-Sep, 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat Oct-Apr), constructed in the late 19th century after the Dominicans were expelled by the Prussian authorities and their monastery standing on this site was pulled down. Wander through to check out the various shops and their contents, including food and clothing.

In front of the market hall is the tall octagonal **Hyacinthus' Tower** (Baszta Jacek; Map p408), one of the remnants of the medieval fortifications. It was built around 1400 and, apart from its defensive role, it also served as a watchtower. Today it houses a photo shop.

Old Town

Despite its name, Gdańsk's Old Town (Map p408) was not the cradle of the city. The earliest inhabited site, according to archaeologists, was in what is now the Main Town area. Nonetheless, a settlement existed in the Old Town from the late 10th century and developed parallel to the Main Town.

Under the Teutonic order, the two parts merged into a single urban entity, but the Old Town was always poorer and had no defensive system of its own. One other difference was that the Main Town was more 'German' while the Old Town had a larger Polish population. During WWII it suffered as much as its wealthier cousin but, apart from a handful of buildings (mainly churches) it was not rebuilt in its previous shape. The most interesting area today is along the Radunia Canal, between ul Garncarska and ul Stolarska.

The largest monument of the Old Town is **St Catherine's Church** (Kościół Św Katarzyny; Map p408), which is the oldest church in Gdańsk, begun in the 1220s. It was the parish church for the whole town until St Mary's was completed. As is common, the church evolved over centuries and only reached its final shape in the mid-15th century (save for the Baroque top to the tower, added in 1634).

The vaulted Gothic interior was originally covered with frescoes, fragments of which were discovered under a layer of plaster. Note the huge painting (11m long) depicting the entry of Christ to Jerusalem, placed under the organ loft in the left-hand aisle, and the richly carved enclosure of the baptismal font (1585) in the opposite aisle. The astronomer Johannes Hevelius was buried in the church's chancel, an 18th-century epitaph is above the grave.

The church is home to the **Tower Clocks Museum** (Muzeum Zegarów Wieżowych; Map p408; ☎ 058 305 64 92; ul Wielkie Młyny; adult/concession 4/2zł; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun), which features a collection of old tower clocks from the 15th century onwards. The church tower also houses a **carillon** (admission 3zł), a set of 49 bells that plays a selection of familiar melodies every hour.

Unfortunately, a major fire in May 2006 collapsed the church roof and caused damage to its interiors. Restoration work was in progress at the time of research, with some areas inaccessible to visitors, including the museum and tower, which were expected to be closed for some time.

Set immediately behind St Catherine's is **St Bridget's Church** (Kościół Św Brygidy; Map p408). Founded 700 years ago, the building was almost completely destroyed in 1945, and until 1970 only the walls were left standing. There's almost nothing left of the prewar furnishings within, but amber fans will be interested in seeing the spectacular 174cm-high amber monstrel depicting the tree of life and the monumental high altar, a recent construction, which comprises a record-breaking 6500kg of the stuff.

Lech Wałęsa attended Mass here when he was an unknown electrician in the nearby shipyard. With the wave of strikes in 1980 the church became a strong supporter of the dockyard workers, and its priest, Henryk Jankowski, took every opportunity to express their views in his sermons. The church remains a record of the Solidarity period, with several contemporary craftworks related to the trade union and to modern Polish history in general. You'll find the tombstone of murdered priest Jerzy Popiełuszko, the Katyń epitaph, a collection of crosses from the 1980 and '88 strikes, and a door covered with bas-reliefs of scenes from Solidarity's history – all in the right-hand (northern) aisle.

The peculiar seven-storey building opposite St Catherine's Church is the **Great Mill** (Wielki Młyn; Map p408). Built in around 1350 by the Teutonic Knights, it was the largest mill in medieval Europe at over 40m long and 26m high, and equipped with a set of 18 millstones, each 5m in diameter. The mill operated until 1945 and just before WWII produced 200 tonnes of flour per day. It now houses a modern shopping mall.

Behind the mill, across a small park, is the **Old Town Hall** (Ratusz Staromiejski; Map

p408), once the seat of the Old Town council. A well-proportioned Renaissance building crowned with a high central tower typical of its Flemish provenance, it was designed at the end of the 16th century by Antonius van Opbergen, the architect later responsible for the Great Arsenal. The brick structure is delicately ornamented in stone, including the central doorway and a frieze with the shields of Poland, Prussia and Gdańsk.

The Old Town Hall now houses the Baltic Sea Culture Centre and an exhibition hall. Go upstairs to see the foyer, notable for its rich decoration, which was partly assembled from old burghers' houses. Note the arcaded stone wall (1560) with three Roman gods in bas-relief. This composition, older than the town hall itself, was moved here from one of the houses in the Main Town. One of the doors leads to the Great Hall, which can also be visited. Concerts are held here – check the programme for details. There's also a café downstairs if you feel like a quick coffee or beer.

SHIPYARD

Gdańsk's **shipyard** (Map p408) is not just an industrial zone, it's an important fragment of 20th-century history. It was here that discontent with the communist regime boiled over into strikes and dissent, which were stamped out by armed force in 1970; 10 years later an electrician named Lech Wałęsa sprang up to address crowds of strikers here, leading to the formation of the Solidarity movement and ultimately to democracy for Poland.

Since the heady times of Wałęsa's presidency, however, the yard has largely lost its protected status; the vast area is now slated to be partly redeveloped as the site of offices and shops, though structures with historic significance will remain in place.

Just in front of the shipyard gates, on Solidarity Sq, the **Monument to the Fallen Shipyard Workers** (Pomnik Poległych Stoczniovców; Map p408) commemorates the workers killed in the riots of 1970. Unveiled on 16 December 1980, 10 years after the massacre, the monument is a set of three 42m-tall steel crosses, with a series of bronze bas-reliefs in their bases. One of the plates contains a fragment of a poem by late Nobel laureate Czesław Miłosz: 'You who wronged a simple man/Do not feel safe. A poet remembers./You can kill one, but another is born.'

The first monument in a communist regime to commemorate the regime's victims, it became an instant symbol and landmark.

Back toward the Old Town is the **Road to Freedom exhibition** (Droga do Wolności; Map p408; ☎ 058 308 4712; www.fcs.org.pl; ul Wały Piastowskie 24; adult/concession 6/4z; ☎ 10am–5pm Tue–Sun), a collection of multimedia displays and artefacts illustrating Poland's turbulent path to democracy, from the 1956 uprisings to martial law and the collapse of communism. At the time of research it was about to move from its former home in the shipyards to this location, attached to the Solidarity HQ. The exhibition is a poignant reminder of just how much has changed over the last 60 years, and of just how much dedication and sacrifice went into achieving that change. It's well captioned in English, and is something every visitor to Gdańsk should see – it rounds out the Main Town's Renaissance splendour with the knowledge of recent events that shaped the city.

Old Suburb

The Old Suburb (Stare Przedmieście; Map p408), south of the Main Town, was the product of the expansion of the city between the 15th and 17th centuries. Reduced to rubble in 1945 and rebuilt in the familiar bland postwar fashion, the suburb has little charm but boasts some notable sights.

The most significant of these is the **National Museum's Department of Early Art** (Muzeum Narodowe Oddział Sztuki Dawnej; Map p408; ☎ 058 301 6804; ul Toruńska 1; adult/concession 10/6z; ☎ 10am–5pm May–Sep, 9am–4pm Oct–Apr), located in the vaulted interiors of the former Franciscan monastery. Among the best museums in the country, it covers the broad spectrum of Polish and international art and crafts, boasting extensive collections of paintings, woodcarvings, gold and silverware, embroidery, fabrics, porcelain, faience, wrought iron and furniture. It has the original figure of St George from the spire of the Court of the Fraternity of St George, an assortment of huge, elaborately carved Danzig-style wardrobes (typical of the city, from where they were sent all over the country) and several beautiful ceramic tiled stoves.

The 1st floor is given over to paintings, with a section devoted to Dutch and Flemish work. The jewel of the collection is Hans Memling's (1435–94) triptych of the *Last Judgment*, one of the earlier works of the artist, dating from 1472 to 1473. You'll also

find works by the younger Brueghel and Van Dyck, and the beautifully macabre *Hell* by Jacob Swaneburgh, who was the master of the young Rembrandt.

Adjoining the museum from the north, and formerly belonging to the Franciscan monastery, is the **Church of the Holy Trinity** (Kościół Św Trójcy; Map p408), which was built at the end of the 15th century, when the Gothic style had already reached its late decorative stage. After St Mary's Church it's the largest in town, with a spacious and lofty whitewashed interior topped with a superb, netlike vault.

Note the high altar's assembly of panels from triptychs of different origins, the old tombstones paving the floor, and the spidery Baroque chandeliers from the mid-17th century.

Westerplatte

Westerplatte (Map p407) is a long peninsula at the entrance to the harbour, 7km north of the historic town. When Gdańsk became a free city after WWI, Poland was permitted to maintain a post at this location, at the tip of the port zone. It served both trading and military purposes and had a garrison to protect it.

WWII broke out here at dawn on 1 September 1939, when the German battleship *Schleswig-Holstein* began shelling the Polish guard post. The garrison, which numbered just 182 men, held out for seven days before surrendering. The site is now a memorial, with some of the ruins left as they were after the bombardment, plus a massive **monument** (Map p407) put up in memory of the defenders. The surviving **Guardhouse No 1** (Wartownia Nr 1; Map p407; ☎ 058 343 6972; ul Sucharskiego; adult/concession 3/2z; ☎ 9am–4pm May–Sep) houses a small exhibition related to the event, including a model of the battle labelled in English.

Bus 106 goes to Westerplatte from the main train station, but a more attractive way to get here is by boat. Ferries, paddle steamers and a replica galleon depart several times daily for Westerplatte from the wharf next to the Green Gate (p424).

Oliwa

Oliwa (Map p407), a desirable suburb about 9km from the historic centre, boasts a fine cathedral set in a quiet park, and provides an enjoyable half-day break from the dense attractions of the Main Town. To get here, take

the commuter train from central Gdańsk and get off at Gdańsk Oliwa station, from where it's a 10-minute walk.

The beginnings of Oliwa go back over 800 years, when the Pomeranian dukes who then ruled Gdańsk invited the Cistercians to settle here in 1186 and granted them land together with privileges, including the revenues of the port of Gdańsk.

The abbey didn't have an easy life. The original church from around 1200 was burnt out by the pagan Baltic Prussians, then by the Teutonic Knights. A new Gothic church, built in the mid-14th century, was surrounded by defensive walls, but that didn't save it from further misfortunes. When in 1577 the abbots supported King Stefan Batory in his attempts to reduce the city's independence, the citizens of Gdańsk burned the church down in revenge. The monks rebuilt their holy home once more, but then the Swedish wars began and the church fell prey to repeated looting, losing its organ and pulpit among other things. The monks' troubles came to an end in 1831, when the Prussian government decided to expel them from the city. The church was given to the local parish and, in 1925, raised to the rank of **cathedral** (Map p407). It came through the war almost unscathed, and is an important, and unusual, example of ecclesiastical architecture.

The first surprise is its façade, a striking composition of two slim octagonal Gothic towers with a central Baroque portion squeezed between them. You enter the church by going downstairs, for its floor is more than a metre below the external ground level. The interior looks extraordinarily long, mainly because of the unusual proportions of the building – the nave and chancel together are 90m long but only 8.3m wide. At the far end of this 'tunnel' is a Baroque high altar (1688), while the previous oak-carved Renaissance altar (from 1606) is now in the left-hand transept. Opposite, in the right transept, is the marble tombstone of the Pomeranian dukes (1613).

The showpiece of the church is the **organ**. The instrument, begun in 1763 and completed 30 years later, is noted for its fine tone and the mechanised angels that blow trumpets and ring bells when the organ is played. In July and August, recitals take place on Tuesday and Friday evenings, but 20-minute performances are held daily every hour or two between 10am and 3pm or 4pm

but it's hard to see it, and the décor is showing its age. However, these quibbles are offset by its excellent location. Guests can hire bicycles (5/30zł per hour/day).

Top End

In keeping with the restored splendour of the Main Town, Gdańsk has some superb accommodation options for those who can afford the finer things in life. Look out for serious discounting at weekends and out of season.

Hotel Królewski (Map p408; ☎ 058 326 1111; www.hotelkrolewski.pl; ul Otowińska 1; s 350zł, d 400-450zł, ste 560-700zł; P ☒ ☑ ☒ ☒ ☒) This hotel is set in an amazing old granary building on the opposite bank of the river from the Main Town, and oozes history from its worn redbrick exterior. Rooms are modern and attractive, and there's a lovely outdoor dining area overlooking the water.

Hotel Mercure Hevelius (Map p408; ☎ 058 321 0000; www.mercure.com; ul Heweliusza 22; r 503zł, ste 990zł; P ☒ ☑ ☒ ☒ ☒) This towering hotel would be included in anyone's short list of 'ugliest buildings of Gdańsk', but its rooms and facilities are reassuringly consistent in quality. There are various in-house options to take advantage of, including a restaurant, bar and massage.

Dwór Oliwski (Map p407; ☎ 058 554 7000; www.dwor-oliwski.com.pl; ul Bytowska 4; s/d €149/184, ste €330; P ☒ ☑ ☒ ☒) If you're inclined to treat yourself to a little luxury, this magnificent manor house provides a compelling reason to head for Oliwa. The five-star accommodation is housed in traditional buildings set amid extensive gardens, and offers sophisticated rooms and sauna facilities. The restaurant has a fantastic reputation for its French cuisine.

Hotel Podewils (Map p408; ☎ 058 300 9560; www.podewils.pl; ul Szafarnia 2; s €183-220, d €224-247, ste €271; P ☒ ☑ ☒) The view from the Podewils across the river to the Main Town can't be beaten. Its cheery Baroque exterior comes straight from the 18th century, and contains rooms filled with elegantly curved timber furniture, classic prints and distinctive wallpaper. There's also a restaurant, a bar and a choice of Turkish or Finnish saunas.

Hotel Hanza (Map p408; ☎ 058 305 3427; www.hotelhanza.pl; ul Tokarska 6; s/d 695/745zł, ste 985-1190zł; P ☒ ☑ ☒ ☒ ☒) This luxurious establishment's modern structure blends seamlessly with the old-world architecture of the waterfront. The rooms are simple and classy, featuring beds with polished timber head-

boards, wide-screen televisions and spotless bathrooms. A riverside terrace allows the sipping of a leisurely drink while taking in the attractive old granaries across the water.

EATING

There are plenty of eateries throughout the centre catering to every budget. As you may expect, fish is plentiful, but you'll have to hunt around for ethnic cuisines.

Bar Mleczny Neptun (Map p408; ☎ 058 301 4988; ul Długa 33/34; mains 2-12zł; ☎ 7.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun) Ultrabudget dining in an original communist-era milk bar, though this joint is a cut above your run-of-the-mill *bar mleczny*, with potted plants, lace curtains, decorative tiling and old lamps for décor.

Green Way (Map p408; ☎ 058 301 4121; ul Garncarska 4/6; mains 4-9zł; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Fri, noon-7pm Sat & Sun; ☎) Folksy blue-and-yellow space serving vegetarian and organic dishes ranging from soy cutlets to Mexican goulash. As the ultimate accolade, even nonveggies come to eat here. There's another, more central, branch at ul Długa 11.

Bar Pod Rybą (Map p408; ☎ 058 305 1307; Długi Targ 35/38; mains 6-20zł; ☎ 11am-9pm Jul-Aug, 11am-7pm Sep-Jun) You wouldn't expect much from a budget eatery at the heart of the tourist trail, but this neat central bar turns out great baked potatoes with a variety of fillings. The old photos of Gdańsk give you something to look at while eating.

Kuchnia Rosyjska (Map p408; ☎ 058 301 2735; Długi Targ 11; mains 9-32zł; ☎ 11am-11pm) Brilliantly coloured Russian restaurant with a folkloric interior, serving lots of traditional snacks, soups and mains.

Gospoda Pod Wielkiem Młynem (Map p408; ☎ 058 302 1779; ul Na Piaskach 1; mains 13-44zł; ☎ noon-11pm) A sure-fire tip for summer, this charming half-timbered building behind the Great Mill has the city's best restaurant garden, straddling the tip of an island on the Radunia Canal. Romantics will lap up the secluded atmosphere, surrounded by shady trees and rustic wagon wheels. There's also a cheaper snack menu with Polish standards such as *bigos* (sauerkraut dish, see boxed text, p61; 5zł).

Kansai (Map p408; ☎ 058 324 0888; ul Ogarna 124/125; mains 15-43zł; ☎ noon-9pm Mon-Sat, noon-8pm Sun) You'd expect to find fish in a seaport, but Kansai adds an exotic twist by serving sushi in full-on Japanese ambience. Waiters are dressed in traditional robes, there's a samu-

rai sword on the counter, and the menu has dishes made from tuna, salmon and butterfish, along with classic California rolls.

Restauracja Kubicki (Map p408; ☎ 058 301 0050; ul Wartka 5; mains 15-43zł; ☎ noon-11pm; ☎) This family firm has served solid, tasty Polish food from its waterfront location since the last days of the German Empire in 1918, making it Gdańsk's oldest continuously operated restaurant. There's plenty of fresh fish on the menu, priced by weight, and a wide-ranging wine list including several Bulgarian drops. There's a great river view from the outdoor seating.

Czerwone Drzwi (Map p408; ☎ 058 301 5764; ul Piwna 52/53; mains 18-65zł; ☎ noon-10pm) Step through the Red Door into a relaxed, refined café atmosphere, which helps you digest the small but interesting menu of Polish and international meals.

Restauracja Gdańska (Map p408; ☎ 058 305 7671; ul Św Ducha 16; mains 24-110zł; ☎ noon-midnight) Eating here is a memorable experience: the five banquet rooms and salons are crammed to the rafters with antique furniture, paintings, model ships, random *objets d'art* and nimble waiters in epaulettes. The upper-end traditional cooking makes a visit doubly worthwhile.

Piwница Rajców (Map p408; ☎ 058 300 0280; ul Długi Targ 44; mains 25-110zł; ☎ 10am-midnight) The gods are smiling on this excellent cellar-restaurant, near the Neptune fountain and below a striking entrance topped by a statue of the god Mercury. The menu features some of the finest Polish cuisine to be had in Gdańsk, particularly its wild boar, and extends to more exotic dishes like springbok fillet.

Tawerna (Map p408; ☎ 058 301 4114; ul Powroźnica 19/20; mains 29-119zł; ☎ 11am-late) A historic eatery within a dark, restfully gloomy interior. It's nautically themed, serves a Polish menu with plenty of fish, and has a great location just inside the Green Gate, which is handy for a bite between city sightseeing and river cruising.

Restauracja Pod Łososiem (Map p408; ☎ 058 301 7652; ul Szeroka 52/54; mains 49-95zł; ☎ noon-10pm) Founded in 1598 and particularly famous for its salmon dishes, this is one of Gdańsk's oldest and most highly regarded restaurants. Red leather seats, brass chandeliers and a gathering of gas lamps fill out the sombre interior. The speciality drink here is Goldwasser, a thick, sweet liqueur with flakes of gold floating in it, and invented and produced in its cellars from the end of the 16th century till the outbreak of WWII.

DRINKING

The photogenic ul Mariacka has several romantic little café-bars, with tables on their charming front terraces. You'll find plenty of open-air summer bars amid the fancy restaurants on the waterfront, especially at the Targ Rybny end.

Punkt (Map p408; ☎ 058 301 2535; ul Chlebnička 2; ☎ 4pm-late) Popular with a hipper brand of student, the murky stained glass here conceals a den of wannabe urban chic, complete with cutting-edge music and fashionable ennu. Look for the permanent gaggle of people on the steps outside.

Irish Pub (Map p408; ☎ 058 320 2474; www.irish.pl in Polish; ul Korzenia 33/35; ☎ 3pm-late Mon-Sat, 4pm-late Sun) Set in the vast vaulted cellars of the Old Town Hall, this sort-of Irish pub is famous for its cheap booze and shamelessly naff sessions of the dreaded karaoke. There's some kind of music most nights – see the very green website for details.

Celtic Pub (Map p408; ☎ 058 301 2999; ul Lektykarska 3; ☎ 5pm-late) Another Hibernian-themed cellar bar with late-night parties, and it's exactly the kind of messy, crowded, chaotic dive you need to round off a hard day's drinking. The surface-level entrance leads to DJs playing music every night, ranging from karaoke to chill-out tunes.

ourpick! Spiritus Sanctus (Map p408; ☎ 058 320 7019; ul Grobla 13; ☎ 2-11pm) If you're tired of beer and vodka, head for this stylish wine bar opposite St Mary's Church. There's no wine list to peruse – instead, the knowledgeable waiters suggest suitable tipples from unfamiliar regions of the Balkans. While you're enjoying your Slovenian white or Croatian red, you can marvel at the amazing décor, a jumble of abstract art and classic *objets d'art*.

Café Ferber (Map p408; ☎ 058 301 5566; ul Długa 77/78; ☎ 8am-2am) It's startling to step straight from Gdańsk's historic main street into this very modern café-bar, dominated by bright red panels, a suspended ceiling and boxy lighting. The scarlet décor contrasts with its comfy brown armchairs, from which you can sip well-made coffee, international wines, and cocktail creations such as the *szary kot* (grey cat). On weekends, DJs spin house and chill-out music into the wee small hours.

Pi Kawa (Map p408; ☎ 058 309 1444; ul Piwna 5/6; ☎ 10am-10pm) This café on Beer Street has a relaxed interior with a country kitchen feel, sporting timber tables, original artwork for

sale, and a fish tank. It's a good hide-out from the tourist crowds on ul Długa.

Kamienica (Map p408; ☎ 058 301 1230; ul Mariacka 37/39; ☎ 10am-11pm) The pick of the bunch on Mariacka is this excellent two-level café with a calm, sophisticated atmosphere and the best patio on the block. It's as popular for daytime coffee and cakes as it is for a sociable evening beverage.

ENTERTAINMENT

Check the local press for up-to-date cultural and entertainment listings. *Gdańsk in Your Pocket* provides comprehensive and usefully opinionated reviews of the city's nightlife options. But, as anyone in town will tell you, Sopot is the place to go for a serious night out.

Clubs & Live Music

Soda (Map p408; ☎ 058 305 1256; ul Chmielna 103/104; ☎ 7pm-late) Cool, laid-back venue with a split identity – upstairs it's a mellow pot plant–strewn bar and restaurant during the day, while downstairs it's a club after dark. Musical styles change from night to night, and can include anything from house to '70s and '80s classics.

Miasto Aniołów (Map p408; ☎ 058 768 5831; www.miastooaniolow.com.pl; ul Chmielna 26; entry 10zł; ☎ 9pm-late) The City of Angels covers all the bases – late-night revellers can hit the spacious dance floor, crash in the chill-out area, or hang around the atmospheric deck overlooking the Motława River. Nightly DJs play disco and other dance-oriented sounds.

Parlament (Map p408; ☎ 058 320 1365; www.parlament.com.pl; ul Św Duchy 2; admission 5-10zł; ☎ 8pm-late Wed-Sat) Hardly a talking shop, this high-profile club plays host to big dance events punctuated by anything from industrial to Asian beats. There's hip-hop on Friday, disco on Saturday...oh, and karaoke on Thursday.

Yesterday (Map p408; ☎ 058 301 3924; ul Piwna 50/51; ☎ 7pm-late) Groovy cellar venue decked out in 1960s flower-power décor, including cartoon characters and a fluorescent portrait of Chairman Mao. DJs play a variety of sounds from 9pm every night, and there's the occasional live gig.

Leisure Activities

U7 (Map p408; ☎ 058 305 5577; www.u7.pl; Plac Dominikański 7; ☎ 9am-1am) Taking the American under-one-roof concept to extremes, U7 of-

fers much more than your average bowling alley: a snack bar, a gym, a sauna, a solarium, pool tables, darts and even a shooting range are packed into the subterranean space by the market hall. Unsurprisingly, the heady combination of tenpin and live ammo is a magnet for Gdańsk's younger citizens.

Opera, Classical Music & Theatre

Baltic Philharmonic Hall (Map p408; ☎ 058 305 2040; www.filharmonia.gda.pl in Polish; ul Ołowianka 1) This is the usual home of chamber music concerts, and also organises many of the major music festivals throughout the year.

State Baltic Opera (Map p407; ☎ 058 763 4906; www.operabaltycka.pl; Al Zwycięstwa 15) Founded in 1950, Gdańsk's premier opera company resides in this opera house in the Wrzeszcz district, next to the Gdańsk Politechnika train station. Alongside the usual operatic repertoire, it stages regular ballets. Symphonic concerts are also held here.

Teatr Wybrzeże (Map p408; ☎ 058 301 1328; www.teatrwyrzeze.pl; Targ Węglowy 1) The main city stage, next to the Arsenal in the Main Town. The theatre features mostly mainstream fare, including some top productions of great Polish and foreign classics.

St John's Centre (Centrum Św Jana; Map p408; ☎ 058 301 1051; www.nck.org.pl; ul Świętojańska 72) Housed within the massive Gothic interior of the former St John's Church in the heart of the Main Town, this spectacular venue is administered by the Baltic Sea Culture Centre as an exhibition space and auditorium, showcasing everything from classical concerts to world music. Check the posters outside for upcoming events.

SHOPPING

Gdańsk is widely known for its amber, nicknamed 'Baltic gold' (see boxed text, opposite). It's sold either unset or in silver jewellery, some of which is high quality. Amber shops are concentrated around ul Mariacka, Długi Targ and Długie Pobrzeże, with dozens more stalls springing up around the Dominican Fair in August. Beware of souvenir shops preying on clueless tourists with overpriced jewellery.

Beyond amber, a good place to buy craft items and paintings created by local artists is **Galeria Piękny Świat** (Map p408; ☎ 058 306 5253; ul Długa 22/27; ☎ 9am-9pm), within the main post office building.

AMBER: TRUE OR FALSE?

Just as oil is nicknamed black gold, amber richly deserves its title of Baltic gold. This 'precious stone' is actually a fossilised tree resin. It's always been highly prized for decorative purposes, and the largest deposits are found along the Baltic shores of Poland and Russia.

Andrzej Gierszewski works as an amber salesman in a small shop on the riverfront in Gdańsk's Main Town. As he's also a history graduate, he has a keen interest in the substance's back story. 'The history of the amber industry is well recorded,' he says. 'We know amber figures of warriors were transported 4000 years ago to northeast Turkey and even further. They've even found amber in Egypt.'

Maintaining its historic success, amber has become one of the most popular 'stones' used in Polish jewellery. But the buyer need beware...at some smaller, less-reputable stalls, you may not be getting the real deal.

Andrzej shares an insider's tips: 'There are three main tests to differentiate between real and fake amber. If you have a lighter, and you put amber into the heat, it has a characteristic smell, like incense, and emits distinct squeaks,' he says. 'But only try this on the usual cognac-coloured amber, not white amber. Also, amber floats in 20% salt water, while plastic or synthetic amber won't.'

And the third test? 'If one rubs amber against cloth, the static electricity produced attracts tiny pieces of paper.'

It's hard to imagine producing a box of matches or a lighter at an amber stall, but Andrzej disagrees. 'If a salesman doesn't have anything to hide, he will allow you to do so. When I worked at a very small stand near the Gdańsk Crane, we did lighter tests for our customers.'

Somehow, though, the static electricity test seems the option with the least stress.

Gdańsk is also a good place for Western-style multiplex shopping, with several massive malls in town – the centres in the Great Mill (see p415) and Market Hall (see p415) are worth a look just for the architecture, while the modern **Madison Centre** (Map p408; ☎ 058 766 7541; www.madison.gda.pl; ul Rajska 10) provides four floors of international brands, food and a gym, not to mention free public toilets. Self-caterers can head for the supermarket in the Great Arsenal building (see p414).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Lech Wałęsa airport (Map p407; ☎ 058 348 1163; www.airport.gdansk.pl) is in Rębiechowo, 14km west of Gdańsk. The **LOT office** (Map p408; ☎ 058 301 1161; Wały Jagiellońskie 2/4) is next to the Upland Gate.

The only domestic flights are with LOT to Warsaw (at least four times daily), but the airport has seen a massive increase over the last few years in international flights, particularly those operated by low-cost European airlines. Destinations served by more than one airline are Frankfurt via LOT and Ryanair (at least twice daily); Munich via LOT and Lufthansa (at least twice daily); Dublin via Centralwings and Ryanair (up to six weekly); and London via Wizz Air and Ryanair (up to three daily).

There are also direct international connections via SAS to Copenhagen (up to three daily); via LOT to Hamburg (daily); with Wizz Air to Cologne (three weekly), Cork (three weekly), Dortmund (daily), Glasgow (three weekly), Hamburg (four weekly), Liverpool (five weekly), Malmö (three weekly), Sheffield (four weekly) and Stockholm (four weekly); via Centralwings to Edinburgh (up to four weekly), Rome (three weekly) and Shannon (twice weekly); and via Norwegian to Oslo (three weekly).

Bus

Gdańsk's PKS terminal (Map p408) is right behind the central train station, and linked by an underground passageway. Buses are handy for regional destinations, which seldom, or never, have trains.

There's one morning bus directly to Frombork (16zł, three hours); alternatively, you can take any of the frequent buses to Elbląg (13zł, 1½ hours) and change there. Five buses head to Krynica Morska via Sztutowo (11zł, 1½ hours), with an additional eight departures per day from July to October. Four fast buses go to Olsztyn daily (26zł, four hours) and one to Lidzbark Warmiński (22zł to 26zł, three to 3½ hours). From June to August there

are three fast buses daily to Łeba (22zł, 2½ hours); otherwise head for Lębork (19zł, 2¼ hours, five daily) and change there.

For the Kaszuby region, there are regular buses travelling to Kartuzy (12zł, one hour) and 15 daily services to Kościerzyna (9zł, 1¾ hours).

The private bus company Polski Express also connects to Warsaw twice a day (42zł to 48zł).

There are plenty of connections from Gdańsk to Western European cities; travel agencies (including Almatour and Orbis, p406) have information and sell tickets. PKS buses travel twice-daily (except Sunday) to Kaliningrad (32zł, five hours), and daily to Vilnius (149zł, 16 hours) via Olsztyn.

Ferry

Polferries (☎ 058 620 8761; www.polferries.pl) operates car ferries from Gdańsk Nowy Port (Map p407) to Nynäshamn in Sweden (adult/concession Skr670/560, 18 hours, up to four times weekly). Information, bookings and tickets can be obtained from Orbis and other travel agents. See also p520.

Train

The main train station, Gdańsk Główny (Map p408), on the western outskirts of the Old Town, handles all incoming and outgoing traffic. Note the station building itself, with the distinctive 'winged wheels' atop its roof; it's another historic monument that has been restored to its former glory.

Almost all long-distance trains to/from the south originate and terminate in Gdynia, while trains running along the coast to western destinations start in Gdańsk and stop at Gdynia en route. Timetables show departure times from all the main Tri-City stations – ensure you look at the correct column.

Gdańsk is a busy railway junction, with 18 services to Warsaw daily (82zł, 4½ hours). Trains go at least twice an hour to Malbork (16zł, 45 minutes), including seven fast trains daily to Olsztyn (34zł, 2½ hours). If you're travelling these routes and don't plan on stopping in Malbork, make sure your camera is ready as you pass the castle.

There are four fast trains to Wrocław (52zł, 7½ hours); they all go through Bydgoszcz (33zł, two hours) and Poznań (46zł, four hours). There are also six trains to Toruń (38zł, 3½ hours), and five to Szczecin (49zł,

5½ hours). For Łeba, take one of the frequent trains to Lębork (20zł, 1½ hours) and change there.

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airport

Bus B goes to the airport up to twice hourly from Gdańsk Główny station (35 minutes), or you can take bus 110 from Gdańsk Wrzeszcz (35 minutes).

Boat

From April until October **Żegluga Gdańska** (Map p408; ☎ 058 301 4926; www.zegluga.gda.pl) runs pleasure boats and hydrofoils from Gdańsk's wharf, near the Green Gate, to Sopot (one way/return 44/60zł), Gdynia (52/70zł), Westerplatte (29/43zł) and across the Gulf of Gdańsk to the fishing village of Hel (60/76zł). Concession tickets cost about two-thirds of the normal fare, but are not available on the hydrofoils.

Another way to go to Hel is aboard the **Ferry Tram** (Tramwaj Wodny; Map p408; www.ztm.gda.pl/ferry), which departs from a point further up the wharf to Sopot (adult/concession 8/4zł, four daily) and Hel (16/8zł, three daily) each weekend during May and June, then daily from July to August. Bicycles cost an extra 2zł to transport.

The paddle-steamer company **Żegluga Pomeranka** (☎ 058 301 1300), leaving from a similar location, also runs regular boats to Westerplatte (one way/return 20/30zł) from May to September, usually including a visit to the port.

From the same departure point, **Ustka-Tour** (☎ 0501 571 383) operates cruises to Westerplatte (adult/concession return 30/20zł, six daily) aboard the *Galeon Lew*, a replica 17th-century galleon.

Car

Gdańsk's busy traffic isn't much fun to drive in, but if you'd like to hire a car for some day trips in the surrounding region, contact **Pol-Rent** (Map p408; ☎ 0601 502 501; www.polrent.com; ul Długa 67/68; per day from €25).

Train

A commuter train, known as the SKM (Szybka Kolej Miejska; Fast City Train), runs constantly between Gdańsk Główny and Gdynia Główna (4zł, 35 minutes), stopping at a dozen intermediate stations, including

Sopot (2.80zł). The trains run every five to 10 minutes at peak times and every hour or so late at night. You buy tickets at the stations and validate them in the big yellow boxes at the platform entrance (not in the train itself), or purchase them prevalidated from vending machines on the platform.

Tram & Bus

These are a slower means of transport than the SKM but cover more ground, running from 5am until around 11pm, when a handful of night lines take over. Fares depend on the duration of the journey: 1.40zł for up to 10 minutes, 2.80zł for 30 minutes and 4.20zł for one hour. A day ticket costs 9.10zł. Remember to validate your ticket in the vehicle, so it's stamped with the date and time.

AROUND GDAŃSK

SOPOT

pop 40,000

Prepare yourself for a shock if arriving in Sopot after a tour of Pomerania's rural districts – this is 21st-century Poland, writ large. As the favoured playground of citizens of neighbouring Gdynia and Gdańsk, along with plentiful international visitors, Sopot is sophisticated and cosmopolitan, and isn't afraid to show it. Unlike its rival seaside towns to the west, Sopot offers both beachfront attractions and cutting-edge urban style, being well populated with stylish bars, clubs and restaurants.

Sopot's incarnation as a fashionable resort arose in 1823 when Jean Georges Haffner, a former doctor in Napoleon's army, popularised sea bathing here. The settlement, originally established in the 13th century as a fishing village, rapidly became the beach destination of the rich and famous, particularly after WWI when it was included in the territory of the Free City of Danzig.

The resort life continues today, with Sopot attracting large numbers of visitors to its long, sandy beach and varied nightlife. Despite being at the centre of the Tri-City, Sopot has managed to maintain an identity separate from its two bigger neighbours. Though pricey in places, it's a fantastic place for some R&R and a splurge or two.

Information

Gamer (Map p427; ☎ 058 555 0183; ul Chopina 1; per hr 4zł; ☎ 9am-10pm) Internet access.

Millennium Bank (Map p427; Plac Konstytucji 3 Maja 1) **NetCave** (Map p427; ☎ 058 551 1183; www.netcave .coo.pl; ul Pułaskiego 7A; per hr 4zł; ☎ 10am-9pm) Internet access.

Post office (Map p427; ul Kościuszki 2)

Sopot School of Polish for Foreigners (Map p427; ☎ 058 550 3284; www.ssp.edu.pl; Al Niepodległości 763) Offers Polish language courses; arranges accommodation.

Tourist office (Map p427; ☎ 058 550 3783; www .sopot.pl; ul Dworcowa 4; ☎ 9am-8pm Jun-Sep, 10am-6pm Oct-May)

Sights & Activities

Sopot's unavoidable pedestrian spine is **ul Bohaterów Monte Cassino**, an attractive and invariably crowded mall stretching from the railway line to the pier. On your way down the street, you can't fail to notice the warped, modern **Crooked House** (Krzywy Domek; Map p427; ☎ 058 555 5123; ul Bohaterów Monte Cassino 53), a building well worth investigating. Concealed within its twin-level innards are a dozen bars and restaurants, and several shops, including a wine outlet.

At the end of Monte Cassino, beyond Plac Zdrojowy, is the famous **Molo** (Map p427; ☎ 058 551 0002; www.molo.sopot.pl; adult/concession Mon-Thu 3/1.70zł, Fri-Sun 3.80/2zł), Europe's longest wooden pier, built in 1928 and jutting 515m out into the Gulf of Gdańsk. Various attractions along its length come and go with the seasons.

North of the pier is the landmark 1927 **Grand Hotel**, adjoining the long waterfront **spa park** that first popularised the town. The park backs directly onto the **beach**, arguably the finest in the Tri-City area and Sopot's *raison d'être* in the all-too-short summer season. Towards the northern end of this stretch is the large **Aqua Park** (Map p407; ☎ 058 555 8555; www.aqua parksopot.pl; ul Zamkowa Góra 3/5; per hr 10zł; ☎ 9am-8pm), which has tubes, slides, spas and a wild river ride, guaranteed to keep the kids happy.

At the southern end of the beachfront, the **Sopot Museum** (Muzeum Sopotu; Map p427; ☎ 058 551 2266; www.muzeumsopotu.pl; ul Poniatowskiego 8; adult/concession 7/5zł; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun) showcases 19th-century furniture and fittings within a grand villa of that era, including some enormous, ornately carved wardrobes. There's an English-language brochure detailing the history of the house, and its attractive architecture is worth a look in its own right.

If you wander about Sopot's back streets, you'll find more fine **villas** (Map p427) from Sopot's 19th-century heyday as the German

resort town Zoppot; some of the best examples are on ul Obronców Westerplatte.

The western part of Sopot, behind the railway track, consists of newer suburbs, which ascend gradually, finally giving way to a wooded hilly area. Here is the **Opera Leśna** (Opera in the Woods; Map p407; ☎ 058 555 8440; www.bart.sopot.pl; ul Moniuszki 12), an amphitheatre that seats 5000 people, and where the prestigious **International Sopot Festival** (☎ 058 555 8440; www.sopotfestival.onet.pl) has been held in late August for over 40 years. The festival began life as a Eurovision-style song contest and still draws crowds to its competing mix of local and international artists.

Sleeping

If you're a budget traveller, you may find Sopot a bit traumatic – there are few low-cost options, and none in the centre of town. As it's a seaside resort, accommodation varies hugely in price and quantity between the high and low seasons. Year-round facilities are supplemented by a variety of pensions and holiday homes in summer. Prices listed are for the high season, which peaks in July and August and can be very, very busy – so book ahead and prepare for high prices. Alternatively, stay in Gdańsk or Gdynia and commute to Sopot via the SKM commuter train.

A good place to start is the tourist office, whose friendly staff keep track of accommodation options, from private rooms and student dorms to holiday homes and villas. There are always locals hanging around the verandah of the office (even when it's closed), offering rooms in their own houses, which start from 25zł per person. Competition can be fierce, and some of the old ladies, in particular, market their lodgings very forcefully!

Pensjonat Eden (Map p427; ☎ 058 551 1503; www.hotel-eden.com.pl; ul Kordeckiego 4/6; s 100-180zł, d 170-260zł, tr/q/ste 320/360/410zł; (P)) It may not be paradise in the strictest sense of the word, but the Eden's comfortable rooms are attractively decked out with vintage touches such as wooden furniture, lace tablecloths and artfully old-fashioned radios, though the place could do with a coat of paint to freshen its appearance.

Willa Zacisze (Map p427; ☎ 058 551 7868; www.apartamenty.gda.pl; ul Grunwaldzka 22a; apt 240zł; (P) (X)) These apartments with modern furniture and fittings allow some savings on meals, as they're fitted out with kitchens, and they're in

a great location close to both the beach and entertainment options.

Pensjonat Wanda (Map p427; ☎ 058 550 3037; www.bsw-hotele.pl; ul Poniatowskiego 7; s 200-250zł, d 250-390zł, tr 410zł; (P) (X)) Ambient three-star pension offering tastefully traditional accommodation, though the curious moulded leather artwork on the walls adds a quirky note to the décor. Its light-filled rooms are decorated with pine tones and yellow wallpaper, and some have balconies overlooking the sea and sand. There's also a restaurant and sauna.

Willa Karat II (Map p427; ☎ 058 550 0742; www.willakarat.pl; ul 3 Maja 31; s/d/tr/q 170/270/290/300zł, ste 340-380zł; (P)) Though it's tucked away at the end of a scrappy laneway full of parked cars, the Willa Karat has light, spacious rooms vividly decorated with bright colours and simple timber furniture, lending a homely touch. Say hello to the budgie as you pass in and out.

Zhong Hua Hotel (Map p427; ☎ 058 550 2020; www.hotelchinski.pl; Al Wojska Polskiego 1; s/d 470/500zł, apt 620-740zł) Unique hotel housed within a vast timber pavilion in Chinese style; even the receptionists are clad in cheongsams. The rooms are located literally on the beach, and are small but contain elegant lacquered furniture, and bathrooms with marble fittings. The onsite restaurant also offers Baltic vistas, and a range of Chinese dishes.

Hotel Rezydent (Map p427; ☎ 058 555 5800; www.hotelrezydent.pl; Plac Konstytucji 3 Maja 3; s 530-580zł, d 650-990zł, ste 2500zł; (P) (X) (S) (L)) The Rezydent is the most elegant hotel in town, though you'll need an inelegantly fat wallet to stay here. Its rooms' tasteful tones are set-off by stylish carpets, timber furniture and gleaming bathrooms. When you've finished luxuriating, there's a classy restaurant and pub downstairs, along with an art gallery, a sauna and massage services.

Camping Nr 19 (Map p407; ☎ 058 550 0445; ul Zamkowa Góra 25; camp site per adult/child 12/6zł, tent additional 5zł, bungalows 90-160zł; (X) May-Sep; (P)) Located in the northern end of town (a five-minute walk from the Sopot Kamienny Potok train station), Camping Nr 19 is a good big camping ground right by the Aqua Park and the beach.

Eating

Much of Sopot's cuisine scene is seasonal, particularly in the beach area, but there's no shortage of good options that stay open all year.



VARIED MENU

Bogdan Grabarczyk has lived in the Tri-City all his life, and in Sopot for the past quarter-century. A former shipyard worker turned restaurateur, he's in the thick of the seasonal action each year in the seaside town. Author Tim Richards talks to him about his home and colourful career.

How is Sopot different from Gdańsk or Gdynia? It's still a small fisherman's village between two big towns...but it isn't a village and there aren't any fishermen. Well, maybe a few.

What's the atmosphere of Sopot? It's like a magic village. Heavy industry doesn't exist in Sopot. There are a lot of old houses, they create a special atmosphere.

But what's it like in the middle of the season? Sometimes it's too much. Thousands of people are walking up and down ul Bohaterów Monte Cassino, just one street. Yeah, Sopot means Monte Casino Street to most people. But it's concentrated – a few metres from the main road it's totally empty. The back streets have atmosphere and a special style.

What was the most recent restaurant you ran? It was a seasonal restaurant, with coffee and cakes and vodka and beer. And fast food, Chinese food. We had a Chinese chef.

And now you're planning a new restaurant? Yes, on the seaside about 70km from Sopot, past Gdynia, with Chinese and Indian food. My wife Gosia was on holiday in India, and she met these Indian chefs and organised visas for these guys to come to Poland. Lots of paperwork!

What did you do before you ran these places? I built and renovated ships in shipyards in Poland and Lithuania. And I also exported fish products, and was deputy manager in a paint factory, and worked in a sand quarry.

You've had a very varied career. Why did you become interested in restaurants? I like to cook. So why not?

Green Way (Map p427; ☎ 0502 309 744; Al Niepodległości 786; mains 6-12zł; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, noon-7pm Sat & Sun; ☒) Similar to its franchise siblings in Gdańsk and the rest of Poland, this is a simple green-hued eatery trading on its excellent budget vegetarian food.

Hana (☎ Map p427; 058 550 2020; ul Wojska Polskiego 1; mains 9-95zł; ☎ 1pm-midnight) Japanese food has arrived in Poland, muscling aside the older Chinese and Vietnamese outlets. This restaurant presents a selection of quality sushi and sashimi in a compact space lined with rice-paper screens. The set menus (90zł to 150zł) include several courses and are better value than ordering à la carte.

Rooster (Map p427; ☎ 058 550 7404; ul Bohaterów Monte Cassino 54; mains 12-57zł; ☎ 11am-midnight Mon-Fri, 11am-1am Sat, 11am-11pm Sun) Feast on burgers, shawarmas, salads and pastas at reasonable prices, though the proprietor has unfortunately issued the waitresses with shiny red shorts about six sizes too small. Sit outside and watch the tourist hordes go by, or stay

within and marvel at the barn-like Texan diner interior, decorated with number plates and telephone poles.

Błękitny Pudel (Map p427; ☎ 058 551 1672; ul Bohaterów Monte Cassino 44; mains 19-37zł; ☎ 9am-11pm) A cosy place in the middle of the main drag, the Blue Poodle features a front room looking like an eccentric nanna's house, decked out with a strange assortment of random objects. As an added plus it serves German Paulaner wheat beer.

Pub Kinski (Map p427; ☎ 058 802 5638; ul Kościuszki 10; mains 25-30zł; ☎ 1pm-3am) The house and birthplace of legendary German actor and psychopath Klaus Kinski (see boxed text, opposite) has been converted into an off-beat bar-restaurant, with film posters and decadent crimson tablecloths within a cosy, candle-lit setting. The man himself probably would have trashed the place, but in a loving way.

our pick Rozmaryn (Map p427; ☎ 058 551 1104; ul Odrodowa 8; mains 36-99zł; ☎ 2-11pm Mon-Fri, 1-11pm Sat

& Sun) It may be the most pricey restaurant in town, but there's a reason – the Italian food served here is excellent, as is the tasteful décor. In addition to the soups, pastas and salads, there are more exotic dishes such as curries. Service and presentation is top class, and there's a way to enjoy it without breaking the budget: dine here between 1pm and 5pm on weekends, when all the dishes are discounted by 50%.

Drinking

our pick Mandarynka (Map p427; ☎ 058 550 4563; www.mandarynka.pl; ul Bema 6) This very cool confection of timber tables, scarlet lampshades and huge orange cushions, is about as loungey as it gets. The bartenders seem to be on first-name terms with all the patrons, and are superbly nonchalant to boot. There's a food menu, and a DJ in action upstairs most nights.

Cocktailo (Map p427; ☎ 0696 501 462; ul Haffnera 6; ☎ 10am-2am) Bright little drinking space hidden from ul Bohaterów Monte Cassino at the back of the Crooked House, with a cosy light-filled interior and a peaceful outdoor seating

area. The drinks list contains Italian wines by the glass (6zł to 15zł), along with good coffee, smoothies and ice cream sundaes.

Caipirinha (Map p427; ☎ 058 555 5380; ul Bohaterów Monte Cassino 53; ☎ 10am-midnight) Another good bar set within the surreal façade of the Crooked House, it serves plenty of cocktails, including local creations like the Sopot Special Night, featuring peach liqueur. It also has a decent selection of nonalcoholic drinks and light meals.

Café Art Deco (Map p427; ☎ 058 555 0160; ul Bohaterów Monte Cassino 9a; ☎ 11am-10pm; ☒) Tucked away at the quiet western end of Monte Cassino in a small courtyard back from the street, the tiny Art Deco serves some alcoholic tipples, but it's the coffee that makes it special. It's an atmospheric update of the classic Polish *kawiarnia* (café) that defies the current onslaught of cookie-cutter café chains.

Kawiarnia u Hrabiego (Map p427; ☎ 058 550 1997; ul Czyżewskiego 12; ☎ 10am-10pm) The oldest family home in Sopot now houses a charming little café and art gallery, far from the madding summer crowds. The quaint interior is perfect

FEELING KINSKI

If you've ever seen a Klaus Kinski film, you won't have any difficulty believing the many outlandish stories about the actor. Kinski's wild, piercing eyes and unruly blonde hair gave him the look of an Aryan angel gone bad, and the manic intensity he brought to his roles was merely a muted version of his off-screen persona. He was arguably the ultimate Method actor, seeing his body as a conduit for the souls of the characters he portrayed.

The actor's finest work came in his collaborations with equally idiosyncratic German New Wave director Werner Herzog. The two met while sharing an apartment in Munich in the 1950s, when 13-year-old Herzog watched Kinski destroying everything around him in a spectacular outburst of rage. Their working relationship involved much the same volatility – one classic archive photo shows Kinski attacking the director with a machete, while on another occasion Herzog put a gun to his star's head to persuade him to keep working. The roll call of Kinski's memorable work with Herzog includes *Aguirre*, *Wrath of God* (1972), *Nosferatu the Vampyre* (1979) and *Cobra Verde* (1987).

Kinski refused to distinguish between art-house and commercial projects, accepting work regardless of its audience or quality. He memorably described his chosen profession as 'prostitution', basing decisions purely on who he was selling himself to, and for how much – busking French poetry in a Berlin bar for pfennigs was the same to him as performing *Hamlet* for a lucrative private client.

Alongside acting and money, Kinski's main obsession was women. Considering himself a reincarnation of the legendary 'devil violinist', composer and philanderer Niccolò Paganini, Kinski threw himself into the constant pursuit of sexual conquests, with breathtaking success. Towards the end of his life the great actor finally completed his 20-year ambition to make a film biography of Paganini; the end product was cut to shreds by distributors and censors due to its highly explicit content, but remains a unique, fragmented, glorious chaos, saying as much about Kinski as it does about his idol. Of all his films, this is perhaps the greatest expression of his truly twisted genius.

for cake and conversation, and there's seating in the garden terrace.

Entertainment

Sopot has a vibrant club and live music culture that's always changing; ask the locals about the current hot favourites. The scene here is also notably gay-friendly: check www.gaypoland.pl for updates on local venues.

Papryka (Map p427; ☎ 058 551 7476; www.klubpapryka.pl; ul Grunwaldzka 11; ☎ 3pm-late) This appealing timbered villa near the beach buzzes on all levels – the two floors, balcony and beer garden are set in an attractive park surrounding the club. Music includes house, dub and alternative sounds. You must be 21 or older to enter.

Soho (Map p427; ☎ 058 551 6927; ul Bohaterów Monte Cassino 61; ☎ noon-3am Sun-Thu, noon-5am Fri & Sat) This long-time hot spot still hasn't lost it. Haunt of the cool people, including scenesters, celebs and fashionistas, Soho goes for a surprisingly rough-cut retro style: brown walls, pink and yellow stripes, and red lighting fixtures to set off the glamorous crowds.

Viva (Map p427; ☎ 058 551 6268; www.vivaclub.pl; Al Mamuszki 2; admission free-25zł; ☎ 9pm-late; P) The self-proclaimed 'Number One in the Tri-City' is still a top spot around for all-out spectacle, hosting vast beachfront dance nights with all the eye candy and hi-tech wizardry it can muster.

Daily Blues (Map p427; ☎ 058 551 3939; www.dailyblues.com.pl; ul Władysława IV 1a; ☎ 4pm-3am) Hidden away in a quiet residential street, this laid-back venue sings the blues daily, with jam sessions on Mondays, Wednesdays and Sundays. Join the happy crowd in its squeezey confines.

Getting There & Away

All trains that service Gdańsk go to Gdynia and stop in Sopot – see p424. Commuter trains to Gdańsk and Gdynia (2.80zł) run every five to 10 minutes at peak times.

A regular ferry service dubbed the **Ferry Tram** (Tramwaj Wodny; www.ztm.gda.pl/ferry) heads from Sopot to Hel or Gdańsk (see p424). Other boats connect Sopot to Gdynia (p432). The landing site is at the pier.

GDYNIA

pop 252,000

You couldn't say Gdynia shares the charms of its southern neighbours in the Tri-City.

As a relatively modern city, it lacks the historic touch and has a little too much concrete for most tastes. However, its broad, straight streets lend the place a look unlike any other Polish city, and it has enough interesting sights to justify a day trip.

Gdynia wasn't always an industrial city; it managed to progress from the 14th century to the early 20th century as a humble fishing village. However, in the aftermath of WWI, when Poland was reconstituted without regaining Gdańsk, the Polish government decided to build a new outlet to the sea. By the 1930s, Gdynia was the largest and most modern port on the Baltic.

The port was badly damaged during WWII, but was rebuilt and modernised and is now the base for much of Poland's merchant and fishing fleet.

Information

Baltic Information Point (Map p431; ☎ 058 620 7711; Molo Południowe; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun)

Bank Pekao (Map p431; ul 10 Lutego 8)

C@fluna Internet (Map p431; ☎ 058 661 2209; ul Armii Krajowej 13; per hr 4zł; ☎ 10am-9pm Mon-Sat) Internet access.

Orbis Travel (Map p431; ☎ 058 620 4844; ul 10 Lutego 2) Travel agent.

Post office (Map p431; ul 10 Lutego 10)

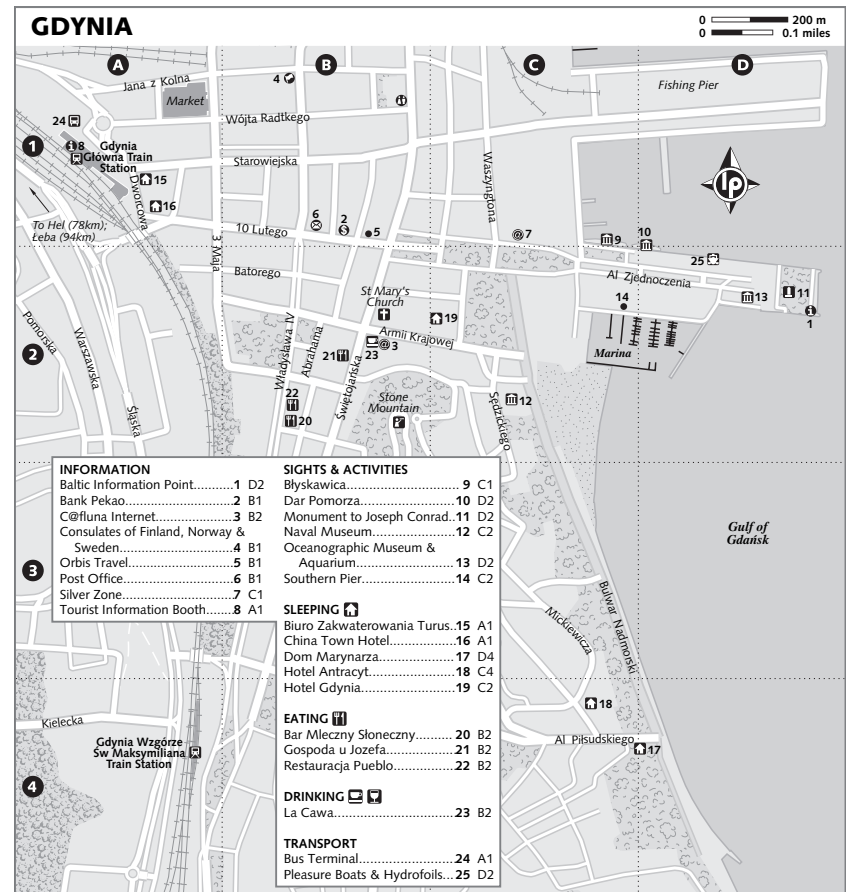
Silver Zone (Map p431; ☎ 058 628 1800; ul Waszyngtona 21; per hr 6zł; ☎ 10am-10pm) Internet access, part of the Silver Screen cinema within the Centrum Gemini building.

Tourist information booth (Map p431; ☎ 058 628 5466; www.gdynia.pl; Gdynia Główna train station; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat, 9am-3pm Sun May-Sep, 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat Oct-Apr)

Sights & Activities

Gdynia's tourist zone is anchored at its **Southern Pier** (Molo Południowe; Map p431). Moored on the northern side are two museum ships, a highlight for visitors. The beautiful three-masted frigate **Dar Pomorza** (Map p431; ☎ 058 620 2371; adult/concession 6/3zł; ☎ 9am-6pm daily Jun-Sep, 10am-4pm Tue-Sun Oct-May) was built in Hamburg in 1909 and used as a training ship for German sailors. Check out the information in English on the dockside before you step aboard.

Next door, the destroyer **Blyskawica** (Map p431; ☎ 058 626 3658; adult/concession 8/4zł; ☎ 10.10am-1pm



& 2-5pm Tue-Sun May-Sep) has a fascinating story. Escaping capture in 1939 by the German invaders, it went on to serve successfully with Allied naval forces throughout WWII. In 1987 it was awarded the Golden Cross of Military Virtue, the only Polish ship to receive this honour. Now it's a floating museum, and you can buy an informative English language booklet (5zł) from the on-board shop which outlines its history.

Near the tip of the pier is the **Oceanographic Museum & Aquarium** (Muzeum Oceanograficzne i Akwarium Morskie; Map p431; ☎ 058 621 7021; www.akwarium.gdynia.pl; Al Zjednoczenia 1; adult/concession 11/7zł; ☎ 9am-7pm daily May-Aug, 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Sep-Apr), a minimally interesting institution that improves once you encounter its bigger residents such as

moray eels and a green turtle. Beyond it is a large **monument** (Map p431) to Józef Konrad Korzeniowski, better known to the English-speaking world as author Joseph Conrad.

South of the pier, on Bulwar Nadmorski, is the **Naval Museum** (Muzeum Marynarki Wojennej; Map p431; ☎ 058 626 3984; ul Sędzickiego 3; adult/concession 4/2zł, free Fri; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun). It has a display of guns, fighter planes, helicopters and rockets, mostly of interest to militaria aficionados.

Behind the museum is a 52m-high hill called **Stone Mountain** (Kamienna Góra; Map p431), which provides views over the beach, the city centre and the harbour from its pretty parkland summit. Keen cyclists or walkers can follow the Bulwar Nadmorski beach road down to Sopot and Gdańsk.

Festivals & Events

Two major events bring seasonal visitors to Gdynia:

Gdynia Summer Jazz Days (☎ 058 620 2836) In July, provides some much-needed musical flavour.

Open'er Festival (www.opener.pl) Lively open-air contemporary music event held in late June, featuring Polish and foreign bands.

Polish Film Festival (☎ 058 621 1509; www.festiwal.filmow.pl) In September; highlights the best of the national film industry.

Sleeping

Biuro Zakwaterowania Turus (Map p431; ☎ 058 621 8265; ul Starowiejska 47) Behind a building opposite the main train station (enter from ul Dworcowa), Turus arranges private rooms, mostly in the centre, for around 40/80zł per single/double. Minimum stays of three nights are required.

China Town Hotel (Map p431; ☎ 058 620 9221; ul Dworcowa 11a; s 90zł, d 140-190zł, tr 240-260zł, q 280zł; Ⓟ) Low-cost accommodation above a kebab shop and a sushi bar, with a vaguely Chinese style in the reception area. The rooms are pretty basic, but manageable for a night if you want to be near the train station. Breakfast is not included.

Dom Marynarza (Map p431; ☎ 058 622 0025; dom.marynarza@wp.pl; Al Piłsudskiego 1; s/d/tr/q/ste 160/200/245/260/360zł) The old-fashioned but curiously comforting décor in this seaside hotel's reception area, with its wood panels supporting various maritime oddments, signals the down-to-earth but friendly tone of the Mariner's Home. Rooms are reasonable, and there's a beer garden out front in summer.

Hotel Antracyt (Map p431; ☎ 058 620 6571; www.hotel-antracyt.pl; ul Korzeniowskiego 19; s/d/tr/ste 180/260/320/400zł; Ⓟ ☎) Located on a pleasant leafy hill, the Antracyt offers spacious comfortable rooms with views over the sea, just a stagger from the beach. Ask for one with a balcony.

Hotel Gdynia (Map p431; ☎ 058 666 3040; www.orbis.pl; ul Armii Krajowej 22; r €90, ste €150; Ⓟ ☎) The hideous concrete exterior of the local Orbis complex evokes the worst architectural excesses of postwar Poland, and the abstract lime-green lightshades in the foyer don't help. However, it has the best range of facilities in Gdynia, and good views from the upper floors.

Eating & Drinking

Architectural beauty may not be its strong point, but Gdynia makes amends with its food presentation, offering plenty of restaurants throughout the city centre with a pleasing range of styles and cuisines.

Bar Mleczny Słoneczny (Map p431; ☎ 058 620 5316; ul Abrahama 60; mains 1-5zł; ☎ 6.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat) Surprisingly light and airy, within a pale yellow interior studded with curious pillars, this classic Cold War-era milk bar serves cheap but tasty Polish staples. The menu is vegetarian-friendly, and there's a good selection of soups and *naleśniki* (crepes). Enter from ul Władysława IV.

Gospoda u Józefa (Map p431; ☎ 058 620 3051; ul Świętojańska 49; mains 9-65zł; ☎ 8am-11pm) A charming traditional-style café offering a good line in homemade Polish cooking, including an extensive choice of sweet and savoury pancakes, along with *pierogi* (dumplings), soups and salads.

Restauracja Pueblo (Map p431; ☎ 058 621 6007; ul Abrahama 56; mains 15-40zł; ☎ noon-11pm) Next to Bar Mleczny Słoneczny and entered from ul Władysława IV, this eatery dishes up Tex-Mex with all the usual trappings: primary colours, funky lamps and music that really wants to be Latino. The well-executed food is an unexpected bonus.

La Cawa (Map p431; ☎ 058 782 0640; ul Świętojańska 35; ☎ 8.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-8pm Sat) Mellow café rendered in orange and brown tones featuring comfy sofas and good coffee. The excellent cakes beckon enticingly from the display cabinet.

Getting There & Away

BOAT
Stena Line (☎ 058 660 9200; www.stenaline.pl) operates ferries to/from Karlskrona, Sweden (adult 155zł to 185zł, concession 130zł to 155zł, 10½ to 12 hours, two or three daily). Services depart from the **Ferry Terminal** (Terminal Promowy; Map p407; ul Kwiatkowskiego 60), 5km northwest of central Gdynia. Information, bookings and tickets can be obtained from Orbis and other travel agents. See also p520.

There are pleasure boats/hydrofoils to Gdańsk (one way/return 52/70zł), Sopot (35/20zł) and Hel (48/35zł) from May to September, departing from the southern pier. One-hour boat excursions go several times daily from April to October (15zł to 23zł).

BUS

The bus terminal (Map p431) is next to the train station. Regional routes include Hel (13zł, 2½ hours, hourly) and Łeba (15zł, three hours, three daily). Polski Express runs services twice a day to Warsaw (45zł to 59zł), calling at Sopot and Gdańsk on the way.

TRAIN

For long-distance trains, see p424. There are several trains daily to Hel (13zł, 1¼ hours, hourly in summer). Roughly hourly trains run to Łębork (16zł, 50 minutes), where you can change for Łeba.

HEL PENINSULA

Located north of the Tri-City and arcing out into the Baltic Sea, the Hel Peninsula (Półwysep Helski) is a 34km-long, crescent-shaped sandbank. The peninsula is only 300m wide at the base and no wider than 500m for most of its length. Only close to the end does it expand out, reaching a breadth of about 3km. The highest point of the peninsula is 23m above sea level. Much of the landscape is covered with trees – picturesque, wind-deformed pines predominate – and there's also a number of typical coastal plant varieties including sand sedge and dune thistle.

The peninsula was formed over the course of about 8000 years by sea currents and winds, which gradually created an uninterrupted belt of sand. At the end of the 17th century, as old maps show, the sand bar was still cut by six inlets, making it a chain of islands. In the 19th century the peninsula was cut into separate pieces several times by storms. The edges have been strengthened and the movement of the sand has been reduced by vegetation, but the sand bar continues to grow.

The peninsula is bookended by two fishing ports: Hel at its tip and Władysławowo at its base. Between them is a third port, Jastarnia, and three villages: Chałupy, Kuźnica and Jurata. All are tourist resorts during the short summer season (July and August). There's a railway and a good road running the whole length of the peninsula.

All along the northern shore stretch beautiful sandy beaches and, except for small areas around the resorts (which are usually packed with holidaymakers), they are clean and deserted.

The Hel Peninsula is easily accessible from the Tri-City by train, bus and boat. The bus

and train can take you anywhere you want, while boats and hydrofoils sail from Gdańsk, Sopot and Gdynia to Hel. A boat trip is the most popular way of getting a feel for the peninsula.

Hel

pop 3900

Let's face it...this town has a name that amuses English speakers, prompting gags about 'when Hel freezes over', 'a cold day in Hel' and 'to Hel and back'. When the clever wordplay is out of the way, however, what remains is a pleasant, relaxed holiday town. At the end of its long slender sand bar, it feels like it's a million miles from the worries of the wider world.

Dependent on seasonal influxes of visitors, Hel is almost dead in winter. In summer, it transforms into a cheerful, lively beach town, its main street full of holidaymakers browsing souvenir stands or having a drink in the numerous beer gardens.

Throughout history, the town benefited from its strategic location at the maritime gateway to Gdańsk. By the 14th century Hel was a prosperous fishing port and trading centre. However, it was constantly threatened by storms and the shifting coastline, and declined in importance in the 18th century before reinventing itself as a popular seaside resort.

SIGHTS

As you walk from the train station to the town centre, you'll notice a park containing a **memorial** to the 1939 defence of the town during the Nazi invasion. Hel was the last place in Poland to surrender; a garrison of some 3000 Polish soldiers defended the town until 2 October. The peninsula became a battlefield once more on 5 April 1945, when about 60,000 Germans were caught in a bottleneck by the Red Army and didn't lay down their arms until 9 May; this time it was the last piece of Polish territory to be liberated.

Just off the beach in the centre is the **Fokarium** (☎ 058 675 0836; www.fokarium.com; ul Morska 2; admission 2zł; ☎ 8.30am-dusk), Hel's signature attraction, and the place to see Baltic grey seals. It has three large tanks housing half a dozen of the creatures, and feeding takes place at 11am and 3pm. The grey seal is the largest and most populous seal species in the Baltic, numbering about 20,000, but it's under threat from development and pollution. Even in the Fokarium

itself, the seals have been endangered by the superstitious Polish habit of throwing coins into any body of water; one of the older animals actually died in 2001 after eating massive amounts of small change over several years. Grisly posters warn visitors against repeating the incident. On your way in and out of the facility, there's no shortage of stallholders willing to sell you plush seals dressed as pirates or sailors, and other such amusing tourist tat.

Elsewhere in town, a dozen 19th-century, half-timbered **fishing houses** on the main street, ul Wiejska, managed to survive Hel's various battles. The oldest building in town is the Gothic church dating from the 1420s, which is now the **Museum of Fishery** (Muzeum Rybołówstwa; ☎ 058 675 0552; Bulwar Nadmorski 2; adult/concession 5/3zł; ☹ 10am-6pm daily Jul & Aug, 10am-4pm Tue-Sun Sep-Jun). It features exhibits on fishing and boat-building techniques, plus a collection of old fishing boats. Though it's attractively laid out, with picturesque fishing boats, dioramas and stuffed sea birds, the lack of English captions robs it of context. Go up to the **tower** for good views over the town, the peninsula and the Gulf of Gdańsk.

There's a beautiful 100m-wide beach on the sea coast, 1km north of town, and you can visit the 42m-high brick **lighthouse** (☎ 058 675 0617; ul Bałtycka 3; adult/concession 3/2zł; ☹ 10am-2pm & 3-7pm Jul & Aug, 10am-2pm & 3-6pm Sep).

SLEEPING & EATING

The town has a reasonable array of places to stay and eat, most of which only open in summer. Many locals rent out rooms in their homes – just ask around. The usual price is about 65zł per double room, but you'll probably find that few locals will want to rent out a room for just one night.

Some of the tourist restaurants on ul Wiejska also offer rooms. Try the **Captain Morgan Pub Hotel** (☎ 058 675 0091; ul Wiejska 21) or **Admiral Nelson** (☎ 058 675 1155; ul Wiejska 62) – a double room costs 100zł at either of them.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Hel can be reached by road and rail; even in the off-season there are fairly regular services by train and bus from Gdynia. When you arrive by rail, follow the brick footpath 500m to the town centre.

You can also get to Hel via the **Ferry Tram** (Tramwaj Wodny; www.ztm.gda.pl/ferry) from Gdańsk or Sopot (see p424).

Another waterborne option is the pleasure boat/hydrofoil from May to September from Gdańsk (p424) and Gdynia (p432).

If you arrive by train and don't feel like walking to the sights, electric-car operators tout for business at the train station as services arrive, and will happily drive you to Hel and back (5zł one way to the town centre, other places negotiable).

Around Hel

For a change from Hel, you may like to stroll along the beach to **Jurata** (12km) or 2km further to **Jastarnia** and take the train back from there, or stay for the night. Both are lively holiday resorts and have camping grounds, places to eat, some nightlife and a range of holiday homes.

Further northwest are two tiny ports, **Kuźnica** and **Chalupy**, which have retained more of their old atmosphere than other places on the peninsula. Finally you get back to the base of the peninsula at **Władysławowo**, which is a large fishing port and town of some 13,000 people, and has a good wide beach. The town has a number of accommodation options and an array of restaurants.

Between Chalupy and Władysławowo, there are several camping grounds that have windsurfing centres. One place you can hire windsurfing gear and catamarans from May to October is **Camp Solar** (☎ 058 677 8967; www.obozy-windsurfingowe.pl; ul Droga Helska, Chalupy; per hr from 30zł).

Around 8km west along the coast from Władysławowo is the **Rozewie Cape** (Przylądek Rozewie), the northernmost tip of Poland. Its 33m-high cliff-top lighthouse has a small **museum** (☎ 058 674 9542; ul Leona Wzorka 1, Jastrzębia Góra; adult/concession 5/3zł; ☹ 9.30am-2pm & 3-7pm Jul & Aug, 10am-2pm & 3-6pm Sep); you can go to the top for sweeping views.

KASHUBIA

If you believe the legend, the region of Kashubia (Kaszuby) was created by giants, whose footprints account for the many hills and lakes that characterise the landscape. Stretching for 100km southwest of Gdańsk, it's a picturesque area noted for its small, traditional villages, and its lack of cities and industry.

In contrast to most of the other groups who gradually merged to form one big family of Poles, the Kashubians have managed

to retain some of their early ethnic identity, expressed in their distinctive culture, dress, crafts, architecture and language.

The Kashubian language, still spoken by some of the old generation, is the most distinct dialect of Polish; other Poles have a hard time understanding it. It's thought to derive from the ancient Pomeranian language.

The area between Kartuzy and Kościerzyna is the most topographically diverse part of the region, including the highest point of Kashubia, Mt Wieżyca (329m). This is the most touristy area of Kashubia, with an array of facilities. Public transport between Kartuzy and Kościerzyna is fairly regular, with buses running every hour or two.

Unless you have your own transport, you miss out on some of the region by being limited to the major routes. Public transport becomes less frequent the further off the track you go. Visiting the two regional destinations Kartuzy (below) and Wdzydze Kiszewskie (right) will give a taste of the culture of Kashubia, though less of its natural beauty.

Kartuzy

pop 15,000

The town of Kartuzy, 30km west of Gdańsk, owes its birth and its name to the Carthusians, a religious order that was brought here from Bohemia in 1380. Originally founded in 1084 near Grenoble in France, the order was known for its austere monastic rules – its monks passing their days in the contemplation of death, following the motto 'Memento Mori' (Remember You Must Die).

When they arrived in Kartuzy the monks built a church and, beside it, 18 hermitages laid out in the shape of a horseshoe. The **church** (☎ 058 681 2085; ul Klasztorna 5) seems to be a declaration of the monks' philosophy; the original Gothic brick structure was topped in the 1730s with a Baroque roof that looks like a huge coffin. On the outer wall of the chancel there's a sundial and, just beneath it, a skull with the 'Memento Mori' inscription.

The maxim is also tangibly manifested inside, on the clock on the balustrade of the organ loft. Its pendulum is in the form of the angel of death armed with a scythe. The clock is tactfully stopped if there's an unusual number of funerals in town.

The interior fittings are mainly Baroque, and the richly carved stalls deserve a closer

look. There's some unusual cordovan (painting on goat leather) decoration (1685) in the chancel, while the church's oldest artefact, an extraordinary panel from a 15th-century Gothic triptych, is in the right-hand chapel.

Another attraction is the **Kashubian Museum** (Muzeum Kaszubskie; ☎ 058 681 1442; www.muzeum-kaszubskie.gda.pl; ul Kościerska 1; adult/concession 7.50/5.50zł; ☹ 8am-4pm Tue-Fri, 8am-3pm Sat year-round, 10am-2pm Sun May-Sep), south of the train station near the railway track. It depicts the traditional culture of the region, with everything from curious folk instruments to typical household implements and furniture.

There's only one hotel in town, but you can easily leave on one of the hourly buses to Gdańsk (12zł, one hour).

Wdzydze Kiszewskie

pop 1000

The small village of Wdzydze Kiszewskie, 16km south of Kościerzyna, boasts an interesting **skansen** (Kaszubski Park Etnograficzny; ☎ 058 686 1288; www.muzeum-wdzydze.gda.pl; adult/concession 8/6zł; ☹ 10am-6pm Jul & Aug, 9am-4pm Tue-Sun Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-3pm Tue-Sun Oct, 10am-3pm Mon-Fri Nov-Mar) featuring typical Kashubian architecture. Established in 1906 by the local schoolmaster, this was Poland's first open-air museum of traditional architecture. Pleasantly positioned on the lakeside, it now contains a score of buildings collected from central and southern Kashubia, including cottages, barns, a school, a windmill and an 18th-century church used for Sunday Mass. Some of the interiors are fitted with authentic furnishings, implements and decorations, showing how the Kashubians lived a century or two ago.

In the village, there are a few budget pensions that provide around 100 beds in all. Wdzydze is linked to Kościerzyna by several buses daily.

LOWER VISTULA

The fertile land within the valley of the Lower Vistula, bisected by the wide, slowly flowing river, was prized by invaders for centuries. Flat, open and dotted with green farms, this region developed during the 13th and 14th centuries into a thriving trade centre, via the many ports established along the Vistula's banks from Toruń to Gdańsk. The history of these towns is intertwined with

that of the Teutonic order (see boxed text, p451), the powerful league of Germanic knights who by then occupied much of the valley. Remnants from the order's heyday now comprise some of the most prominent sights in the region.

Though the Lower Vistula suffered much destruction in the closing months of WWII, what survived is a rich cultural inheritance of great depth and interest.

TORUŃ

pop 208,000

In some ways, Toruń is the city that time forgot – the low-rise centre of the former Hanseatic port has a slow-paced country-town feel, and its Old Town has avoided excesses of commercial signage and tourist tat. On the other hand, it's not *too* sleepy, and the vicinity of the central square buzzes with bars, restaurants and music venues.

But Toruń's entertainment options pale into insignificance compared with its spectacular Gothic architecture, an impressive collection of redbrick churches, residences and fortifications that justify the town's promotional slogan 'Gotyk na dotyk' (Touch Gothic). Undamaged in WWII, Toruń's Old Town was included on Unesco's World Heritage List in 1997.

Beyond architecture, Toruń is best known as the birthplace of Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543). His name (Mikołaj Kopernik in Polish) is all over town, and you can even buy gingerbread shaped in his image. Which is another Toruń icon – its *pierniki* (gingerbread) is famous across Poland. It may not have the international profile of Gdańsk or Kraków, but Toruń should be high on any visitor's must-see list.

History

Toruń was kickstarted into prominence in 1233, when the Teutonic Knights (see boxed text, p451) transformed the existing 11th-century Slav settlement into one of their early outposts. The knights surrounded the town, then known as Thorn, with walls and a castle. Rapid expansion as a port meant that newly arriving merchants and craftspeople had to settle outside the city walls and soon built what became known as the New Town. In the 1280s Toruń joined the Hanseatic League (see boxed text, p413), giving further impetus to its development.

Toruń later became a focal point of the conflict between Poland and the Teutonic order, and when the Thirteen Years' War finally ended in 1466, the Treaty of Toruń returned a large area of land to Poland, stretching from Toruń to Gdańsk.

The following period of prosperity ended with the Swedish wars, and the city fell under Prussian domination in 1793, later becoming part of Germany. Toruń didn't return to Poland until the nation was recreated after WWI.

After WWII, which fortunately did relatively little damage to the city, Toruń expanded significantly, with vast new suburbs and industries. Luckily, the medieval quarter was unaffected and largely retains its old appearance.

Orientation

The historic sector of Toruń sits on the northern bank of the Vistula, made up of the Old Town (Stare Miasto) to the west and the New Town (Nowe Miasto) to the east. All the major attractions are in this area.

The bus terminal is a five-minute walk north of the historic quarter, while the main train station is south across the river, a short bus ride away. When coming from the station over the bridge, you'll get a fine view of the Gothic silhouette of the city.

Information

Bank Pekao (ul Wielkie Garbary 11)

EMPIK Megastore (☎ 056 622 4895; ul Wielkie Garbary 18) Bookshop.

Ksero Uniwerek (☎ 056 621 9279; ul Franciszkańska 5; internet per hr 3zł; ☎ 8am–7pm Mon–Fri, 9am–4pm Sat)

Orbis Travel (☎ 056 658 4221; ul Mostowa 7)

Post office (Rynek Staromiejski 15)

Pralnia Wiatka (☎ 0601 512 358; ul Szeroka 37/37a; from 5zł; ☎ 10am–7pm Mon–Fri; 10am–4pm Sat) A rare Polish laundrette.

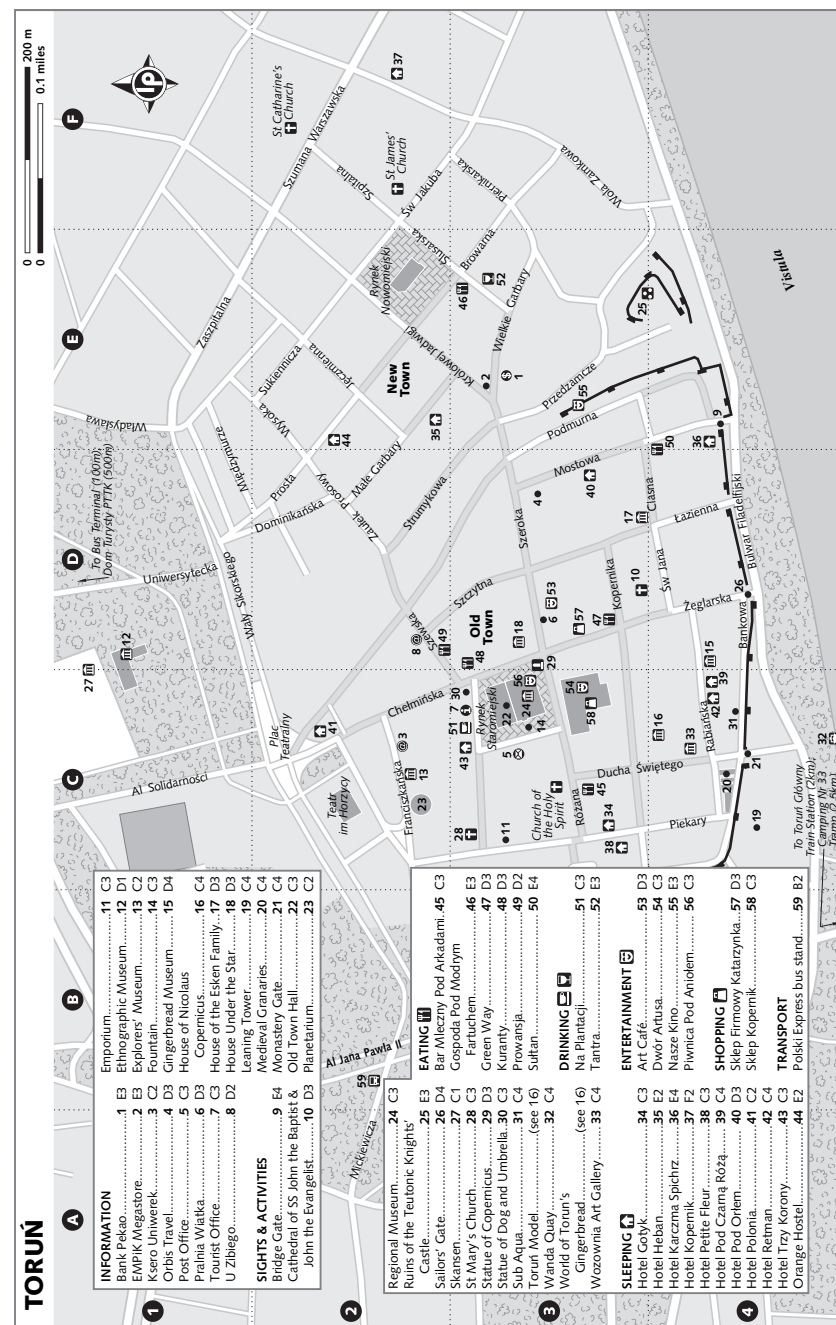
Tourist office (☎ 056 621 0931; www.it.torun.pl; Rynek Staromiejski 25; ☎ 9am–4pm Mon & Sat, 9am–6pm Tue–Fri year-round, 9am–1pm Sun May–Aug)

U Zibiego (☎ 056 621 0191; ul Szewska 6; per hr 4zł; ☎ 10am–10pm Mon–Sat, noon–6pm Sun) Internet access.

Sights

OLD TOWN

The usual starting point on Toruń's Gothic trail is the **Old Town Market Sq** (Rynek Staromiejski), dominated by its massive redbrick town hall and lined with fine restored houses, many graced by intricate decorative façades.



The **Old Town Hall** (Ratusz Staromiejski) was built at the end of the 14th century and hasn't changed that much, though some Renaissance additions lent an ornamental touch to the sober Gothic structure. It was once used as the municipal seat and a market, but today the building is occupied by the main branch of the **Regional Museum** (Muzeum Okręgowe; ☎ 056 622 7038; www.muzeum.torun.pl; Rynek Staromiejski 1; adult/concession 10/6zł; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, 10am-4pm Tue-Sun Oct-Apr).

Displays within its original interiors include a collection of Gothic art (painting, woodcarving and stained glass), a display of local 17th- and 18th-century crafts, and a gallery of Polish paintings from around 1800 to the present. You can go up the **tower** (adult/concession 10/6zł; 🕒 10am-8pm May-Sep, 10am-5pm Oct-Apr) for a fine panoramic view.

The square is also furnished with a number of interesting items of statuary. A few steps from the town hall entrance is a **statue of Copernicus**, one of the oldest monuments dedicated to the stargazer and a regular feature in holiday snaps.

West of the town hall, opposite the post office, is an intriguing small **fountain** built in 1914. Bronze-cast frogs sit on its rim, admiring a statue of a violin-playing boy known as Janko Muzykant, Toruń's very own answer to the Pied Piper story. Legend has it that a witch once came to the town, but wasn't welcomed by the locals. In revenge, she invoked a curse, and the town was invaded by frogs. The mayor offered a sackful of gold and his daughter to anyone who would rescue the town. A humble peasant boy then appeared and began to play his rustic fiddle. The frogs, enchanted by the melodies, followed him to the woods and the town was saved.

On the opposite side of the Rynek, at the corner of ul Chełmińska, you'll find another curious critter-related **statue** at knee-level, depicting a dog and umbrella. The pooch's name is Filus, and he starred in a famous long-running Polish comic strip as the pet of broolly-wielding Professor Filutek.

Copernicus pops up again in the Regional Museum's second big attraction, the brick Gothic **House of Nicolaus Copernicus** (Dom Mikołaja Kopernika; ☎ 056 622 7038; ul Kopernika 15/17; adult/concession 10/7zł; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, 10am-4pm Tue-Sun Oct-Apr). Unfortunately it's an institution suffering from an identity crisis, unsure of whether its exhibits should focus on old fur-

niture, astronomy or Copernicus' life story. As there's only sporadic English captioning, amid scholarly doubt over whether the great man was really born in this house, the museum is less interesting than it should be. More engaging, if overpriced, is its short **audio-visual presentation** (adult/concession 12/7zł) regarding Copernicus' times in Toruń, with a **model** of the town during that period. There are soundtracks in several languages, English included. The third element of the museum is the extravagantly titled **World of Torun's Gingerbread** (Świat Toruńskiego Piernika; adult/concession 10/6zł), which offers insights into the arcane art of *pierniki* creation. Visitors are guided by a costumed medieval townswoman and given the chance to bake their own. A combined ticket to any two of the three attractions costs 18/11zł.

A street away is another facility focused on the same subject, the **Gingerbread Museum** (Muzeum Piernika; ☎ 056 663 6617; www.muzeumpiernika.pl; ul Rabińska 9; adult/concession 8.50/6.50zł; 🕒 9am-6pm). Here you can learn about gingerbread's history and create even more of the stuff, under the enlightened instruction of a mock-medieval gingerbread master.

If you're feeling sated with gingerbread by this point, the Regional Museum presents less sugary exhibitions inside several interesting old houses.

The **House Under the Star** (Kamienica Pod Gwiazdą; ☎ 056 622 7038; Rynek Staromiejski 35; adult/concession 7/4zł; 🕒 11am-5pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, 10am-4pm Tue-Sun Oct-Apr), the most richly decorated house on the main square, showcases a small but elegant collection from Asia, including Japanese swords, Indian statues and Chinese pottery from the Tang dynasty. The building's ornate Baroque fittings include striking polychrome ceilings and a statue of Minerva.

The Gothic **House of the Esken Family** (Dom Eskenów; ☎ 056 622 8680; ul Łazienna 16; adult/concession 7/4zł; 🕒 11am-5pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, 10am-4pm Tue-Sun Oct-Apr), set behind the cathedral, was converted into a granary in the 19th century. It's worth persevering past the dry city history displays on the 1st floor, to encounter the 2nd floor collection of medieval weaponry and archaeological exhibits from the Iron and Bronze Ages, including a human skeleton buried in the distant pre-Poland past.

Finally, the **Explorers' Museum** (Muzeum Podróżników; ☎ 056 622 7038; ul Franciszkańska 11; adult/concession 8/5zł; 🕒 11am-5pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, 10am-4pm Tue-Sun Oct-Apr) is an institution to be placed on

every die-hard traveller's itinerary. It contains artefacts from the collection of inveterate wanderer Antonio Halik, comprising hats, travel documents and souvenirs of his journeys – including a vast array of hotel keys!

Of the historical buildings outside the museum's administration, the largest and most impressive is the giant Gothic **Cathedral of SS John the Baptist & John the Evangelist** (Katedra Św Janów; ul Św Jana; donation adult/child 2/1zł, tower 6/4zł). Work started around 1260 and was only completed at the end of the 15th century, by which time the church dominated the town's skyline, as it still does today. Its massive tower houses Poland's second-largest historic bell (after the one in the Wawel Royal Cathedral of Kraków), the Tuba Dei (God's Trumpet). Cast in 1530, it weighs 7238kg and is rung for significant religious and national events. On the southern side of the tower, facing the Vistula, is a large 15th-century clock; its original face and single hand are still in working order. Check out the dent above the VIII – it's from a cannonball that struck the clock during the Swedish siege of 1703.

The interior is a light-filled environment with elaborate altars resting beneath the whitewashed vaulting. Its most striking murals are the monochrome paintings set high at the back of each aisle, which depict a monk and a devil or plague figure; created by an unknown artist, the black-and-white style is highly unusual for this kind of church art.

The high altar, adorned with a Gothic triptych and topped with a crucifix, has as a background a superb stained-glass window in the best medieval style. The last chapel in the right-hand aisle holds the oldest object in the church, the font where Copernicus was baptised. To one side is his epitaph.

The third great Gothic structure in the old town is **St Mary's Church** (Kościół NMP; ul Panny Marii), erected by the Franciscans at the end of the 13th century. Austere and plain from the outside, it has a lofty interior with tall, intricate stained-glass windows and a prominent golden altarpiece, framed by a wooden archway depicting a complete crucifixion scene.

History buffs should also take the opportunity to check out the remnants of the town's original medieval fortifications. To the east, in a triangle squeezed between the Old and New Towns, are the **ruins of the castle**, built by the Teutonic Knights. It was destroyed by the

town's inhabitants in 1454 as a protest against the order's economic restrictions (they must have been really ticked off – those Teutonic castles were solidly built).

Following the old city walls east around from the castle, you'll come to the first of three surviving city gates, the **Bridge Gate** (Brama Mostowa). A 700m-long bridge was built here between 1497 and 1500 and survived for over three centuries. Continue along the walls to find the other two gates, the **Sailors' Gate** (Brama Żeglarska) and the **Monastery Gate** (Brama Klasztorna). At the far western end are a few medieval granaries and the **Leaning Tower** (Krzywa Wieża).

Amid all the history, Toruń presents more modern cultural diversions. The **Wozownia Art Gallery** (☎ 056 622 6339; ul Rabińska 20; adult/concession 5/3zł, free Tue; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Fri, 11am-6pm Sat & Sun) has changing displays of contemporary art, while aspiring astronomers can see what Copernicus was on about at the **Planetarium** (☎ 056 622 6066; ul Franciszkańska 15/21; adult/concession 8.50/6.50zł; 🕒 9.30am-3.30pm Mon, 9.30am-5.30pm Tue-Fri, 11.30am-3pm Sat & Sun), which usually has two daily shows in English.

NEW TOWN

North of the castle lies the New Town, centred on the **New Town Sq** (Rynek Nowomiejski). The building in the middle is a former Protestant church, erected in the 19th century after the town hall was pulled down. It's a quieter, more tourist-free part of town, and the square hosts irregular art and craft markets.

OTHER SIGHTS

In a park just to the north of the Old Town is the **Ethnographic Museum** (Muzeum Etnograficzne; ☎ 056 622 8091; Waly Sikorskiego 19; adult/concession 8.50/5.50zł, free Mon; 🕒 9am-4pm Mon, Wed & Fri, 10am-6pm Tue, Thu, Sat & Sun mid-Apr-Sep, 9am-4pm Tue-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Oct-mid-Apr). It focuses on traditional fishery, with all sorts of implements, boats and nets. Admission also lets you visit the small but good **skansen** in the grounds, which contains examples of the traditional rural architecture of the region and beyond.

Activities

Beyond succumbing to Gothic mania in the Old Town, you can enjoy the great outdoors by getting out on the water. Below the

Monastery Gate you'll find the **Wanda** (☎ 0601 625 682; adult/concession 8/6zł; ☹ 9am-7pm), a pleasure boat which will take you for a 40-minute cruise along the Vistula, once 15 passengers can be rounded up.

Not far away, **Sub Aqua** (☎ 056 652 1008; ul Bankowa 14/16) arranges diving excursions. Bicycles can be hired from **Emporium** (☎ 056 657 6108; ul Piekary 28; per hr 5zł; ☹ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat year-round, 10am-4pm Sun Jun-Jul), which offers discounts to ISIC card holders. If you fancy a drive in the countryside, contact **Bonus** (☎ 056 648 0747; janusz_nalaskowski@poczta.onet.pl) to hire a car.

Festivals & Events

Probalica Music & Art Festival of Baltic States

(☎ 056 648 8647) Held in May.

Kontakt International Theatre Festival (☎ 056 622 5597; www.teatr.torun.pl) Held in May/June, productions have audio translation in English.

International Meetings of Folk Bands (☎ 056 622 8091) Held in early June.

Music & Architecture International Summer

Festival (☎ 056 655 4929; www.tos.art.pl) Held from late June to August.

Toruń Days City festival held on 24 June.

Sleeping

Toruń has plenty of central places to stay, but as hotels tend to be small, finding a room can be tricky in busy times; weekdays are busiest, and many places offer substantial weekend discounts.

BUDGET

Orange Hostel (☎ 056 652 0033; www.hostelorange.pl; ul Prosta 19; dm/s/d/tr 30/50/90/120zł; ☐ ☒ ☑) The wave of Polish hostels for the international backpacker has finally swept over sleepy Toruń. Orange is in a handy location, its décor tends toward the brightly coloured and cheerful, and its kitchen is an impressive place to practise the gentle art of self-catering.

Dom Turysty PTTK (☎ 056 622 3855; www.pttk.torun.pl; ul Legionów 24; s/d/tr/q 60/76/99/112zł) The 65-bed PTTK hostel is in a residential house, a 10-minute walk north of the Old Town (five minutes from the bus terminal), with 24-hour reception and a snack bar. Rooms are simple but clean and practical.

Hotel Trzy Korony (☎ 056 622 60 31; www.hotel3korony.pl; Rynek Staromiejski 21; s 95-155zł, d 130-200zł, tr 165-245zł) This budget hotel is by no means luxurious, but the simple rooms are neatly

furnished with pine furniture, blue sofas and sunny yellow wallpaper. The hotel's glorious history includes stopovers by three distinguished monarchs (hence the 'three crowns' in the name).

Hotel Kopernik (☎ 056 652 25 73; www.hotel-kopernik.torun.pl; ul Wola Zamkowa 16; s 110-150zł, d 135-190zł, ste 200-260zł; ☐ ☒ ☑) It may have once been an army hostel, but the military edges have since rubbed off this attractively priced hotel in the New Town. Its basic but comfortable rooms are equipped with pine furniture, chunky radio sets, and pot plants with fake blooms.

Hotel Pod Orłem (☎ 056 622 5024; www.hotel.torun.pl; ul Mostowa 17; s 110zł, d 140-180zł, ste 200zł; ☐ ☒ ☑) The Pod Orłem is one of Toruń's oldest hotels, with a history going back more than a century. Leather-padded doors hide some pretty spacious rooms; the cheaper ones are strangely like staying at your grandma's. Breakfast is an extra 15zł.

Camping Nr 33 Tramp (☎ 056 654 71 87; www.tramp.mosir.torun.pl; ul Kujawska 14; camp sites per adult/child 8/4zł, per tent 5zł, d/tr/q 65/80/100zł, cabins 40-80zł; ☹ May-mid-Sep; ☐) This camping ground, a five-minute walk from the main train station, has simple hotel-style rooms, a collection of basic cabins, a tent/caravan area and an onsite bar serving food. Some triple rooms have their own bathrooms.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

For some mysterious reason, Toruń has a vast number of three-star hotels housed within historic buildings in the centre of town, and competition keeps standards gratifyingly high.

Hotel Polonia (☎ 056 657 1800; www.polonia.torun.pl; Plac Teatralny 5; s 150zł, d 190-220zł, tr 245zł, q 280zł; ☐ ☒ ☑) The Polonia has a curious topography, with a *kantor* (private currency-exchange office) on the 1st floor and the breakfast room in the basement. These oddities aside, its rooms are a comfortable option, though they can vary considerably in dimensions.

Hotel Retman (☎ 056 657 4460; www.hotelretman.pl; ul Rabińska 15; s 160-190zł, d 210zł) Simply furnished hotel with tasteful dark timber furniture and red carpets, highlighting the simplicity of its white walls. Downstairs there's a restaurant and a pub, handy for that post-sightseeing restorer.

Hotel Pod Czarną Różą (☎ 056 621 9637; www.hotelczarna.oz.pl; ul Rabińska 11; s/d/tr 170/210/250zł; ☐ ☒ ☑) 'Under the Black Rose' is spread between

a historic inn and a new wing facing the river, though its interiors present a uniformly clean up-to-date look. Some doubles come with small but functional kitchens.

Hotel Gotyk (☎ 056 658 4000; www.hotel-gotyk.com.pl; ul Piekary 20; s 150-180zł, d 250-300zł) Yet another restored town-house hotel. Pass the suit of armour in the foyer and up green carpeted stairs, to find individually decorated rooms and classic furniture.

Hotel Petite Fleur (☎ 056 663 4400; www.petitefleur.pl; ul Piekary 25; s 190-270zł, d 250-290zł; ☐ ☒ ☑) The Petite Fleur is one of the best midrange options in Toruń, with elegantly appointed rooms containing smoothly polished timber furniture and elegant prints. It also has an impressive French restaurant downstairs in its cellar, and a memorable lounge.

our pick **Hotel Karczma Spichrz** (☎ 056 657 1140; www.spichrz.pl; ul Mostowa 1; s/d 190/250zł, ste 300-350zł; ☐ ☒ ☑ ☒ ☑) Situated within a historic granary on the waterfront, this hotel's rooms are well supplied with personality, featuring massive exposed beams above elegant timber furniture. There's a restaurant and bar within the establishment, along with a billiards room.

Hotel Heban (☎ 056 652 1555; www.hotel-heban.com.pl; ul Małe Garbary 7; s/d 190/300zł, ste 350-500zł; ☐ ☒ ☑) Luxuriously restored town house with elegant touches. The foyer is a collection of classic ornamentation, including brass fireplace hoods, statues of lions, and marble floors. Upstairs, the rooms feature lots of timber elements. The onsite restaurant is also a pleasant place to dine.

Eating

Bar Mleczny Pod Arkadami (☎ 056 622 2428; ul Różana 1; mains 2-6.50zł; ☹ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat & Sun) Toruń's most central milk bar is just off the Old Town Sq, offering sturdy bites at silly prices. The outdoor window serves up waffles, ice cream and northern Poland's best *zapiekanki* (Polish pizza).

Green Way (☎ 056 621 1056; ul Żeglarska 18; mains 6-12zł; ☹ 10.30am-8.30pm Mon-Sat, noon-7pm Sun) Another instalment in the national vegetarian chain, it serves cheap animal-free food in a cheery orange stucco interior.

our pick **Sułtan** (☎ 056 621 0607; ul Mostowa 7; mains 7-18zł; ☹ noon-midnight Sun-Thu, noon-2.30am Fri & Sat) Light, bright venue with an Arabian motif, it cooks up Middle Eastern cuisine in an space decorated with colourful lanterns. The menu contains many variants of kebabs, along with

soups, salads, pizzas and a scattering of decent vegetarian options.

Prowansja (☎ 056 622 2111; ul Szewska 19; mains 10-18zł; ☹ noon-10pm Sun-Thu, noon-11pm Fri & Sat) This charming eatery does a convincing impersonation of a Provence restaurant and wine bar. Quiche, crepes and salads add to the Frenchness of it all, but it's the wine list that's the highlight. There's an ISIC card discount available.

Kuranty (☎ 056 662 5252; Rynek Staromiejski 29; mains 12-49zł; ☹ 11am-2am) The menu is firmly based on the three Ps: pizza, pasta and *piezogi* (including a rather tasty baked version which looks suspiciously like the Italian calzone). Random photos and extraordinary Art Nouveau lights add to the atmosphere. Be warned: sports-playing TVs hang off the walls.

Gospoda Pod Modrym Fartuchem (☎ 056 622 2626; Rynek Nowomiejski 8; mains 16-29zł; ☹ 10am-10pm) This atmospheric 15th-century eatery on the New Town Sq modestly claims to be 'probably the oldest restaurant in the world', and has served Polish kings and Napoleon. Polish standards are joined by more adventurous choices involving tortillas and Indian spices, on the vegetarian-friendly menu.

Drinking

our pick **Tantra** (☎ 0697 133 569; ul Ślusarska 5; ☹ noon-midnight Sun-Thu, noon-2am Fri & Sat) Forget those Gothic bricks – this bar takes the colour red to new heights in its astonishingly decorated interior. It's done out in an Indian and Tibetan theme and layered with cloth and other artefacts from the subcontinent, including some tastefully rendered images of erotic temple statuary. Sit on the cushion-strewn divans, order a drink from the long list and meditate on the infinite.

Na Plantacji (☎ 056 655 0231; Rynek Staromiejski 23; ☹ 10am-10pm) Was it ever this civilised down on the plantation? Genteel ladies sip tea while waiters glide past bearing orders from the voluminous menu of hot beverages. This might be the place to order that great Polish refresher – *herbata z rumem* (tea with rum).

Entertainment

Dwór Artusa (☎ 056 655 4929; Rynek Staromiejski 6) The Artus Court, one of the most impressive mansions on the main square, is now a major cultural centre and has an auditorium hosting musical events, including concerts and recitals.

Art Café (☎ 056 652 2076; ul Szeroka 35; 🕒 9pm-late) The insider's address for everything new and cool in electronic music, from house to hardcore, with occasional hip-hop nights thrown in. Posters outside the door outline upcoming acts.

Piwnica Pod Aniołem (☎ 056 622 70 39; www.podaniolem.art.pl in Polish; Rynek Staromiejski 1) This splendid, spacious pub in the town hall cellar is one of the old quarter's most popular live music venues – check the big posters at street level for the latest gigs.

our pick Nasze Kino (☎ 056 652 2372; www.naszekino.pl in Polish; ul Podmurna 14; admission 12zł) A cool little arthouse cinema embedded within part of the old city walls, its single screen showing a range of non-Hollywood films. Double features and movie marathon screenings are cheaper.

Shopping

Toruń is famous for its *pierniki*, which has been produced here since the town was founded. The confection comes in a variety of shapes, though some are intended for decorative purposes only – they're too hard to be eaten. Good places to buy it are **Sklep Firmowy Katarzynka** (☎ 056 622 37 12; ul Żeglarska 25) and **Sklep Kopernik** (☎ 056 645 07 34; Rynek Staromiejski 6).

Getting There & Away

BUS

The PKS terminal, close to the northern edge of the Old Town, handles regular bus services to Chełmno (8.50zł, 1½ hours), Golub-Dobrzyń (8.50zł, 1½ hours) and Bydgoszcz (9zł, one hour). Polski Express runs departures every hour or two to Bydgoszcz (12zł, one hour) and Warsaw (32zł to 54zł, 3¾ hours), and two a day to Szczecin (59zł, six hours), leaving from a stand on ul Mickiewicza.

TRAIN

The Toruń Główny train station is about 2km south of the Old Town, on the opposite side of the Vistula. Buses 22 and 27 (2zł, 10 minutes) link the two.

Trains head to Grudziądz (11zł, 1¾ hours) and Bydgoszcz (16zł, one hour) at least every other hour. There are also departures to Malbork (34zł, 2½ hours, three daily), Gdańsk (38zł, 3½ hours, seven daily), Olsztyn (34zł, 2½ hours, eight daily), Poznań (33zł, 2½ hours, five daily) and Warsaw (40zł, three hours, five daily).

GOLUB-DOBRYŃ

pop 13,000

Golub-Dobrzyń may sound like a minor character in *The Lord of the Rings*, but it is in fact a town about 40km east of Toruń. Dobrzyń, on the southern bank of the Drwęca River, is newish and not worth a mention, but Golub was founded in the 13th century as a border outpost of the Teutonic Knights (see boxed text, p451), who left behind an impressive castle.

Castle

Golub's sturdy, square castle is its most prominent feature, looming over the town from a central hill. The structure consists of a massive Gothic brick base topped with a slightly more refined Renaissance cornice, which was added in the 17th century. The whole building was extensively restored after WWII. Its small **museum** (☎ 056 683 24 66; adult/concession 10/8zł; 🕒 9am-7pm May-Sep, 9am-4pm Oct-Apr) is interesting more for the original Gothic interiors than for its modest ethnographic collection.

Festivals & Events

Every July the castle hosts the **International Knights' Tournament** (☎ 056 683 2455), a big mock-medieval jamboree including jousting, music and lots of costumes.

Sleeping & Eating

Dom Wycieczkowy PTK (☎ 056 683 24 55; zamek@golub.pl; hostel dm/d 30/80zł, hotel s/d/tr 150/200/250zł; 📍 🚶) The castle's upper floor houses some of the cheapest fortification accommodation in Poland. There are two standards on offer: one a hostel style with dorm beds and simple doubles, the other consisting of hotel-type rooms. A pleasant café in the vaulted cellar serves snacks and drinks.

Getting There & Away

The town has a regular bus service to Toruń (8.50zł, 1½ hours) and Grudziądz (10.50zł, two hours, four daily). There's a bus stop at the foot of the castle, but not all incoming services stop there – you may have to walk 1.5km from the bus station in Dobrzyń.

BYDGOSZCZ

pop 366,000

It's hard to imagine why you'd head to Bydgoszcz (*bid-goshch*) for an extended stay – though it's one of Poland's largest cities, the majority of the city is a postwar industrial zone

with little character. However, it's not without its charms, particularly in the centre where local authorities have spent time and money regenerating the city's older quarters.

Lying outside the territory of the Teutonic Knights (see boxed text, p451), Bydgoszcz developed over time into a trading centre, beer producer and military base. Becoming part of Prussia in the First Partition of 1772, Bydgoszcz returned to Poland in 1919 and underwent intensive industrial development.

Since it's only an hour from Toruń and has its own international airport, you may find yourself here on the way to or from its sexier Gothic sister, and there's enough of interest to fill a pleasant few hours. It would also make a reasonable day trip from Toruń, if you fancy a change of scene.

Information

Bank Pekao (ul Dworcowa 6)

Main post office (ul Jagiellońska 6)

Tourist office (☎ 052 321 4595; www.it.byd.pl; Stary Rynek 1; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat)

Sights & Activities

The Old Town is on the southern bank of the Brda River, a 20-minute walk from the train station. Its heart, **Stary Rynek**, is dominated by the palatial **town hall** and a large Modernist **monument** to the victims of fascism. It was here that the Nazi invaders kept hostages at gunpoint for two days in September 1939, shooting 40 of them. Nowadays the grim monument seems somewhat at odds with the life of the square and the surrounding streets.

To the west, just off the Rynek, the metal front door of the 16th-century brick **parish church** depicts scenes from the city's 1000-year history. Within is a gilded Baroque high altar with a 1466 painting of the Virgin Mary. What's really surprising, however, is the church's colour scheme – its interior is done out in vivid purple and orange shades that would have appealed to adherents of 1960s flower power. You may want to keep your sunglasses on! The illustrations on the walls date from the 1920s when the church was redecorated, having been commandeered in the 19th century for use as storage by various passing military forces.

The Regional Museum has branches in several interesting buildings around town. The most important of these is the 18th-century

White Granary (Biały Spichrz; ☎ 052 585 9812; ul Mennica 1; adult/concession 6/4zł; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Fri, noon-4pm Sat & Sun), west of the Rynek on Mill Island (Wyspa Młyńska). Displays here outline the region's history, and illustrate traditional arts and crafts.

In the newer part of town, a block north of Hotel Pod Orłem on ul Gdańska, you can find a seated **statue** of celebrated Bydgoszcz citizen and mathematician Marian Rejewski (see boxed text, p444).

For a more relaxing perspective on the city, the **Water Tram** (Tramwaj Wodny; ☎ 052 323 3201; www.tramwajwodny.byd.pl; adult/concession 2.20/1.10zł) runs up and down the river from the Fish Market (Rybi Rynek) on the Old Town waterfront, up to four times daily from May to October. One stop is on the riverbank below the bus station, if you want to enter or depart the centre by less conventional means.

Sleeping & Eating

Youth hostel (☎ 052 322 7570; www.ssm.bydgoszcz.pl; ul Sowińskiego 5; dm 20-60zł, s 50-60zł, d 70-80zł; 🕒 📍) This 100-bed youth hostel, just five minutes' walk from the station, has everything from singles to 10-bed dorms available all year. ISIC card holders receive discounts. Note that reception is closed between 10am and 5pm, and there's an 11pm curfew.

Hotel Ratuszowy (☎ 052 339 8400; www.hotelratuszowy.com.pl; ul Długa 37; s 160-250zł, d 230-300zł, ste 280-450zł; 📍 🚶) This is the only option for visitors wishing to stay in the Old Town. Luckily it's a nice, low-key place in a quiet, central location, and the rooms are just homely enough to be welcoming.

Hotel Brda (☎ 052 585 0100; www.hotelbrda.com.pl; ul Dworcowa 94; s 150-250zł, d 260-350zł, ste 390-440zł; 📍 🚶) Unexciting but reliable, the Brda is a standard conference-class block near the station with neat rooms and a good range of facilities.

Hotel Pod Orłem (☎ 052 583 0530; www.hotelpodorlem.pl; ul Gdańska 14; s 300-350zł, d 440zł, ste 530-640zł; 📍 🚶) This elegant hotel, with its ornate façade, has been the city's most prestigious inn ever since it opened in 1898, hosting Prussian and Polish VIPs alike. It was restored to its prewar Art Nouveau elegance towards the end of the communist period. The fanciest option here is the Rubenstein Suite, named for famous Polish-born pianist Artur Rubenstein.

ADVENTURES OF A CRYPTOLOGIST

Mathematicians are usually stereotyped as bookish, unworldly creatures. But not so Bydgoszcz-born Marian Rejewski (1905–1980), who took on the Nazi ciphers to become one of the heroes of WWII.

Rejewski was teaching at Poznań University in 1932, a year before Hitler came to power, when he was seconded to the Polish army's Cipher Bureau. Using a mix of intuition and mathematical equations, he soon deciphered the inner workings of the Enigma machines, which encrypted German military traffic, years before the famous British Ultra project began its work at Bletchley Park outside London.

In 1939, with war imminent, Rejewski's team decided to reveal all to the astonished cryptology teams of France and Britain. This data was to be of invaluable assistance to Poland's allies, as periodic upgrading of the German devices meant the decryption work was an ongoing project.

When Poland was overrun, Rejewski's team fled to France via Romania, evacuating again to Algeria when France was invaded. Returning to work undercover in unoccupied Vichy France, Rejewski fled to Spain in 1943, where he was promptly robbed by his pistol-wielding guide and imprisoned by the Spanish police. Released after a few months, he headed through Portugal and Gibraltar, to finally end up in Britain. Here he resumed his code-breaking efforts, though relegated to relatively minor projects.

In 1946, Rejewski returned to Bydgoszcz to be reunited with his family. In the mid-1970s the story of the Polish role in cracking Enigma broke, and Rejewski was feted both internationally and at home. He died a national hero in 1980.

Bydgoszcz is intensely proud of its mathematical prodigy: nowadays you can encounter a statue of Marian Rejewski on ul Gdańska, a block north of the Hotel Pod Orłem. Conservatively depicted in suit and glasses, the great mathematician is seated modestly on a bench. Next to him is the likeness of an Enigma machine, the device he once defeated.

Restauracja Kaskada (☎ 052 324 9332; ul Mostowa 2; mains 10-18zł; ☎ 11am-8pm) You can spot this big, modern, multilevel eatery from almost any point on the Rynek. Indecisive diners can ponder their options inside, outside or in the adjoining snack bar; if all else fails, the kiosk here is open 24 hours.

Gallery Restaurant (☎ 052 322 6023; Stary Rynek 15/21; mains 13-72zł; ☎ 1pm-midnight) Fine food is the watchword in the two gracious dining rooms occupying Gallery's cellar, with a bar, and dancing on Friday and Saturday nights. The street-level café provides a more relaxed alternative.

Getting There & Away

IJ Paderewski airport (☎ 052 365 4650; www.plb.pl; Al Jana Pawła II 158) is located 3km south of the city centre, accessible via bus 80 (2.20zł, hourly, 20 minutes) from the Old Town. A taxi should cost about 30zł (15 minutes). There are domestic flights to Warsaw via LOT (up to three daily), and international flights via Ryanair to London (daily) and Dublin (twice weekly).

The main train station is 1.5km northwest of the Old Town, while the bus terminal is

1km east; city buses 54 and 94 link the two stations, passing through the centre.

Trains go frequently to Toruń (16zł, one hour), and there are also services to Gdańsk (33zł, 2¼ hours, 15 daily), Poznań (33zł, 2½ hours, 11 daily) and Warsaw (46zł, four hours, seven daily).

Buses head to Toruń regularly through the day (9zł, one hour). Polski Express also runs buses every hour or two to Warsaw (42zł, 4½ hours) via Toruń and Płock, leaving Bydgoszcz from a stand 150m west of the bus station on ul Jagiellońska.

CHEŁMNO

pop 20,000

The bus journey to Chełmno (*heum-no*), around 40km north of Toruń, makes you feel you're heading for a forgotten place far from urban pressures. Then, after passing through green fields and tiny villages, you're suddenly confronted by mighty Gothic city walls and imposing churches, set high on a hilltop. The town's compact size and intact Old Town are an atmospheric combination.

Like Toruń, Chełmno was once an important centre in the territories of the Teutonic

Knights (see boxed text, p451). Though it had been a Polish settlement since the late 10th century, the Teutonic Knights bookmarked it as a potential capital when they arrived in the late 1220s. Their castle was completed by 1265, bolstering Chełmno's profitable position on the Vistula trade route, and its lucrative affiliation to the Hanseatic League (see boxed text, p413).

After the Treaty of Toruń, Chełmno was returned to Poland, but a devastating plague and a series of wars left the town an unimportant place by the time it was annexed by Prussia in 1772. Though it was returned to Poland in 1920 and survived WWII without major damage, things stayed quiet. Today it's a relaxed, attractive town whose historic atmosphere and visual appeal make it well worth a visit.

Information

Bank Gdański (ul Dworcowa 3)

Kredyt Bank (ul Dworcowa 24A)

Tourist office (☎ 056 686 2104; Ratusz, Rynek;

☎ 8am-3pm Mon & Sat, 8am-4pm Tue-Fri)

Sights & Activities

Walking along ul Dworcowa from the bus terminal, you'll enter the Old Town through the **Grudziądz Gate** (Brama Grudziądzka), the only surviving medieval gateway. It was remodelled in the 17th century to incorporate a chapel. Note an expressive pieta in the niche in the gate's eastern façade.

Past the gate, you'll find yourself on a chessboard of streets, with the Rynek at its heart. In the middle stands the graceful Renaissance **town hall**, built around 1570 on the site of the previous Gothic structure and now home to the **Regional Museum** (Muzeum Ziemi Chełmińskiej; ☎ 056 686 1641; adult/concession 3/2zł; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat, 11am-2pm Sun). Its collection relates the town's history within its original interiors, including a spectacular courtroom.

Outside, affixed on the rear wall of the town hall is the old Chełmno measure, the 4.35m-long *pręt chełmiński*. The entire town was laid out according to this measure, setting all the streets exactly the same width apart. It is divided into 'feet' a little smaller than an English foot. This unique system was used until the 19th century, and the town also had its own weights.

Just off the Rynek is the massive, late-13th-century Gothic **parish church**. The magnificent interior is crammed with ornate Baroque and

Rococo furnishings, and also holds some supposed relics of St Valentine, patron saint of lovers, locked within the right-hand pillar as you face the altar.

The **Church of SS John the Baptist & John the Evangelist** (Kościół Św Jana Chrzyciela i Jana Ewangelisty), in the western end of the Old Town, was built between 1266 and 1325 and has a richly gilded high altar with an ornate organ to the side. Underneath the organ is a black-marble tombstone from 1275, one of the oldest in the region.

The town's other churches are less spectacular but are worth a peek just for their original Gothic structures. They're open to visitors between 10am and 6pm, from May to September.

Finally, you may want to inspect the 2.2km-long **fortified walls**, which have survived almost in their entirety. There once were 23 defensive towers in the walls and some still exist, though they're not all in good shape.

If you want to see more of the surrounding countryside, the tourist office can arrange bicycle or walking **tours**, and supply details of **sightseeing flights** by light aircraft or balloon.

Sleeping & Eating

Europejskie Centrum Wymiany Młodzieży (☎ 056 686 1256; ul Jastrzębskiego 5; s/d/tr 60/100/130zł; ☎ May-Sep) On Lake Starogrodzkie, 2km west of the walled town, the European Centre of Youth Exchange offers basic rooms and a camping ground.

Hotel Centralny (☎ 056 686 0212; www.hotelcentralny.pl; ul Dworcowa 23; s/d/tr/q 90/120/150/200zł) Outside the city walls, the Centralny is simple but perfectly pleasant, and very convenient for the bus station. Its worthwhile restaurant (mains 5zł to 22zł) is an air-conditioned oasis on a hot summer day.

Hotelik (☎ 056 676 2030; ul Podmurna 3; s/d/tr 100/140/160zł; ☎) Located in a quiet corner of the Old Town, right near the Grudziądz Gate, the half-timbered Hotelik offers good value for money and a late-opening restaurant.

Karczma Chełmińska (☎ 056 679 0605; www.karczmachelminska.pl; ul 22 Stycznia 1b; s/d/tr/q/ste 150/190/240/260/280zł; ☎) This tourist-friendly courtyard hotel, in the southwestern corner of the Old Town, is a little cheesy at times (see the big wooden figure outside) but offers neat rooms with great stone-effect bathrooms. The courtyard restaurant, with waiters in traditional garb, serves up good food (mains 7zł to 55zł), including interesting seasonal dishes.

Restauracja Spichlerz (☎ 056 686 9912; ul Biskupia 3; mains 4-13zł; ☎ 9am-midnight Mon-Fri, 10am-midnight Sun) Full of farmhouse beams and fantasy murals, the combination of pub-restaurant and youth hang-out makes for an interesting atmosphere. It's just off the Rynek.

Getting There & Away

Buses depart roughly hourly to Bydgoszcz (7.70zł, 1½ hours), Toruń (8.50zł, 1½ hours) and Grudziądz (6.50zł, 50 minutes). There are also 12 buses a day to Gdańsk (25zł, 2½ hours).

GRUDZIĄDZ

pop 99,000

The wave of urban renewal sweeping Pomeranian cities doesn't seem to have yet reached Grudziądz (*grootjonts*), located some 30km down the Vistula River from Chełmno. Its Old Town is a mass of peeling façades and haphazard cobblestones, and trams still run through its market square. Despite the decay, there's something intriguing about its weathered architecture, as if you're being given a glimpse of how Polish cities must have looked a few decades ago.

Grudziądz may not be too focused on appearances, but its history is certainly colourful. It started life as an early Piast settlement, came under the rule of the Teutonic Knights (see boxed text, p451) as Graudenz in the 1230s, then returned to the Polish crown in 1466. The city was caught up in the 17th-century wars with Sweden – it was burnt down while being liberated by Polish troops in 1659. In the First Partition of 1772, Grudziądz was swallowed by Prussia, developing as an industrial centre before returning to Poland in the aftermath of WWI.

Grudziądz was severely damaged in 1945 but was rebuilt and developed into a bustling, if fairly unremarkable, urban centre.

Information

Bank Millennium (ul Sienkiewicza 19)

Bank Pekao (ul Chełmińska 68)

Tourist office (☎ 056 461 2318; www.it.gdz.pl; ul Skłodowskiej-Curie 19; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Jul-Aug, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat May, Jun & Sep, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri Oct-Apr)

Sights

The extraordinary row of crumbling **granaries** (*spichrze*) was built along the whole length

of the town's waterfront to provide storage and protect the town from invaders. Begun in the 14th century, they were gradually rebuilt and extended until the 18th century, and some were later turned into housing blocks by cutting windows in the walls. These massive buttressed brick buildings – most of them six storeys high – are an impressive sight.

The town's other drawcard is its regional **museum** (☎ 056 465 9063; www.muzeum.grudziadz.pl; ul Wodna 3/5; adult/concession 6/3zł; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue, 10am-3pm Wed-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), based in a former Benedictine convent at the southern end of the old quarter. The main building houses contemporary paintings from the region and temporary exhibitions, with further sections on local archaeology and history in two old granaries just to the west.

A few other buildings in the centre retain their historical significance, the most impressive of which is the **Church of St Francis Xavier** (Kościół Św Franciszka Ksawerego; ul Kościelna), built in 1715. Most of the church's narrow interior is taken up by a beautiful Baroque high altar, and the surrounding ornamentation includes some unusual chinoiserie, a decorative style drawing on Chinese art.

At the top of the hill that slopes up from the granaries, you'll find the remnants of the Teutonic order's 13th-century **castle** and a great view over the Vistula.

Sleeping & Eating

Youth hostel (☎ 056 643 5540; ul Hallera 37; dm 17-20zł) This 150-bed hostel is in a large, nondescript, 11-storey block, part of the Bursa Szkolna (School Dorm), 1.5km south of the Old Town. Its small dorms provide more privacy than usual.

Ośrodek Wypoczynkowy Rudnik (MORiW; ☎ 056 462 2581; www.moriw.pl; ul Zalesna 1; bungalows 45-100zł; ☎ ☎) This two-star camping ground, on a lake 5km south of town, has an enviable selection of facilities, including restaurants, sports equipment, boats, a children's playground, and a paddling pool. In summer, the R bus runs here from a stop near the tourist office.

Hotel Teatr (☎ 056 462 0900; ul Focha 19; s/d/tr/apt 49/98/147/122zł; ☎) Reasonably priced accommodation hidden inside a cultural complex, cheek-to-cheek with a theatre. The apartment is a good-value self-catering option, and the hotel is on the tram 1 route between the train station and Old Town.

Hotel Kowalkowski (☎ 056 461 3480; www.hotel.grudziadz.net; ul Chopina 1/3; s/d/tr/ste 139/179/219/290zł; ☎) South of the Old Town and west of the train station, this is a comfy three-star choice with a restaurant and bar on the premises.

Da Grasso (☎ 056 643 4444; Rynek 13; mains 13-23zł; ☎ 11am-10pm) Facing the market square and its dramatic military statue, this cheap-and-cheerful pizzeria serves up all the usual suspects, with a generous vegetarian selection.

Getting There & Away

The train station is about 1km southeast of the Old Town, a 15-minute walk or a quick trip on tram 1. The bus terminal is a short walk north of the station. Seven trains run daily to Toruń (11zł, 1½ hours), and five very slow trains limp to Kwidzyn (7.50zł, one hour), continuing further north to Malbork (13zł, 1¾ hours). Buses to Bydgoszcz (12zł, 1¾ hours) and Chełmno (6.50zł, 50 minutes) leave roughly every hour. There are also eight buses to Kwidzyn (10zł, 45 minutes).

KWIDZYN

pop 37,000

Kwidzyn is a tranquil town containing a surprisingly massive Gothic castle and cathedral. Located 40km downriver from Grudziądz, it's yet another medieval stronghold of the Teutonic order (see boxed text, p451), and was formerly known as Marienwerder. Under the rule of German authorities for most of its history, the town became part of Poland after 1945.

Information

Tourist office (☎ 055 79 5812; ul Katedralna 18;

☎ 8am-4pm) Next to the cathedral.

Sights

The square **castle**, with its central courtyard, was built in the first half of the 14th century. It experienced many ups and downs in subsequent periods and suffered a serious loss in 1798 when the Prussians pulled down two sides (eastern and southern) and the main tower. It passed unscathed through WWII.

Most of the building is now the **Kwidzyn Museum** (☎ 055 646 3797; ul Katedralna 1; adult/concession 7/5zł; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun May-Aug, 9am-4pm Tue-Sun Sep-Apr), which has several sections including displays on medieval sacred art, regional folk crafts and plenty of farming implements, as well as a display in the cellar

detailing the German-funded archaeological excavations around the site. There are some grim sets of manacles hanging off the dungeon walls for effect, and some inexplicably placed cannons beside them. You won't find any English labelling, but the fine original interiors justify a visit, and there are some good views over the countryside from some of the windows.

The most curious feature of the castle is the two unusual towers standing some distance away from the western and southern sides, linked to the main building by arched bridges. The smaller tower held a well, while the western one was the *gdanisko* (knights' toilet), and later also served as the execution ground. You can visit both while wandering around the interior, but it's also worth walking around the outside.

The **cathedral** attached to the castle is the familiar Gothic brick blockbuster, which has a suitably defensive appearance, thanks to its 19th-century tower. Look for the interesting ceramic mosaic (from around 1380) in the external wall above the southern porch.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Kaskada (☎ 055 279 3731; www.hotelkaskada.emeteor.pl; ul Chopina 42; s/d/tr/q 135/160/215/250zł; ☎) Right opposite the train station, the Kaskada has been recently redone in bright colours and also has a simple restaurant, making it a good option if you decide to stay over.

Pensjonat Miłosna (☎ 055 279 4052; www.milosna.emeteor.pl; ul Miłosna 2; s/d/tr/q 220/250/280/310zł; ☎) Miłosna is a stylish villa set in the woods off the Grudziądz road; about 4km from Kwidzyn, it's only a practical proposition for motorists. Rooms are cosy and comfortable, and there's also a good restaurant.

Getting There & Away

The bus and train stations are set 200m apart, both around a 10-minute walk from the castle. Seven trains head to Malbork (7.50zł, 45 minutes), four to Grudziądz (7.50zł, one hour) and two to Toruń (15.50zł, 2¾ hours). There are 10 buses daily to Malbork (8.80zł, 50 minutes), five to Elbląg (13zł, 1½ hours) and four to Gdańsk (17zł, two hours).

GNIEW

pop 6800

Not to be outdone, the small town of Gniew (pronounced gnyef) has an equally prominent

and remarkably well-maintained castle in its location on the other side of the Vistula. The town has also retained its original medieval layout in its tiny old centre. With few interruptions from modern life, it's a charming place to visit for a couple of hours.

Sights

The first stronghold of the Teutonic order (see boxed text, p451) on the left bank of the Vistula, the **castle** was built in the late 13th century and is a massive, multistorey brick structure with a deep courtyard. In 1464 it came under Polish rule and remained so until the First Partition of 1773. The Prussians remodelled it to accommodate a barracks, a jail and an ammunition depot. It was seriously burnt out in 1921, but the 2m-thick walls survived and it was later restored.

The castle now houses the **Archaeological Museum** (☎ 058 35 2537; www.zamek-gniew.pl; Plac Zamkowy 2; adult/concession 8/5zł; 🕒 9am-5pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, by appointment Oct-Apr). The archaeological exhibition is in two rooms, but you will also get to see the chapel and temporary exhibitions in other rooms, and wander through most of the castle. All visits are guided and the tour takes up to 1½ hours; unless you pay 50zł for a foreign-language guide, this will mean tagging along with a Polish group and hanging around through some fairly lengthy explanations of each display (including a dramatic account of the Battle of Grunwald). At weekends historical performances are held twice a day.

Sleeping & Eating

Dormitorium (☎ 058 535 2162; dm 33zł) In part of the castle, the 90-bed Dormitorium offers bunk accommodation in spacious vaulted dorms, which are heated in winter. It's simple but clean and has character, and offers some of Poland's cheapest castle beds. Breakfast is an extra 15zł.

Pałac Marysieńki (☎ 058 535 2162; Plac Zamkowy 3; s/d/tr/ste 100/150/240/250zł; 🍷) The Pałac is a large, imposing building set next to the castle, fully renovated and offering a fine range of comfortable accommodation. The house restaurant is of equally good value.

Getting There & Away

Gniew's bus terminal is about 200m north-west of the Rynek. There are roughly hourly services to Tczew (10zł, 45 minutes), six to

Gdańsk (15.50zł, 1½ hours), one to Grudziądz (13zł, one hour) and two to Toruń (23zł, 2½ hours).

MALBORK

pop 38,000

It's not hard to figure out what the tourists streaming out of Malbork's train station every day are heading towards – this quiet hamlet's spectacular castle. The top dog among Polish fortifications, the magnificent Unesco-listed structure is a classic example of the medieval fortress, and Europe's largest Gothic castle as well. In summer it's at its busiest, playing host to crowds of both local and international visitors. Malbork is an easy day trip from Gdańsk, but you could also stay overnight to appreciate the town and its famous stronghold in a less hectic atmosphere.

Information

Bank Pekao (ul Piłsudskiego 9)

Post office (ul 17 Marca 38)

Tourist office (☎ 055 273 4990; ul Piastowska 15;

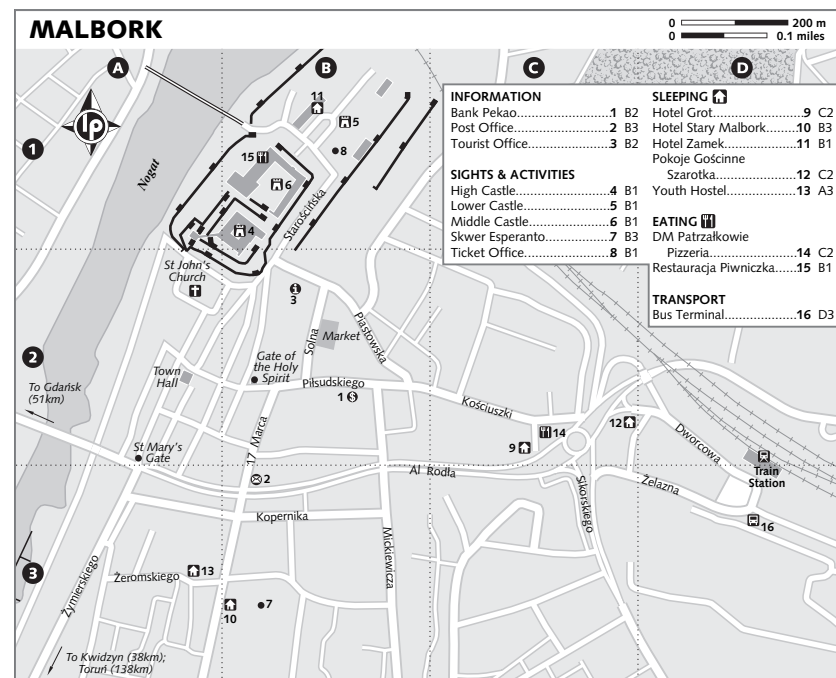
🕒 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun Jun-Sep)

Sights

Malbork's showpiece *extraordinaire* is the massive castle that sits on the bank of the Nogat River, an eastern arm of the Vistula. Built by the Teutonic Knights (see boxed text, p451), the **Marienburg** (Fortress of Mary) was the main seat of the order for almost 150 years, and its vast bulk is an apt embodiment of its weighty history.

The immense castle took shape in stages. First was the so-called High Castle, the formidable central bastion that was begun around 1276 and finished within three decades. When Malbork became the capital of the order in 1309, the fortress was expanded considerably. The Middle Castle was built to the side of the high one, followed by the Lower Castle still further along. The whole complex was encircled by three rings of defensive walls and strengthened with dungeons and towers. The castle eventually spread over 21 hectares, making it the largest fortress built in the Middle Ages.

The castle was only seized by the Polish army in 1457, during the Thirteen Years' War, when the military power of the knights had started to erode. Malbork then became the residence of Polish kings visiting Pomerania, but from the Swedish invasions onwards it



gradually went into decline. After the First Partition in 1772, the Prussians turned it into barracks, destroying much of the decoration and dismantling sections of no military use.

In the 19th century the Marienburg was one of the first historic buildings taken under government protection, becoming a symbol of medieval German glory. Despite sustaining damage during WWII, almost the entire complex has been preserved, and the castle today looks much as it did six centuries ago, dominating the town and the surrounding countryside. The best view is from the opposite side of the river (you can get there by footbridge), especially in the late afternoon when the brick turns an intense red-brown in the setting sun.

The fortress now operates as the **Castle Museum** (Muzeum Zamkowe; ☎ 055 647 0802; www.zamek.malbork.pl; ul Starościńska 1; tours adult/concession 30/17.50zł; 🕒 9am-7pm Tue-Sun May-Aug, 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Apr & Sep, 10am-3pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar) and access is strictly controlled. Most of the rooms and chambers are open to visitors, housing dozens of exhibitions on various historical and archaeological topics.

The entrance to the complex is from the northern side, through what used to be the only way in. From the main gate, you walk over the drawbridge, then go through five iron-barred doors to the vast courtyard of the **Middle Castle** (Zamek Sredni). On the western side (to your right) is the **Grand Masters' Palace** (Pałac Wielkich Mistrzów), which has some splendid interiors. Alongside is the **Knights' Hall** (Sala Rycerska), which is the largest chamber in the castle at 450 sq metres. The remarkable ceiling has its original palm vaulting preserved. The building on the opposite side of the courtyard houses a collection of armour and an excellent display of amber.

The tour proceeds to the **High Castle** (Zamek Wysoki), over another drawbridge and through a gate (note the ornamented 1280 doorway) to a spectacular arcaded courtyard that has a reconstructed well in the middle. You'll then be taken around the rooms on three storeys, including the knights' dormitories, kitchen, bakery, chapterhouse and refectory. The entrance to the **castle church** is through a beautiful Gothic doorway, known as the Golden Gate. Underneath the church's

presbytery is St Anne's Chapel, with the grand masters' crypt below its floor.

Finally, you can climb the castle's main square **tower** for an excellent view over the whole complex and the flat countryside around, and visit the terraces that run around the High Castle between the main buildings and the fortified walls.

Unfortunately, the castle management is persisting with its long-standing policy that every visitor must join a tour to enter the castle, even though non-Polish language tours are thin on the ground or relatively expensive. Polish guides pick up groups every half-hour, taking up to three hours to go around; in July and August there are also three daily tours in English (at 11am, 1.30pm and 3.30pm) and four in German (at 10am, noon, 1.30pm and 3.30pm), for 35zł including entry.

If you miss the relevant slot or visit out of season, German-, French-, Russian- and English-speaking guides are available on request for 150zł per group (plus the standard entrance fee). If you hang around the ticket office listening for new arrivals speaking your language, you could band together to spread the cost of a group tour.

Late tours (adult/concession 17.50/11.50zł), which leave shortly before closing time, run at breakneck speed and miss some exhibitions. Access to the grounds on Monday, when all the buildings and exhibition rooms are closed, costs just 5zł.

During the warmer months a sound-and-light show, **Cross and Sword** (Krzyżem i Mieczem; ☎ 055 647 0978; adult/concession 15/8zł; 🎫 shows at 10pm Jun-Jul, 9.30pm mid-Apr–May & 1-15 Aug, 9pm 16-31 Aug, 8pm 1-15 Sep), is held at the castle, but only in Polish. Still, it's a good chance to see the building in a different light. Another onsite spectacle is the **Siege of Malbork**, a week-long medieval fair in mid-July that includes craft workshops, concerts, outdoor movies and a dramatic staged siege of the castle.

If you've seen the castle and have more time to kill in Malbork, walk south along the line of the river, past impressive remnants of the old city walls, to **Skwer Esperanto** (Plac Zamenhofa), behind the Hotel Stary Malbork. This scrappy park isn't much to look at, but around its edge are commemorative stones placed by keen international speakers of Esperanto from as far away as Korea and Congo, in honour of the world language invented by Ludwig Zamenhof. There's a monument

to the great man in the middle of the park. The explanatory signage is in Polish...and Esperanto, naturally.

Sleeping & Eating

Youth hostel (☎ 055 272 2408; ul Żeromskiego 45; dm 25-30zł, d 51zł; 📍) Housed in a local school, this year-round hostel has a few doubles, but most beds are in dorms sleeping eight or more people. Internet access is only available in July and August. If you arrive when reception is closed, just press the buzzer.

Pokoje Gościnne Szarotka (☎ 055 612 1444; ul Dworcowa 1a; s/d/tr/q 25/45/65/80zł) Surprisingly pleasant rooms near the train station are simple but well maintained, though the shared bathrooms are basic. If you just want to dump your luggage for a few hours while checking out the castle, the obliging staff will rent you a room for 10zł per two hours (no, it isn't what you think!).

Hotel Stary Malbork (☎ 055 647 2400; www.hotelstarymalbork.com.pl; ul 17 Marca 26/27; s 210-250zł, d 250-360zł, ste 550-650zł; 📍) This graceful hotel is the best value in town, with delightful green rooms boasting excellent fittings and furniture. The staff are friendly and efficient, and there's a sauna, café and restaurant on the premises.

ourpick Hotel Grot (☎ 055 646 9660; www.grot.hotel.pl; ul Kościuszki 22d; s/d/tr/ste 199/289/379/399zł; 📍) British and Australian travellers will laugh at the name, but there's nothing unhygienic about this brand-new three-star hotel. It's very classy for its price range, with contemporary furniture and an impressive restaurant. It's located back from the street down an unnamed dead-end laneway opposite the unrecommended Hotel Zbyszko.

Hotel Zamek (☎ 055 272 3367; biuro@hotelzamek.pl; ul Starościńska 14; s/d/tr/q/ste €72/86/112/138/170; 📍) Nestled in a restored medieval building in the Lower Castle, a former hospital, the Hotel Zamek isn't as palatial as you might expect. The interiors are dark and a bit drab, but the location's great. The in-house restaurant is good, though often crowded with tour groups.

DM Patrzalkowie Pizzeria (☎ 055 272 3991; ul Kościuszki 25; mains 9-16zł; 🕒 10am-9pm Sun-Thu, 10am-10pm Fri & Sat) At the station end of town, this eatery's friendly staff serves pizza, pasta, *pierogi*, salads and soups to a mixed crowd of locals and tourists, including some decent vegetarian options.

A THOUSAND AND ONE KNIGHTS

It's impossible to travel anywhere in Pomerania without encountering the ghosts of the Teutonic Knights, the military monks who ended up ruling great swathes of modern-day Germany and Poland.

Their rise is a spectacular tale worthy of a big-budget Hollywood treatment, involving foreign origins, holy war, conquest, defeat and an unexpected sideline in charitable works.

The Order of the Hospitallers of Saint Mary of the Teutons in Jerusalem, as it was formally known, was founded in Palestine in 1190, as a medical body to treat Germanic knights fighting in the Crusades.

In this religion-infused landscape, the order attracted many fighters wanting to take holy orders. From this potent military and spiritual mix emerged the Teutonic Knights, warrior monks who wore a distinctive white habit with a black cross.

Back in Europe, their big break came when the Polish Duke Konrad I of Mazovia needed help subduing the pagan Prussians of the Lower Vistula.

By the end of the 13th century, the Teutonic Knights had conquered all of Prussia. They then set about consolidating their rule by building castles, importing German peasants to build up the population, and developing trade. Towns such as Thorn (Toruń) and Elbing (Elbląg) became important Teutonic centres, and the castle at Marienburg (Malbork) was a potent symbol of the order's might.

Inevitably, territorial tensions arose with the neighbouring and newly resurgent Kingdom of Poland. After a century of friction, the Knights fell to combined Polish and Lithuanian forces at the Battle of Grunwald (1410). But their greatest defeat at Polish hands was yet to come – the Thirteen Years' War saw the order's own subjects turn against it, and the Treaty of Toruń in 1466 forced it to give up much of Pomerania, Warmia and the banks of the Vistula.

The Teutonic Knights were on the way out. In 1525 the order's Grand Master Albert transformed Prussia into a secular state, ending the knights' rule and naming himself duke. Then, after centuries of decline, Napoleon declared the Teutonic order dissolved in 1809.

Curiously though, the order refused to die. In 1834 the Austrian Emperor Franz I re-established the Teutonic order as a religious body, restricted to charitable and nursing activities – neatly returning the body to its medieval roots. Nowadays the Grand Master holds office at Singerstrasse 7 in Vienna, where the Teutonic order operates a museum and archive. It even has a website: www.deutscher-orden.at (in German).

Restauracja Piwniczka (☎ 055 273 3668; ul Starościńska 1; mains 10-80zł; 🕒 10am-7pm) Situated in an atmospheric cellar beneath the west wall of the castle, facing the river, this restaurant dishes up excellent, flavoursome Polish standards along with specials like Castle's Pot Soup (pork and mushroom) and The Knight's Plate (two kinds of pork and a chicken shashlik).

Getting There & Away

The train station and bus terminal are at the eastern end of the town centre, 1km from the castle. Malbork sits on the busy Gdańsk-Warsaw railway route, so there are plenty of trains to Gdańsk (16zł, 45 minutes) and Warsaw (express 74zł, 3¼ hours). There are also frequent links with Elbląg (10zł, 20 minutes) and seven daily services to Kwidzyn (7.50zł, 45 minutes), four to Grudziądz (13zł, 1¼ hours), and seven to Olsztyn (31zł, 1¼

hours). There's also one train to Kaliningrad (4¼ hours). PKS buses also serve most regional destinations.

Coming from Gdańsk by train, you'll catch a splendid view of the castle; watch out to your right when crossing the river.

ELBLĄG

pop 127,000

Elbląg (*el-blonk*) is something of a revelation. Though being low on sights, and not an obvious place for either Poles or international travellers to visit, its innovatively rebuilt Old Town is an intriguing slice of 21st-century Poland. The unexpectedly harmonious blend of old buildings and recently created modern structures catches the eye and gives the city a unique look. Though it's still a work in progress, Elbląg is fast becoming an attractive place to drop into.

Centuries before WWII turned its historical centre into a heap of rubble, Elbląg became a stronghold and port of the Teutonic Knights (see boxed text, p451). In the 13th century, the Vistula Lagoon (Zalew Wiślany) extended further south than it does today, allowing the town to develop as a maritime centre and a member of the Hanseatic League (see boxed text, p413). When Elbląg came under Polish rule after the Treaty of Toruń, it was a major gateway to the sea. Later, Swedish invasions and the gradual silting up of the waterway capsized the town's prosperity, though a partial revival came with industrial development in the late 19th century.

The port may have gone, but the city still enjoys favourable geography – it's a gateway to Frombork, the starting/finishing point of the Elbląg-Ostróda Canal (see p486) and a jumping-off point for the Russian region of Kaliningrad.

Information

Bank Pekao (Stary Rynek 18a)

Lobos (☎ 055 642 1952; ul Nitschmana 20/22) Travel agency.

Nell@ (☎ 055 643 6855; ul Słoneczna 19a; per hr 2zł; ☎ 8am–8pm Mon–Fri, noon–10pm Sat, noon–8pm Sun) Internet access northeast of the Old Town.

Orbis Travel (☎ 055 236 8555; ul Hetmańska 24)

Post office (Plac Słowiański 1)

Tourist office City centre (☎ 055 232 4234; www.it.elblag.com.pl; ul Czerwonego Krzyża 2; ☎ 7.30am–3.30pm Mon–Fri); Market Gate (☎ 055 611 0820; Brama Targowa; ☎ 10am–6pm Jun–Jul, 8am–4pm Mon–Fri Aug–May)

Sights & Activities

In the early 1990s work started on a project combining modern and traditional elements with the city's Old Town area, creating a stylised **New Old Town** harking back to the merchants' quarters of the great Hanseatic cities. Though construction is ongoing, the area has already acquired a distinctive character, aided by the flurry of new restaurants, bars and hotels cashing in on the increasingly attractive neighbourhood.

One blast from the past still dominates this evolving site: **St Nicholas' Church** (Kościół Św Mikołaja) is a sturdy, redbrick concoction, noted for its 95m-high, carefully reconstructed tower. Within, you'll find some of the original woodcarving, including several triptychs, which escaped war damage.

Some 200m to the north is the **Galeria El** (☎ 055 232 5386; ul Kuśnierska 6; adult/concession 4/2zł; ☎ 10am–6pm Mon–Sat, 10am–5pm Sun), formerly St Mary's Church. Another massive Gothic brick structure, the original church was gutted and now houses a gallery of contemporary art, with occasional concerts and events. It's worth a visit just to see the imposing, lofty interior, and the large modern art objects dotted through the grounds.

A few steps from here is the **Market Gate** (Brama Targowa), the only surviving gate of the medieval fortifications. In front of it is a **statue** of a baker who legendarily saved the town in the 16th century when he spotted the approaching Teutonic Knights, bent on invasion, and cut the ropes that held the gates open. It's good luck to touch his nose as you pass. You can climb to the top of the gate for free, and check out city views.

A five-minute walk south along the river bank is the **Elbląg Museum** (☎ 055 232 7273; Bulwar Zygmunta Augusta 11; adult/concession 9/5zł, free Sat; ☎ 9am–5pm Tue–Sun May–Sep, 8am–4pm Tue–Sun Oct–Apr). Occupying two large buildings, the museum has sections on archaeology and the city's history, plus a photographic record of the town from the 19th century to WWII.

For some physical activity in the great outdoors, head for **Nurwid** (☎ 0601 617 008; Bulwar Zygmunta Augusta; ☎ daylight) near the canal boat quay. These enterprising gentlemen will happily hire you kayaks, boats and bicycles, from 5zł per hour.

Sleeping

Hotel Sowa (☎ 055 233 7422; ul Grunwaldzka 49; s 125–145zł, d 165–180zł; ☎) The centre's a bit of a walk from this two-star, but the bus station is right across the road, making it ideal if you want an early start out of town. There's a restaurant on site, and bicycles available for 5zł per hour.

Pensjonat Boss (☎ 055 239 3728; www.pensjonatboss.pl; ul Św Ducha 30; s/d/tr/ste 150/220/300/300zł) One of several small hotels in the Old Town, Pensjonat Boss offers 13 comfortable rooms above its own bar. The building is a nicer example of the new-look architecture, especially when the window boxes bloom.

Hotel Viwaldi (☎ 055 236 2542; www.viwaldi.m.walentynowicz.pl; Stary Rynek 16; s/d/ste 230/300/385zł; ☎) Though the blue-grey exterior is a little off-putting, this well-organised hotel has no problem satisfying its demanding target market. There's a restaurant, nightclub and 10% discount at weekends.

Camping Nr 61 (☎ 055 641 8666; www.camping61.com.pl; ul Panieńska 14; camp sites per adult/child 12/6zł, d/q 60/100zł; ☎ May–Sep; ☎) Elbląg's pleasantly shaded camping ground occupies an unusually convenient spot on the Elbląg River, close to the Old Town and about 1km west of the train and bus stations.

Eating & Drinking

Café Carillon (☎ 055 232 5295; ul Mostowa 22; mains 8–18zł; ☎ 10am–10pm) This stylish venue has a small patio with a view of St Nicholas' Church, while the interior is an amazing pastiche of Art Deco-style stained glass on a musical theme. The extensive drinks menu is a bit pricey, however.

Roma (☎ 055 237 5555; ul Wieżowa 15; mains 8–21zł; ☎ 11am–10pm) Attractive pizzeria and café a few doors from the Hotel Viwaldi. Pizza, pasta, soups and fish dishes are served within its brown-and-white pseudo-Mediterranean interior.

Złoty Żuraw (☎ 055 642 2233; Stary Rynek 35C; mains 14–16zł; ☎ noon–11pm) On a strategic corner of the Old Town, this Chinese restaurant is decorated in red and gold, with trellises covered in greenery between its booths. Spot the Buddha statue on the way in.

Restauracja Pod Aniolami (☎ 055 236 1726; ul Rybacka 23/24B; mains 17–30zł; ☎ noon–midnight) Tempting tourists and hip locals alike, the Latin American menu here adds a welcome dash of chilli. It's hard not to say *olé*.

Getting There & Away

BOAT

Boats heading for the Elbląg-Ostróda Canal depart from the quay next to the Old Town. Information and tickets are available from **Żegluga Ostródzko-Elbląska** (☎ 055 232 4307; www.zegluga.elblag.com.pl; ul Wieżowa 14) near the Hotel Viwaldi.

The neighbouring wharf is the departure point for cruises operated by **Żegluga Gdańska** (☎ 055 232 7319; www.zegluga.gda.pl). They depart at 7am daily from May to September, calling at Krynica Morska (return adult/concession 43/30zł, 2½ hours), then continuing to Frombork (86/60zł, four hours), before returning to Elbląg. At the time of research, the company was not running services to Kaliningrad due to tensions between Poland and Russia; no doubt they will resume when the political ice thaws.

BUS

The bus terminal is next to the train station; PKS buses to Gdańsk (13zł, 1½ hours) and Braniewo, for Frombork (8zł, 40 minutes), operate at least hourly. Private minibuses serve the same Braniewo via Frombork route. Polski Express also runs two services a day to Warsaw (38zł).

TRAIN

The train station is 1km southeast of the centre. There are regular trains to Malbork (10zł, 20 minutes, roughly hourly), Gdańsk (20zł, 1¼ hours, 14 daily) and Olsztyn (24zł, 1½ hours, nine daily).

FROMBORK

POP 2500

It's an adventure getting to Frombork by bus, tucked away as it is near the northeast edge of coastal Poland. Roads narrow as you pass through stands of forest, interrupted only by dot-on-the-map villages. The payoff is worth it, however, as you arrive beneath the impressive walled complex that overlooks the tranquil town and the water beyond.

What looks like a castle is, in fact, a cathedral, established by the Warmian bishops (see p479) in the 13th century after a forced departure from nearby Braniewo, following an uprising of pagan Prussians. Later, from 1466 to 1772, Frombork was part of Poland, before it shifted to Prussian control as Frauenburg.

In WWII the town was devastated, but the cathedral somehow survived, and Frombork became repopulated by Poles exiled from territories annexed by the Soviet Union.

The complex is an attractive reason to visit Frombork, but the icing on the cake is its association with Nicolaus Copernicus. It was here that he spent the latter half of his life and conducted most of the observations and research for his heliocentric theory. Copernicus was buried in the cathedral, having survived just long enough to have the first printed copy of his great work placed in his hands – or so the legend goes.

Sights

CATHEDRAL HILL

The Cathedral Hill complex (Wzgórze Katedralne) is today the **Nicolaus Copernicus Museum** (Muzeum Mikołaja Kopernika; ☎ 055 244 0075; www.frombork.art.pl). It covers several sights within the fortified complex, each visited

on a separate ticket. The entrance is from the southern side through the massive **Main Gate** (Brama Główna), where you'll find the ticket office.

The **cathedral** (adult/concession 4/2zł; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat May-Sep, 9am-4pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr), in the middle of the courtyard, is a huge brick Gothic construction embellished with a decorated western façade and a slim octagonal tower at each corner. Built from 1329 to 1388, it was the largest church ever built by the Warmian bishops, and became a model for most of the subsequent churches they founded throughout the region.

The Baroque organ within, dating from 1683, is a replacement for the one looted by the Swedes in 1626. The instrument is noted for its rich tone, best appreciated during the Sunday recitals held annually from late June to late August, as part of Frombork's **International Festival of Organ Music** (www.frombork-festival.pl in Polish).

Note the large number of tombstones within the cathedral's interior, and look for the two intriguing Baroque marble epitaphs, each with the image of a skeleton and a skull: one is on the first northern column (near the chancel), the other on the fifth southern column.

In the southeastern corner of the courtyard is the **Old Bishops' Palace** (Stary Pałac Biskupi; adult/concession 4/2zł; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, 9am-4pm Tue-Sun Oct-Apr), now the museum's main exhibition space. On the ground floor are objects discovered during postwar archaeological excavations, while the other levels are largely devoted to the life and work of Copernicus, along with temporary displays and a collection of old telescopes.

The most interesting section is on the first floor, where modern artists' interpretations of the great man, in sculpture and oils, are presented, before you pass into the room containing books and other artefacts from his time.

Though Copernicus is essentially remembered for his astronomical achievements (supplanting the old geocentric Ptolemaic system with his revelation that the earth revolves around the sun), his interests extended to many other fields, including medicine, economy and the law. Apart from an early edition of his famous *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium* (On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres), there are copies displayed of his treatises and manuscripts on a range of subjects, together with astronomi-

cal instruments and a copy of Jan Matejko's painting depicting the astronomer at work. The exhibits are well lit and creatively placed, though there's no English captioning.

The high tower at the southwestern corner of the defensive walls is the former cathedral **belfry** (dzwonnica; adult/concession 4/2zł; ☎ 9.30am-5pm May-Sep, 9am-4pm Oct-Apr), which has a **planetarium** (adult/concession 6/4zł) at its base presenting half-hour shows in Polish. Go to the top of the tower for views of the cathedral, town, and the Vistula Lagoon and Vistula Spit (see boxed text, opposite).

At the northwestern corner of the complex is the 14th-century **Copernicus Tower** (Wieża Kopernika). It's believed that the astronomer took some of his observations from here, and the top floor is set up to re-create his study; if he'd looked down, he could also have seen his own house, which was just across the road. At the time of research the tower was indefinitely closed to visitors; check with the ticket office to see if it's open when you arrive.

OTHER SIGHTS

The 15th-century **Hospital of the Holy Ghost** (☎ 055 243 7562; ul Stara; adult/concession 4/2zł; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sat May-Sep, 9am-4pm Tue-Sat Oct-Apr), formerly St Anne's Chapel, contains exhibitions of religious art and medical history. It's a short walk east of the cathedral.

The **Water Tower** (Wieża Wodna; ☎ 055 243 7500; ul Elbląska 2; adult/concession 3/2zł; ☎ 9am-7pm May-Sep, 9am-3pm Oct-Apr), across the main road from the cathedral, was built in 1571 as part of one of the first water-supply systems in Europe and was used for two centuries to provide Cathedral Hill with water through oak pipes. The admission fee lets you climb to the top of the tower.

Sleeping & Eating

In addition to the following options, several private homes around town rent rooms to visitors at reasonable prices – look out for the *kwatery prywatne* signs.

Kwatery Prywatne Koczergo (☎ 055 243 7357; ul Kapelańska 5; s/d 40/70zł; ☎ ☒ ☒) Convenient, nicely turned-out lodgings in a residential house just off the Rynek. You can cook meals in the kitchen and relax in the garden – an excellent pick.

Hotelik Dom Familijny Rheticus (☎ 055 243 7800; www.domfamilijny.pl; ul Kopernika 10; s 80-88zł, d 100-120zł, apt 150-200zł; ☎ ☒) This fine family villa contains

DIY TRAVEL: MIERZEJA WIŚLANA

If you want to escape the tourist hordes of Gdańsk, head east to the Mierzeja Wiślana (Vistula Spit). This long, narrow sand bar is flanked by the Gulf of Gdańsk to the north and the Zalew Wiślany (Vistula Lagoon) to the south, a vast estuary which stretches all the way to Kaliningrad in Russia. The peninsula is also part Russian, being neatly bisected by the international border.

On the route from Gdańsk to the spit is Sztutowo, some 30km from the city. Here you'll find Stutthof, the former extermination camp in which the Nazis disposed of Polish resistors from the beginning of WWII, and which later became part of their Final Solution against Jews. Nowadays it's a sombre museum presenting exhibitions and documentaries about the Nazi occupation of the region.

Continuing on to the Mierzeja Wiślana, there's a wealth of natural attractions, including pine forests, giant sand dunes, a cormorant reserve at Kały Rybackie, and places to hire sailboats, yachts and catamarans. Krynica Morska is the major town on the peninsula, with a popular swimming beach, accommodation in old-fashioned villas, and a lighthouse open to visitors. You can reach Krynica Morska by bus or car from Gdańsk, or by ferry from Elbląg (p453).

For that all-over Baltic tan, there's even a nude beach near Piaski, 12km east of Krynica Morska on the far Polish end of the spit. And while you're enjoying the Mierzeja Wiślana beaches, don't forget to have a look for fragments of amber on the shore, washed up by storms in the colder months...

nine spacious apartments with various configurations sleeping up to five people. The onsite solarium, hairdresser and florist all add to the informal character of the place. Breakfast is an extra 7zł.

Hotel Kopernik (☎ 055 243 7285; www.hotelkopernik.pl; ul Kościelna 2; s/d/tr 120/170/210zł; ☎ ☒ ☒ ☒) The modern Hotel Kopernik has 37 reasonable rooms, its own budget restaurant and the only *kantor* in town. The motel look doesn't sit well with Frombork's more traditional buildings, but some south-facing rooms have great views of the cathedral.

Camping Nr 12 (☎ 055 243 7744; ul Braniewska 14; camp sites 5zł & per person 10zł, dm 25zł, d/tr 50/75zł; ☎ May-Sep) This privately owned camping ground is at the eastern end of town, on the Braniewo road. It has basic cabins and a snack bar on the grounds.

Restauracja Akcent (☎ 055 243 7275; ul Rybacka 4; mains 5-29zł; ☎ 10am-11pm; ☒ ☒) An alternative to the hotel eateries listed above, this is a decent place with a sightline to the castle and a menu that goes beyond the basics.

Getting There & Away

The bus station is in the western part of town, near the waterfront. Buses run to Elbląg (8zł, 40 minutes, hourly) and Gdańsk (16zł, three hours, five daily).

Just north of the station is the marina; from here pleasure boats go to Krynica Morska (return adult/concession 42/30zł, 1½ hours) and on to Elbląg (86/60zł, four hours; see p453).

NORTHERN & WESTERN POMERANIA

Stretching northwest from Gdańsk, the Baltic coast is Poland's key summer holiday strip. It may not be as well known as Spain's Costa del Sol, but it's an attractive coastline of dunes, woods and coastal lakes, fronted by pristine white sandy beaches.

The numerous resort towns stretching all the way from Hel to Świnoujście are engaging places to spend some time. Often blessed with historic architecture, they also contain pleasant green parks and a good mix of restaurants, bars and other diversions. Outside the urban centres, there are also two interesting national parks on the Pomeranian coast.

As you move around, you'll notice that northern and western Pomerania is basically a rural, sparsely populated region, with compact towns and little industry. This blend of natural beauty with the delights of low-key resort towns makes it a pleasing region to explore, whatever the season.

ŁEBA pop 3800

In the summer months, Łeba (*weh*-bah) is an uber-resort town, taken over by Polish and German holidaymakers. There's a relaxed, good-humoured buzz in the air, generated by the vacationing crowds and the various

eateries and amusements that spring up to keep them diverted. Outside the high season, however, Łeba reverts to its off-peak persona of a small, quiet fishing port.

Life wasn't always this relaxed here – in the 16th century the town moved from the western to the eastern bank of the Łeba River after a huge storm flattened the settlement. Even then, Łeba was prey to the exotic peril of shifting sand dunes, which threatened to cover its buildings and disrupt shipping. However, at the end of the 19th century a new port was constructed and forests were planted to impede the sands.

Nowadays it's a great place for a seaside jaunt, boasting a generous expanse of wide sandy beaches and clean water for swimming. It's also within day-trip distance from Gdańsk, and the attractive Słowiński National Park is just next door.

Orientation

The train and bus stations are next to each other in the southwestern part of Łeba, two blocks west of ul Kościuszki, the main drag. This shopping street crosses the Chełst canal then runs north to the port, on a brief stretch of the Łeba River that joins Lake Łebsko to the sea. The river divides Łeba's beachfront into two sections – the east and the quieter west.

Information

Bank Pekao (ul Kościuszki 87)

Biuro Wczasów Przymorze (☎ 059 866 1360; ul Zawiszy Czarnego 8) Information and accommodation; arranges guides to the national park.

Post office (ul Kościuszki 23) Postal services and *kantor*.

Tourist office (☎ 059 866 2565; www.leba.pl; ul 11 Listopada 5a; ☎ 8am–8pm Mon–Fri, 8am–6pm Sat, 10am–4pm Sun Jul–Aug, 8am–4pm Mon–Fri Sep–May)

Town library (☎ 059 866 1723; ul 11 Listopada 5a; per hr 2zł; ☎ noon–7pm Mon–Sat) Internet access, next to the tourist office.

Sleeping & Eating

As in most seaside resorts, the accommodation and culinary picture varies wildly between the high season and the rest of the year. Most places have their own eating facilities, and there's a particular concentration of eateries along and around ul Kościuszki.

All prices given here are for the peak season, July to August. At other times of the year, you'll be amazed how much the rates drop.

Dom Turysty PTTK (☎ 059 866 1324; ul Kościuszki 66; dm 40zł) A surprisingly good entry in the ultrabudget category, the PTTK is often virtually empty between groups, so you may even get a room to yourself. The shared bathrooms reflect the pressures of mass occupation, but the price includes breakfast so you can't really quibble.

Mazowsze (☎ 059 866 1870; www.zwmazowsze.pl; ul Nadmorska 15; s/d/tr 140/160/230zł; ☎ ☒ ☑ ☒ ☒) A stiff walk east of the centre, but just 150m from the beach, the Mazowsze complex accommodates up to 250 people in comfortable rooms. As its main function is as a health resort, all kinds of interesting treatments and fitness activities are available, from cryotherapy to tennis.

Arkun (☎ 059 866 2419; www.arkun.interleba.pl; ul Wróbleckiego 11; s/d/tr 100/200/300zł; ☎ ☒ ☒) The mixed modern-traditional building by the fishing wharf looks like it ought to be pretty fancy, but in fact rooms here are a reasonable lower-midrange standard. Prices come down if you stay for more than one night, though breakfast costs an extra 20zł. Six rooms have balconies facing the canal.

Hotel Gołabek (☎ 059 866 2175; www.hotel-golabek.leba.pl; ul Wybrzeże 10; s/d/tr/ste 240/330/390/700zł; ☎ ☒ ☒) It may be named after a cabbage roll, but the Gołabek exudes style on the edge of the wharf, with charming old fishing boats and port views. The sauna, solarium and waterfront restaurant all add to the value. In summer the hotel hires out bicycles (5zł per hr).

Hotel Neptun (☎ 059 866 1432; www.neptunhotel.pl; ul Sosnowa 1; s 455zł, d 455zł, tr 645–685zł, ste 875–1160zł; ☎ ☒ ☒ ☒) With super-elegant rooms and an impeccably tasteful restaurant, this spectacular castle-like villa sets the Baltic standard for class and refinement. Located right on the seashore, it has a terrace pool area overlooking the beach, and a bar with great views of the sunset.

Camping Nr 41 Ambré (☎ 059 866 2472; www.ambre.leba.pl; ul Nadmorska 9a; camp sites per adult/child 13/8zł, bungalows 240–400zł) This camping ground has a handy range of rooms, a restaurant and delicatessen, and neat, cared-for grounds and facilities. It's open for caravans all year (30zł supplement). And for dogs (3zł).

Relaks (☎ 059 866 1250; ul Nadmorska 13; cabins 280–460zł, r 210–320zł; ☎ ☒ ☒ ☒) An upmarket camping ground with full amenities, beach access, charming wooden Toblerone cabins (sleeping up to six people) and some spa-

cious rooms. Warning: the cabins' gardens are populated by garden gnomes.

Maat (☎ 059 866 2977; ul Kościuszki 30a; mains 11–39zł; ☎ 10am–midnight) For casual dining overlooking the canal in the town centre, try this place. Its upstairs timber balcony with a fishy motif has water views, and the staff serve up excellent pizzas, and a range of salads, pasta and fish dishes.

Getting There & Away

The usual transit point to/from Łeba is Łębork, a town 29km to the south, offering good connections with Gdańsk, Gdynia and some other destinations. Trains to Łębork (7.50zł, 50 minutes) depart up to 18 times daily in summer, but only twice daily the rest of the year. Buses (5zł, 35 minutes) head to Łębork at least every hour, supplemented by private minibuses, including those of **Bogus Bus** (☎ 059 862 9300), which runs the route twice-hourly. There's one direct bus between Łeba and Gdynia in summer (18zł, three hours), and two to Słupsk (10zł, 1½ hours).

SŁOWIŃSKI NATIONAL PARK

The 186-sq-km **Słowiński National Park** (Słowiński Park Narodowy; ☎ 059 811 7204; adult/concession 4/2zł; ☎ 7am–9pm May–Sep, 8am–4pm Oct–Apr) takes up the 33km stretch of coast between Łeba and the fishing tourist village of **Rowy**, complete with two large lakes, the Łebsko and the Gardno, and their surrounding belts of peat bog, meadows and woods. It's named after the Slav tribe of the Słowiczyńcy (Słowińcy), a western branch of the Kashubians whose descendants inhabited this part of the coast right up until the 19th century. In 1977 the park was included on Unesco's list of World Biosphere Reserves.

Sights

SHIFTING DUNES

The most unusual feature of the national park are the **shifting dunes** (*wydmy ruchome*), which create a genuine desert landscape (see boxed text, p458). They're on the sand bar separating the sea from Lake Łebsko, about 8km west of Łeba. Rommel's Afrika Korps trained in this desert during WWII, and the site was also a secret missile testing ground from 1940 to 1945.

The dunes are easily reached from Łeba: take the road west to the hamlet of **Rąbka** (2.5km), where there's a car park and the

gate to the national park. Private minibuses, open-sided electric cars and motorised trains (5zł) ply this road in summer, from a stop on Al Wojska Polskiego, north of the canal. It's also an easy walk. The sealed road continues into the park for another 3.5km to the site of the rocket launcher, now an outdoor **museum** (adult/concession 6/5zł). From here a wide path goes on through the forest for another 2km to the southern foot of the dunes, where half-buried trees jut out of the sand. As you walk round the bend from the woods, it's quite a sight – the pale, immense dunes open up in front of you like a desert dropped into the middle of a forest, with a striking contrast at the line where the trees meet the sand. Continue up the vast dunes for a sweeping view of desert, lake, beach, sea and forest.

No cars or buses are allowed beyond the car park. You can walk to the dunes (45 minutes), buy a ticket on one of the small electric cars (10zł one way), or rent a bicycle (6zł per hour). There are also large electric cars (5zł one way) and boats (12zł), but both only go as far as the launcher, so you'll still have 2km to walk to the dunes. Coming back, you can either retrace your steps or walk to Łeba along the beach (8km), perhaps stopping for a swim – something you certainly can't do in the Sahara.

LAKES

There are four lakes in the park, two large and two small. They are shallow lagoons that started life as bays and were gradually cut off from the sea by the sand bar. With densely overgrown, almost inaccessible marshy shores, they provide a habitat for about 250 species of birds, which live here either permanently or seasonally. Large parts of the lake shores have been made into strict no-access reserves, free from human interference.

About 16km long and 71 sq km in area, **Lake Łebsko** is the biggest in Pomerania and the third-largest in Poland, after Śniardwy and Mamry in Masuria. It's steadily shrinking as a result of the movement of the dunes, the growth of weeds, and silting.

KLUKI

Set on the southwestern shore of Lake Łebsko, the tiny isolated hamlet of Kluki was the last holdout of Słowinian culture, now showcased in the centrally located **skansen** (Muzeum Wsi Słowińskiej; ☎ 059 846 3020; adult/concession 7.50/4.50zł; ☎ 9am–3pm Mon, 9am–6pm Tue–Sun Jun–Aug, 9am–3.30pm

Tue-Sun Sep-May). It's modest but authentic, comprising original *in situ* buildings. The long, two-family, whitewashed houses are fitted with traditional furniture and decorations.

Regular bus transport to Kluki runs from Słupsk (7.50zł, one hour, six daily). During summer there are three daily buses between Łeba and Kluki, or you could try negotiating the hire of a private minibus. Summer boat tours go twice-weekly to the skansen (adult/concession 45/39zł), including admission and an English-speaking guide, making a six-hour round trip.

SMÓLDZINO

West of Kluki, outside the park's boundaries, Smółdzino boasts a fine **Natural History Museum** (Muzeum Przyrodnicze; ☎ 059 811 7204; adult/concession 3/1.50zł; ☎ 9am-5pm daily May-Sep, 7.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri Oct-Apr), which features collections of flora and fauna from the park's various habitats.

Just 1km southwest of the village is **Mt Rowokół**, the highest hill in the area at 115m above sea level. On its top is a 20m **observation tower**, providing sweeping views over the forest, the lakes and the sea. The path up the hill begins next to the petrol station and you can get to the top in 15 minutes.

Buses to Słupsk (7.50zł, 45 minutes) go fairly regularly through the day. There's one morning bus to Łeba in the summer holidays.

SŁUPSK

pop 98,000

Less visited by tourists, Słupsk (pronounced swoopsk) is a regional service centre with a country town pace. Though its façades are a little cracked and faded, the city centre is home to some broad, attractive thoroughfares containing well-maintained gardens, and some grand 19th-century buildings. There's a distinct sense of civic pride, and a lot of pro-European signage about the city – even

the local PKS affiliate has a logo resembling the EU stars painted on its buses.

Like all Pomeranian cities, Słupsk's history involves a complex list of owners: it began life in the 11th century as a Slav stronghold on the Gdańsk–Szczecin trading route, then was ruled by Gdańsk dukes from 1236, passed to the Brandenburg margraves in 1307 and later became part of the West Pomeranian Duchy. In 1648 it reverted to the Brandenburgs, and became part of Prussia, then Germany, until returning to Polish rule after WWII.

Today, Słupsk is a pleasant alternative to the busier centres on the coast, and is a good base for visiting the seaside resorts of Darłowo and Ustka.

Information

Bank Pekao (ul 9 Marca 6)

Kawiarnia Internet (☎ 0601 641 003; per hr 4zł;

☎ 10am-10pm Mon-Sat) Upstairs at the train station.

Net Arena (☎ 059 841 4700; ul Staszica 14; per hr 2.50zł;

☎ 10am-10pm Sun-Thu, Fri & Sat 24hr) Internet access.

Post office (ul Łukasiewicza 3)

Tourist office Plac Zwycięstwa (summer tourist info booth; Plac Zwycięstwa); ul Sienkiewicza 19; ☎ 059 842 4326; www.slupsk.pl; ul Sienkiewicza 19; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat Jun-Aug, 8am-4pm Mon-Fri Sep-May) Ask the helpful staff about tours to Słowiński National Park.

Sights

The **Museum of Central Pomerania** (Muzeum Pomorza Środkowego; ☎ 059 842 4081; ul Dominikańska 5; admission 4.50zł; ☎ 10am-3pm Mon, 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun) is housed within Słupsk's main attraction, its commanding 16th-century **castle**. Beyond its impressive blocky tower are sacral woodcarvings, historic furniture and other exhibits illustrating the town's history. The highlight is a 200-piece collection of portraits by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (1885–1939), the controversial writer, photographer and painter popularly known as Witkacy.

SHIFTING SANDS

The 'walking' dunes in the Słowiński National Park are composed of sand thrown up on the beach by waves. Dried by wind and sun, the grains of sand are then blown away to form dunes that are steadily moving inland. The 'white mountain' progresses at a speed of 2m to 10m a year, burying everything it meets on its way. The main victim is the forest, which is gradually disappearing under the sand, to reappear several decades later as a field of skeletal trees.

The process started at least 5000 years ago, and so far the dunes have covered an area of about 6 sq km and reached a height of 30m to 40m, with the highest peak at 42m. They continue to spread inland over new areas, maintaining their miniature Sahara-by-the-Sea.



The building opposite the castle gate is the 14th-century **mill** (admission 4.50zł; ☎ 10am-3pm Mon, 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun), an annex to the museum. Its three floors contain colourful displays of traditional decorative arts including costume, embroidery and pottery, with a small amber display in the basement. There's not an English caption in sight, but a combined entry ticket to both sections of the museum is available at 7.50zł.

Next to the mill is the 15th-century **St Hyacinthus' Church** (Kościół Św Jacka). The main body of the church is often closed outside service times, but its fine organ can be heard at regular summer concerts, held midweek in July and August.

Only two remnants of the 15th-century fortified walls that once encircled the town survive: the **Mill Gate** (Brama Młyńska), beside the mill, and the **Witches' Tower** (Baszta Czarownic; ☎ 059 841 2621; ul Nullo 8; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun), a bit further north. The latter has had a sensational career, having been a 17th-century jail for women suspected of witchcraft; in total, 18 women were executed here up to 1714. Nowadays the tower is a showroom

for the Baltic Gallery of Art, exhibiting funky contemporary works.

One more enduring element of the fortifications is the **New Gate** (Brama Nowa), facing the elaborate Renaissance-Gothic **town hall**. You can climb the castle-like hall's impressive main **tower** (adult/concession 2/1zł; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon, 9am-3pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep) for a full Słupsk panorama. Fans of red brick and stained glass should also check out the chunky **St Mary's Church**, with its vibrantly coloured windows, and the restored city **library** (built between 1276 and 1281), itself formerly a house of God.

Not far from the library is an untidy **park** with signage commemorating the birthplace of Heinrich von Stephan (1831–97), the reputed inventor of the postcard. Pause for a moment and pay homage to the creator of the indispensable travel accessory.

Festivals & Events

Polish Piano Festival (☎ 059 842 4960) Held in September.

Komeda Jazz Festival (☎ 059 842 1396) Held in November, and dedicated to the father of Polish jazz, Krzysztof Komeda.

Sleeping

Ślupsk has a decent range of accommodation options, most in attractive old 19th-century buildings.

Hotel Mikotajek (☎ 059 842 2902; ul Szarych Szeregów 1; s 70zł, d 80-100zł) Ascend the graceful timber staircase to cheap rooms with TV, a random selection of duvet covers and a choice of en suite or shared bathrooms. The fittings are a bit shabby, but the very high ceilings lift the mood.

Hotel Piast (☎ 059 842 5286; www.hotelpiast.slupsk.pl; ul Jedności Narodowej 3; s 132-190zł, d 149-240zł, tr 240zł, ste 390-490zł; P) Affordable accommodation in a grand 1897 structure, with options ranging from basic guesthouse-style rooms to proper luxury suites. The corridors are a bit grim, but the staff are friendly and the rooms are pleasantly light and airy.

Hotel Atena (☎ 059 842 8814; www.hotel.atena.at.pl; ul Kilińskiego 7; s/d 120/150, tr 180-240zł; P) The Greek theme doesn't go much beyond the name, but the rooms are quite comfy in this classic lemon-coloured building. They're of variable size, but with neat parquet floors and pine furniture.

Hotel Zamkowy (☎ 059 842 5294; www.przymorze.com.pl; ul Dominikańska 4; s/d/tr 150/220/250zł; P) Right next to the castle, this is a good, unfussy option, with rooms ranging from tiny singles to spacious two-room doubles, with lovely clean bathrooms. Choose between the church side (views of St Hyacinthus) and the road side (garden views).

Hotel Staromiejski (☎ 059 842 8464; www.przymorze.com.pl; ul Jedności Narodowej 4; s 130-190zł, d 220-250zł, tr 270zł) Right next door to the Piast, the Staromiejski is posh and smart. The newly renovated rooms feature vibrant carpets and timber furniture. The fancy in-house restaurant (mains 12zł to 35zł) dishes up quality Polish food.

Eating & Drinking

All the hotels listed under Sleeping have their own restaurants, but there are plenty of eateries scattered around the city centre, including the following.

Bar Mleczny Poranek (☎ 059 844 3397; Al Wojska Polskiego 46; mains 1-6zł; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun) Serves up all the Polish standards and their trimmings (along with pizzas) in a plain, unreconstructed *bar mleczny* setting.

our pick **Pizza Grill w Piwnicy** (☎ 059 841 0440; ul Bema 9; mains 5-17zł; ☎ noon-10pm Sun-Mon, 11am-10pm Tue-Thu, 11am-11pm Fri & Sat) Atmospheric cellar restaurant and bar, with tables made from massive cross-sections of tree trunks. Menu choices include good pizzas and various grilled meat dishes. Try not to meet the gaze of the stuffed animals on the walls.

For a drink in style, overlooking the gardens of broad Al Sienkiewicza, **Caffeteria Retro** (☎ 059 841 4235; Al Sienkiewicza 3; ☎ 9am-midnight Mon-Fri, noon-midnight Sat & Sun) is the place to park yourself. If you're feeling reckless, it sells beers flavoured with syrups such as mint, coconut or Irish cream.

Getting There & Away

BUS

PKS buses serve Leba (10zł, 1½ hours, two daily), Gdynia (15zł, three hours, two daily) and Darłowo (8.50zł, 1½ hours, 11 daily). Buses to Smołdzino (7.50zł, 45 minutes) go regularly throughout the day, and six continue as far as Kluki (6.80zł, one hour).

Three companies operate buses to Ustka (3.80zł, 30 minutes): PKS, Nord Express and MZK, the local bus company. You can expect several services hourly in summer, departing from Al Wojska Polskiego.

TRAIN

The PKP station has trains roughly every two hours east to Gdańsk (31zł, two hours). Eight trains head west to Szczecin (42zł, 3½ hours). Three trains go straight to Warsaw (53zł, seven hours), with two extra services in summer.

USTKA

pop 16,000

This fishing port is an ambient inclusion in the list of Baltic resort towns, with a pleasant, neatly maintained centre and some impressive, elegant architecture. It's been popular with German sun-seekers since 19th-century; 'Iron Chancellor' Otto von Bismarck built an elaborate beach shack here, and their enthusiasm shows no sign of abating. As a result, the town offers a lively seaside promenade, a good quantity of parkland and some appealing accommodation options.

Information

Bank Pekao (ul Marynarki Polskiej 81c)

Doma Ustka (☎ 059 814 5623; www.doma.ustka.pl; ul Wilcza 22) Accommodation-finding service.

Post office (ul Marynarki Polskiej 47)

Tourist office (☎ 059 814 7170; www.ustka.pl; ul Marynarki Polskiej 87; ☎ 8am-8pm Jul & Aug, 9am-5pm Mon-Sat Sep-Jun) Can provide information on fishing tours, horse riding, canoeing and hiking in the area.

Sleeping & Eating

The helpful tourist office staff can help find you a place in a hotel, pension, holiday home or private house, starting from 55zł per person.

Baltic Art Gallery (Bałtycka Galeria Sztuki; ☎ 059 814 6089; www.hotel.baltic-gallery.art.pl; ul Zaruskiego 1a; d/tr 60/75zł; ☎) Art imitates life at this 19th-century granary, which is right by the port, and doubles as a contemporary art gallery. The art is downstairs, the budget travellers up above.

Pensjonat Oleńka (☎ 059 814 8522; ul Zaruskiego 1; d 250, ste 400-550zł) Just next door, in the middle of the granary row, the Oleńka has just three rooms and four suites, all elegantly stylish.

Hotel Rejs (☎ 059 814 7850; www.hotelrejs.com in Polish; ul Marynarki Polskiej 51; s/d 190/260zł, ste 260-320zł; P) Swish central hotel, just minutes from the beach and offering spiffy modern standards. It has an excellent house restaurant with a geographically diverse wine list.

Villa Red (☎ 059 814 8000; www.villa-red.pl; ul Żeromskiego 1; s/d/tr/ste 260/340/370/580zł; P) A grand old redbrick pile built in 1886 for Otto von Bismarck, Ustka's most prominent beach-side villa is crammed with antique furniture. There's also a restaurant and nightclub in the grounds.

Camping Słoneczny (☎ 059 814 5586; ul Grunwaldzka 35; dm 35zł, cabins 100zł) The most convenient of the two seasonal camping grounds, about 1.2km away from the beach. Cabin space disappears like snow in summer.

Getting There & Away

The train station is diagonally opposite the tourist office. The bus station is a five-minute walk further north along Al Marynarki Polskiej. Trains to Ślupsk depart about every other hour (4.50zł, 25 minutes) in summer, and there are three or four buses per hour (3.80zł, 30 minutes). Regular buses also go to Rowy (6.80zł, one hour), on the edge of Słowiński National Park. In July and August, Polski Express runs daily to Warsaw (81zł, nine hours).

DARŁOWO

pop 14,000

This spread-out coastal settlement west of Ustka falls into three easy parts: inland

Darłowo, and the western and eastern sections of Darłówek, a beachfront settlement divided by the Wieprza River. The result is an interesting contrast of the historic and the hedonistic – represented by the medieval character of Darłowo and the prosaic seaside feel of Darłówek.

Darłowo, 2.5km from the Baltic, was yet another successful Hanseatic trading port (see boxed text, p413) in medieval times, with a familiar chessboard of streets laid out in 1312. It also has several venerable buildings worth a look.

Darłówek, by contrast, was once a small fishing port but has developed into a popular seaside resort, its western and eastern sides linked by a pedestrian drawbridge that opens when boats go into or out of the bay. The two towns are linked by local buses that run regularly along both sides of the river.

Information

Post office (ul Morska 3)

Tourist office (☎ 094 314 2902; ul Zamkowa 4; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sun & Sat) Near the castle.

Sights

South of Darłowo's central Rynek is its well-preserved 14th-century **castle**, erected in 1352 and renovated in 1988. It was the residence of the Pomeranian dukes until the Swedes devastated it during the Thirty Years' War, and the Brandenburgs took it following the Treaty of Westphalia. The dethroned King Erik, who ruled Denmark, Norway and Sweden between 1396 and 1438 and became known as the 'last Viking of the Baltic', lived in the castle for the last 10 years of his life. He is believed to have hidden his enormous ill-gotten treasure here; so far it remains undiscovered, so keep your eyes peeled as you wander about!

The castle's resident **museum** (Muzeum Zamku Książąt Pomorskich; ☎ 094 314 2351; www.muzeumdarlowo.pl; ul Zamkowa 4; adult/concession 8/4zł; ☎ 10am-4pm) features well-restored period interiors packed with folk carvings, portraits of Pomeranian princes, original Danzig furniture, sacred art, armour, quite a few paintings of ships at sea, and even some exhibits from the Far East. No English captions, but it's still worth a look. Poke around the claustrophobic brick basement to see the former beer cellars and medieval central heating.

Besides the main body of the castle, there is a **Nautineum** (admission 3zł) holding seafaring artefacts, just under the ramparts. Other sections house temporary exhibitions, including the castle's main **tower** (admission 2zł).

The western side of the Rynek is occupied by the **town hall**, a largish Baroque building, lacking a tower and fairly sober in decoration except for its original central doorway, and a rather fetching nautical fountain out front. Right behind it rises the massive brick **St Mary's Church**. Begun in the 1320s and enlarged later, it has preserved its Gothic shape pretty well.

Worth special attention are the three **tombs** placed in the chapel under the tower. The one made of sandstone holds the ashes of King Erik, who died in Darłowo in 1459. His tombstone, commissioned in 1882 by the Prussian Emperor Wilhelm II, isn't as impressive as the two mid-17th-century, richly decorated tin tombs standing on either side of it, which contain the remains of the last West Pomeranian duke Jadwig and his wife Elizabeth.

A few hundred metres north of the Rynek is the marvellous **St Gertrude's Chapel** (Kaplica Św Gertrudy). The most unusual building in town, it is 12-sided and topped with a high, shingled central spire. It's been renovated and looks amazing, but is usually only open for Mass.

Sleeping

Accommodation is highly seasonal, with summer lodgings operating mainly in Darłówek. Many locals rent out rooms in their homes, from 30zł per person.

Hotel Irena (☎ 094 314 3692; Al Wojska Polskiego 64, Darłowo; s/d/tr/ste 70/120/130/150zł) One of a handful of options in central Darłowo, the Irena is a decent pension, with neat, clean rooms and easy access to the castle and the bus station.

Róża Wiatrów (☎ 094 314 2127; www.rozawiatrow.pl; ul Muchy 2, Darłówek; camp sites per adult/child 10/8zł, d 230-320zł, tr 270-400zł, cabins 60-100zł, apt 420zł; ☎ May-Oct, camping Jun-Aug) This multifaceted holiday complex near the sea has camping space for 100 bodies and offers plenty of other accommodation, from plain to glam.

Klub Plaza (☎ 094 314 2407; ul Stowiańska 3, Darłówek; s/d/q 185/370/800zł; ☎ ☎ ☎) Complex situated bang on the beachfront, offering a staggering range of facilities. Prices include breakfast (even with self-catering facilities), the huge penthouse apartments sleep up to six people, and you get a choice of sea or park views.

Getting There & Away

The bus terminal is at the southwestern end of Darłowo, a 10-minute walk from the Rynek. Buses run twice a day to Ustka (7.30zł, 50 minutes) and Słupsk (8.50zł, 1½ hours).

KOŁOBRZEG

pop 44,000

If like lying on the beach but quickly get bored, Kołobrzeg (*ko-wob-zhek*) may appeal. This atmospheric seaside town, with its long clean beach, spa treatments, beer gardens and relaxed strolling crowds of German tourists, is big enough to offer urban distractions on top of the delights of sea and sand. It's actually one of Poland's oldest settlements, having been founded in the 7th century when salt springs were discovered here. In 1000 it became a seat of the Polish bishopric, putting it on a par with Kraków and Wrocław.

The good times couldn't last, unfortunately, the town became a popular destination for military invaders, including Swedes, Brandenburgs, Russians and the French forces under Napoleon. Once this phase was over, Kołobrzeg reinvented itself as a sunny spa resort, only to be demolished by the two-week battle for the city in the closing months of WWII.

With the war well behind it, Kołobrzeg is once again a popular seaside city and busy working port, and some effort has been made to rebuild it in a style sympathetic with its history. Factor in its plentiful parks and lively beachfront area, and you have a coastal city that well repays a few days' visit.

Information

Albatros (☎ 094 354 2800; www.albatros.turystyka.pl; ul Morska 7A; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Accommodation service.

Bank Pekao (ul Zródlana 5)

BPH Bank (ul Łopuskiego 6)

Net Spin (☎ 094 354 7366; Gielkowa 7C; per hr 4zł;

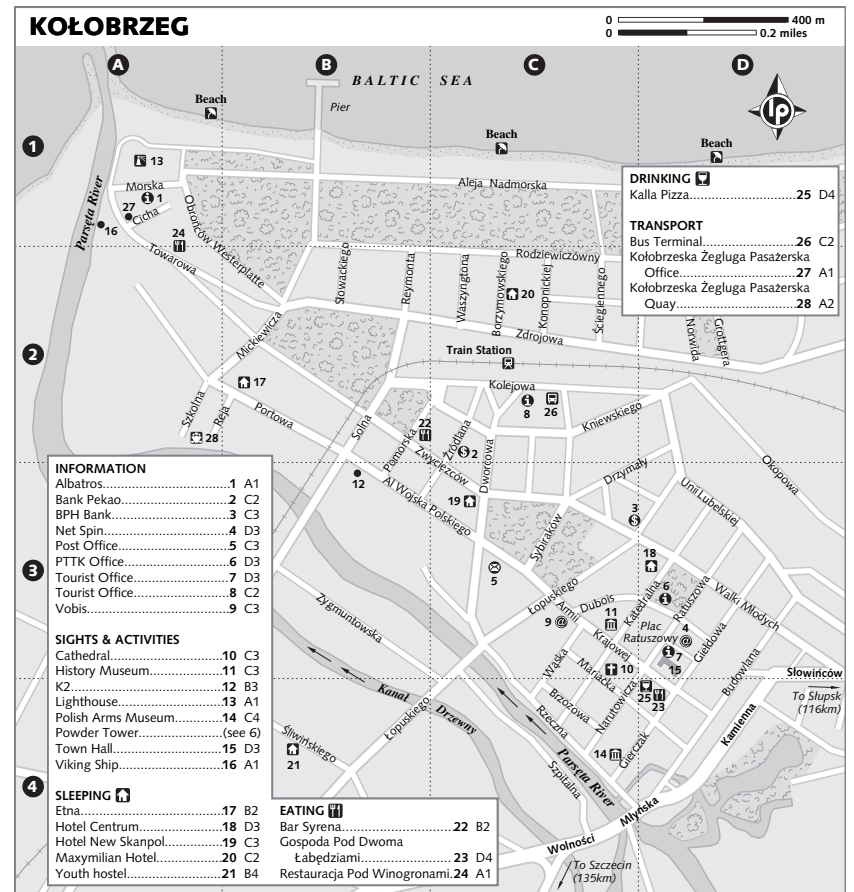
☎ 10am-9pm) Internet access.

Post office (ul Armii Krajowej 1)

PTTK (☎ 094 352 2311; butpttk@interia.pl; Baszta Prochowa, ul Dubois 20; ☎ 7.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) Accommodation and information.

Tourist office train station (☎ 094 352 7939; www.kolo-brzeg.pl; ul Dworcowa 1; ☎ 8am-5pm Jul & Aug, 8am-4pm Mon-Fri Sep-Jun); city centre (☎ 094 354 7220; Plac Ratuszowy 2/1; ☎ 8am-5pm)

Vobis (☎ 094 354 0891; ul Armii Krajowej 20; per hr 4zł; ☎ 10am-6pm) Internet access.



Sights & Activities

Not much remains of Kołobrzeg's old quarter, but the area around the central Rynek has been rebuilt as what you might call the **New Old Town**, an interesting blend of old and new architecture.

The 14th-century **cathedral** is the most important historic sight in town. Though badly damaged in 1945, it has been rebuilt close to its original form. For such a massive building, it has a surprisingly light-filled interior, illuminated by its extremely tall and narrow windows. Its colossal two conjoined towers occupy the whole width of the building, and the façade is a striking composition of windows placed haphazardly – a bizarre folly of its medieval builders and rebuilders.

The five-naved interior is impressively spacious. Its most striking feature is the leaning columns on the right side of the nave, which give the impression that the cathedral is on the point of collapsing. Don't worry – they have been leaning since the 16th century.

Old fittings include three 16th-century triptychs and a unique Gothic wooden chandelier (1523) in the central nave. There are some even older objects such as the bronze baptismal font (1355) featuring scenes of Christ's life, a 4m-high, seven-armed candelabrum (1327) and the stalls in the chancel (1340). Outside is a striking modern monument celebrating 1000 years of Polish Catholicism; the design, a symbolic split cross joined by a peace dove, depicts

influential rulers Bolesław Chrobrego and Otto III.

The **town hall**, just east of the cathedral, is a neo-Gothic structure designed by Karl Friedrich Schinkel and erected in the 1830s after the previous 14th-century building was razed by Napoleon's forces in 1807. The area in the front of the main entrance is populated by beer gardens in summer, so it's a pleasant place to sit and admire the architecture. One of its wings houses a **modern art gallery** (☎ 094 352 4348; ul Armii Krajowej 12; adult/concession 4/2zł; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun).

Prepare yourself for a surprise – the **Polish Arms Museum** (Muzeum Oręża Polskiego; ☎ 094 352 5254; ul Gierczak 5; adult/concession 7/5zł; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon, Tue & Thu-Sun, 9.30am-noon Wed Jun-Aug, 10am-4pm Tue, Wed & Fri-Sun, 11am-5pm Thu Sep-May, outdoor display only Tue) is more interesting than you'd expect. Its displays cover the history of weaponry across the ages, with examples of swords, armour, halberds and more modern military technology, including an outdoor display of suitably daunting weapons and vehicles. Its vast display of cannonballs is courtesy of Kołobrzeg's various battles, and the 1945 destruction is impressively depicted via war wreckage against a panorama of the burning city. It's well worth buying the English language guidebook for 6zł.

Its sister institution, the **History Museum** (☎ 094 352 5253; ul Armii Krajowej 13; adult/concession 7/5zł; ☎ 10am-4pm Wed, Fri & Sat, 11am-7pm Thu) is also worth a look, partly because it's housed in a gracious old merchant's house, the Braunschweig Palace. It has a neatly presented collection, with an emphasis on weights and scales. Head downstairs for an interesting audiovisual presentation (in English on request) about the city's history, using images of old postcards.

Around the corner, near the Hotel Centrum, is the **Powder Tower** (Baszta Prochowa; ul Dubois 20). This 15th-century survivor from the original city walls was given this name in 1945, in honour of an earlier tower that exploded into oblivion in 1657 when its gunpowder store caught fire. Occasional medieval fairs are held around its base.

In the seaside sector, the **beach** itself is the attraction, supplemented by the usual seasonal stalls, games, novelty boat trips, buskers and other street life. There are also various outlets offering **spa treatments**, though for some odd reason they're rarely available on

weekends. At intervals along the sands you can hire a **beach chair** (per hour 8zł) for two, to sunbathe in comfort. Walk out 200m over the sea on the **pier**, an obligatory trip for holidaymakers. To the west, by the harbour and its newly constructed cluster of waterside apartments, stands the **lighthouse** (latarnia Morska; ☎ 0502 058 767; adult/concession 3/2zł; ☎ 10am-4pm daily, ☎ until sunset Jul & Aug), which you can climb for panoramic views.

A fun excursion is a ride on the replica **viking ship** (☎ 0604 189 120; cnr ul Towarowa & ul Gicha; adult/concession 20/15zł; ☎ 10am-5pm), which heads into the Baltic for regular 45-minute cruises. If you fancy more active exercise, head to **K2** (☎ 094 354 7874; Al Wojska Polskiego 28h; per hr 5zł, per day 30zł; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat) to hire a bicycle.

Sleeping

The summer crowds can make a real dent in Kołobrzeg's substantial accommodation range, though private rooms are on offer from locals hanging around the tourist office and train station brandishing *wolne pokoje* (rooms free) signs. You can expect to pay about 30zł to 35zł per person for these rooms.

Youth hostel (☎ 094 352 2769; ul Śliwińskiego 1; dm 60zł; ☎ Jul & Aug) Basic accommodation in the summer months, set up in a local school. It's located to the west of the city centre, across the Parsęta River.

Etna (☎ 094 355 2525; www.hoteletna.pl; ul Portowa 18; s/d/ste 160/200/300zł; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) This massive beach-area building looks plain from the outside, but the rooms are spacious and bright, and you can indulge in a full range of spa treatments here (even Polynesian massage!).

Hotel Centrum (☎ 094 354 5560; www.centrum.info.pl; ul Katedralna 12; s/d/tr/ste 130/210/260/300zł; ☎ ☎ ☎) Popular with tour groups, the Hotel Centrum provides comfortable accommodation right in the city centre, with its own restaurant, café and nightclub. The large rooms, with relaxing timber tones, often have park or garden views.

Hotel New Skanpol (☎ 094 352 8211; www.news.kanpol.pl; ul Dworcowa 10; s/d/ste €50/69/95; ☎ ☎ ☎) The communist-era Skanpol has recently been given a 21st-century make-over, and is now an attractive option with loads of facilities, including in-house health treatments. Though its blocky 1960s styling makes this

hotel stand out like a sore thumb, its height creates good views over the city.

our pick **Maxymilian Hotel** (☎ 094 354 0012; www.maxymilian-hotel.pl; ul Borzymowskiego 3; s/d 185/280zł, ste 380-430zł; ☎ ☎ ☎) The splendidly classy Maxymilian revels in a quiet location and quality rooms – a touch more elegant than those usually found in resort hotels. The restaurant and spa facilities mean you don't have to go far to relax. Breakfast is an extra 25zł, and full board is available.

Eating & Drinking

In the beach district, most holiday homes provide meals for their guests (and often for nonguests); half and full board is often possible. There are also seasonal fast-food outlets and cafés everywhere, as well as some good year-round options.

our pick **Restauracja Pod Winogronami** (☎ 094 354 7336; www.winogrona.pl; ul Towarowa 16; mains 12-52zł; ☎ 11am-midnight) In the harbour area, 'Under the Grapes' has a slightly French air, but the hearty menu draws mainly on the Polish and German rule books, with a few intriguing items such as 'trapper's cutlet with mushrooms'.

Bar Syrena (☎ 094 352 3188; ul Zwycięzców 11; mains 7-13zł; ☎ 11am-6pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat, 11am-4pm Sun) Modern take on the classic *bar mleczny*, serving up Polish standards in a spick-and-span tiled dining room with abstract prints on the walls. There's a reasonable selection of salads, and the *placek po węgiersku* (Hungarian potato cake and goulash) is to die for.

Gospoda Pod Dwoma Łabędziami (☎ 094 354 7126; ul Armii Krajowej 30b; mains 14-32zł; ☎ 11am-9pm) Downstairs eatery with a stone floor and rustic décor, and drawings of Kołobrzeg buildings on the walls. Hearty Polish food is on the menu, including some excellent soups.

Kalla Pizza (☎ 094 354 0330; ul Armii Krajowej 32; mains 10-31zł; ☎ 10am-11pm) A great place for a drink is this beer garden operated by Kalla Pizza in the warmer months, in the square in front of the town hall. It's a cut above its rivals, with floral décor and a miniature Neptune fountain among the timber tables. You can order pizza from the nearby shopfront and eat it alfresco.

Getting There & Away

The train and bus stations are next to each other, halfway between the beach and the historic centre. The harbour is 1km northwest.

There are seven trains daily east to Gdańsk (42zł, four hours) and six west to Szczecin (18.50zł, 2¾ hours). Six fast trains head to Warsaw (69zł, 9¾ hours).

Buses head to Świnoujście (22zł, 2½ hours, four daily) and Słupsk (22zł, 2¾ hours, twice daily). Polski Express runs one bus a day to Warsaw (69zł, 7½ hours).

Kołobrzaska Żegluga Pasażerska (☎ 094 352 8920; www.kzp.man.pl; ul Morska 2) operates regular catamaran cruises to Nexo on Bornholm Island, Denmark (one way/return 100/150zł, 4½ hours). The service sails daily from May to September, and three times a week from October to April.

KAMIENŃ POMORSKI

pop 9100

On paper, this small town doesn't seem promising: it was devastated in the battles of WWII, and very little was restored in a sympathetic style. However, the breathtakingly ugly buildings that fill the town centre are more than made up for by the attractive historic fragments that remain, and its waterfront location on Kamień Bay gives the sleepy centre a touch of scenic beauty.

Information

Bank Pekao (ul Gryfitów 2a)
Post office (ul Pocztowa 1)

Sights

Kamień's **cathedral** is well worth stopping for as you journey along the coast. Begun by the Wolinian bishops in a Romanesque style, it was then thoroughly revamped in the 14th century in the Gothic fashion, which has basically survived to this day. Inside is an impressive triptych on the high altar, thought to derive from the school of Veit Stoss, the maker of the famous pentaptych in the Basilica of the Assumption of Our Lady (p182) in Kraków.

While you're in the church, don't miss the cloister **pleasure garden** (admission 2zł) – the entrance is through a door from the left-hand aisle. This retreat from the woes of the medieval world is a beautiful, serene space that retains its power to calm the nerves. Stand in the centre of the garden, next to the 1124 baptismal font, and breathe deeply. Once you're done, check out the old tombstones along the walls of the cloister, which were moved here in 1890 from the church's floor to preserve their carved images.

Going west through the centre of town you'll reach the **Wolin Gate** (Brama Wolińska), part of the 14th-century city walls. It now houses the **Museum of Precious Stones** (Muzeum Kamieni; ☎ 0609 358 205; ul Słowackiego 1; adult/concession 8/5zł; 🕒 10am-6pm Jun-Sep, 10am-5pm Oct-May), which features semiprecious rocks and baubles, along with dinosaur bones and other fossils. It's a refreshingly interesting exhibition that's well laid out and well lit, despite the lack of English captions. Be aware that the steps to each new level of the building get steeper and narrower!

Festivals & Events

The **Festival of Organ & Chamber Music** (☎ 091 382 0541) is held from mid-June to late August, with concerts every Friday evening, and shorter organ performances twice daily.

Sleeping & Eating

Youth hostel (☎ 091 382 0841; Plac Katedralny 5; dm 15-20zł; 🕒 Jul & Aug, reception 7-10am & 5-10pm) In a school across the road from the cathedral, this 60-bed hostel has large dorms only, though the impressive redbrick edifice doesn't lack character.

Hotel Staromiejski (☎ 091 382 2644; www.hotel-staromiejski.pl; ul Rybacka 3; s/d/tr 112/160/204zł; 📞 📺 📺) A smart, service-oriented hotel, though it lacks the character and charm of the neighbouring Hotel Pod Muzami. However, you can't beat its terrace café for views over the water.

Hotel Pod Muzami (☎ 091 382 2241; www.podmuzami.pl; ul Gryfitów 1; s/d/tr 115/164/200zł) In a beautiful historic timbered house on the corner of the central Rynek, the Pod Muzami is a breath of fresh air. Friendly staff offer 12 reasonably spacious rooms within sight of the water, plus a good house restaurant (mains 6zł to 29zł).

Between the Rynek and the cathedral, **Kawiarnia o Poranku** (☎ 091 382 2425; ul Gryfitów 14; mains 8-12zł; 🕒 10am-11pm) is a pleasant place for a hot drink or light meal after sightseeing. Its menu contains multiple variants of hot chocolate and tea, along with wine, beer, and great garlic bread.

Getting There & Away

The bus terminal, 600m south of the centre, has services every two hours or so to Szczecin (18zł, two hours), and up to three an hour to Międzyzdroje (14zł, 1½ hours) and Świnoujście (15zł, 1¾ hours). There are also two fast buses daily to Kołobrzeg (19zł,

1½ hours) and two to Gdynia (45zł, seven hours) via Słupsk. From the nearby sleepy train station, two to three services a day head to Szczecin (14zł, 1½ hours).

MIĘDZYZDROJE

pop 5500

Międzyzdroje (myen-dzi-zdro-yeh) almost shuts down and rolls up its main street in winter. However, blessed with warm seas and clean beaches, it's a thriving seaside resort in the warmer months. A long sandy shoreline and a picturesque coastal cliff occupy the northeast of town, and the attractive Wolin National Park stretches to the southeast. Parks and gardens in the centre of town link the two, and provide a pleasant place to while away a few leisurely hours.

Information

Internet Café (☎ 091 328 0421; ul Norwida 17a; per hr 5zł; 🕒 11am-7pm Mon-Fri, 11am-6pm Sat & Sun)

PTTK (☎ 091 328 0382; www.pttk-międzyzdroje.com; ul Kolejowa 2) Can arrange guides to natural attractions.

Tourist office (☎ 091 328 2778; www.międzyzdroje.pl in Polish; ul Bohaterów Warszawy 20; 🕒 10am-5pm)

Viking Tour (☎ 091 328 0768; www.vikingtour.com.pl; ul Niepodległości 2a) Accommodation bookings and tours.

Wolin Travel (☎ 091 328 2774; www.wolin-travel.com; ul Turystyczna 2/22) Accommodation bookings.

Sights

The **Natural History Museum** (Muzeum Przyrodnicze; ☎ 091 328 07 27; ul Niepodległości 3; adult/concession 5/3zł; 🕒 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) is a taxidermist's heaven, displaying dozens of stuffed examples of the fauna of Wolin National Park, via a fairly dull set of static displays in gloomily lit rooms. There are also exhibits of minerals, along with amber, and a marginally more engaging fossil display upstairs. Though unexciting, the museum's collection is a good overview of the park's wildlife.

Outside, two large bird cages can be found on either side of the museum building; one holds two long-eared owls, the other a genuine (if slightly scruffy-looking) white-tailed eagle, said to be the model for Poland's national emblem. The national park's headquarters are just opposite the eagle.

Sleeping & Eating

Międzyzdroje is crammed with accommodation – the best approach is to contact one of the specialised local travel agencies (see

opposite). Private rooms start at 30zł per person in July and August, 20zł in other months. Pensions/holiday homes will cost from 40/30zł per person.

There are cafés, restaurants and snack bars liberally scattered through the town, many in pleasing proximity to parks or the sea.

Dom Turysty PTTK (☎ 091 328 0462; ul Kolejowa 2; s/d 35/70zł; 📞) This old-fashioned hostel is one of the cheapest places to stay in Międzyzdroje, though its room standards and location won't knock your socks off. It is handy for the main bus stop and the museum, however.

FWP Posejdon (☎ 091 328 0567; www.fwp.pl; Promenada Gwiazd 4; s/d/tr 110/200/300zł; 📞 📺 📺) Though the main building of this complex is downright ugly, and the rooms somewhat scuffed, you can't beat its location just a stone's throw from the sea. In addition to the hotel-standard rooms in its three main buildings, the FWP offers 500 beds spread over 11 budget holiday homes.

Hotel Amber Baltic (☎ 091 328 1000; www.hotel-amber-baltic.pl; Promenada Gwiazd 1; s/d €93/132, ste €205-250; 📞 📺 📺 📺 📺) If you fancy a splurge, you're in the right place – this is one of the best resort hotels on the coast, with great views over the Baltic and various amenities including a Jacuzzi, solarium and gym. Golfers can catch a shuttle bus to the hotel's own course, a short distance outside town.

Camping Nr 24 Gromada (☎ 091 328 0275; ul Polna 10a; tents per person 13-15zł; 🕒 Jun-Sep) At the southwestern end of town, Gromada is the largest camping facility here; there are another two camping grounds slightly closer to the beach.

Restauracja Bursztynowy Szlak (☎ 091 328 0649; ul Niepodległości 4; mains 8-22zł; 🕒 10am-10pm) Across the road from the museum, this eatery offers good-value dishes in a soothingly rustic setting. There's a decent selection of salads, *pierogi* and omelettes among the menu choices.

Getting There & Away

The train station is at the southern end of town, with a PKS stop outside. Międzyzdroje is on the Szczecin-Świnoujście railway line and all trains stop here, providing roughly 20 daily services in each direction. There are also four daily trains to Wrocław (52zł, seven hours) and three to Warsaw (57zł, 8½ hours).

The main bus stop is on ul Niepodległości, opposite the museum. PKS and private buses

run to Świnoujście (4.80zł, 15 minutes) up to five times an hour. Two fast buses go daily to Kołobrzeg (22zł, 2½ hours) and two as far as Gdynia (54zł, eight hours). In summer there are hourly buses to Kamień Pomorski (14zł, 1½ hours).

WOLIN NATIONAL PARK

Set in the far northwestern corner of the country, Wolin National Park (Woliński Park Narodowy) occupies the central section of Wolin Island, just southeast of Międzyzdroje. With a total area of about 50 sq km, it's one of the smaller Polish parks, yet it's picturesque enough to warrant a day or two's walking.

The park's northern edge drops sharply into the sea, forming an 11km-long sandy cliff nearly 100m high in places.

Back from the coast are a number of lakes, mostly on the remote eastern edge of the park. The most beautiful is the horseshoe-shaped **Lake Czajcze**. Away from the lakeland, there's **Lake Turkusowe** (Turquoise), named after the colour of its water, at the southern end of the park, and the lovely **Lake Gardno** close to the seashore, next to the Międzyzdroje-Dziwnów road. The lakes are surrounded by mixed forest, with beech, oak and pine predominating. The flora and fauna is relatively diverse, with a rich bird life. The last wild bison in Pomerania were wiped out in the 14th century, but there's a small **bison reserve** (adult/concession 5/3zł; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) inside the park, 2km east of Międzyzdroje.

Activities

The best way to explore the park is by **hiking**, and the small area means a good walk needn't be too taxing. Three marked trails wind into the park from Międzyzdroje. The red trail leads northeast along the shore, then turns inland to **Wiselka** and continues through wooded hills to the small village of **Kotczewo**. The green trail runs east across the middle of the park, skirts the lakeland and also ends in Kotczewo. The blue trail goes to the southern end of the park, passing the Turquoise Lake on the way. It then continues east to the town of **Wolin**.

All the trails are well marked and easy. Get a copy of the detailed *Woliński Park Narodowy* map (scale 1:30,000), and consult the park headquarters in Międzyzdroje for further information.

ŚWINOUJŚCIE

pop 40,000

As far northwest as you can get in Poland without leaving the country, Świnoujście (shvee-no-ooysh-cheh) is an attractive seaside town with a touch of faded grandeur along its waterfront promenade, and a relaxed atmosphere despite its role as a major port and naval base. There are plenty of green parks and a choice of water views over sea or river, something that may have inspired its famous literary residents from its 19th-century German past, including novelist and travel writer Theodor Fontane and poet Ernst Schreierberg. Other notable visitors included Kaiser Wilhelm II and Tsar Nicholas II, who met here in 1907, sparking fruitless hopes that their friendship would avert a European war.

Świnoujście's location makes the city a handy entry point for travellers across the Baltic, via ferry services from Sweden and Denmark; it also has a border crossing with Germany.

Orientation

Świnoujście straddles two islands at the mouth of the Świna River. The eastern part of town, on Wolin Island, has the port and transport facilities; the main town is across the river on Uznam Island (Usedom in German), linked by a frequent shuttle ferry. Here you'll find the town centre and, 1km further north, the beach resort; the two are separated by a belt of parks.

Information

Bank Pekao ul Monte Cassino (ul Monte Cassino 7) ul Piłsudskiego (ul Piłsudskiego 4)

Biuro Podróż Partner (☎ 091 322 4397; ul Bohaterów Września 83/14) Information and ferry tickets; enter via Pasaż Żeglarski.

M & M Internet Café (☎ 0602 797 510; ul Piastowska 1/4a; per hr 3zł; ☎ 10am-9pm) Internet access.

Morskie Biuro Podróż PZB (☎ 091 322 4396; mbp.swinoujscie@polferries.pl; ul Bema 9/2) Information and ferry tickets.

Post office (ul Piłsudskiego 1)

Tourist office (☎ 091 322 4999; www.swinoujscie.pl; ul Wybrzeże Władysława IV; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat)

Sights & Activities

The **beach** is one of the widest and longest in Poland, and a major tourist attraction. Back from the sands, the waterfront resort district

still retains a certain *fin-de-siècle* air in places, with some elegant villas, and the main pedestrian promenade is packed with stalls and amusements in summer. If you fancy cycling along the quiet, flat roads in this part of town, you can hire a bike from **Wypożyczalnia Rowerów Jakub** (☎ 0602 230 688; ul Matejki 19; per hr 4zł, per day 20zł; ☎ 9am-6pm).

The town centre has received a good deal of beautification in recent years, though its attractive small-scale buildings are still rudely interrupted by the odd concrete monstrosity. The marina waterfront is a good place for a stroll, and you can drop into the **Museum of Sea Fishery** (Muzeum Rybołówstwa Morskiego; ☎ 091 321 2426; Plac Rybaka 1; adult/concession 5/3zł; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) on your way. If you're keen on stuffed sea life, you'll be delighted by the static displays of albatrosses, sharks and seals, along with fishing paraphernalia and model boats. The museum's saving grace is its three tanks of exotic fish, including a real live piranha. There are also displays on the town's history, including historic official seals of a nonaquatic nature, but no captions in English.

A curious remnant from WWII is the **Air Raid Shelter** (ul Wyspiańskiego 51), which was once used by residents sheltering from heavy Allied bombing of then German Swinemünde. The shelter's exterior is inexplicably decorated with nautical memorabilia including anchors and ropes. It's not open for viewing, but there's an explanatory plaque in English.

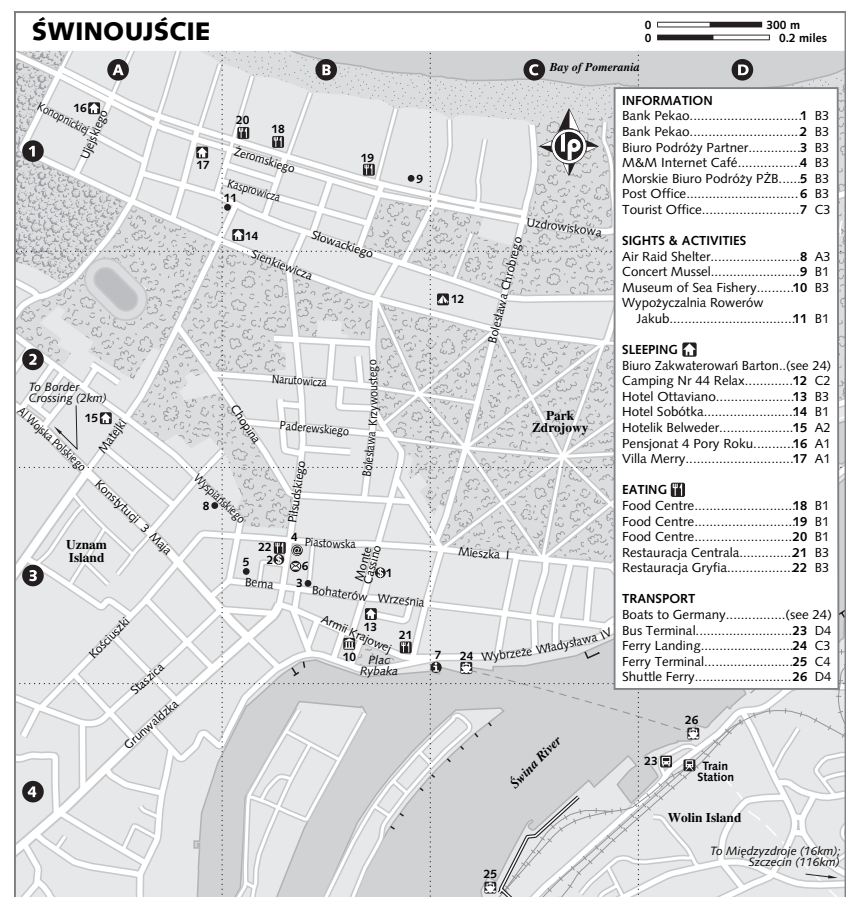
Festivals & Events

At the end of September, just as the tourist season is waning, Świnoujście takes part in the **Four Corners Culture Week** (☎ 091 321 3705; www.four-corners.org), a series of concerts and exhibitions held in conjunction with similar events on Bornholm (Denmark), Rügen (Germany) and Southeast Skåne (Sweden). The main stage is the whimsically designed open-air Concert Mussel (Muszla Koncertowa; Map p469), near the beach.

Sleeping & Eating

As in other Baltic beach resorts, the high season is in July and August. The tourist office keeps an eye on what's available in all categories.

There are a few year-round restaurants, mostly in the centre, but the majority of places are seasonal. Three loosely defined food cen-



tres on the beach promenade, ul Żeromskiego, have convenient clusters of eating options.

Biuro Zakwaterowań Barton (☎ 091 321 1155; www.barton.com.pl; Wybrzeże Władysława IV) For private rooms, head to this small office by the ferry landing. Prices start from 25zł and average around 40zł to 60zł per person; note that most are in the southwestern suburbs, with almost none in the beach area.

Villa Merry (☎ 091 321 2619; www.villa-merry.com; ul Żeromskiego 16; d €18-23, apt €26-90; P) One of the top self-catering options in town, Merry's two swish Art Nouveau buildings contain several kitchen-equipped apartments with an accent on white tiles and cool blue tones.

Pensjonat 4 Pory Roku (☎ 091 321 1694; www.4poryroku.com.pl; ul Ujejskiego 8; d 230-270zł, tr/q/ste

345/410/395zł; P ☎ ☎) Hidden gem off the main promenade, offering beautiful light-filled rooms with parquet floors. Breakfast is served in the sociable communal kitchen, and the pension also smokes its own fish.

our pick Hotelik Belweder (☎ 091 327 1678; www.hotel-belweder.pl; ul Wyspiańskiego 1; s/d/tr/ste 180/240/330/380zł; P ☎ ☎) Small hotel in a leafy neighbourhood, within walking distance of both the town centre and the beach. Spacious rooms are done out in bright orange tones, with lofty ceilings and well-maintained fittings. A good place to escape the summer bustle.

Hotel Ottaviano (☎ 091 321 4403; www.ottaviano.pl; ul Monte Cassino 3; s/d/tr 168/254/278zł; P ☎ ☎ ☎) Well located in the town centre, and handy

for the ferry crossing, the Ottaviano is good value. There's a hint of Scandinavian in the décor, via loads of blonde wood and a light and airy look. The in-house restaurant has views across the attractive paved street.

Hotel Sobótka (☎ 091 321 4964; www.sobotka.uznam.net.pl; ul Sienkiewicza 13; d/tr 264/360zł, ste 310-570zł; P ☒ ☒) The Sobótka is a plain-looking sanatorium hotel, with the scents of mysterious therapeutic agents hovering in the air. It offers dozens of health treatments, many of which you'll never have heard of before (magneto-stimulation anyone?). Full board available.

Camping Nr 44 Relax (☎ 091 321 3912; www.camping-relax.com.pl; ul Słowackiego 1; camp sites per adult/student/child 12/10/7zł; bungalows 110-190zł) This large, popular camping ground is superbly located between the beach and the spa park, and has a good selection of year-round bungalows, though you'll need a miracle to get one in July or August.

Restauracja Gryfia (☎ 091 321 2578; ul Piłsudskiego 10; mains 10-30zł; ☎ 10am-3am) This eatery's black interior makes for a sombre atmosphere, but it's relieved by hearty serves of Polish standards. Every evening except Wednesday, the Gryfia's clientele trips the light fantastic via music and dancing.

Restauracja Centrala (☎ 091 321 2640; ul Armii Krajowej 3; mains 10-45zł; ☎ 10am-midnight) Chilled-out space with a gorgeous burnt orange interior, and striking frescoes featuring primitive figures; grab a seat for marina views. The apple strudel with vanilla cream is particularly good, and there's live jazz here at regular intervals.

Getting There & Away

The most convenient overland crossing to/from Germany is 2km west of town. The first town on the German side, Ahlbeck, handles transport further into the country.

BOAT

Tickets for all boat services are available at the terminals and from most travel agencies around town.

Germany

The German company **Adler-Schiffe** (☎ 091 322 4288; www.adler-schiffe.de) runs boats from Świnoujście to Ahlbeck, Heringsdorf and Bansin in Germany, up to four times daily. A return ticket, including a stopover, costs €7.50 for adults and €3.80 concession. The com-

pany also operates weekly ferries to German Altwarp (one-way adult/child €10/5, 2½ hours) and Zinnowitz (one way adult/child €9.50/4.80, five hours).

Scandinavia

Major carrier **Polferries** (☎ 322 61 40; www.polferries.pl) operates ferries to Ystad, Sweden (adult/concession Skr540/460, seven hours, daily), Rønne, Denmark (250/220kr, 5¼ hours, weekly) and Copenhagen (450/380kr, nine hours, four to five weekly). **Unity Line** (☎ 359 55 92; www.unityline.pl) also runs daily ferries to Ystad (Skr470/390, seven hours).

All ferries depart from the ferry terminal on Wolin Island.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

If you're arriving with your own transport, you can only use the shuttle ferry at weekends and after 10pm on weekdays; otherwise you'll have to head for the crossing serving Karsibór Island, 7km south of Świnoujście. Expect to wait during the peak season (usually no longer than a couple of hours). Passage for both vehicles and passengers is free.

TRAIN & BUS

The bus terminal and train station are next to each other on the right bank of the Świna River. Passenger ferries shuttle constantly between the town centre and the stations (free, 10 minutes).

All trains go via Międzyzdroje (7.50zł, 15 minutes) and Szczecin (28zł, two hours), with departures every hour or two. There are also trains to Warsaw (fast/express 58/97zł, 8¼ hours, three daily), and to Kraków (63zł, 12½ hours, four daily) via Poznań (46zł, five hours) and to Wrocław (54zł, seven hours).

There are two daily buses that run to Szczecin (25zł, 2½ hours), but plenty of services cover the coast, including 10 buses to Kamień Pomorski (15zł, 1¼ hours) and two buses to Kołobrzeg (22zł, 2½ hours). All routes go via Międzyzdroje, which is also served by half-hourly private buses (4.80zł, 15 minutes).

Europa-Linie buses (€1.90) link the Polish and German sides of the island. A day pass valid for six single journeys costs 10zł, or €4 in Germany. City bus 8 also runs to the border (2zł, 10 daily).

SZCZECIN

pop 411,000

When you first encounter the western port city Szczecin (*shcheh-cheen*), the impression is of an unaesthetic muddle of architecture inherited from wildly different ages. But on a sunny day you can't help noticing the rough-edged beauty of the crumbling German-era apartment buildings and mansions, and the city's unkempt but spacious parks, and reflect on its past splendour and future potential. Though a busy working port, there's plenty of scope for play, with enough entertainment and sights to warrant a stopover.

History

Szczecin's beginnings go back to the 8th century, when a Slav stronghold was built here. In 967 Duke Mieszko I annexed the town for the newborn Polish state, but was unable to hold or Christianise it. It was Bolesław Krzywousty who recaptured the town in 1121 and brought the Catholic faith to the locals.

Krzywousty died in 1138 and the Polish Crown crumbled; Pomerania formally became an independent principality. Periods of allegiance to Germanic and Danish rulers followed, before Western Pomerania was unified by Duke Bogusław X in 1478, with Szczecin being chosen as the capital.

The next major shift in power came in 1630, when the Swedes conquered the city. Sweden then ceded Szczecin to the kingdom of Prussia in 1720, which as part of Germany held the region until WWII. Under Prussian rule, Szczecin (Stettin in German) grew considerably, becoming the main port for landlocked Berlin. By the outbreak of WWII the city had about 300,000 inhabitants.

In April 1945 the Red Army passed through on its way to Berlin, leaving 60% of the urban area in ruins. Only 6000 souls remained of the former population, most of the others having fled.

With new inhabitants, mostly drawn from territories lost by Poland to the Soviet Union, the battered city started a new life, developing into an important port and industrial centre for the postwar nation.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Bondi (☎ 091 433 5933; Al Wyzwolenia 1; per hr 3zł; ☎ 9am-11pm)

Internet Café (☎ 091 433 0319; ul Obronców Stalingradu 12; per hr 3zł; ☎ 10am-10pm) Enter from ul Śląska.
Portal (☎ 091 488 4066; ul Kaszubska 52; per hr 4zł; ☎ 24hr)

MONEY

Bank Pekao West (Al Wojska Polskiego 1); North-west (ul Obronców Stalingradu 10/11); East (ul Grodzka 9); Northeast (Plac Żołnierza Polskiego 16)
Deutsche Bank (Al Wyzwolenia 12)

POST

Post office main post office (Al Niepodległości 41/42); station branch (ul Dworcowa 20b)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Cultural & Tourist Information Centre (☎ 091 489 1630; www.zamek.szczecin.pl; ul Korsarzy 34; ☎ 10am-6pm) In the castle.

PTTK (☎ 091 434 5624; Al Jedności Narodowej 49A)

Tourist office (☎ 091 434 0440; Al Niepodległości 1; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat Jun-Aug, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri Sep-May)

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Orbis Travel (☎ 091 434 7563; Plac Zwycięstwa 1)

Sights & Activities

Rome wasn't built in a day, and Szczecin's historic heart won't be rebuilt overnight. Gradually, however, the local authorities are building up the city's tourist infrastructure. A prime example is the **Red Tourist Route**, a 7km walking circuit around town covering 42 important historic sights and buildings; pick up the explanatory map at one of the tourist offices and look for the red arrows sprayed graffiti-style on the pavement. It's a great overview of Szczecin's attractions if you have limited time in the city.

The mother of all Szczecin monuments is the **Castle of the Pomeranian Dukes** (Zamek Książąt Pomorskich). This vast, blocky building looms over the Old Town, but the square central courtyard and simple Renaissance-style decoration atop the walls have a certain understated grace (spot the repeated circular pattern that resembles the Yin and Yang symbol). The castle was originally built in the mid-14th century and grew into its current form by 1577, but was destroyed by Allied carpet bombing in 1944 before being extensively restored. Admire the colourful historic clockface from the courtyard, with its jester

SZCZECIN

0 200 m
0 0.1 miles

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SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

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figure chiming in each new hour, then climb to the top of the 58.6m **bell tower** (adult/concession 4/3zł) for a view of the city.

The castle also accommodates the **Castle Museum** (Muzeum Zamkowe; ☎ 091 489 1630; www.zamek.szczecin.pl; ul Korsarzy 34; adult/concession 6/3zł; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Sun). Its star exhibits are six spectacular sarcophagi of the Pomeranian dukes. These large tin boxes are decorated with a fine engraved ornamentation, and were made between 1606 and 1637 by artists from Königsberg. Following the death of the last Pomeranian duke, Bogusław XIV, the crypt was walled up until the sarcophagi were discovered during restoration work in 1946, after the castle's wartime destruction. The remains of the dukes were deposited in the cathedral, while the least-damaged sarcophagi were restored for display.

Various temporary exhibitions are presented in other rooms of the castle, including art shows. In summer, concerts are held on Sunday in the courtyard or the former chapel, which occupies nearly half the northern side.

A short walk south will bring you to the 15th-century Gothic **town hall**, one of the finest buildings in the city. This is the only relic of the Old Town, having miraculously survived the near-total destruction of the district in WWII. Szczecin never enjoyed the meticulous postwar reconstruction of other Polish cities, but the Old Town is finally being pieced back together: an attractive line of stylised burghers' houses has been constructed right behind the town hall, in striking contrast to the unbecoming communist-era blocks opposite. As the renewal inches along, the area has started to fill with fashionable cafés and upmarket bars. The day the market square in front of the town hall ceases to be an open-air car park, you'll know the Old Town has finally (re)arrived.

Within the town hall is the **Historical Museum of Szczecin** (Muzeum Historii Miasta Szczecina; ☎ 091 431 5258; Plac Rzepichy 1; adult/concession 6/3zł; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun), which is well laid out within the airy light-filled interior. The star exhibit is a medieval treasure trove unearthed in 2001 during building works elsewhere in the city, a multimillion dollar collection of silver coins, buttons, rings and other jewellery – and the small iron pot the loot was stashed in. At time of research there were plans to add English captions.

Not far away is the **Cathedral Basilica of St James** (Bazylika Katedralna pw Św Jakuba Apostoła; ul Wyszyńskiego; requested donation €1; 🕒 groups 2-5pm Mon-Sat) a historic church built in the overwhelming fortress-like style favoured by the medieval religious authorities, which dominates the view toward the city centre. It was consecrated in 1187 but only reconstructed in 1972. On one side of the cathedral is the 15th-century vicarage and on the other a huge bell weighing almost 6 tonnes, dating from 1681.

The **National Museum's Department of Early Art** (Dział Sztuki Dawnej; ☎ 091 431 5200; www.muzeum.szczecin.pl; ul Staromylnska 27; adult/concession 6/3zł; 🕒 10am-4pm Tue-Sun) is located two blocks north in an 18th-century palace that formerly served as the Pomeranian parliament. It features a collection of religious art, particularly woodcarving from the 14th to 16th centuries, and you can also get the Pomeranian crown jewels. The **Contemporary Art Museum** (Muzeum Sztuki Współczesnej; ☎ 091 431 5200; www.muzeum.szczecin.pl; ul Staromylnska 1; adult/concession 6/3zł; 🕒 10am-4pm Tue-Sun), another National Museum campus directly across the street, hosts changing displays of modern art. In both buildings the captions are primarily in Polish, but there is a general brochure available in English. A joint ticket to the two institutions is 10/5zł.

A third National Museum outpost is the grand **Maritime Museum** (Muzeum Morskie; ☎ 091 431 5200; www.muzeum.szczecin.pl; ul Waly Chrobrego 3; adult/concession 6/3zł; 🕒 10am-4pm Tue-Sun), on a hill next to the Naval Academy, above the waterfront. The maritime exhibits are a bit dull, but the regional archaeology displays and ethnographical artefacts present more interest. There are minimal English captions throughout the permanent exhibitions.

A recently opened attraction near the train station is **Szczecin Underground** (☎ 091 434 0801; www.schron.szczecin.pl; ul Kolumba 1; adult/concession single tour 15/14zł, both tours 25/23zł; 🕒 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, noon-4pm Sun). This sprawling set of concrete tunnels beneath the city streets was designated as a bomb shelter in the 1940s and as a fallout shelter thereafter. Tours alternate between a WWII or Cold War theme approximately every hour, and attract a 3zł surcharge after 5pm on a weekday, after 2pm Saturday and all day Sunday. English-language tours are only scheduled for 3pm and 4pm on Saturday, but can be booked for groups of 10 or more.

Sleeping BUDGET

Summer hostel (☎ 091 433 2924; ul Grodzka 22; dm 16-25zł; ☹ Jul & Aug) A super-cheap central option for the summer months.

our pick Youth hostel (☎ 091 422 4761; www.ptsm.home.pl; ul Monte Cassino 19A; dm 20-22zł, s/d/q 50/56/96zł; ☎ ☒ ☑) Everything is pleasant about this place, with its simple but bright rooms located in a leafy neighbourhood. There's a laundry for guest use, and out in the well-kept garden there are concrete table tennis tables! It's 2km northwest of the centre; take tram 3 from the station to Plac Rodła and change for the west-bound tram 1 to the 'Piotra Skargi' stop.

Pokoje Gościnne Pocztylion (☎ 091 440 1209; ul Dworcowa 20b; dm 42zł; ☎) Talk about well-kept secrets... you have to pass a guard box to reach this unmarked accommodation. It's worth the effort as this post office facility is surprisingly nice inside, with spacious bright rooms containing fridges and TVs. There's also a kitchen and a spectacular communal lounge with enormous potted palms and a pool table.

Hotelik Słowiński (☎ 091 812 5461; ul Potulicka 1; s 73-108zł, d 88-120zł, tr 117-135zł) This former police dorm is modest and neat, if a little plain. The swirly brown carpets are a blast from the past, but the high ceilings add perspective to the smallish rooms. There's a choice of en suite or shared bathrooms.

Camping Nr 25 Marina (☎ 091 460 1165; www.camping.marina.pl; ul Przechodna 23; adult/child 15/7zł, cabins 60-100zł; ☹ May-Sep) Good camping ground with cabins on the shore of Lake Dąbie in Szczecin Dąbie, about 7km southeast of the city centre. If you are coming by train, get off in Szczecin Dąbie and continue by urban bus 56 or walk 2km.

MIDRANGE

Dom Nauczyciela (☎ 091 433 0481; www.dn.szczecin.pl; ul Słaska 4; s 100zł, d 120-140zł, tr 150zł) Quiet, neat and central, this is an unpretentious residential establishment that has light-filled rooms with stucco walls, an international bookshop, home-cooked food and massive discounts for students. Breakfast is an extra 15zł.

Hotelik Elka-Sen (☎ 091 433 5604; www.elkasen.szczecin.pl; Al 3 Maja 1a; s/d/tr/q 120/140/160/200zł; ☎ ☒ ☑) Strange name, strange location: the Elka-Sen has a lift as its front door and occupies a basement space in the School of Economics, itself next door to the local prison. The foyer's a little gloomy but the rooms receive natural light and the bathrooms shine.

Ibis Hotel (☎ 091 480 1800; www.ibishotel.com; ul Dworcowa 16; r 189zł; ☎ ☒ ☑) This business-style hotel is housed in the Novotel building but is more affordable, with straightforward neat rooms and a bar and restaurant downstairs.

Hotel Victoria (☎ 091 434 3855; Plac Batorego 2; s/d 140/190zł; ☎) Just uphill from the bus terminal and train station, this determinedly old-fashioned accommodation has friendly staff and lashings of brown in its décor, and sits opposite an unkempt park in a quieter part of the city centre. Rooms vary in size so have a look first. The downstairs Tango nightclub plays up-to-date 'boompah boompah' music, according to a staff member.

Hotel Campanile (☎ 091 481 7700; www.campanile.com.pl; ul Wyszyńskiego 30; r 199zł; ☎ ☒ ☑ ☑) This hotel is in pole position for sightseeing, as it's an easy walk from the castle, the Old Town, the train and bus stations, and the city's main drag. Rooms are compact but tidy and comfortable, with tea- and coffee-making facilities. There's a bar and restaurant off the foyer, with a bright – some might say clashing – colour scheme.

Hotel Podzamcze (☎ 091 812 1404; ul Sienna 1; s/d 190/240zł, ste 240zł; ☎) On the corner of the partially reconstructed Old Town, this small guesthouse offers cosy modern rooms with unfussy fittings above a traditional restaurant and pub. The quality buffet breakfast adds value to the tariff, and there are a bundle of good bars and restaurants just around the corner.

Hotel Rycki (☎ 091 814 6601; www.hotelrycki.pl; ul Potulicka 2a; s/d/ste 180/240/360zł; ☎ ☑) It's all swords, breastplates and suits of armour in the reception area of this imposing redbrick pile, tucked away within its own walled grounds. The rooms are soothing with their timber furniture and green tones, and there's a smart restaurant on site.

TOP END

Novotel (☎ 091 480 1400; www.novotel.com; Al 3 Maja 31; s/d €88/90; ☎ ☒ ☑ ☑) A four-star option containing lots of spacious white rooms with parquet on the bathroom floors, and the full complement of in-house facilities. The location is useful for transport links.

Radisson SAS Hotel (☎ 091 359 5595; www.radisson.sas.com; Plac Rodła 10; s from €94, d from €106, ste from €209; ☎ ☒ ☑ ☑ ☑) Szczecin's fanciest option, if not its prettiest, features slick rooms within a salmon-pink complex. The hotel also comes complete with its own shops, two restaurants,

a sauna, a gym, bars and smart little fruit-scented gels and shampoos in its bathrooms.

Eating

Bar Rybarex (☎ 091 434 3222; ul Obronców Stalingradu 6; mains 3-15zł; ☹ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat) This budget fish cafeteria has a reasonable range of piscine dishes to choose from. From the vibrant red and blue interior, you can watch Szczecin life go by through the large plate-glass windows.

Restauracja Chata (☎ 091 434 1338; Plac Hołdu Pruskiego 8; mains 8-45zł; ☹ 12-10pm Mon-Fri, noon-3am Sat) Charming place serving traditional Polish food in rustic timber surroundings, decked out with folkloric items from peasant dresses to carved mirror frames. Some interesting specials tempt the curious, like joint of boar in a wild mushroom sauce.

our pick Pannkoekenrestaurant Haga (☎ 091 812 1759; ul Sienna 10; mains 10-21zł; ☹ 11am-10pm Mon-Thu, 11am-11pm Fri & Sat, noon-10pm Sun) Haga specialises in very filling Dutch pancakes – over 400 varieties of 'em, served up in a dining room decorated with old wall clocks and porcelain plates. There's also soup served within a bread loaf, which can be eaten afterwards – don't try to tackle both this and a pancake unless you're ravenous.

Karczma Polska Pod Kogutem (☎ 091 434 6873; Plac Lotników 3; mains 12-55zł; ☹ 11am-midnight Sun-Thu, 11am-1am Fri & Sat) The rustic barn look is enduringly popular with restaurants serving traditional Polish food, and Karczma Polska doesn't disappoint – there's even a mock pigsty on the way downstairs to the toilets. Its external wooden deck is a great vantage point over the picturesque square opposite, and the menu offers plenty of options. Roast rabbit in hazelnut sauce, anyone?

Avanti (☎ 091 434 6410; Al Jedności Narodowej 43; mains 15-89zł; ☹ noon-10pm Sun-Thu, noon-11pm Fri & Sat) Serious and authentic Italian food served in a refined, atmospheric interior that wouldn't be out of place in any sophisticated city – if you excuse the scale model of the Leaning Tower of Pisa housing the wine selection.

Restauracja Bombay (☎ 091 812 1171; www.india.pl; ul Partyzantów 1; mains 25-45zł; ☹ 1-11pm; ☹) This would be quite a treat in any country – quality Indian food, including items such as thali meals, served in tastefully exotic surrounds by waiters with impeccable English. It's owned by a former Miss India (1973 vintage), and boasts an appropriately international wine list.

Drinking

Szczecin's drinking hot spots are the Old Town area, for sophisticated tipples and conversation, and the funkier pedestrian strip of ul Bogusława, for terrace lounging and decent music.

Winiarnia Bachus (☎ 091 488 3721; ul Sienna 6; ☹ noon-11pm Mon-Fri, 3pm-midnight Sat, 3-10pm Sun) Classy wine bar offering outdoor seating overlooking the square in front of the town hall and it serves up beer, spirits and wine, though the selection isn't as broad as you'd expect. There's also fine food on the menu, including snails.

Christopher Columbus (☎ 091 489 3401; ul Wały Chrobrego 1; ☹ 10am-1am Sun-Thu, 10am-2am Fri & Sat) This bar-restaurant, boasting an attractive timber-lined interior, overlooks the river and its less than fascinating dockyards, but you can always turn your chair to face the nearby Naval Academy. The curved bar resembles a boat, and there's a vast beer garden. Jazz and swing music is on Monday and Tuesday evenings, respectively.

Brama Jazz Café (☎ 0660 765 211; Plac Hołdu Pruskiego 1; ☹ 10am-midnight) Housed in the Baroque Royal Gate, another fragment of lost history, the Brama has a DJ playing different styles of jazz on Tuesday nights. Have a drink in the relaxed outdoor area beneath a stern circle of carved Prussian eagles.

Entertainment

Check the local press and flyers for the latest nightlife listings, or visit www.clubbing.szn.pl (Polish only).

Mezzoforte/Zielony Abażur (☎ 091 814 4144; ul Bogusława 8; mains 8-38zł; ☹ 10am-midnight Sun-Thu, 10am-2am Fri & Sat) This Italian restaurant leads a double life as one of Szczecin's hippest bars/clubs, with a different musical flavour on the upstairs stereo every day, and guest artists laying beats in the basement at night. The outdoor seating on the cobblestone mall is a great place to sip a beer.

City Hall (☎ 091 440 3288; www.cityhall.pl; Czerwony Ratusz, ul Dworcowa; admission 5-10zł; ☹ 6pm-late) The basement of the massive Red Town Hall packs in up to 400 mad-for-it clubbers for some of the biggest nights in town, featuring rhythms from soul to house to R & B. The best night is Saturday, when Berlin DJs often hop over the border to play here.

Trezor (☎ 091 812 55 52; www.trezor-club.pl; ul Wyszyńskiego 14; admission 10-15zł; ☹ 9pm-4am Wed-Fri,

9pm-5am Sat) An unpromising entrance with an appearance halfway between the Tardis and a Portaloo, hidden in the courtyard back from the street, leads down into three floors of good old-fashioned hedonism. For over-20s only.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The **airport** (☎ 091 484 7400; www.airport.com.pl) is in Goleniów, about 45km northeast of the city. A shuttle bus (11.90zł) operated by **Interglobus** (☎ 091 485 0422; www.interglobus.pl) picks up from stops outside the LOT office and the train station before every flight, and meets all arrivals. **LOT** (☎ 0801 703 703; Al Wyzwolenia 17) runs a similar service via a minibus; enquire about tickets at its office. Alternatively, a taxi should cost around 120zł.

There are services to Warsaw (up to four daily) via LOT, London (four weekly) via Ryanair, Dublin (four weekly) via Centralwings, and Oslo (twice weekly) via Norwegian.

BUS

The bus terminal is uphill from the train station and handles frequent departures to Stargard Szczeciński (7zł, 50 minutes, twice hourly) and Kamień Pomorski (18zł, two hours, up to 14 daily). There are regular summer buses to nearby beach resorts, but limited services to Świnoujście and Międzyzdroje – go by train instead. Polski Express runs two buses daily from here to Warsaw (69zł to 83zł, 9½ hours).

Evatrans (☎ 091 484 2010; www.evatrans.pl) runs daily minibuses to Berlin (one way/return 83/128zł, 2½ hours), as does **Interglobus** (☎ 091 485 0422; www.interglobus.pl), starting from 45zł one way. Enquire at the bus terminal or the train station for details.

TRAIN

The main train station, Szczecin Główny, is on the bank of the Odra River, 1km south of the centre. There are trains to Poznań (38zł, 2½ hours, 12 daily), Gdańsk (49zł, 5½ hours, five daily), Kołobrzeg (18.50zł, 2¾ hours, six daily) and Zielona Góra (38zł, five hours, one or two daily). There are up to eight daily services to Warsaw (54zł, 7½ hours), including two InterCity trains (96zł, 5¾ hours). Trains to Stargard Szczeciński (12zł, 30 minutes) depart at least every 30 minutes, and to Świnoujście (28zł, two hours) every hour or so (fewer in winter). Two to three services a day head to Kamień Pomorski (14zł, 1½ hours).

STARGARD SZZECIŃSKI

pop 70,000

Believe it or not, slow-paced Stargard Szczeciński was once a prosperous port city and member of the Hanseatic League (see boxed text, p413), so wealthy it could afford to fight Szczecin for control of the Odra River trade route. The fierce competition between the two ports even led to a war in 1454. The conflict was conducted with no holds barred, and included regular battles, complete with the ransacking and sinking of the enemy's ships.

But that was then. Today Stargard has no port at all, and is content to be a satellite town of its old rival. WWII added to its decline by destroying over 70% of its buildings, and the resultant reconstruction left the town a modern urban sprawl with a fair amount of industry. However, its remaining medieval walls, and the massive churches that dominate the skyline, are worth a day trip from Szczecin or a quick break in transit.

Information

For information head to the **Tourist office** (☎ 092 578 5466; www.cit.stargard.com.pl; Rynek Staromiejski 4; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat).

Sights

As in so many Pomeranian cities, one of Stargard's main attractions is a mighty brick church. **St Mary's Church**, one of the largest in the region, was begun in 1292. It was extended several times by the end of the 15th century, then the townspeople left the structure alone for another five centuries, at which point the church was destroyed during WWII. Its rich external decoration of glazed bricks and tiles, with three elaborate doorways, was restored between 1946 and 1962. Step inside and look up at the amazing painted columns and ceiling vault.

Next door is the guardhouse formerly accommodating the city guards, now the **City Museum** (☎ 092 578 3835; Rynek Staromiejski 2/4; adult/concession 6/3zł, free Sat; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Fri & Sun, 10am-2pm Sat). It was also once a library and a weights and measures office, which explains the exhibits on weights and measures among those depicting local history and archaeology. Adjoining the museum is the **town hall**, a late-Gothic building with a beautifully ornamented Renaissance gable.

St John's Church, on the opposite side of the Old Town, has the highest tower in Western

Pomerania (99m). It was constructed in the 15th century but has been modified significantly over the years.

The city's **fortified walls** were once 2260m long, having been built between the late 13th century and the beginning of the 16th century. Once hailed as the most elaborate system of fortified walls in Pomerania, they're now just over a kilometre in length, with three surviving gates and five towers. In summer the towers occasionally hold exhibitions administered by the museum, and you can generally climb them for the view.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel PTTK (☎ 092 578 3191; www.hotelpttk.pl; ul Kuśnierzy 5; s 50-80zł, d 65-150zł, tr 80-140zł; ☎) Just a few minutes' walk from the cathedral, the PTTK occupies one of the few old buildings,

a gabled house overlooking the small canal, to have survived in the area. The oddly shaped rooms are pretty good value, though breakfast costs an extra 10zł.

Hotel Staromiejski (☎ 578 22 11; ul Spichrzowa 2; s 72-90zł, d 95-130zł, tr 117zł, ste 170zł; ☎) This large apartment block is geared towards coach parties, offering a greater choice of rooms (with shared or en suite bathroom). Rooms are cheaper for stays of more than one night.

Getting There & Away

The train and bus stations are close to each other, 1km west of the Old Town.

Szczecin is easily reached by bus (7zł, 50 minutes) and train (12zł, 30 minutes), both running twice hourly. You can also pick up most eastbound rail services from Szczecin here.

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