

Poland its history and geography history essay

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Poland: Its History and Geography

Poland is a beautiful land with a staggering history. It has always been between two of the most powerful nations in Europe and has been attacked and invaded from all sides. Poland is pretty much the red headed step-child of north Eastern Europe. It has gone from dominating Europe and being one of the largest countries there to completely being wiped off the map. It has been the epicenter of two world wars and its people are still alive, strong and proud today, holding onto their traditions and ways of life. I had the pleasure of marrying a beautiful woman with strong Polish ancestry and we traveled to Poland for our honeymoon in 2009.

We can pretty much trace the Polish origins to the Slavic people. We do not know when the first Slavic tribe arrived in Mid-Evil Europe but most historians would agree it was anywhere between the 5th and 8th centuries (Planet). From the 8th century on we see many of these tribes ban together to form the Polish people. The name Poland comes from one of these original tribes, the Polanie, which means people of the field (Zamoyski). These tribes settled near the Warta River which is near modern day Poznan. We know that during this time these people were led by Piast and he was able to unite the tribes into one people and gave them the name Polska (Planet). Poland in its very early history was formed into two different countries, Great Poland and Little Poland. Great Poland was officially founded a country by Mieszko, its first king in 966 and Little Poland was founded in 1047 by southern tribes (Infoplease). Both of these countries were made into one by Casimir I the

Restorer. Poland reached its peak of power after it merged with Lithuania by royal marriage in 1386 (Infoplease). From the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries Poland was a very dominate force in Europe and won its battles against Russia, the Teutonic Knights and the Turks (Michener). In the 18th century Poland's power and influence is in decline and Russia's is on the upswing. The Tsars of Russia expand into neighboring countries with little resistance and Poland pretty much became a puppet of Russian rule. As Poland's strength diminished, its neighbors Russia, Prussia, and Austria gained in strength and at the end of the 18th century these countries decided to partition Poland between the three of them (Planet). There were three partitions in total during the periods of 1772, 1792 and 1795. For more than a hundred years there would be no Polish state in Europe but this did not stop the resistance of the Polish people and there were several civil wars during this time. World War 1 was the direct result of the three occupying countries, Russia, Prussia and Austria, going to war against each other. Most of the fighting during this war was done in Polish lands and resulted in massive lives lost. Probably the worst result for Poland was that since there was no Polish state, at the time, there could not be any army to fight for its cause. The result of this was the polish people were forced into differing armies and were forced to fight each other. After WWI Poland found itself in ruins and had to basically rebuild from scratch. In 1919 The Treaty of Versailles and the defeat of the Russians in 1920 gave Poland its new boundaries in Europe. It stretched from Germany in the west to Czechoslovakia in the south and Lithuania in the north-east to Belarus and Ukraine in the east. Poland was now home to some 26 million people one third of which were Jews, Ukrainians, Belarusians and Germans (Planet). The <https://assignbuster.com/poland-its-history-and-geography-history-essay/>

only good this war brought about for the Polish people is that after it ended in 1918 Poland was able to regain its independence in November of that year when Marshal Pilsudski took control of Warsaw. In 1922 Pilsudski retired and Poland had four years of instability until he retook power in a military coup in 1926 and ruled as a dictator until his death in 1935 (Infoplease). On September 1, 1939 Germany invaded Poland and in less than a month occupied Warsaw the capital. At the same time the Soviet Union invaded from the east. Poland didn't stand a chance against these two overbearing militaries. On September 28th Germany and the Soviet Union divided Poland once again (Zamoyski). Hitler decided that the Polish people and culture should be wiped off the face of the earth for good. He in particular focused his attention on the Jewish Poles. Thousands of Poles were rounded up and put into concentration camps where they were forced to help in Germany's war effort. All religious leaders and prominent Poles were systematically executed so there would be little resistance. For the most part the Jews were eliminated. They were separated from the rest of the population and sent to the ghettos where they would regularly be shipped off to extermination camps throughout Poland. All in all by the end of the war almost three million Jews and one million non-Jewish Poles were killed (Planet). After WWII ended the Soviet Union was granted control over Poland at the Yalta conference. Stalin pushed communism on all of Poland and setup a provisional government in Moscow which would soon be moved to Warsaw and was called the Polish Committee of National Liberation (Infoplease). Soon after, many of the old government joined with this new one and formed the Polish Government of National Unity which the United States and England recognized. Poland remained under communistic rule for almost 40 years

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until in 1985 when Gorbachev was elected and his reforms and softer stance allowed for more democratic rule in Eastern Europe. Finally in 1990 most all of the remnants of Communism were flushed out and Poland once again became a free democracy. Poland today is still suffering from its past and trying to form a better economic and political future for all the Polish people. Now that we have seen a brief history of Poland, let's take a look at its geography. Poland as it stands today covers 120, 728 square miles, or about the size of New Mexico. It borders seven countries: Belarus, Czech Republic, Germany, Lithuania, Russia, Slovakia and Ukraine (Briney). The capital of Poland is Warsaw and the overall population of the country is around thirty eight and half million people and ninety percent of their population is Catholic. It has mountains, at which Rysy is its highest point of eight thousand feet, and lowlands at which Elblaskie is six and half feet below sea level (Briney). Most of Poland is made up of lowlands and there are many rivers that run throughout of which the Vistula is the largest. Its weather is mostly mild all around with highs averaging in the summer of 75 degrees and in the winters 32 degrees. Poland has been blessed with many minerals and is among some of the world's largest producers of coal, zinc, copper, lead, sulphur, and rock salt. When my wife and I were in Poland we had the opportunity to see one of the oldest rock salt mines in the world, the Wieliczka Salt Mine, which has been continually mining salt since the thirteenth century. It was enormous and we saw firsthand the artistic skill of the miners throughout the centuries. Since this was such a dangerous job the workers, mostly catholic, wanted to go to mass before beginning their shifts and because of that they carved out of the salt, chapels on every level they mined. In the very early years Poland was known for its amber which <https://assignbuster.com/poland-its-history-and-geography-history-essay/>

made up most of the Amber Route (Affairs). Still today Poland has a major role in the production of amber. Flint is believed to be the earliest material mined in Poland and we have evidence of this dating back to 3500 BC (Affairs). Iron ore was mined during the fourth century BC in the Swietokrzyskie Mountains. Around the same time we see quarries of ceramic materials and clay along with lead, copper, silver and gold mines around Silesia and Maloposka (Affairs). In the eighteenth century Poland's main mining operations shifted to coal. In east Galicia oil began being mined a bit later in the century. During WWI Poland was home to one of the largest natural gas mining operations in Europe and after the war the city of Cracow established a mining academy with the intent to educate future miners and engineers (Affairs). When Poland had its borders re traced after the war it lost most of its oil fields but gained much more coal in the Upper and Lower Silesia. During the 1970's Poland became one of the world's largest producers of hard coal. Poles refer to their coal as "black gold" because it is the main export and money earner of the country (Affairs). Poland is rich in historical landmarks almost as much as it resources. Go anywhere in the country and you will see ruins of ancient castles, many of them are still standing. Cracow was once the capital of Poland until its move to Warsaw by King Sigismund III in 1596 (Chung). During our travels to Cracow our guide mentioned Cracowvians were very upset about the move until WWII when they were happy because ninety percent of Warsaw was leveled which left Cracow mostly intact. When we were there in 2009 we could see where the old mid-evil walls in Warsaw met the new ones. The main square in Warsaw was rebuilt using earlier paintings from Polish artists to look like the war never happened. But it is pretty evident to see in the walls that stood during <https://assignbuster.com/poland-its-history-and-geography-history-essay/>

the war which still have bullet holes still in them. As mentioned before Poland is a very Catholic country and the architecture wonder of the basilicas and cathedrals in Poland would leave anyone in awe. Cracow is home to many of these of which is the Basilica of St. Mary's and the Wawel Cathedral built on top of a large hill surrounded by a massive stone wall and also encloses Wawel Castle which dates to the tenth century (Chung). Poland is a beautiful country and if History teaches us anything Poland will always be around even if the country is taken off the map. Poland will always be in the hearts and minds of it people and if it is there then Poland will live on. F:

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