

Poland – people, culture, language

A guide for businesses



The country

Poland today: A population of 39 million, rich natural resources and a strong enterprise spirit have attracted foreign investment and created a dynamic economy. The capital Warsaw, with 1.6 million inhabitants, is the country's economic and political centre. Poland is the sixth-largest country in the European Union.

Growth sectors: Automotive electronics, IT and telecoms, environment, food and food processing, infrastructure, tourism and financial services – the Warsaw Stock Exchange is now outpacing Western stock markets.

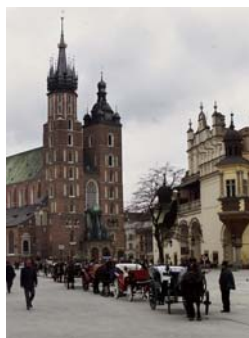


Above, countryside of the Tatra mountains near Zakopane. EPA PHOTO / JANEK SKARZYNSKI

Environment: Poland's rich and varied landscape includes long, sandy beaches along the Baltic coast, central lowlands drained by great north-flowing rivers, the majestic Sudeten and Carpathian mountains to the south, beautiful lakes and virgin forests. The country has over twenty national parks, home to 90 species of mammals including the European bison and occasional brown bears.

Did you know..?

- Poland's first Constitution of 3 May 1791 was the first written constitution in Europe.
- Esperanto, the international language, was created in Poland.
- Polish mathematicians helped crack the Enigma code during the Second World War.
- Pope John Paul II is Polish and almost became a professional footballer!
- During the last two decades the Nobel Prize for literature has been awarded to two Polish poets Czesław Miłosz and Wisława Szymborska.
- Famous Poles include astronomer Copernicus, composer Chopin, writer Conrad and scientist Marie Skłodowska-Curie, the discoverer of radium and the first ever woman to receive a Nobel prize.



Above, general view of Krakow's Market Square, with the Mariacki. EPA PHOTO EPA JANEK SKARZYNSKI

The people

■ **Cultured.** Krakow, Poland's third largest city, has been its cultural centre since the Middle Ages. In 2000, it was the Cultural City of Europe.



Above, guests enjoying themselves in the jazz club Tygmont in downtown Warsaw. EPA PHOTO / JANEK SKARZYNSKI

■ **Entrepreneurial.** The rapidly-developing private sector is now responsible for 70% of Poland's economic activities.

■ **Friendly.** A well-known Polish saying is, "a guest in the home, God in the home." The Poles are a hospitable nation and enjoy entertaining people in their own home.

■ **Opinionated.** Anyone not wanting to risk an argument should not start a discussion about politics! Everyone has his or her own opinion: popular legend has it that whenever two Poles have a discussion, three political parties will be formed!

■ **Family-orientated.** Polish people value a successful family life above all else. Poland has one of the lowest divorce rates in Europe.

■ **Catholic.** 95% of Poles belong to the Roman Catholic faith; 75% are practising.

Business culture and etiquette

- **Ambitious:** the Poles are tough negotiators, hungry for success and eager to do business with the UK.
- **Western management methods:** many Polish businesspeople have studied in Western Europe or the USA, and knowledge of Western models is widespread. Over the past ten years, foreign firms have invested over \$59 billion in Poland.
- **New technologies:** today, there are 16 million mobile-phone users in Poland. 80% of businesses have Internet access and 70% of companies use the Internet to search for information.
- **Bureaucracy:** be prepared for business deals to take longer than expected and involve more paperwork.
- **Making initial contact:** this is most successfully done in writing, in Polish (see overleaf for help with translations).
- **Building a successful working relationship:** take a leaf out of the Germans' book and visit Polish contacts regularly. In meetings, formal business attire is the norm; it is customary to shake hands with all present and exchange business cards. A few words of Polish go a long way (see overleaf for some basic Polish phrases). Remember, a nod of the head is used to signify understanding, not agreement! Small gifts are acceptable.

Language

- **Official language:** Polish.
- **English:** widely spoken, especially by the younger generations. English is now the top foreign language for business in Poland, and has taken over from German as the most popular foreign language taught in schools. However, it may not be spoken in bus and train stations, so plan transportation ahead.
- **Finding translators/interpreters:** in the UK, you can search for local, quality-assured providers on **BLIS Professionals** (www.blis.org.uk/professionals). In Poland, translators and interpreters are readily available – the best place to enquire is at the British Embassy (see Resources section).



Above, view into the main hall of Warsaw's University Library.
EPA PHOTO EPA JANEK SKARZYŃSKI

Basic Polish phrases

The positive impression you will make by learning to speak a few basic Polish phrases cannot be overestimated. Below are some commonly-used phrases – if you are interested in learning the Polish language, you can search for quality-assured trainers and courses at www.blis.org.uk.

	Polish	Pronunciation
Hello	Cześć	Cheshch
Good day/ morning	Dzień dobry	Dzyen dobri
Good evening	Dobry wieczór	Dobri vyechoor
Goodbye	Do widzenia	Do veedzenyah
Yes / no	Tak / nie	Tahk / nye
Please / thank you	Proszę / dziękuję	Prosheh / dzyenkooyeh
That's all right	W porządku	Fpozhortku
Excuse me	Przepraszam	Psheprasham
My name is...	Nazywam się...	Nazivam syeh...

Company case studies

"A young, dynamic nation. Very keen to do business with UK companies. Use of a translation agency ensured our initial communication reached the right people...patience is needed to get things off the ground, but we're now beginning to benefit from our perseverance."

Fogarty, Boston

"After many attempts to communicate in English to a long list of Polish companies with no success, we visited in March, sent follow-up communications in Polish and as a result we now have a high-class distributor, a regular order book and a Polish version of our website."

HS Thermal, Manchester

"The decision to set up an operation in Poland was critical to the future development of the company, a main driver being the employment of local staff, who are highly educated, committed and highly skilled."

Meritmill, Batley

Signposting and resources

- **BLIS Professionals** (www.blis.org.uk/professionals) – an on-line, quality-assured database of translators, interpreters, language trainers and cultural consultants in your area. You can search for BLIS providers offering Polish language services to companies in the East Midlands.

- **Resources** and organisations for more information:

Euro Information Centre www.euro-info.org.uk

British Polish Chamber of Commerce

www.bpcc.org.pl

Polish Embassy www.polishemb-trade.co.uk

British Embassy in Poland www.britishembassy.pl

Polish Agency for Foreign Investment

www.paiz.gov.pl

UK Trade & Investment –

www.uktradeinvest.gov.uk

Sources

- Research and text: Central European Development Agency (CEDA) 01302 367662
Chancellery of the Polish Prime Minister www.kprm.gov.pl
Foreign & Commonwealth Office www.fco.gov.uk
- Photographs: European Commission www.europa.eu.int

Company quotes: Courtesy of CEDA

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Tel: 0115 854 1399
Fax: 0115 854 1617
www.rln-eastmidlands.com