

Location Overview

Szczecin <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Szczecin>

The city, situated by the River Odra, has a rich history, shaped over the centuries by different nations – from the early Slavs to Brandenburg Germans to Danes to Swedes to French, to Prussians to Poles. Szczecin is the largest city in the Province of Western Pomerania and the historic capital of the Duchy of Pomerania, the former seat of the Griffin dynasty dukes. For centuries, despite its changing political allegiances, the city was known as “Stettin”, the name changed to Szczecin after World War II. Szczecin has been an important economic, commercial, cultural and tourist hub. It is also a major academic centre, with several universities, including the University of Szczecin, West Pomeranian University of Technology and the Pomeranian Medical University.



A Szczecin panorama from the tower of the Pomeranian Dukes' Castle



The Szczecin Concert Hall (Filharmonia)

With its area of over 300 km², Szczecin is the third largest city in Poland. Nearly 40% of its area is covered by greenery, Lake Dąbie, and wetlands of the so-called Międzyodrze. The administrative boundaries of the city enclose a part of the Szczecin Landscape Park. Another landscape park, the Lower Odra Valley, a protected Natura 2000 area, directly adjoins the southern borders of Szczecin.

Szczecin was granted civic rights by Duke Barnim the First in 1243 and shortly thereafter joined the Hanseatic League. Thus began one of the most vigorous growth periods in the city's history. The city acquired a large town hall, a number of houses and churches enclosed within city walls that were adorned by gates, water gates and towers. In the 14th century, a huge ducal residence was built on the hill overlooking the river, as were also the so-called Stone House and the church of St. Otto.

The reign of Prince Boguslav the Tenth, who unified Pomerania and made Szczecin the capital of the Great Duchy, was a prosperous period in the city's history. The Duke married the Polish princess Anna of the Jagiellonian dynasty, a daughter of the Polish King Casimir Jagiellon. The big wedding took place in the Szczecin castle and the wedding party went on for many days.

After the Thirty Years' War, the city was taken over for almost a hundred years by the Swedes who added the crown and lions to the official Szczecin coat of arms. The Swedes also began the construction of large fortifications, which were later expanded by the Prussians. Szczecin became officially known as a fortress until the demolition of the fortifications in the second half of the 19th century. The city then became part of the German empire.

The city changed in the 1930s, when its administrative borders were expanded to include the nearby villages and the town of Dąbie (German: Altdamm). The Great City of Szczecin was established and functioned until the end of World War II. More than 70% of the city's urban buildings and nearly 85% of the port and industrial areas were destroyed during "carpet" air raids in 1943 by the British and American Air Forces. When World War II ended and the Yalta Treaty came into effect on 26 April 1945, temporarily, and finally on 5 July 1945, Szczecin was taken over by the Polish administration.

Historical attractions worth seeing in Szczecin:

- a) The Pomeranian Dukes' Castle: A Renaissance residence of the Pomeranian rulers of the Griffin dynasty. Today the castle houses the Centre for Cultural and Tourist Information and the Opera Theatre as well as the Castle Museum and the West Pomeranian Marshall's Office;



Pomeranian Dukes' Castle (left) and Red City Hall (right)

- b) The Chrobry Embankments (in German: Hakenterrassen; in Polish: Wały Chrobrego): one of the most recognizable places in Szczecin; a representative part of the town at the riverfront, with historic buildings of the Governor's Office, National Museum and the Maritime University; next to the revitalized Odra river waterfront with a number of pubs, coffee bars and restaurants;



Chrobry Embankments (Hakenterrassen) along the Odra River bank

- c) The Cathedral Basilica of St. James: the biggest and tallest (110.7 m) gothic church in Szczecin; the seat of the archbishop; the top of the restored spire features a lookout offering a spectacular view over the city and its surroundings; every year on the 25th of July, the day of the cathedral's patron saint (St. James), the James Fair is held. It refers to the medieval tradition with events and stands selling local products and handicrafts offered by local artists and artisans;
- d) The Central Cemetery: the third largest cemetery in Europe, with unique tree species, monumental and historical tombs as well as scenic sites.

For more information, see the Mini Guide.

The Western Pomerania

The Western Pomerania (the Province of Western Pomerania) is an administrative unit in NW Poland. Historically, the province covers the territories of the former Duchy of West Pomerania, eastern Brandenburg, and north-western Great Poland. Situated far away from political and administrative centres, the province has been affected by an interplay of Pomeranian, Polish, German, Danish, and Swedish influences and has become a region featuring cultural heritage of many nations.

The province's northern boundary is the Baltic Sea coast. The province's relief is very diverse and mostly of post-glacial origin. Most common are morainic uplands dotted with numerous post-glacial lakes. South of the morainic upland zone there is a belt of morainic hills formed during the last glaciation. The hills rise to 160–245 m above the sea level. The southernmost part of the province shows flat outwash plains supporting extensive woodlands. The northern coastal belt is intersected by valleys of rivers discharging to the Baltic Sea.



Cliff coasts of the Baltic Sea in Western Pomerania

The province has 1389 lakes, which cover a total of 57,000 hectares, i.e. 2.5% of the region's area. The lakes are mostly post-glacial in origin, with picturesque shorelines. Eight lakes are larger than 1000 hectares, for which reason they are attractive sailing areas. Rivers in the region, flowing down scenic post-glacial valleys and frequently cutting through woodland areas, add to the province's landscape richness. They are popular kayaking and canoeing routes. Particularly famous and popular, in Poland and abroad, is kayaking down the River Drawa.

A total of 28% of the province's area is under various forms of protection, from national parks to landscape parks, nature reserves, and Natura 2000 areas. The most touristically attractive protected areas include the Wolin National Park on the Island of Wolin and several landscape parks (Cedyński, Iński, Drawski, and the Lower Odra Valley). The Natura 2000 areas occupy up to 80% of the coastal belt, the largest percentage of such areas in Europe. The province features 19 special protection areas for birds and 63 special areas of habitat conservation. They offer excellent bird watching sites, for example in the Karsiborska Kępa nature reserve or within the River Świna storm delta.

Numerous historical monuments and urban complexes, preserved until today, bear witness to the many centuries of cultural evolution of Western Pomerania. The region's trademarks are magnificent northern gothic edifices, half-timber residences and churches, knight's castles and nobility manors, and palace-park complexes.

Nowadays tourism is the most important industry of Western Pomerania, the region being visited annually by more than 2 million people. They head primarily to the Baltic Sea coast, attractive on account of its sandy beaches and excellent touristic infrastructure. The second most important destination is the lakeland belt offering attractive recreation opportunities by clean and scenic lakes. The entire province features numerous, specially marked, hiking, biking, kayaking, and sailing trails.

Travel Information

By air

To get to Szczecin from overseas, the easiest way is probably to fly to Berlin. The Berlin airports Tegel and Schoenefeld are located ca. 2 h drive by an excellent highway. Szczecin is also accessible from Polish airports in Gdańsk, Poznań and Warszawa.

There is a local airport at Szczecin Goleniów <http://www.airport.com.pl/en> a small airport located ca. 40 km from the city centre, serving primarily the NW region of Poland with domestic flights to Warszawa (Warsaw) and several airports in western and northern Europe. Regular connections are served by LOT Polish Airlines and by budget operators including Ryanair, WizzAir and Norwegian. The airport features some bars and restaurants, stores, and car rental.

Delegates arriving to Berlin (Berlin Tegel or Berlin Schoenefeld) might consider using the services of Flixbus <https://www.flixbus.co.uk/bus-timetable-stop/szczecin> ; advance booking is recommended. Those arriving to Szczecin Goleniów might use the services of Interglobus (Follow Me!) airport shuttle service (<https://www.interglobus.pl/Default.aspx?language=en>); advance booking is recommended as well. There are also taxis

By train

Szczecin is accessible by train and car from whole over Europe. The Szczecin Główny Railway Station (<http://pkpsa.pl/en/>) serves many domestic routes, including to Warszawa and Kraków and international connections including Berlin and Hamburg in Germany. The trains serving long distance domestic connections are fairly inexpensive and comfortable; the ICE trains offer free WIFI.

Car rental

Szczecin has plentiful car-hire facilities. In addition to local companies, services of some multinational car rental companies are available as well Avis and Europcar. Rent-a-car facilities can be found in large hotels as well as at the Szczecin Goleniów Airport.

Passports and Visas

Poland is a member state of the European Union (EU) and belongs to the Schengen zone. To enter the EU and Schengen zone, international travellers need a valid passport, with a minimum of six months validity, and should check current visa policies and procedures (<http://www.schengenvisainfo.com/poland-visa/>). Citizens of countries who need a visa are listed at: <http://www.schengenvisainfo.com/who-needs-schengen-visa/>. Delegates, who do require a visa to enter the Schengen zone can complete the visa application form online (<http://www.schengenvisainfo.com/poland-visa/>).

Currency

The Polish currency is called złoty (pronounced zwoty), known as the Polish zloty (PLN). At the moment of writing (mid-May), the exchange rate of PLN vs US Dollar is ca. 3.7 (USD 1 = PLN 3.7); Euro = 4.3; Pound Sterling = 4.9