

# History comes alive in amazing Poznan

Phil Hawkes finds much to write home about in Poland's fifth-largest city

THE fast train from Warsaw shudders to a halt at Poznan's busy station.

Wojciech is there to meet me and although I have trouble pronouncing his name, we soon become 24-hour friends. He's going to show everything possible in a short visit and see me safely on to the train leaving for Berlin the next day.

Soon after arriving, I begin to realise my fundamental mistake – I haven't allowed long enough to do justice to this charming place, situated half way between Warsaw and Berlin.

It's a mistake I'll regret.

Wojciech is a PhD in cultural geography. He's a human

encyclopedia, passionate about his city, knowledgeable about the history and culture of Poznan and Poland in general.

For an Australian, there's a lot to learn. Our curriculum is sadly lacking in the history of Eastern Europe, except for relevance to the events of World War II when Poland was invaded by Nazi Germany, then in 1945 by the Soviet Union who ruled until independence in 1989-90.

It's a shocking history, steeped in blood and sacrifice, and I marvel at the resilience of the Polish people after years of occupation and turmoil.

In an historical sense,



Outside and inside the remarkable Blow Up Hall hotel, which is a living gallery.



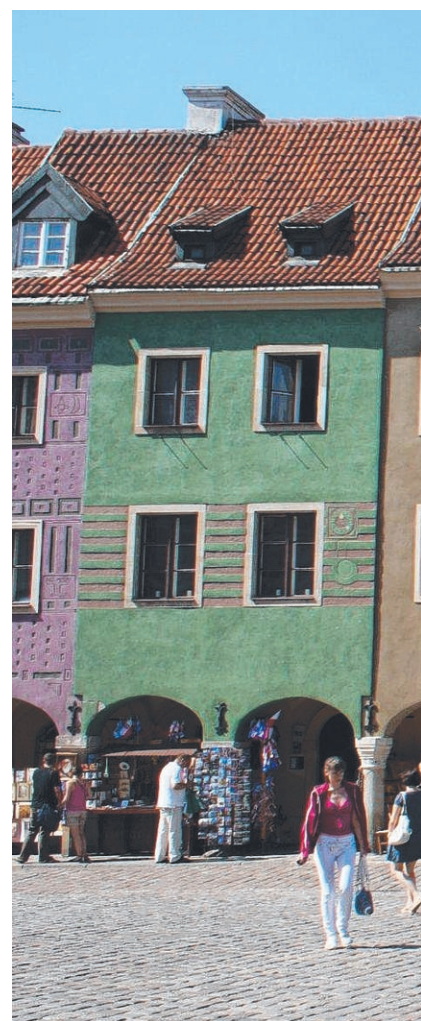
Poznan is a good place to start learning about Poland. Warsaw has more history related to the Jewish pogroms, but Poznan's background dates back much further. It's regarded as Poland's first capital and the birthplace of the Polish nation in the 10th century.

In fact our starting point for

the tour, fittingly, is the Cathedral of St Peter and St Paul dating back to that time, where the first Polish kings are buried. Constructed and added to in a mixture of styles, mainly Gothic, it's most impressive.

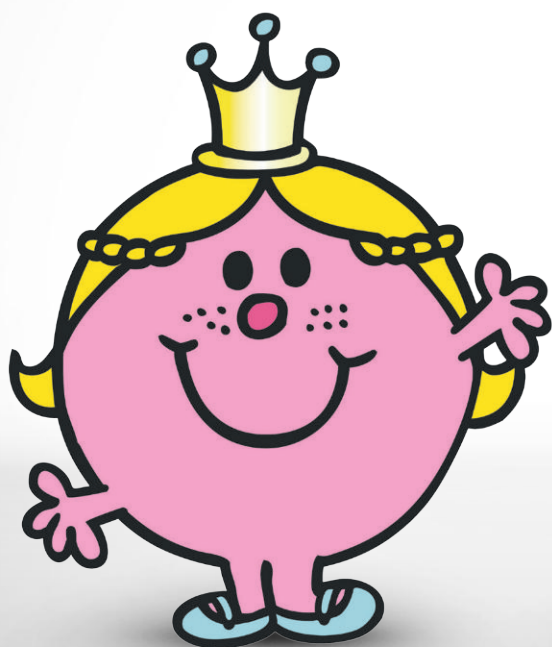
Next we visit the Royal Castle, dating to the 13th century, largely destroyed

during World War II and now partly rebuilt. Today it serves as the Museum of Functional Art. We move on to an equally important monument, Poland's smallest restaurant Vine Bridge, where chef Radek presides over all of 10 seats, offering a set daily menu of delicious Polish food



deconstructed for a modern clientele. The wine, a pinot noir from Wroclaw in southern

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## LINDSAY SAUNDERS

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Colour and history abound in Poznan and (below) the Stary Browar (Old Brewery) Shopping Mall. Main picture: Jan Mazurczak

Poland, is interesting. It lets you know that the area was previously in Germany.

In Poznan, a few people still speak German (and Russian) but English is taught in all schools.

Over the afternoon and evening we explore the delightful Old Town Square, Stary Rynek, with its colourful restored buildings and small shops selling artefacts and souvenirs, plus many wine and beer bars.

One beer house, Basilius, claims to have 150 different brews but sadly there was too little time to try them all. I manage to imbibe a potent Kejter ale (6 per cent) because the dog on the label reminds me of home, but it's a good choice anyway.

Goats are also prominent in Poznan. The renaissance City Hall tower features two bucks who butt heads 12 times on the stroke of noon daily. It's a fun variation on the cuckoo clock.

Apart from galleries and small museums covering a wide range of interests, another must-see in Poznan is the 20th



century Imperial Castle. It's not really a castle but a neo-Romanesque palace built for German Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1910.

It served as a provincial residence until his abdication and exile in 1918. Then, in 1939 after the Nazi invasion, architect Albert Speer oversaw the conversion of the building

into apartments for Hitler and the Third Reich officials.

Today, it functions as a centre of culture with performance spaces, galleries and restaurants.

Perhaps the most surprising attraction in Poznan is not a historic monument but a modern hotel. It's entirely unexpected

GO2  
DESINATION

## GETTING THERE

Poznan is easily reached by fast train from Warsaw or Berlin. There are direct flights from London on Ryanair or Polish airline Wizzair.

poznan.travel  
blowuphall5050.com  
slh.com

and completely eclectic, and even the name, Blow Up Hall, has you wondering what's in store.

We soon find out. The hotel entrance is at one end of an old brewery, Stary Browar, now converted into a modern shopping mall with every designer brand you've heard of, and some you haven't.

That's a good start. Next, we are given an iPhone at check-in. This acts as a guide to our room and opens the door, although there's a back-up key too. We also use it to call the hotel staff, or local numbers.

On the way to our room, TV screens show our images "scrambled" into artistic shapes meant to be works of art. But that's the whole concept, this hotel is meant to be a living gallery, 50 per cent art and 50 per cent functional.

Does it work? That's debatable and some will find it doesn't fit their idea of how a hotel should be run. It's fun, weird and somehow engaging, even if certain things don't work well.

Next day, as we say goodbye to Wojciech at the train station, he hands us a box of local pastries called croissants St Martin, a much appreciated gesture typical of the Poznanites we met.

The croissants remind us that we were lucky to have made this brief stopover, and we determine to return for a longer stay.

GET OUT  
THERE

## FIJI

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## RUSSIA

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The package includes five nights accommodation with daily breakfast, sightseeing with local English-speaking guides, second-class travel on the high-speed Sapsan train and return airport transfers.

There are nine guaranteed departures between May and September in 2014.

beyondtravel.com.au



Horse-drawn carriage rides are part of the Central Park magic.

## NO MORE APPLE FOR NY HORSES?

Time may be running out for the iconic horse carriages that carry tourists around New York City's Central Park.

Mayor Bill de Blasio has already declared his intention to shut down the industry, saying it is inhumane to keep horses in modern-day Manhattan.

While that debate could be over, at least one nagging question remains: What will become of the horses?

Both sides of New York City's carriage-horse battle

insist they will find a sanctuary for the approximately 200 horses licensed to pull carriages in New York City.

But drivers warn that shutting down the city stables might have the unintended effect of eliminating a rare outlet for surplus horses pouring out of the farming and racing industries – sending them faster to the slaughterhouse.

"If they did not come to New York City, most of these horses would be dead," said Ian

McKeever, an Irishman who owns nine Central Park horses and has been driving a carriage in the city since 1987.

That's an argument that infuriates critics of the industry, who say the nation's unwanted horse dilemma is no excuse to preserve an inhumane business.

"Anyone who cares about a horse wouldn't think that taking it and sticking it in midtown traffic is the right answer to that problem," said Allie Feldman, executive

director of a leading anti-carriage lobbying group, New Yorkers for Clean, Livable and Safe Streets.

Carriage owners insist their horses are as healthy and happy as any in a well-run rural barn. Most live in one of four stables, hidden away inside old three or four-storey buildings on Manhattan's far West Side. On days they work, the horses clop through city traffic, amid honking cabs, for up to 3.2 kilometres before reaching Central Park.