## Travel Outlook

## Three phase visit to Poland

## A stranger in a strange country

I have just returned from a 17 day stay in Poland. I had never been to Eastern Europe before and in many ways Poland was such an alien place that I often felt I was on another planet rather than in another country. Not speaking any Polish beyond yes (tak) and no (nie) didn't help me feel any more at home.

I really have to stress the importance of going to the country on a guided tour; otherwise you can go crazy trying to go anywhere, buy anything; even getting lunch is no easy feat. Travel operators in the country are well aware of the difficulties for an individual tourist and are very willing to arrange a package that suits the taste of any group, even if it is a group of two.

My stay was divided into three phases: six days on a guided tour with Orbis, the largest tour operator in the country; six days staying with a Polish woman, renting a nice room

STORY, PHOTOS BY DIAHANN NADEAU

Hungarian empire in 1772. Two more partitions followed in 1793 and 1795. Poland did not regain its independence until 1918, a hundred and twenty-three years later.

Twenty-one years after that, Hitler attacked the country on September 1, 1939. In three weeks he had totally defeated the Polish Army. With this loss began the most devastating period in Polish history. Not only did Hitler try to completely eliminate Jews in Europe; he believed that in order to meet German demands in the east, 30 million Slavs had to die. In Poland some six million citizens died, one out of

again. When the tide of battle turned, the Nazis planted dynamite throughout the city in order to blow it up. But the Soviets surrounded the city before the Nazis could escape, and Cracow was saved because the Nazis did not want to blow themselves up.

In the years since the war, the old city in Warsaw has been completely rebuilt and the Royal Castle restored to its former glory through heroic and passionate efforts. Poles are incredibly patriotic, proud of their heritage, determined to preserve all that is essential to the heart of Polish culture.

Every one I talked to, from taxi drivers to diplomats, revealed an enormous pride, a heart-felt sense of history. Most of the reconstruction one sees was financed by the ordinary citizen; the Polish people donated time and money to restore Warsaw to its former beauty.

I shed tears many times during my stay; the memorial to the Jewish ghetto is profoundly moving; the fabulous churches that had been looted and burnt, restored now, but never regaining many of the treasures the Nazis took, were a sorrowing sight. I did not visit Auschwitz, though I was not far from there at Cracow, because I felt I could not bear to see the terrible remnants of such a horrifying place

Continued on page 16



MAKE A NOTE OF:

12% RRF

- 60 to 71 years of age
- Guaranteed Rates
- No Fees
- RRSP
- Annuities

BERND NERMANN, C.L.U.
BRAMPTON 459-4228

Annuity Analysis & Retirement Planners Inc.



TEUTONIC KNIGHTS CASTLE IN MALBORG FROM THE 12TH-13TH CENTURY (Photo by Diahann Nadeau)

in her centrally located apartment, and finally five days staying with my friend Lucyna out in the suburbs. Each phase had its good and bad points. (I will go into more detail on these next week).

While on the guided tour I saw some magnificient buildings and some wonderful spots. Local tour guides joined us to explain the history of the region or the site. I saw and felt more history of the region or the site. I saw and felt more history in Poland than I have ever seen before, even on other trips to Europe.

Because it was the aspect that most captured my heart and mind, I would like to talk about the history of Poland in this first article. Poland as a country made its appearance around the year 1000. The nation is celebrating its first millenium. During the early years Polish kings and princes fought for power over eastern Europe, warring with various ethnic groups and factions, the most interesting enemy being the Teutonic Knights.

I visited Malborg, a 12th and 13th century castle/fortress built by the Teutonic Knights. It is so impressive and magnificent that this castle alone is worth the visit to Poland. The next day I toured Torun, a town dating from the 12th century, with its own reminders of the Teutonic Knights. It is also the birthplace of

Copernicus.
Unfortunately the country suffered a series of weak monarchs and
atrong neighbours during the second
half of the 18th century and the coun-

try was first partitioned between Russia, Prussia and the Austroevery fifth Pole.

I cannot begin to describe how devasting the war was in Poland. There is no place in Poland which was not affected by the war. Warsaw was completely leveled by 1945; the Nazis made a point of blowing the whole city up. Cracow, the ancient capital, was not destroyed, because Hitler planned to make it the capital





ALDETALTIME MAINTENTANAL ENGINE MAY OCCUR. WE SHEAVE THE MERY TO COMMET ANY EN