

## **POLAND - INFORMATION SHEET**

### **BACKGROUND**

Called the Republic of Poland, the country has a population of approximately 38.6 million and is the seventh largest country in Europe. It is bordered by Germany in the West, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic in the South, by the Ukraine and Belarus in the East, Lithuania, the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad and the Baltic Sea lie to the North.

### **LANGUAGE**

Polish is the official language of Poland.

### **RELIGION**

According to the 2006 International Religious Freedom Report by the US Department of State more than 96 % of citizens were identified as Roman Catholic. The rest of the population consists mainly of Eastern Orthodox Jehovah's Witnesses and various Protestant religious minorities.



### **RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS**

**CHRISTMAS** - Christmas preparations involve hanging mistletoe over the front door to ward off evil and placing wheat in the dining room corners and under the tablecloth to chase away misery. The table is set for one extra person to remember absent family members or accommodate an unexpected guest. The dinner begins with a prayer and sharing of blessed Oplatek bread (Christmas wafers) to represent Communion.

**EASTER** - In Poland people hang symmetrical cut-paper designs called wycinanki (Polish paper cutting pronounced VIH-CHEE-NON-KEY) inside their homes before Easter. The designs tend to be of animals, trees or flowers. They remain on the walls until the following year, when they are replaced by new wycinanki.

**NAME DAYS** - Many families in Poland still observe former naming customs where a child is named after a patron saint. Parents look for a saint whose feast day is on or near the birth or baptismal date of their child. Often the name day is more important to remember than the birthday. This anniversary is important for Poles and in no other culture is it celebrated with equal fanfare.

Other religious holidays observed include Assumption of the Virgin Mary (August 15th), All Saints' Day (November 1st) and Corpus Christi.

### **SOCIAL CUSTOMS**

Poles are reputed to be avid readers with an ardent interest in the arts. Polish writers and filmmakers, in particular, are internationally renowned. Poland has a lively cultural scene with around 280 arts festivals taking place across the country covering all types of music, film, video, theatre and the visual arts. Jazz music is particularly supported with around thirty jazz festivals taking place each year. **MARRIAGE:** Polish people place great importance on family. Poland has one of the lowest divorce rates in Europe. However, very recently, this appears to have risen due, apparently, to a huge migration of workers to the United Kingdom.

### **CUISINE**

Polish cuisine includes Polish sausage, red beet soup, Polish dumplings, flaczki (tripe soup), cabbage rolls, Oscypek, pork chops, traditional stew, various potato dishes and a fast food sandwich zapiekanka filled with meats, pickles and cheeses. Traditional Polish desserts include doughnuts and gingerbread.

### **FAMOUS POLISH CONTRIBUTORS TO WORLD HISTORY**

Thadeus Kosciuszko (Polish national hero and general who led the 1794 Kosciuszko Uprising against Imperial Russia), Marie Curie (twice awarded Nobel Prize in Physics and Chemistry for the discovery of the elements radium and polonium), Frederick Chopin (composer), Walesa, John III Sobieski (17th century King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania), Copernicus (first astronomer to formulate a scientifically based heliocentric cosmology that displaced the Earth as the centre of the universe), Joseph Conrad (writer), Wanda Landowska (harpsichordist), Bronislaw Malinowski (anthropologist), Ignace Paderewski (pianist), Arthur Rubenstein (pianist).

### **REFERENCES**

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