

July 2012 Poland

July 2, 2012: Gdansk

We went off from our hotel by tram to view the city.



The monument to the Fallen Shipyard Workers was close to the trams top. It was also near the modern shipyards. The commemorates the victims of the bloody worker strikes of December 1970 that lead to the “Solidarity Movement” that lead to the fall of communism in Poland.



As we approached the Old Town, there was a large group of young people being videoed for some commercial, they had them cheering for something, but we had no idea what.

As you enter the Old Town, you see the Great Armory that would once brim with guns, cannon balls and arms of all kinds. On the right, no finer statue of Neptune, the symbol of Gdansk’s bond with the sea. Though not apparent from this photo, water is splayed from the top and sides of the trident, keeping the statute wet as Neptune would be inclined to be.



The Great Crane is the most characteristic and unmistakable symbol of Gdansk. In the Middle Ages it was the largest port crane in Europe. The reconstructed mechanism inside is still in working condition and is powered by men in an immense wooden wheel who would walk in it like hamsters.

July 4, 2012 Torun

Torun is known for its medieval, Gothic architecture. Its reported history goes back to 1100 and the town fought many battles from its city walls, castles and fortresses. The Teutonic Knights established their outpost here in 1233. These were the Crusader Knights. There were wars against heathen Prussians thereafter. Finally the knights were overthrown by the townspeople and their castle demolished. Though reconstructed in part, you can see the remains of the old castle in part.



Most notably, this is the home town of Nicholas Copernicus, the astronomer (among other things) that determined that the earth was not in the center of the universe but rather the earth and other planets revolved around the sun. Of course, such heresy could get you killed, but money talks and Nick was of a monied family, high up in the Torun community and he was well educated, so we now have a modern map of the solar system.

Behind him stands the town hall, with a bell tower we were able to climb.



One of the bells inside the tower.

A view from the tower of the city below.



Also the historic building where the peace treaty was signed.

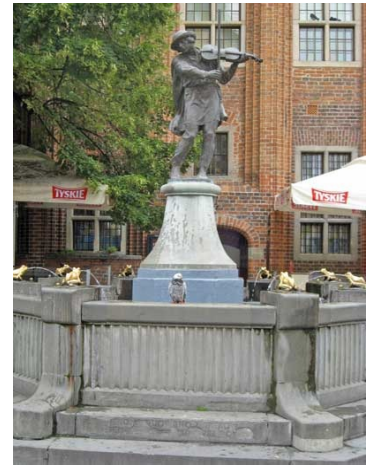
Across the street is this replica of a donkey used as a punishment device. The back has a metal strip in the upright position on which the prisoner would have to sit, very uncomfortable.





In the museum were collections of paintings, sculptures and artifacts from the medieval times.

Around the corner, this statue of a legendary fiddler who sent the plague of frogs away, much like the piped piper did for the mice of England.

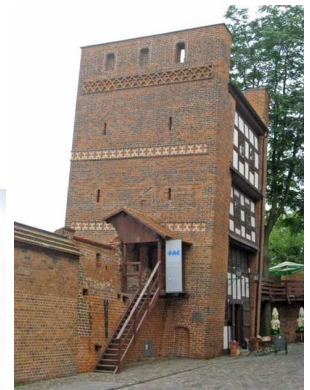


The city is surrounded by walls with gates, this one is the "bridge gate."

This "leaning tower" settled as the clay along the river moved and indeed is at quite an angle. A restaurant is inside now.

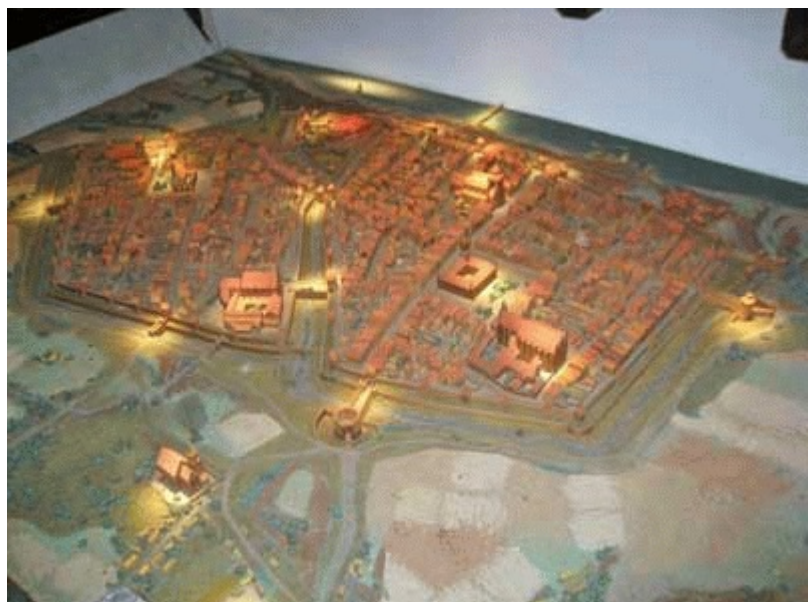


The Gothic granary and the Baroque granary show the buildings that were here in the 15th century. Nearby, Copernicus house is a museum to his education and discovery. This room might have been where he wrote his famous book on the earth's orbits.



We watched a movie with a light presentation on this

model of the town which was quite good. It was also perfectly timed in our journey as it explained the various churches that we were about to see and their influence on Copernicus' life.





On the left the place where Copernicus lived and on the right, the Cathedral of Saints John, the Baptist and John the Evangelist, where Copernicus was baptized.



Remains of the Teutonic Knight's castle on the left and the Evangelical Church on the right.



Tonight we decided to eat Polish so we asked the hotel clerk for his favorite restaurant. We tried pierogies, the baked kind and I heard that the garlic bread with cheese was good. So we ate. The cheese bread was good and the pierogies, well they're okay.



July 5, 2012 Warsaw

Our first stop was the Warsaw Rising Museum, a tribute to Warsaw's participation in World War II. This elaborate museum had movies and artifacts from Poland's attempt to shed its German occupation near the end of the war. WW II began when Germany invaded Poland in 1939. The Poles lived for five years with the occupation, not having surrendered but rather having its government in London in the meantime.

Germany was at war with the Soviet Union, hoping to end communism and Poland might have succeeded if it had had Soviet support. Sadly, with the Germans attacking from the West and the Soviets not assisting from the East, Warsaw was caught in the middle and though valiant, lost. My interest in WW II was piqued and last night I read the Wikipedia summaries of World War I which lead to World War II and lead to the Arab-Israel conflict that we have suffered for the past 65 years.



Germany's retaliation on Poland for the "Uprising" was to completely destroy the city of Warsaw. Following their victory, Germans used flame throwers and explosives to destroy 85% of the buildings in Warsaw concentrating on the historic and government buildings first. Accordingly, everything in Warsaw has been built in the last 50 years including the Royal Castle, a museum to the history of Poland. This structure has never been occupied by royalty as there has not been royalty here since World War I.



Other than a few government buildings constructed during the communist era, most of the notable buildings in Warsaw are churches. This is a representative one.

This mermaid with sword and shield is in the central market square of the "Old Town" The mermaid is part of Poland's heritage.



The Barbican reflects the fortress formerly at the north end of the city wall. All which has been reconstructed of modern brick for posterity.

In short, Warsaw is not worth a visit, Poznan and Krakow are much more interesting.