

City fortifications



Begin your trip with the Cathedral Island, an island formed between the rivers Warta and Cybina. It is here that in the tenth century a powerful settlement was developed, along with Gniezno, the best fortified settlement in emerging Poland. What most contributed to the shaping of Poznań's role was its strategic location. Such conditions for crossing over the Warta River were not to be found either dozens of kilometres to the south or north of the settlement. Furthermore, Poznań safeguarded Gniezno from the west against possible German attacks. Even Emperor Henry II did not dare to attempt conquering the town - in 1005 he arrived with his army in Poznań's environs, concluding a deal with King Bolesław Chrobry. Until the 13th century, Poznań's settlement was an important link in the Polish defence system. It was surrounded by a rampart 10-12 meters high and up to 25 meters wide. The rampart was built of earth, stone and wood was repeatedly rebuilt and fortified. Its sections are well preserved and soon will become one of major attractions of the archaeological reserve currently developed at ul. Posadzego. Entrances to the castle were guarded by a wooden gate, the entire system being further complemented by observation towers.



Poznań settlement consisted of two parts. The first was the ducal town situated within the triangle of: Panny Marii Street, Ostrów Tumski Street and Cathedral Square. The main element of this part was the **ducal palace** with a chapel (a palace) located roughly in today's place of the **Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary**. The second part of the settlement, surrounded by separate ramparts, was located around the cathedral church dating back to 968; the system was further complemented with a fortified merchants' and craftsmen's village, with its borders being marked by the streets Wyszyńskiego, Zagórze and Wieżowa.

In 1038, the settlement was burned by the Czech Duke Břetislav. That's when, as reported by chronicler Gallus Anonymus, Poznań cathedral was inhabited by wild animals, and the capital was moved to Krakow. However, the city of Poznań was rebuilt in no time, and when in 1138 Poland was divided into districts, Poznań advanced to become the capital of Wielkopolska.

In 1253 Poznań was granted an urban charter, and development of an ideal mediaeval town began on the left bank of the river. Architects not only marked out the central market square, including even the house frontages and the orthogonal layout of the streets, but also the line of the walls meant to protect the city. The fortifications were strong - the Czech king John of Luxemburg, who besieged Poznań in 1331, failed to seize the city. ✘

Lines where the walls were once laid down are marked at the street level with red paving stones. While strolling from Cathedral Island you can see the markings at **Wielka Street**, where the

irregular shape of the lines means that it is the former location of the **Great Gate**, one of four gates leading into the town. However, we will actually start our walk around medieval fortifications at the junction of Wroniecka Street and Stawna Street, featuring partial **reconstructions of the Wroniecka Gate, two towers** and a **section of the wall** being 41.5 m long. The total perimeter of the walls in the mediaeval era was 2300 steps (approximately 1725 m).



The reconstructed portion of the walls is a powerful piece of fortifications, further reinforced by a pond and moat fed with Bogdanka River waters. No one has ever even tried to capture the town from that side. A section of the original outer wall is part of the first building from the side of Solna Street (Wroniecka 12). The original height of the wall at this point was 11.5 m, and the wall was reinforced with numerous towers. You will pass one of them during the walk. The tower

called **Katarzynki Tower** was built back in the fourteenth century and extended in the sixteenth. All towers consisted of three storeys, the last two storeys having portholes.

After reaching the end of the reconstructed city wall, you will find at Masztalarska Street ✘ the remains of one of the **towers of the outer wall**. It survived only due to the fragments of fortifications having been incorporated into a nineteenth-century house built here. The tower was discovered while cleaning up the city after the devastations caused during the Second World War and preserved in the previous state. What attracts our attention here is the 1.5-meter-wide tower walls with their numerous portholes.

✘ Continue your walk up Zamkowa Street and climb the Przemysł Hill with a thirteenth-century **Royal Castle** - an important part of medieval fortifications. The Castle also played a representative role; in 1295 it became the seat of the Polish King Przemysł II. The sight of the castle was dominated by a defence tower and was characterised by walls being 3 metres thick. The Castle was repeatedly rebuilt, and in the eighteenth century the site with castle ruins was redeveloped - the buildings constructed at that time in lieu of the former castle have survived to this day and presently house the **Museum of Applied Arts**. While going down Przemysł Hill, along Ludgardy Street, you can notice a section of preserved **outer wall**, the further course of which was incorporated into the elevation of the National Museum. It is here that most attempts were made to capture the city, and this wall was most vulnerable to the attacks. The last saved section of the mediaeval fortifications can be found between Wroniecka Street and the former Jesuit College. Wroniecka Street featured the **Wroniecka Gate**, marking the beginning of the preserved fragment of the walls, since late eighteenth century embedded in the Hotel Saski's facade. The exposed section of the wall was built at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when Jesuits removed the old wall to make space for a church and a college. In return for an approval, they were obliged to later restore the walls and towers.

Fortress of Poznań

Poznań's strategic role increased when, as a consequence of the second partition of ✘

Poland, Poznań was incorporated into Prussia (1793) and when the border between territories annexed to Prussia and Russia was moved west due to Napoleonic wars (1815). Consequently, Poznań grew to be a city of great strategic significance; in times of conflict, the capital of the Province was situated on the shortest route between Berlin, Warsaw and Moscow. A process was then launched to transform Poznań into a fortress. The major fort, the "**Winiary Fort**" (**the Citadel**) was developed on a hill overlooking the nineteenth-century city, later enclosed with tight walls of the polygonal fortress. In the third quarter of the nineteenth century the fortress was fortified with eighteen forts, which surrounded the city on its distant outskirts. Fortifications were further extended until mobilisation before the First World War, thus turning Poznań into one of the largest military complexes in Europe, capable of withstanding a prolonged siege. The early twentieth century, however, saw a commencement of the dismantling of the inner ring of fortifications, as they ceased to play an important military role due to developing military technology. In the place of the inner ring the **Castle District** was developed.

✘ As a fortress, Poznań has been tested in practice only once - in 1945, when the Germans stubbornly defended it against advancing Soviet forces. Although it was impossible to defend the city Germans held out in Poznań for a month thanks to the old Prussian fortifications. The remains of the fortifications can be seen to this day. Poznań's largest fort, situated on the wine hill (Citadel), was largely demolished and converted into a park. The building of the former War Laboratory now houses the **Museum of Armaments**, while the casemated gantry of the Small Sluice has been occupied by the "**Poznań**" **Army Museum**.

One of the few preserved elements of the inner fortification ring is the blockhouse of **Columb Fort**, located in Marcinkowski Park. Nowadays, it houses a pub, so you can at least still see its interior. Other elements preserved in better or worse condition include all 18 forts surrounding the city (9 major and 9 intermediate forts).

At the moment, visitors can see some of the sections of **Fort VII**, presently housing the **Museum of Wielkopolska Martyrs**, devoted to the German Death Camp for the Polish population, which operated there during the Second World War. Furthermore, every year on the June Fortress Weekend one of the forts is opened to visitors, who are guided by staff clad in historical uniforms.

