



Poland

cultural note

After the Second World War, Poland found itself once again dominated by the Russians. Poland's liberation began with the organization of the Solidarity labor union. Despite threats and arrests, Solidarity and its leader, Lech Walesa, continued their efforts throughout the eighties. Amazingly, Solidarity not only survived, but was legalized in 1989. The might of the U.S.S.R. had faltered, and the Communist government of Poland yielded to the people's will. Poland left the U.S.S.R.-dominated Warsaw Pact and became a multiparty democracy. Lech Walesa, a former electrician, became president of Poland in 1990.

Country Background

History

The very existence of Poland is a testament to the tenacity of the Polish people, for this country has disappeared from the face of Europe several times.

The Slavic tribes that would later become the Polish people settled in this northern corner of Eastern Europe more than two thousand years ago. The nation took its name from one of these tribes, the Polane (the people of the plain). The Polish nation dates its existence to the tenth century, with the ascension of King Mieszko I in 963 A.D. Mieszko adopted the Roman Catholic faith in 966, and the country has remained staunchly Catholic to this day.

Poland flourished culturally and economically, but not politically. The country's flat, fertile plains and lack of defensible frontiers have made it a constant target for its aggressive neighbors. In 1386 the Polish state opted for unification with neighboring Lithuania, and for a time Polish fortunes were strengthened. But again political decline set in, and the country was partitioned three times between the German, Russian, and Austrian Empires. By 1795, the time of the third partition, Poland had vanished.

The 1815 Congress of Vienna decreed that a Kingdom of Poland still existed, but only within the confines of the Russian Empire, where it was legally ruled by the Russian czar. For the next hundred years the Poles continually worked for independence, with the Poles' Catholicism serving as a rallying point against their Russian Orthodox overlords.

It was World War I that returned Poland to the map. When Russia sued the Central Powers for peace, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1918 dismembered the Russian Empire. Poland reemerged as an independent state. But this independence proved to be short-lived. World War II began when Nazi Germany overran Poland. Over 6 million Poles,

including virtually the entire population of Polish Jews, died during the occupation. The Germans were pushed out by the Soviet Army in 1945, and the Polish borders were redrawn in their current configuration.

But Poland was not yet free. Instead, Poland became a Communist state under Soviet domination. Again the Poles protested against their Russian overlords.

The first glimmering of success came in 1981 with the organization of the Solidarity labor union. Martial law was unable to stifle the will of the people, and after the Polish regime ascertained that the Soviets would not intervene-Solidarity was legalized in 1989. Political liberalization and a transition to a market economy were followed by the election of Solidarity leader Lech Walesa as the leader of the Polish Republic in late 1990.

Type of Government

The Republic of Poland is a multiparty democracy. The president is the chief of state; the prime minister is the head of government. There are two legislative houses: the Senate with 100 seats and the Diet with 460.

Language

Polish is the official language. Closely related to Czech, Polish is placed in the Slavic branch of the Indo-European linguistic family (English is also part of this family). Polish is written in a modified Latin alphabet, not the Cyrillic alphabet of Russian. However, Polish is often considered the most difficult Indo-European language for native speakers of English to master.

Religion

The vast majority of Poles are Roman Catholics. About 1.5 percent of the population is Orthodox.

cultural note

Since the overthrow of the Communist regime, religious holidays have been celebrated openly. Poles take great pride in the fact that Pope John Paul II is Polish. However, there is some opposition to the influence the Catholic Church has gained in secular matters.

Demographics

The population of Poland is about 38.5 million. The country is very homogeneous; 98 percent of the population is ethnic Polish. Ukrainians constitute a very small minority.

Cultural Orientation

Cognitive Styles: How Poles Organize and Process Information

The Polish culture has always been open to information from the West. With the demise of Communism, many aspects of education in Poland are in a state of flux. Poles are abstractive, processing information conceptually and analytically, however, they value relationships as much as the law.

Negotiation Strategies: What Poles Accept as Evidence

In Poland, truth rests more on objective facts than on the subjective feelings of the moment. Faith in ideologies that may change one's perspective on the truth is changing, shifting from the ideologies of the Communist party to those of nationalism and democracy.

Value Systems: The Basis for Behavior

With the fall of the Iron Curtain and the rise of democracy, the value systems of Poland are being influenced more and more by those of the West. The following three sections identify the Value Systems in the predominant culture - their methods of dividing right from wrong, good from evil, and so forth.

Locus of Decision Making

As the movement toward freedom and privatization advances, more decision-making responsibility is being placed on the shoulders of the individual. There is a strong sense of individualism and democracy, plus a belief that all citizens should influence the way the society is governed. In many instances, the individual may transfer decision-making responsibility to the group as a whole or to a consensus of privileged individuals.

Sources of Anxiety Reduction

Post-Communist freedom is perceived as threatening most of the structures the Poles have depended upon for stability and security. However, since most Poles are Catholics, the church is a significant factor in filling this need. Polish Catholicism has been described as emotional and traditional, and the Poles are considered the most devout of all European Catholics. A strong extended family also helps to give structure and security.

Issues of Equality / Inequality

The removal of Communist party control has allowed resentments over inequality to surface. Internal disputes arise over power and control. Although Poland has a largely homogeneous population, the drive for power will be seen at all levels of government, business, and society. This drive for power threatens to undercut the humanitarian belief in equality. There is some disjunction between private and public morality.

Although Poland is a male-dominated society, it is not necessary to hide one's emotions. There is a history of sensitivity to the feelings of others; intentions, feelings, and opinions are openly expressed.

Business Practices

Appointments



punctuality

- As a foreigner, you are expected to be on time for all appointments.
- Punctuality was not required under the Communist regime. Do not be surprised if your Polish counterpart is very late.

- The Polish work day starts early. Appointments at 8:00 A.m. are not unusual.
- Business lunches are often held quite late, around 4:00 or 5:00 P.m.
- Requests for appointments should be made in writing when possible. Translating the request into Polish will make a good impression.
- Most businesses have a 5 1/2-day workweek: 8:00 Or 9:00 A.M. to 2:00 or 3:00 P.m., Monday through Friday, and 8:00 A.M to 1:30 P.m. Saturdays.



Negotiating

- It is difficult to predict how long it will take to negotiate a business deal. Under the former regime, deals would take months. Even today, if the government is involved, you can expect negotiations to proceed slowly. On the other hand, some of Poland's new entrepreneurs are anxious to move quickly. With small enterprises, this is sometimes possible.
- A local Polish representative will be vital to successful operations. Everything from office space to restaurant reservations is in short supply, and only a local "fixer" will be able to arrange them for you.
- Bring plenty of business cards and give one out to everyone you meet.
- It is not necessary to have your business card translated into Polish.
- Proposals, reports, and promotional materials should be translated into Polish. If graphics are included in this material, make sure they are well done and neatly printed. Poland has long had some of the best graphic artists in the world.

cultural note

Poland's relations with its neighbors have not always been cordial; Poland was partitioned between the German, Russian, and Austro-Hungarian Empires. Do not bring up your background if you are of German, Hungarian, or Russian descent.

Anti-Semitism is also a subject to avoid. Remember that the Nazis located most of the death camps on Polish soil, not in Germany itself.

Poland is still a male-dominated society. Most of the business persons you meet will be male, and admonishing Poles for sexist attitudes, real or perceived, will not help your relationship.

- If possible, keep the conversation away from politics.
- Food, sports, and sightseeing are good topics to bring up.



Business Entertaining

- Business lunches and dinners are popular, but breakfast meetings are virtually unknown in Poland.
- Poland suffers from a major housing shortage. Because apartments are very cramped, do not expect a Polish business person to invite you home. Almost all entertaining is done in clubs and restaurants.

- The person who issues the invitation to a restaurant is usually the one who pays the bill.
- As a foreigner, you will probably get more attention and better service in restaurants and clubs than Poles - but only if people realize that you are a foreigner. Speak English.
- Despite having to go to work early, Poles love to stay up late, talking and drinking. Leaving early may insult them, so be prepared for a long night.
- Although there is an effort to promote beer as an acceptable drink (most Poles consider beer a chaser), vodka is still the drink of choice. Don't get trapped in a vodka-drinking contest with Poles; you'll lose. Expect your glass to be refilled every time it is empty until the vodka runs out.

Time

- Poland is one hour ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (G.M.T. + 1), and thus six hours ahead of U.S. Eastern Standard Time (E.S.T. + 6).

Protocol



Greetings

- Shake hands when you meet a Pole and when you leave. Be sure to shake hands when you are introduced to someone for the first time.
- Wait for a Polish woman to extend her hand before offering to shake hands. Old-fashioned Polish men may kiss a woman's hand; foreign men are not expected to do this. If you feel an additional expression of respect is called for, simply make a short bow.
- Close Polish friends or relatives may greet each other effusively, with much hugging and kissing of cheeks.



Titles / Forms of Address

- As in some other Slavic cultures, the final letter in a woman's surname may be different from that of a man's. Where this is the case, a woman's surname will end in the letter 'a' - thus, it is Mr. Solski and Mrs. Solska.
- The simplest way to address a Polish professional is by using Mr., Mrs., or Miss and their job title.
 - Mr. = Pan ("pahn")
 - Mrs. = Pani ("pah'-nee")
 - Miss = Panna ("pah'-nah")
 - Mr. Executive = Pan Dyrektor Mr. Reporter = Pan Redaktor

cultural note

If a Pole lacks a title, be sure to address him as Mr. plus (surname). Only close adult friends will address each other by their first names. You will know if a Pole wishes you to use his first name: there is a whole ceremony (the *bruderschaft*) that celebrates the decision to go to a first-name basis.



Gestures

- In social situations, when a Pole flicks his Finger against his neck, he is inviting you to join him for a drink (probably vodka).
- Do not chew gum while speaking to someone.
- Do not litter; Poles are shocked at the sight of anyone throwing trash anywhere but in a trash receptacle.
- Avoid loud behavior in public; Poles tend to be a quiet people. You will notice that Poles speak more softly than North Americans.
- Polish men tend to have traditional views of acceptable female behavior. Women who speak forthrightly may encounter resistance from Polish men.
- When asking directions from strangers, a woman should approach either a policeman or another woman. Approaching a man will probably be interpreted as flirting.



Gifts

- A foreign gift is appropriate the first time you meet a Polish businessman. Liquor (anything except vodka) is a good choice.
- Always bring a gift when visiting a Polish home, even for a brief visit. Flowers are the most common gift. Give the flowers, unwrapped, to your hostess. Always bring an odd number of flowers, and avoid red roses (used for courting) and chrysanthemums (used at funerals).
- Items that are in short supply in Poland are always appreciated as gifts or tips, but which items are scarce varies. Coffee, perfume, and American cigarettes are usually a good bet. Even if you don't smoke, bring cigarettes.



Dress

- Business dress is the same as in the United States: suits and ties for men, dresses for women. Colors tend to be conservative.
- For casual wear, jeans are ubiquitous for both men and women. Jeans with a dressy shirt or blouse will get one through most nonbusiness situations. Exceptions are
 - expensive restaurants (these require suits and ties or dresses);
 - theater and the opera (these require suits and ties or dresses);

- dinner invitations in a Polish home (these require jackets and ties or dressy pants or skirts); and
- formal invitations, as on New Year's Eve (these require tuxedos or gowns).