

Warsaw – Wine, Food & Travel, by Michèle Shah

Warsaw may not yet be on everyone's bucket wish list, but it should be! It is one of Europe's most dynamic capitals. With an estimated 1.7M inhabitants it is a bustling city with plenty to do and see. What struck me in particular other than its rich cultural heritage, is its vibrant restaurant and wine scene.

Warsaw is centrally located in Poland, contoured by the Vistula river, and within 250 km from the Baltic Sea, 300 km from Krakow and 400 km from the Zakopane Mountains – all well worth a visit! But let us explore Warsaw for now.

A bit of background history

Once described as the Paris of the East, Warsaw was considered one of the most beautiful cities in the world until the disastrous damages inflicted during WWII. Its history has been a succession of tragic events, which in part have contributed to the 'richness' of its soul and people who have been subjected to a number of invasions. It is possibly the Warsaw Uprising between August and October 1944 that left the biggest scars, which left more than 85% of Warsaw's historic center deliberately annihilated by occupying German troops.



After the war, a five-year reconstruction campaign by its citizens resulted in today's meticulous restoration of the Old Town, The New Town and what constituted the Royal Route with its wonderful aristocratic townhouses, palaces, churches and market-place. A process which continued until the mid-1960s and considered an outstanding example of a near-total reconstruction of a span of history covering the 13th to the 20th century, receiving the status of UNESCO World Heritage site in 2013.

Logistics: Old Town and New Town

Today it is a delight to walk through the historic center of Warsaw, known as the Old Town. Quaint alleyways, horse driven carriages, baroque and neoclassical architecture and the magnificent Old Town square with its fountain, cafés and restaurants create a unique sense of history, which in the summer, become the stage for musical and theatrical performances and open-air galleries. Needless to say, it is a popular tourist destination. The New Town is practically a continuation of the Old Town. Its main street ulica Freta, runs from the Barbican and up past the New Town Square and beautiful Palladian style buildings. It was also in part home to the Jewish ghetto.

Krakowskie Przedmieście, is one of the best known and most prestigious streets in Warsaw, surrounded by historic palaces, churches and manor-houses. Krakowskie Przedmieście Royal Avenue constitutes the northernmost part of Warsaw's Royal Route, linking the Old Town and Royal Castle (at Castle Square) with some of the most notable institutions in Warsaw, including – proceeding southward – the Presidential Palace, Warsaw University, and the Polish Academy of Sciences situated in the Staszic Palace. The immediate southward extension of Krakowskie Przedmieście along the Royal Route is ulica Nowy Świat (New World Street).



Nowy Swiat, or "New World Street" starts from downtown Warsaw and takes you right up to the Old Town. It is one of Warsaw's busiest streets for shopping and café and dining destinations.

Culture: What to experience in Warsaw

Following this historic introduction, it is important to plan a visit to the **Warsaw Rising Museum**. Housed in a former tramway power station, the modern museum guides visitors through interactive displays, video footage and photographs paying tribute to all those who fought and died for their country's independence.

Palace of Culture and Science

Known as the highest viewing platform in Warsaw, the building was completed in 1955 as a 'gift from the Soviet people', the building is the embodiment of Socialist Realist architecture. It is still the tallest building in Poland and fulfils the role of a cultural center accommodating theatres, museums, a cinema and a concert hall. Take the lift to the 30th floor, which offers 360° panoramic views of the city.

POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews

This is a modern narrative museum which presents a 1000-year history of Polish Jews. The museum is highly interactive and its extensive research and exhibits give a unique documentation on Polish Judaism, both locally and abroad. It is located in the center of the former Jewish district where in 1943 intense battles of the Ghetto Uprising took place.

In 2016, POLIN Museum won the title of the European Museum of the Year Award (EMYA 2016).

Łazienki Royal Park

Warsaw is blessed by wonderful parks. The most impressive and the most central, the **Łazienki Royal Park** known as a Palace-garden is central to Warsaw. The name Łazienki means *baths* and derives from the park's center-piece and best-known attraction, the Palace on the Island. The palace was originally built in the 17th century as a private bathhouse for Stanisław Herakliusz Lubomirski, owner of the adjacent Ujazdów Castle and much of the surrounding land. The bathhouse was bought by the last king of Poland, Stanisław August Poniatowski in 1772 and converted into a private residence. It was at this time that the grounds were formally laid out as a private garden. Today the park with its many palaces, summer houses, pavilions, mansions, orangerie, amphitheatre, cafes, restaurants and lakes, is also home to the iconic Fryderyk Chopin Art Nouveau monument (1926), where weekly Sunday Chopin Piano recitals take place. The cycle starts in mid-May ending in the third week of September and is a delightful experience where one can enjoy concerts played by young prominent pianists: the first concert starts at 12.00 pm and the second at 4.00 pm. The concerts are free of cost.



Fryderyk Chopin Museum

Fryderyk Chopin is intrinsic to Warsaw's musical culture. The museum which was recently renovated is well worth a visit. It is interactive and one can spend any amount of time in there listening to excerpts of music and learning about the life of this musical genius.

The Young Talents at the Fryderyk Chopin Museum concert series serves the purpose of highlighting gifted pianists. On Thursday evenings, young artists play in the Concert Hall of the Museum, presenting programmes that are never lacking in pieces by Fryderyk Chopin.

Chopin evenings on Okólnik street

Every summer Tuesday, masterpieces by Chopin and other composers are performed on the patio of the University of Music. Entry to all concerts is free: everyone is welcome to come and listen to music interpreted by students and graduates of Polish music academies. Concerts are held on the patio or in the Concert Hall of the Fryderyk Chopin University of Music.

Wine & Food in Warsaw

This is possibly one of the most dynamic fast track scenes taking place in Warsaw over the past few years, achieving great merit and interest. Here listed are some of the ones that are of particular interest for the use of primary ingredients, creativity and ability to match dishes to an excellent selection of wines by the glass.

Selection of new cutting edge restaurants – delivering excellent value for money with great wines lists



Kieliszki na Hozéj is a bistro/wine bar style, airy and bright with nice décor, green hanging plants and lots of open views. Its buzzing from morning to evening with ‘foodies’ enamored with Chef Dawid Balana’s passionate cooking (graduate of Alain Ducasse Education programme in Poland, who graduated with honors in March 2016). French, Scandinavian and Polish cuisine are his favorites. He truly appreciates the traditional, classic cuisine and is strongly inspired by traditional recipes which he reinterprets in a modern style. His favorite ingredients are sour cream, butter, potato, onion and truffle – without these elements he cannot imagine his dishes. There is a commendable wine list to match the cuisine. <http://www.kieliszkinahozej.pl>





Kieliszki na Proznej is a bistro/wine bar style, centrally located on the ground floor in an attractive area of Warsaw, it is similar in style to Kieliszki na Hozój offering an assortment of good main courses, fresh fish and traditional Polish tartar and ribeye steaks, corn fed chicken, but also small original dishes including homemade pickles, traditional borscht soup and chicken in gelé and salads. All products coming from small farm suppliers. Excellent wine list managed by award winning Sommelier Pawel Demianiuk. **Best Wine Bar @ Warsaw** www.kieliszkinaproznej.pl



Delightful small restaurant on Rozbrat street, run by Chef Bartosz Szymczak, a talented prodigy who worked in London for several years at Bleeding Heart, Arbutus and Sanderson Hotel. His cuisine is top class, creative, well balanced, and very tasty. This accompanied by the excellent wine list, presented by knowledgeable sommeliers in a relaxed friendly atmosphere is a real winner. **Best Neo Bistro @ Warsaw** www.rozbrat20.com.pl



Brasserie Warszawska is an elegant bistrot near the embassy district of Warsaw, serving superb food which is a mix of French and Polish cuisine with a modern twist inspired by resident Chef Mateusz Wichrowski, awarded with the Bib Gourmand Michelin symbol. This is where you can get superb fresh Oysters if that's what you are looking for. The signature of Piotr Woyde sommelier and GM lies in his style of service which he likes to call, "controlled chaos". Piotr loves searching out and ageing interesting labels which he opens only when perfectly aged. He loves to surprise his customers with unexpected wine and pairings.
Best French @ Warsaw www.brasseriewarszawska.pl



Butchery & Wine, as the restaurant suggests, is where to eat the best steak in Warsaw, accompanied by a savvy selection of wines. All meats come from free range farms aged to perfection. The essential elements are: honest cooking, which can be traced back to the freshest ingredients, which come from small specialist suppliers. Their motto: eat what you love, says it all. Knowledgeable sommelier Kamil Wojtasiak is a member of Polish Sommelier Association, graduated from the WSET Advanced course. <http://www.butcheryandwine.pl>



Strictly Traditional Polish Cuisine

Stary Dom Restaurant offers good traditional Polish cuisine in a traditional setting at reasonable prices. Here you can sample some of the best Polish dishes. <http://www.restauracjastarydom.pl>

Dom Polski Restaurant is set in a villa surrounded by garden. It offers Polish tradition with modernity with several signature dishes such as (flaki po warszawsku, zrazy Kasztelańskie or jablecznik z jabłek z grójeckich sadów) are promoted with the logo of Mazovia Culinary Heritage. <http://www.restauracjadompolski.pl/en/>

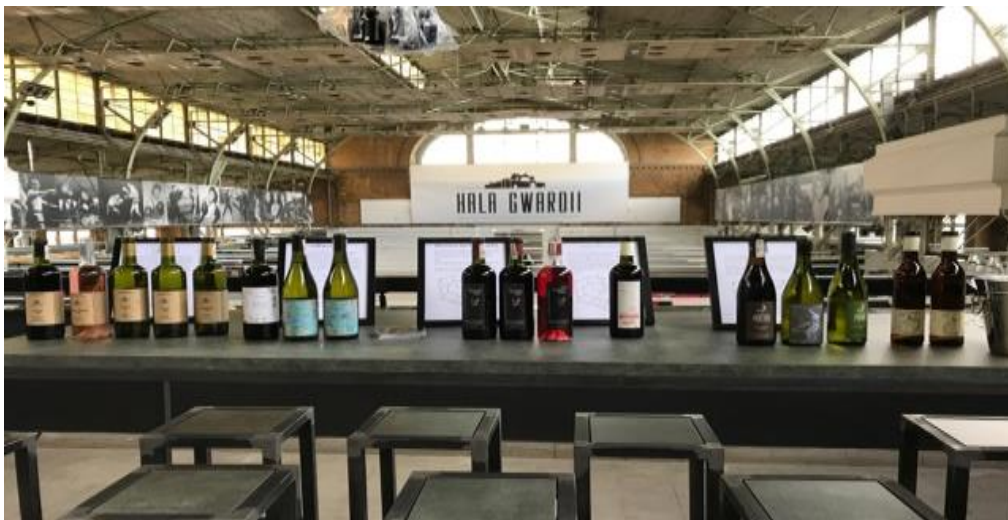
Lotos Restaurant - ul. Belwederska 2, Warsaw +48 22 841 13 01 (no website) If you wish to go back in time to the 70's this is an amazing place for that sort of décor. (communist era in décor but very friendly service). The food is not refined but you get excellent value for money and it is definitely off the beaten tourist track.

Polish wines

The tradition of Polish wine was never a prominent one and was definitely not taken into consideration while Poland was under Soviet rule as all vineyards were uprooted and the land used to produce grain or other vegetables that went to increase the food supply of the Soviet Union. Interest has crept back since year 2000 increasing to when in 2009 Poland counted 20 wineries in production and a new wine legislation was created. Today Poland can count about 197 wineries and officially 250ha of vines though unofficially there are about 2000ha (of young vineyards that do not yet sell wine), each winery averages about 1.5ha with the exception of a few larger: Winnica Turnau on north-west of Poland and the Winnica Srebrna Gora at Krakow, both have 28ha area. In 2016 about 7000 hectolitres were produced and the trend is increasing, which sees the creation of some 40 to 50 new winery enterprises each year.

Because of the cool climate growers have concentrated production mainly on hybrids such as Hibernial, Solaris, Johanniter and Seyval Blanc in the white varieties with a slow but sure interest in producing some promising examples of Chardonnay, one the most popular white variety after which comes vitis vinifera varieties such as Riesling, Gewurtztraminer, Pinot Gris and Pinot Blanc. The red hybrids include Rondo Regent, and Marechal Foch, along with some vitis vinifera varieties such as Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Zweigelt.

There is also a growing interest in sparkling wines due to the crisp climate.



Hala Gwardii

Was extensively damaged during the IIWW. In the years that followed it was re-adapted to serve as a gym and earned nationwide fame as the stomping ground of legendary boxing coach Feliks 'Papa' Stamm. Out of respect for history, the management of Gwardii have pursued an overt boxing theme with the walls decorated with images of Stamm and his medal winning pupils.

Its recent opening end September 2017 promises to be a popular market with quality food stalls where you can also sample foods from different countries drawing inspiration from similar places from around the world, like Lisbon's Mercado de Ribera or Mercado Boqueria in Barcelona, where people come not only to buy food, but also to meet friends over coffee a meal and a glass of wine. It will also house a tasting room and wine shop opened by one Poland's most savvy importers, Vini e Affini – wine importer and distributor and can be found under the name, **Wine Corner Poland**.

<http://vini-affini.pl>

Food Markets Forteca situated in Zakroczymska Street, close to Old Town is a revelation for finding authentic bio products. The fort was built between 1852 and 1854 to protect the City. Since 1999 the Fort has been privately owned by a well-known family of Warsaw restaurateurs, Agnieszka and Marcin Kręgliński and run by Piotr Petryka (Agnieszka's husband). The focus is on organic produce and in some cases biodynamic produce. All producers come from within a 100km radius and meet here every Wednesday to sell their produce. The market has a special atmosphere with delicious wafts of freshly baked bread and colorful displays of vegetables, fruits, honey, jams, juices, pickle, eggs, milk, cheeses, cold cuts, fish, bread and grains. All the products are certified organic and in some cases biodynamic and only animal products that have been bred according to ethical conditions can be sold in this market.



Hala Mirowska

Hala Mirowska constructed in 1899-1901 is one of the largest and oldest food markets in the center of Warsaw. There are two market buildings, and an open-air market between them. During the Second World War Germans conducted civil executions here. Bullet holes are still visible on the northern wall of one hall.

Where to stay

Warsaw has a number of modern international hotel chains such as Best Western, Sheraton and Hilton, but there are also a number of boutique hotels in beautiful centrally located town houses that are becoming more and more popular. There is also a good choice of apartments and rooms on Airbnb.com



My Favourite is Hotel Le Regina in Wasrsaw, strategically situated in the Old Town, inside the historic Mokrowsky Palace and the nearby vicinity of the old city and its Royal Castle. The rooms and suites are a good size and elegantly furnished. Le Rigina's French restaurant is recommended and awarded 3 Gault Millau Points. Enjoy the spa area. This is a great hotel to relax and enjoy Warsaw. <http://www.mamaisonleregina.com>



Hotel Rialto was established in 2003 as Warsaw's first boutique hotel. Rialto's style traces its roots to the best architectural and artistic traditions of interior décor in old Warsaw. It is located in a fully-restored, early 20th century tenement house at the intersection of the Wilcza and Emili Plater streets. The Art Deco époque formed the inspiration for the hotel's interior design, which is consistently reflected in all the corners of the hotel. <http://www.rialto.pl>

The H15 Boutique Hotel & Residence, includes carefully designed and decorated apartments situated in a XIX century building where the past meets the present. H15 Boutique boats 47 luxury rooms & apartments. H15 Boutique Hotel & Residence has been rewarded as The Best 5star Hotel in Poland 2017 by Trivago. <http://www.h15boutiqueapartments.com>



Michèle Shah is a wine critic and travel writer

www.micheleshahtravel.com