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Warsaw for explorers

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WARSAW MERMAIDS

Every child in Poland knows that the figure on Warsaw's coat of arms is a mermaid. There was a time when the whole country was very familiar with Ludwika Nitschowa's mermaid statue – which stands next to Świętokrzyski Bridge – as a picture of his sculpture was the backdrop for the official Polish Television station. Ludwika Nitschowa's mermaid model was Girl Scout and poet Krystyna Kraheńska; she wrote the words of many famous songs during the period of the Warsaw Uprising, including her best-known lyrics: "Hey boys, a bayonet on a gun." Before the Świętokrzyski Bridge was built, the temporary "Mermaid Bridge" stood in its spot.

A copy of yet another famous mermaid statue, carved in the 19th century by Konstantin Hegel, stands in the Old Town Square (Rynek Starego Miasta). The original is in the Historical Museum of Warsaw, which is located in one of the Old Town Squares' surrounding buildings.

A huge sandstone statue of the mermaid, carved in an Art Nouveau style, is located on the Markiewicz viaduct, which acts as an extension of Karowa Street. In 1905, it was cast in zinc by Jan Woydyga.

How many mermaids in total there are in Warsaw is anybody's guess, as nobody has ever counted them all. The Old Town is full of them. They are on embankments, and in greenery or placed on wind roses. Municipal buildings are decorated with mermaids, as are the areas around the old tram depot on Przyokopowa Street, The Warsaw Rising Museum, Poniatowski Bridge, Gwardii Hall and The Królikarnia, just to mention a few. A truly unique and one-of-a-kind of mermaid faces the entrance to the Museum of Technology (at the Palace of Culture and Science).

Top left
Old Town Square

Top middle
Markiewicz overpass

Top right
Near
Świętokrzyski Bridge

KANONIA (CANON'S HOUSE)

Small square behind St. John's Cathedral

In the Middle Ages this was a churchyard cemetery, which was liquidated in the late 18th century. In 1944, like the whole of the Old City, the canon's buildings lay in ruins. Among the restored buildings, Canon's House is distinguished by its narrow front facing the square, which is the width of a single window. From the side of the Vistula River, the house is actually much wider, because the land on which it stands is shaped like a triangle, not a rectangle. Like in Amsterdam, this was a clever trick to avoid paying tax, as in olden times, the amount of land tax to be paid depended on the width of the external *façade*.

The bell in the square was cast over forty years ago in Daniel Thym's studio; the statue of King Zygmunt III Waza, which stands aloft on a column in Zamkowy Square, is also Thym's work.

The nearby Dawna Street is a charming old cobbled street with an arched passageway connecting the buildings on its opposite sides.

At Canon's House one may also find Warsaw's oldest stone tablet marking the name of the street itself: ulica Kanonia.



The bell at Kanonia



G NOJNA 'MOUNTAIN' 'Escarpment'

Today, this 'mountain' is a vantage point from which you can enjoy a spectacular panoramic view of Praga and the Vistula River valley. But nearly 400 years ago, it was a garbage dump which, by the end of the 17th century, had reached the size of a mountain – and the stench became unbearable. An additional problem caused by the garbage landfill was the milling rats. Finally, to deal with these problems, the King issued a decree which resulted in the destruction of the landfill. Sadly, at the time some waste flowed into the Vistula River, which ran much closer to the base of the 'mountain' than it does today.

Before the Vistula's position and flow were changed, ships could come almost right up to the houses which today stand on Brzozowa Street, which marks the beginning of the Gnojna 'Mountain'. Many years ago, many buildings on Brzozowa Street served as storehouses for grain.

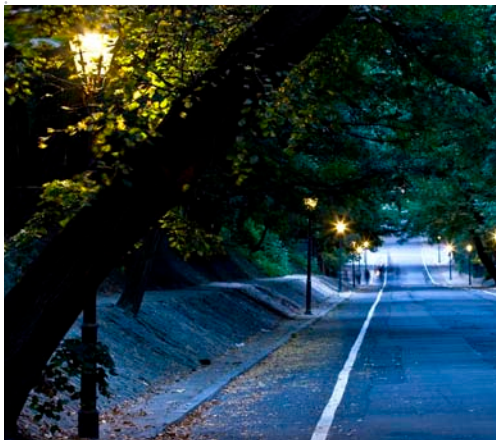
GAS LAMPS

Along Agrykola and Bielany

In Warsaw, there are over 150 'active' gas lanterns, all of which are ignited by hand by the lighthouse keepers just before dusk, and then extinguished by hand at dawn. The best-known lamps stand on Agrykola Street, which runs along Łazienki Park. There is also a large concentration of gas lamps – numbering well into the dozens – in Bielany, especially along the following streets: Platnicza, Granowska, Szafarska and Ceglowska, as well as in the area of Konfederacji Square. In the Powiśle region, many may be found along Jezierskiego Street, and in Sadyba, they stand along Orężna, Kąkolewska, Godebskiego and Jodłowa Streets.

A very notable single lamp stands in the New Town directly in front of the statue of the Virgin Mary, on Srebrna Street near the Wola Museum and at the crossroads of 9 Suchoa Street and Emilia Zoli Street.

ulica Agrykola





WARSAW'S MERIDIAN

Plac Teatralny (Teatralny Square)

A curiosity is to be found at Teatralny Square: here is a symbol of the meridian of $21^{\circ} 00'$ in an Eastern longitude running through Warsaw. This designated line connects the clock tower on Jablonowski Palace to the huge pillar standing in the parking lot in front of the National Opera. Although it is surrounded by an intricate metal fence, you need to truly keep an eye out for it, as it is often obscured by parked cars.

Since Coordinated Universal Time (UTC) is fixed relative to the zero meridian passing through Greenwich, local time is then determined in each country's capital. The time difference, for example, between Warsaw and Paris is therefore one hour and fourteen minutes.

Teatralny Square takes its name from the monumental Grand Theatre (Teatr Wielki), which houses both the National Opera and the National Theatre.

FOTOPLASTIKON

Al. Jerozolimskie 51

Built at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, a Fotoplastikon was a popular device that allowed viewers to watch changing three-dimensional images. The Warsaw Fotoplasikon is unique because it is one of the very few in the world and it stands in its original spot. With only a few breaks due to historical circumstances, it has always been here.

The Fotoplastikon's archives have over 3,000 original photographs from around the globe, starting with photos documenting the opening of the Suez Canal, through to expeditions to Spitzbergen, and images of the Warsaw Uprising.

Warsaw residents consider the Fotoplastikon to be a very magical place. During the Nazi occupation of World War II, it served an additional role as a clandestine meeting and contact point. After the war, when over 80% of the capital lay in smoldering ruins, it fueled hopes for the city's reconstruction, by highlighting and showing colour photographs of pre-war Warsaw.

During the 1950s and '60s, sweethearts often went here on dates, and the room resounded with Polish jazz, which was banned at the time.

Today, when visitors enjoy original black-and-white slides of pre-war Warsaw, they do so whilst listening to contemporary show-tunes, played on a phonograph.

In 2008, the Fotoplastikon was placed under the auspices of the Warsaw Rising Museum.

Stereoscopic image



GROCHOWSKIE GATES

and the CHOCOLATE FACTORY

ul. Zamoyskiego 36 i 55

The Grochowskie Gates are two neoclassical buildings standing opposite each other; it was these gates which determined the borders of Warsaw until 1889. At that time, a police officer was the caretaker of one, in the other was a fee collector who also admitted foodstuffs into the city. Currently they are part of the building which houses the Wedel Chocolate Shop and Chocolate Parlour.

Wedel's confectionery factory was founded in the mid-19th century by Karol Wedel, and then headed successively by his son Jan and grandson Emil; from the beginning, it was one of the distinguishing features of the capital. During the time of the Polish People's Republic, it was nationalized and forced to change its name to commemorate the anniversary of the July 22nd Communist Manifesto; from then on, it was known as 'July 22nd – formerly E. Wedel'. Today, Wedel delicacies are known and appreciated in the all the world.

The need to widen Grochowska Street resulted in both gates being moved by about 10 meters. Their original positions are marked by clinker bricks on the street and sidewalk.



Grochowskie Gates



B EARS ON THE WALKWAY al. Solidarności

The paddock
along
aleja
Solidarności

In 1952, a paddock to house some brown bears was built along the WZ route. Since that time, nearly everyone who travels this way involuntarily looks over, to check if the bears are 'at home'.

Currently, there are three bears and together they form a family of sorts. There is a male named Mirage, who was born in 1976, making him the oldest member. Then there are two sisters, Tatra and Turnia who were born on the New Year's Eve in 1982. All three came into the world in the Warsaw Zoo.

In the depths of the zoo garden there are three more bears; they came to the zoo after the Julinek Circus was closed. Their birth certificates were lost, but they are presumed to be 20-something years old. Their names are Paddington, Mała and Sabina, with Paddington being very popular with children. The bears have two godparents: journalist and presenter Wojciech Mann – who at one time read excerpts from the adventures of Paddington Bear on the radio – and Michał Rusinek, who translated a well-loved books about an unruly and rambunctious teddy bear.



YARD SHRINES

Yard shrines are a peculiarity in Warsaw, and they are found among numerous surviving pre-war buildings. They stand in courtyards, under gates and on stairways, mainly in Praga and in the city centre, but many have also survived in Wola, Żoliborz, Ochota and Mokotów. Most were created during the time of the occupation and the Warsaw Uprising, when many churches were bombed, prompting the city residents to construct these shrines to take the place of the churches. In all, there are nearly 800 of such shrines in Warsaw, and they are cared for by the residents of the surrounding buildings.

The most valuable yard shrine – recently rebuilt and entered in the official Monuments Register – is more than 100 years old. It is located in the building at the corner of 54 Żąbkowska Street, at the corner of Korsaka Street. It is a stone depiction of the Madonna and Child, designed by sculptor Feliks Giecewicz, and it was often subjected to the creative impulses and initiatives of workers, who worked at the factory producing dishes, enamel and metal products. Renewed over a course of many years by amateurs using oil paints, the statue took on a decidedly trashy and weathered look. Conservation work carried out in 2009 returned it to its original state and appearance.

Top left
ulica Żąbkowska 54

Top middle
Courtyard at
ulica Żąbkowska 12

Top right
ulica Mińska 15

ulica Śródkowa 9



WOODEN HOUSES

After the collapse of the November Uprising in 1831, the Russians fortified Warsaw and issued a prohibition on brick buildings. As a result, wooden houses began to emerge, though sadly, very few have survived. At 18 Biruty Street in Targówek, there is one house a porch and it may be seen from the yard, though it has long been threatened with demolition, as a roadway is planned to go this way. Another storied house with ornate roofs and gates stands at 26 Kawęczyńska Street, and a Russian-style house with fanciful carved peaks is at 9 Śródkowa Street in the New Praga area.

Also, note that on some brick buildings in Praga, there are some lovely wooden elements. For example, the 'Róża Kwiatkowska House' (dom Róży Kwiatkowskiej) at 13 Żąbkowska Street has some freestyle wooden shutters on the first floor. There is also a small wooden gallery in the courtyard of the 'Rothbilth House' (dom Rothbiltha) at 50/52 Targowa Street. Built between 1818-1819, it is the oldest surviving house in Praga.



ELECTION FIELDS

Wola District

From the 16th to 18th centuries, Poland had free elections in which nobles voted for a King. The first such election took place in 1573 after Zygmunt August – the last Jagiellonian – died childless. It was held in the town of Kamień, which today is the Kamionek region of Praga. The next election was carried out in the then-village of Wola (which is still a district in Warsaw, and goes by the same name).

The election fields had covered areas which protected the voting senators against sun and rain, and there was a large area in which the electors, their staff and election observers all gathered. Currently, at this point four streets coincide: Obozowa, Gostyńska, Ostroroga and Sołtyka.

These free elections contributed significantly to the development of the city. On the 400th anniversary of the establishment of these elections, on the spot where they took place, a marker was erected. Designed by Stanisław Michalik, its main component is an obelisk upon which is engraved '*Electio Viritim*' (loosely translated from Latin, it means 'Each one separately' or 'Each one in person'). Surviving memorials and monuments to Poland's free elections also stand on the following streets: Elekcyjna, Obozowa, Banderii and Wolności.

Top left

Electio Viritim obelisk

Top right

Election of Stanisław August by B. Bellotto – painting from the collection of the Royal Castle

OLD POWĄZKI

The Historic Powązki Cemetery, called 'Old Powązki', is the oldest Catholic cemetery in Warsaw. In 1790, the cemetery was full of statues and medallions of great artistic value and today, they represent elements of classicist, Art Nouveau and contemporary sculpture.

At the back of the catacombs there is 'The Avenue of Honour' (Aleja Zasłużonych), in which lie luminaries of Polish culture: writers, actors, composers, singers and painters. For example, the country's first Nobel Prize winner Władysław Reymont, who died in 1925, is buried here.

In addition to these catacombs, the cemetery is also the final resting place of Chopin's parents, Polish national opera composer Stanisław Moniuszko, poet Zbigniew Herbert, director Krzysztof Kieślowski, composer Witold Lutosławski, and many other famous Poles.

In 1974, at the initiative of writer and social activist Jerzy Waldorff, the Care and Social Committee of Old Powązki was formed; today, this group bears his name. Every year on November 1st, the renovation of tombstones is carried out; money for this endeavor is collected in cans by actors, journalists, athletes and politicians.

Tombstones
at Powązki
Cemetery





G HETTO WALL

On November 16th, 1940, the Ghetto walls went up; 3.5 meters high and covering an area of 307 hectares, approximately 360,000 Jews from Warsaw and an additional 90,000 Jews from the surrounding areas were imprisoned inside them. In total, about 300,000 were sent to Treblinka death camp, and close to 100,000 died of starvation within the walls.

On April 19th, 1943 the Ghetto Uprising began; it was violently suppressed by the Nazis after one month. Nearly all survivors were killed at the spot, and the Jewish quarter of the entire area was bulldozed to the ground. The only part of the Ghetto walls to have survived stands in a courtyard, between Sienna and Zlota Streets. To view it, enter from 62 Zlota Street because the gate at 55 Sienna Street is permanently closed.

To remind Warsaw and the world about the history of the Ghetto, 21 points marking the Ghetto boundaries have been set up, in the form of plaques. In addition to these maps, photos and descriptions in English and Polish, iron plates have been driven right into the city's pavements, showing the width of the wall and where it ran.

Top left

Symbolic marking showing the route of the wall

Top right

Part of the wall along ulica Sienna 55



THE PALM HOUSE AND THE ARTIFICIAL PALM TREE

The Warsaw Palm House at 4 Biały Kamień Street in Mokotów opened on November 29th, 1929. Aside from the palm trees – which were already about 20 years old at the time of the house's opening – there are numerous exotic plants (among them, banana, fig and araucaria). Derived from seedlings after the war, these plants 'created' the Botanical Garden and a new Orangery in the Royal Gardens.

After an 'upgrade' and renovations in September of 2009, the Palm House was enlarged and has acquired a modern look.

Created by artist Joanna Rajkowska – a woman who crates installation art in public spaces – the 15-foot-high plastic palm tree was unveiled in December of 2002. It was a key element of the city project, 'Greetings from Jerozolimskie Avenue'. Arousing the enthusiastic support of some residents, and the strong objections of others, it has undoubtedly become a new but very important symbol of the city.

Top left
100-year-old
Palm House
in Mokotów

Top right
Charles de Gaulle
roundabout

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