

Warsaw (Polish: Warszawa [varˈʂava] ( listen); see also other names) is the capital and largest city of Poland. It stands on the Vistula River in east-central Poland, roughly 260 kilometres (160 mi) from the Baltic Sea and 300 kilometres (190 mi) from the Carpathian Mountains. Its population is estimated at 1.740 million residents within a greater metropolitan area of 2.666 million residents, which makes Warsaw the 9th most-populous capital city in the European Union. The city limits cover 516.9 square kilometres (199.6 sq mi), while the metropolitan area covers 6,100.43 square kilometres (2,355.39 sq mi).

In 2012 the Economist Intelligence Unit ranked Warsaw as the 32nd most liveable city in the world. It was also ranked as one of the most liveable cities in Central Europe. Today Warsaw is considered an "Alpha-" global city, a major international tourist destination and a significant cultural, political and economic hub. Warsaw's economy, by a wide variety of industries, is characterised by FMCG manufacturing, metal processing, steel and electronic manufacturing and food processing. The city is a significant centre of research and development, BPO, ITO, as well as of the Polish media industry. The Warsaw Stock Exchange is one of the largest and most important in Central and Eastern Europe. Frontex, the European Union agency for external border security, has its headquarters in Warsaw. It has been said that Warsaw, together with Frankfurt, London, Paris and Barcelona is one of the cities with the highest number of skyscrapers in the European Union. Warsaw has also been called "Eastern Europe's chic cultural capital with thriving art and club scenes and serious restaurants".

The first historical reference to Warsaw dates back to the year 1313, at a time when Kraków served as the Polish capital city. Due to its central location between the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth's capitals of Kraków and Vilnius, Warsaw became the capital of the Commonwealth and of the Crown of the Kingdom of Poland when King Sigismund III Vasa moved his court from Kraków to Warsaw in 1596. After the Third Partition of Poland in 1795, Warsaw was incorporated into the Kingdom of Prussia. In 1806 during the Napoleonic Wars, the city became the official capital of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, a puppet state of the First French Empire established by Napoleon Bonaparte. In accordance with the decisions of the Congress of Vienna, the Russian Empire annexed Warsaw in 1815 and it became part of the "Congress Kingdom". Only in 1918 did it regain independence from the foreign rule and emerge as a new capital of the independent Republic of Poland. The German invasion in 1939, the massacre of the Jewish population and deportations to concentration camps led to the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto in 1943 and to the major and devastating Warsaw Uprising between August and October 1944. Warsaw gained the title of the "Phoenix City" because it has survived many wars, conflicts and invasions throughout its long history. Most notably, the city required painstaking rebuilding after the extensive damage it suffered in World War II, which destroyed 85% of its buildings. On 9 November 1940, the city was awarded Poland's highest military decoration for heroism, the Virtuti Militari, during the Siege of Warsaw (1939).

The city is the seat of a Roman Catholic archdiocese (left bank of the Vistula) and diocese (right bank), and possesses various universities, most notably the Polish Academy of Sciences and the University of Warsaw, two opera houses, theatres, museums, libraries and monuments. The historic city-centre of Warsaw with its picturesque Old Town in 1980 was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Other main architectural attractions include the Castle Square with the Royal Castle and the iconic King Sigismund's Column, St. John's Cathedral, Market Square, palaces, churches and mansions all displaying a richness of colour and architectural detail. Buildings represent examples of nearly every European architectural style and historical period. Warsaw provides many examples of architecture from the gothic, renaissance, baroque and neoclassical periods, and around a quarter of the city is filled with luxurious parks and royal gardens.

Warsaw's name in the Polish language is Warszawa, approximately /vˈʂarˈava/ (also formerly spelled Warszewa and Warszowa), meaning "belonging to Warsz", Warsz being a shortened form of the masculine name of Slavic origin Warcisław; see also etymology of Wrocław. Folk etymology attributes the city name to a fisherman, Wars, and his wife, Sawa. According to legend, Sawa was a

mermaid living in the Vistula River with whom Wars fell in love. In actuality, Warsz was a 12th/13th-century nobleman who owned a village located at the modern-day site of Mariensztat neighbourhood. See also the Vršovci family which had escaped to Poland. The official city name in full is miasto stołeczne Warszawa (English: "The Capital City of Warsaw"). A native or resident of Warsaw is known as a Varsovian – in Polish warszawiak (male), warszawianka (female), warszawiacy (plural).

The first fortified settlements on the site of today's Warsaw were located in Bródno (9th/10th century) and Jazdów (12th/13th century). After Jazdów was raided by nearby clans and dukes, a new similar settlement was established on the site of a small fishing village called Warszowa. The Prince of Plock, Bolesław II of Masovia, established this settlement, the modern-day Warsaw, in about 1300. In the beginning of the 14th century it became one of the seats of the Dukes of Masovia, becoming the official capital of Masovian Duchy in 1413. 14th-century Warsaw's economy rested on mostly crafts and trade. Upon the extinction of the local ducal line, the duchy was reincorporated into the Polish Crown in 1526.

In 1529, Warsaw for the first time became the seat of the General Sejm, permanent from 1569. In 1573 the city gave its name to the Warsaw Confederation, formally establishing religious freedom in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. Due to its central location between the Commonwealth's capitals of Kraków and Vilnius, Warsaw became the capital of the Commonwealth and the Crown of the Kingdom of Poland when King Sigismund III Vasa moved his court from Kraków to Warsaw in 1596. In the following years the town expanded towards the suburbs. Several private independent districts were established, the property of aristocrats and the gentry, which were ruled by their own laws. Three times between 1655–1658 the city was under siege and three times it was taken and pillaged by the Swedish, Brandenburgian and Transylvanian forces.

Warsaw remained the capital of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth until 1796, when it was annexed by the Kingdom of Prussia to become the capital of the province of South Prussia. Liberated by Napoleon's army in 1806, Warsaw was made the capital of the newly created Duchy of Warsaw. Following the Congress of Vienna of 1815, Warsaw became the centre of the Congress Poland, a constitutional monarchy under a personal union with Imperial Russia. The Royal University of Warsaw was established in 1816.

Warsaw was occupied by Germany from 4 August 1915 until November 1918. The Allied Armistice terms required in Article 12 that Germany withdraw from areas controlled by Russia in 1914, which included Warsaw. Germany did so, and underground leader Piłsudski returned to Warsaw on 11 November and set up what became the Second Polish Republic, with Warsaw the capital. In the course of the Polish-Bolshevik War of 1920, the huge Battle of Warsaw was fought on the eastern outskirts of the city in which the capital was successfully defended and the Red Army defeated. Poland stopped by itself the full brunt of the Red Army and defeated an idea of the "export of the revolution".

After the German Invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939 began the Second World War, Warsaw was defended till September 27. Central Poland, including Warsaw, came under the rule of the General Government, a German Nazi colonial administration. All higher education institutions were immediately closed and Warsaw's entire Jewish population – several hundred thousand, some 30% of the city – herded into the Warsaw Ghetto. The city would become the centre of urban resistance to Nazi rule in occupied Europe. When the order came to annihilate the ghetto as part of Hitler's "Final Solution" on 19 April 1943, Jewish fighters launched the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Despite being heavily outgunned and outnumbered, the Ghetto held out for almost a month. When the fighting ended, almost all survivors were massacred, with only a few managing to escape or hide.

By July 1944, the Red Army was deep into Polish territory and pursuing the Germans toward Warsaw. Knowing that Stalin was hostile to the idea of an independent Poland, the Polish government-in-exile in London gave orders to the underground Home Army (AK) to try to seize control of Warsaw from the Germans before the Red Army arrived. Thus, on 1 August 1944, as the Red Army was nearing the city,

the Warsaw Uprising began. The armed struggle, planned to last 48 hours, was partially successful, however it went on for 63 days. Eventually the Home Army fighters and civilians assisting them were forced to capitulate. They were transported to PoW camps in Germany, while the entire civilian population was expelled. Polish civilian deaths are estimated at between 150,000 and 200,000.

After World War II, under a Communist regime set up by the conquering Soviets, the "Bricks for Warsaw" campaign was initiated, and large prefabricated housing projects were erected in Warsaw to address the housing shortage, along with other typical buildings of an Eastern Bloc city, such as the Palace of Culture and Science, a gift from the Soviet Union. The city resumed its role as the capital of Poland and the country's centre of political and economic life. Many of the historic streets, buildings, and churches were restored to their original form. In 1980, Warsaw's historic Old Town was inscribed onto UNESCO's World Heritage list.

John Paul II's visits to his native country in 1979 and 1983 brought support to the budding solidarity movement and encouraged the growing anti-communist fervor there. In 1979, less than a year after becoming pope, John Paul celebrated Mass in Victory Square in Warsaw and ended his sermon with a call to "renew the face" of Poland: Let Thy Spirit descend! Let Thy Spirit descend and renew the face of the land! This land! These words were very meaningful for the Polish citizens who understood them as the incentive for the democratic changes.

Warsaw lies in east-central Poland about 300 km (190 mi) from the Carpathian Mountains and about 260 km (160 mi) from the Baltic Sea, 523 km (325 mi) east of Berlin, Germany. The city straddles the Vistula River. It is located in the heartland of the Masovian Plain, and its average elevation is 100 metres (330 ft) above sea level. The highest point on the left side of the city lies at a height of 115.7 metres (379.6 ft) ("Redutowa" bus depot, district of Wola), on the right side – 122.1 metres (400.6 ft) ("Groszówka" estate, district of Wesoła, by the eastern border). The lowest point lies at a height 75.6 metres (248.0 ft) (at the right bank of the Vistula, by the eastern border of Warsaw). There are some hills (mostly artificial) located within the confines of the city – e.g. Warsaw Uprising Hill (121 metres (397.0 ft)), Szczerbiwice hill (138 metres (452.8 ft) – the highest point of Warsaw in general).

Warsaw is located on two main geomorphologic formations: the plain moraine plateau and the Vistula Valley with its asymmetrical pattern of different terraces. The Vistula River is the specific axis of Warsaw, which divides the city into two parts, left and right. The left one is situated both on the moraine plateau (10 to 25 m (32.8 to 82.0 ft) above Vistula level) and on the Vistula terraces (max. 6.5 m (21.3 ft) above Vistula level). The significant element of the relief, in this part of Warsaw, is the edge of moraine plateau called Warsaw Escarpment. It is 20 to 25 m (65.6 to 82.0 ft) high in the Old Town and Central district and about 10 m (32.8 ft) in the north and south of Warsaw. It goes through the city and plays an important role as a landmark.

The plain moraine plateau has only a few natural and artificial ponds and also groups of clay pits. The pattern of the Vistula terraces is asymmetrical. The left side consist mainly of two levels: the highest one contains former flooded terraces and the lowest one the flood plain terrace. The contemporary flooded terrace still has visible valleys and ground depressions with water systems coming from the Vistula old – riverbed. They consist of still quite natural streams and lakes as well as the pattern of drainage ditches. The right side of Warsaw has a different pattern of geomorphological forms. There are several levels of the plain Vistula terraces (flooded as well as former flooded once) and only small part and not so visible moraine escarpment. Aeolian sand with a number of dunes parted by peat swamps or small ponds cover the highest terrace. These are mainly forested areas (pine forest).

Warsaw's mixture of architectural styles reflects the turbulent history of the city and country. During the Second World War, Warsaw was razed to the ground by bombing raids and planned destruction. After liberation, rebuilding began as in other cities of the communist-ruled PRL. Most of the historical buildings were thoroughly reconstructed. However, some of the buildings from the 19th century that

had been preserved in reasonably reconstructible form were nonetheless eradicated in the 1950s and 1960s (e.g. Leopold Kronenberg Palace). Mass residential blocks were erected, with basic design typical of Eastern bloc countries.

Gothic architecture is represented in the majestic churches but also at the burgher houses and fortifications. The most significant buildings are St. John's Cathedral (14th century), the temple is a typical example of the so-called Masovian gothic style, St. Mary's Church (1411), a town house of Burbach family (14th century), Gunpowder Tower (after 1379) and the Royal Castle Curia Maior (1407–1410). The most notable examples of Renaissance architecture in the city are the house of Baryczko merchant family (1562), building called "The Negro" (early 17th century) and Salwator tenement (1632). The most interesting examples of mannerist architecture are the Royal Castle (1596–1619) and the Jesuit Church (1609–1626) at Old Town. Among the first structures of the early baroque the most important are St. Hyacinth's Church (1603–1639) and Sigismund's Column (1644).

Building activity occurred in numerous noble palaces and churches during the later decades of the 17th century. One of the best examples of this architecture are Krasiński Palace (1677–1683), Wilanów Palace (1677–1696) and St. Kazimierz Church (1688–1692). The most impressive examples of rococo architecture are Czapski Palace (1712–1721), Palace of the Four Winds (1730s) and Visitationist Church (façade 1728–1761). The neoclassical architecture in Warsaw can be described by the simplicity of the geometrical forms teamed with a great inspiration from the Roman period. Some of the best examples of the neoclassical style are the Palace on the Water (rebuilt 1775–1795), Królikarnia (1782–1786), Carmelite Church (façade 1761–1783) and Evangelical Holy Trinity Church (1777–1782). The economic growth during the first years of Congress Poland caused a rapid rise architecture. The Neoclassical revival affected all aspects of architecture, the most notable are the Great Theater (1825–1833) and buildings located at Bank Square (1825–1828).

Exceptional examples of the bourgeois architecture of the later periods were not restored by the communist authorities after the war (like mentioned Kronenberg Palace and Insurance Company Rosja building) or they were rebuilt in socialist realism style (like Warsaw Philharmony edifice originally inspired by Palais Garnier in Paris). Despite that the Warsaw University of Technology building (1899–1902) is the most interesting of the late 19th-century architecture. Some 19th-century buildings in the Praga district (the Vistula's right bank) have been restored although many have been poorly maintained. Warsaw's municipal government authorities have decided to rebuild the Saxon Palace and the Brühl Palace, the most distinctive buildings in prewar Warsaw.

There are also many places commemorating the heroic history of Warsaw. Pawiak, an infamous German Gestapo prison now occupied by a Mausoleum of Memory of Martyrdom and the museum, is only the beginning of a walk in the traces of Heroic City. The Warsaw Citadel, an impressive 19th-century fortification built after the defeat of the November Uprising, was a place of martyr for the Poles. Another important monument, the statue of Little Insurgent located at the ramparts of the Old Town, commemorates the children who served as messengers and frontline troops in the Warsaw Uprising, while the impressive Warsaw Uprising Monument by Wincenty Kuźma was erected in memory of the largest insurrection of World War II.

The Saxon Garden, covering the area of 15.5 ha, was formally a royal garden. There are over 100 different species of trees and the avenues are a place to sit and relax. At the east end of the park, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is situated. In the 19th century the Krasiński Palace Garden was remodelled by Franciszek Szanior. Within the central area of the park one can still find old trees dating from that period: maidenhair tree, black walnut, Turkish hazel and Caucasian wingnut trees. With its benches, flower carpets, a pond with ducks on and a playground for kids, the Krasiński Palace Garden is a popular strolling destination for the Varsovians. The Monument of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising is also situated here. The Łazienki Park covers the area of 76 ha. The unique character and history of the park is reflected in its landscape architecture (pavilions, sculptures, bridges, cascades, ponds) and

vegetation (domestic and foreign species of trees and bushes). What makes this park different from other green spaces in Warsaw is the presence of peacocks and pheasants, which can be seen here walking around freely, and royal carps in the pond. The Wilanów Palace Park, dates back to the second half of the 17th century. It covers the area of 43 ha. Its central French-styled area corresponds to the ancient, baroque forms of the palace. The eastern section of the park, closest to the Palace, is the two-level garden with a terrace facing the pond. The park around the Królikarnia Palace is situated on the old escarpment of the Vistula. The park has lanes running on a few levels deep into the ravines on both sides of the palace.

Other green spaces in the city include the Botanic Garden and the University Library garden. They have extensive botanical collection of rare domestic and foreign plants, while a palm house in the New Orangery displays plants of subtropics from all over the world. Besides, within the city borders, there are also: Pole Mokotowskie (a big park in the northern Mokotów, where was the first horse racetrack and then the airport), Park Ujazdowski (close to the Sejm and John Lennon street), Park of Culture and Rest in Powsin, by the southern city border, Park Skaryszewski by the right Vistula bank, in Praga. The oldest park in Praga, the Praga Park, was established in 1865–1871 and designed by Jan Dobrowolski. In 1927 a zoological garden (Ogród Zoologiczny) was established on the park grounds, and in 1952 a bear run, still open today.

The flora of the city may be considered very rich in species. The species richness is mainly due to the location of Warsaw within the border region of several big floral regions comprising substantial proportions of close-to-wilderness areas (natural forests, wetlands along the Vistula) as well as arable land, meadows and forests. Bielany Forest, located within the borders of Warsaw, is the remaining part of the Masovian Primeval Forest. Bielany Forest nature reserve is connected with Kampinos Forest. It is home to rich fauna and flora. Within the forest there are three cycling and walking trails. Other big forest area is Kabaty Forest by the southern city border. Warsaw has also two botanic gardens: by the ■azienki park (a didactic-research unit of the University of Warsaw) as well as by the Park of Culture and Rest in Powsin (a unit of the Polish Academy of Science).

There are 13 natural reserves in Warsaw – among others, Bielany Forest, Kabaty Woods, Czerniaków Lake. About 15 kilometres (9 miles) from Warsaw, the Vistula river's environment changes strikingly and features a perfectly preserved ecosystem, with a habitat of animals that includes the otter, beaver and hundreds of bird species. There are also several lakes in Warsaw – mainly the oxbow lakes, like Czerniaków Lake, the lakes in the ■azienki or Wilanów Parks, Kamionek Lake. There are lot of small lakes in the parks, but only a few are permanent – the majority are emptied before winter to clean them of plants and sediments.

Demographically, it was the most diverse city in Poland, with significant numbers of foreign-born inhabitants. In addition to the Polish majority, there was a significant Jewish minority in Warsaw. According to Russian census of 1897, out of the total population of 638,000, Jews constituted 219,000 (around 34% percent). Warsaw's prewar Jewish population of more than 350,000 constituted about 30 percent of the city's total population. In 1933, out of 1,178,914 inhabitants 833,500 were of Polish mother tongue. World War II changed the demographics of the city, and to this day there is much less ethnic diversity than in the previous 300 years of Warsaw's history. Most of the modern day population growth is based on internal migration and urbanisation.

In 1939, c. 1,300,000 people lived in Warsaw, but in 1945 – only 420,000. During the first years after the war, the population growth was c. 6%, so shortly the city started to suffer from the lack of flats and of areas for new houses. The first remedial measure was the Warsaw area enlargement (1951) – but the city authorities were still forced to introduce residency registration limitations: only the spouses and children of the permanent residents as well as some persons of public importance (like renowned specialists) were allowed to get the registration, hence halving the population growth in the following years. It also bolstered some kind of conviction among Poles that Varsovians thought of themselves as

better only because they lived in the capital. Unfortunately this belief still lives on in Poland (although not as much as it used to be) – even though since 1990 there are no limitations to residency registration anymore.

Throughout its existence, Warsaw has been a multi-cultural city. According to the 1901 census, out of 711,988 inhabitants 56.2% were Catholics, 35.7% Jews, 5% Greek orthodox Christians and 2.8% Protestants. Eight years later, in 1909, there were 281,754 Jews (36.9%), 18,189 Protestants (2.4%) and 2,818 Mariavites (0.4%). This led to construction of hundreds of places of religious worship in all parts of the town. Most of them were destroyed in the aftermath of the Warsaw Uprising of 1944. After the war, the new communist authorities of Poland discouraged church construction and only a small number were rebuilt.

The basic unit of territorial division in Poland is a commune (gmina). A city is also a commune – but with the city charter. Both cities and communes are governed by a mayor – but in the communes the mayor is vojt (wójt in Polish), however in the cities – burmistrz. Some bigger cities obtain the entitlements, i.e. tasks and privileges, which are possessed by the units of the second level of the territorial division – counties or powiaty. An example of such entitlement is a car registration: a gmina cannot register cars, this is a powiat's task (i.e. a registration number depends on what powiat a car had been registered, not gmina). In this case we say about city county or powiat grodzki. Such cities are for example Lublin, Kraków, Gdańsk, Poznań. In Warsaw, its districts additionally have some of powiat's entitlements – like already mentioned car registration. For example, the district Wola has its own evidence and the district Ursynów – its own (and the cars from Wola have another type of registration number than these from Ursynów). But for instance the districts in Kraków do not have entitlements of powiat, so the registration numbers in Kraków are of the same type for all districts.

Legislative power in Warsaw is vested in a unicameral Warsaw City Council (Rada Miasta), which comprises 60 members. Council members are elected directly every four years. Like most legislative bodies, the City Council divides itself into committees which have the oversight of various functions of the city government. Bills passed by a simple majority are sent to the mayor (the President of Warsaw), who may sign them into law. If the mayor vetoes a bill, the Council has 30 days to override the veto by a two-thirds majority vote.

The mayor of Warsaw is called President. Generally, in Poland, the mayors of bigger cities are called presidents – i.e. such cities, which have over 100,000 people or these, where already was president before 1990. The first Warsaw President was Jan Andrzej Menich (1695–1696). Between 1975 and 1990 the Warsaw Presidents was simultaneously the Warsaw Voivode. Since 1990 the President of Warsaw had been elected by the City council. In the years of 1994–1999 the mayor of the district Centrum automatically was designated as the President of Warsaw: the mayor of Centrum was elected by the district council of Centrum and the council was elected only by the Centrum residents. Since 2002 the President of Warsaw is elected by all of the citizens of Warsaw.

Warsaw, especially its city centre (Śródmieście), is home not only to many national institutions and government agencies, but also to many domestic and international companies. In 2006, 304,016 companies were registered in the city. Warsaw's ever-growing business community has been noticed globally, regionally, and nationally. MasterCard Emerging Market Index has noted Warsaw's economic strength and commercial center. Moreover, Warsaw was ranked as the 7th greatest emerging market. Foreign investors' financial participation in the city's development was estimated in 2002 at over 650 million euro. Warsaw produces 12% of Poland's national income, which in 2008 was 305.1% of the Polish average, per capita (or 160% of the European Union average). The GDP per capita in Warsaw amounted to PLN 94 000 in 2008 (c. EUR 23 800, USD 33 000). Total nominal GDP of the city in 2010 amounted to 191.766 billion PLN, 111696 PLN per capita, which was 301,1 % of Polish average. Warsaw leads the region of East-Central Europe in foreign investment and in 2006, GDP growth met expectations with a level of 6.1%. It also has one of the fastest growing economies, with GDP growth at

6.5 percent in 2007 and 6.1 percent in the first quarter of 2008.

Warsaw's first stock exchange was established in 1817 and continued trading until World War II. It was re-established in April 1991, following the end of the post-war communist control of the country and the reintroduction of a free-market economy. Today, the Warsaw Stock Exchange (WSE) is, according to many indicators, the largest market in the region, with 374 companies listed and total capitalization of 162 584 mln EUR as of 31 August 2009. From 1991 until 2000, the stock exchange was, ironically, located in the building previously used as the headquarters of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR).

The FSO Car Factory was established in 1951. A number of vehicles have been assembled there over the decades, including the Warszawa, Syrena, Fiat 125p (under license from Fiat, later renamed FSO 125p when the license expired) and the Polonez. The last two models listed were also sent abroad and assembled in a number of other countries, including Egypt and Colombia. In 1995 the factory was purchased by the South Korean car manufacturer Daewoo, which assembled the Tico, Espero, Nubia, Tacuma, Leganza, Lanos and Matiz there for the European market. In 2005 the factory was sold to AvtoZAZ, a Ukrainian car manufacturer which assembled there the Chevrolet Aveo. The license for the production of the Aveo expired in February 2011 and has since not been renewed. Currently the company is defunct.

The University of Warsaw was established in 1816, when the partitions of Poland separated Warsaw from the oldest and most influential Polish academic center, in Kraków. Warsaw University of Technology is the second academic school of technology in the country, and one of the largest in East-Central Europe, employing 2,000 professors. Other institutions for higher education include the Medical University of Warsaw, the largest medical school in Poland and one of the most prestigious, the National Defence University, highest military academic institution in Poland, the Fryderyk Chopin University of Music the oldest and largest music school in Poland, and one of the largest in Europe, the Warsaw School of Economics, the oldest and most renowned economic university in the country, and the Warsaw University of Life Sciences the largest agricultural university founded in 1818.

Another important library – the University Library, founded in 1816, is home to over two million items. The building was designed by architects Marek Budzyński and Zbigniew Badowski and opened on 15 December 1999. It is surrounded by green. The University Library garden, designed by Irena Bajerska, was opened on 12 June 2002. It is one of the largest and most beautiful roof gardens in Europe with an area of more than 10,000 m<sup>2</sup> (107,639.10 sq ft), and plants covering 5,111 m<sup>2</sup> (55,014.35 sq ft). As the university garden it is open to the public every day.

Like many cities in Central and Eastern Europe, infrastructure in Warsaw suffered considerably during its time as an Eastern Bloc economy – though it is worth mentioning that the initial Three-Year Plan to rebuild Poland (especially Warsaw) was a major success, but what followed was very much the opposite. However, over the past decade Warsaw has seen many improvements due to solid economic growth, an increase in foreign investment as well as funding from the European Union. In particular, the city's metro, roads, sidewalks, health care facilities and sanitation facilities have improved markedly.

Today, Warsaw has some of the best medical facilities in Poland and East-Central Europe. The city is home to the Children's Memorial Health Institute (CMHI), the highest-reference hospital in all of Poland, as well as an active research and education center. While the Maria Skłodowska-Curie Institute of Oncology it is one of the largest and most modern oncological institutions in Europe. The clinical section is located in a 10-floor building with 700 beds, 10 operating theatres, an intensive care unit, several diagnostic departments as well as an outpatient clinic. The infrastructure has developed a lot over the past years.

Thanks to numerous musical venues, including the Teatr Wielki, the Polish National Opera, the Chamber Opera, the National Philharmonic Hall and the National Theatre, as well as the Roma and

Buffo music theatres and the Congress Hall in the Palace of Culture and Science, Warsaw hosts many events and festivals. Among the events worth particular attention are: the International Frédéric Chopin Piano Competition, the International Contemporary Music Festival Warsaw Autumn, the Jazz Jamboree, Warsaw Summer Jazz Days, the International Stanisław Moniuszko Vocal Competition, the Mozart Festival, and the Festival of Old Music.

Nearby, in Ogród Saski (the Saxon Garden), the Summer Theatre was in operation from 1870 to 1939, and in the inter-war period, the theatre complex also included Momus, Warsaw's first literary cabaret, and Leon Schiller's musical theatre Melodram. The Wojciech Bogusławski Theatre (1922–26), was the best example of "Polish monumental theatre". From the mid-1930s, the Great Theatre building housed the Upti Institute of Dramatic Arts – the first state-run academy of dramatic art, with an acting department and a stage directing department.

Several commemorative events take place every year. Gatherings of thousands of people on the banks of the Vistula on Midsummer's Night for a festival called Wianki (Polish for Wreaths) have become a tradition and a yearly event in the programme of cultural events in Warsaw. The festival traces its roots to a peaceful pagan ritual where maidens would float their wreaths of herbs on the water to predict when they would be married, and to whom. By the 19th century this tradition had become a festive event, and it continues today. The city council organize concerts and other events. Each Midsummer's Eve, apart from the official floating of wreaths, jumping over fires, looking for the fern flower, there are musical performances, dignitaries' speeches, fairs and fireworks by the river bank.

As interesting examples of expositions the most notable are: the world's first Museum of Posters boasting one of the largest collections of art posters in the world, Museum of Hunting and Riding and the Railway Museum. From among Warsaw's 60 museums, the most prestigious ones are National Museum with a collection of works whose origin ranges in time from antiquity till the present epoch as well as one of the best collections of paintings in the country including some paintings from Adolf Hitler's private collection, and Museum of the Polish Army whose set portrays the history of arms.

A fine tribute to the fall of Warsaw and history of Poland can be found in the Warsaw Uprising Museum and in the Katyń Museum which preserves the memory of the crime. The Warsaw Uprising Museum also operates a rare preserved and operating historic stereoscopic theatre, the Warsaw Fotoplastikon. The Museum of Independence preserves patriotic and political objects connected with Poland's struggles for independence. Dating back to 1936 Warsaw Historical Museum contains 60 rooms which host a permanent exhibition of the history of Warsaw from its origins until today.

The 17th century Royal Ujazdów Castle currently houses Centre for Contemporary Art, with some permanent and temporary exhibitions, concerts, shows and creative workshops. The Centre currently realizes about 500 projects a year. Zachęta National Gallery of Art, the oldest exhibition site in Warsaw, with a tradition stretching back to the mid-19th century organises exhibitions of modern art by Polish and international artists and promotes art in many other ways. Since 2011 Warsaw Gallery Weekend is held on last weekend of September.

Their local rivals, Polonia Warsaw, have significantly fewer supporters, yet they managed to win Ekstraklasa Championship in 2000. They also won the country's championship in 1946, and won the cup twice as well. Polonia's home venue is located at Konwiktorska Street, a ten-minute walk north from the Old Town. Polonia was relegated from the country's top flight in 2013 because of their disastrous financial situation. They are now playing in the 4th league (5th tier in Poland) -the bottom professional league in the National – Polish Football Association (PZPN) structure.

The mermaid (syrenka) is Warsaw's symbol and can be found on statues throughout the city and on the city's coat of arms. This imagery has been in use since at least the mid-14th century. The oldest existing armed seal of Warsaw is from the year 1390, consisting of a round seal bordered with the Latin



inscription *Sigillum Civitatis Varsoviensis* (Seal of the city of Warsaw). City records as far back as 1609 document the use of a crude form of a sea monster with a female upper body and holding a sword in its claws. In 1653 the poet Zygmunt Laukowski asks the question:

The origin of the legendary figure is not fully known. The best-known legend, by Artur Oppman, is that long ago two of Triton's daughters set out on a journey through the depths of the oceans and seas. One of them decided to stay on the coast of Denmark and can be seen sitting at the entrance to the port of Copenhagen. The second mermaid reached the mouth of the Vistula River and plunged into its waters. She stopped to rest on a sandy beach by the village of Warszowa, where fishermen came to admire her beauty and listen to her beautiful voice. A greedy merchant also heard her songs; he followed the fishermen and captured the mermaid.

One of the most famous people born in Warsaw was Maria Skłodowska-Curie, who achieved international recognition for her research on radioactivity and was the first female recipient of the Nobel Prize. Famous musicians include Władysław Szpilman and Frédéric Chopin. Though Chopin was born in the village of Żelazowa Wola, about 60 km (37 mi) from Warsaw, he moved to the city with his family when he was seven months old. Casimir Pulaski, a Polish general and hero of the American Revolutionary War, was born here in 1745.

Tamara de Lempicka was a famous artist born in Warsaw. She was born Maria Górska in Warsaw to wealthy parents and in 1916 married a Polish lawyer Tadeusz Lempicki. Better than anyone else she represented the Art Deco style in painting and art. Nathan Alterman, the Israeli poet, was born in Warsaw, as was Moshe Vilenski, the Israeli composer, lyricist, and pianist, who studied music at the Warsaw Conservatory. Warsaw was the beloved city of Isaac Bashevis Singer, which he described in many of his novels: Warsaw has just now been destroyed. No one will ever see the Warsaw I knew. Let me just write about it. Let this Warsaw not disappear forever, he commented.