

# Poland Team Explores Factories, Farms, and Festivals

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Friday, Sept. 7

Today was rainy for our sight-seeing tour. Nevertheless the dreariness did not hide the beauty of the landscape surrounding the 17th century castle at the museum of Lancut.

Of all the castles we toured, this was my favorite. It seemed more livable. But the wealth that a few citizens achieved is in marked contrast to those who lived in the surrounding areas.

Unfortunately we were not allowed to take pictures inside the castle of the ornate furnishings. We needed to wear felt shoes overtop of our own to protect the beautiful wooden floors composed of many different woods and designs.

We also toured a wicker, rattan, and classic furniture factory. This had been a home business that has expanded to employ 160 persons. In addition about 7,000 work out of their home to weave



Group members gather for a picture in "Oldtown."

wicker, which grows as a plant in the field.

One of our group exclaimed over the uniqueness of a large suitcase basket. The owner insisted on giving it to her. She tried to decline graciously, but he insisted on mailing it to her home in New York.

It seems natural to comment on items we like, and are not accustomed to be given items just because we like them. It seems ungracious and rude not to compliment people.

We stopped at an agrotourism farm in the area, which was large enough to sleep 20 persons. The rooms featured individually-tiled bathrooms of the newest designs. The owner said that her husband and son did the tile work which saved tremendous amount of money.

This farm also provided a catering business with an area for groups to be served.

In the afternoon we met with 4-H groups in the area. Ethnic dances and a folk group band welcomed us and performed.

They told us about their 4-H programming and asked many questions about ours. These groups composed of girls focused on cooking and preserving traditional crafts. They had such sweet, innocent faces.

The traditional garb worn to perform the dances varies from region to region. One of our group asked where she could purchase a hand embroidered blouse, the woman said they were

not available but offered to sell the one she wore.

Our team member gave her double the money she asked and the woman kissed the money and seemed ecstatic with the money.

We toured a food processing plant that was established in recent years. The plant processes Polish pickles, relishes, and preserves. They even import some pickles and sweet and sour cabbage to the U.S.

The plant did not seem to have approved methods for canning nor personal safety for workers, nonetheless it is providing 200-250 jobs which are greatly needed in the area.

The owner seemed quite proud of his plant and offered us a table spread with snacks and plenty of beverages. He also took us to one of his two supermarkets. We were impressed with the cleanliness and wide selection of products.

I forgot to mention that on a previous day, we had made a stop at a restaurant. Our group

was divided into two vehicles and we drove off without Kathryn Wentzel who was in the restroom.

We were not far when we remembered and yelled stop, but the driver who did not understand English continued. No one in our vehicle spoke Polish.

We jabbered and made all kinds of motions, but the driver only smiled as if we were quite crazy and continued.

Fortunately our next stop was about 10 minutes later, where we told the Polish translator. Kathryn was quickly retrieved. She had remained calm and confident of our soon return.

However this incident serves to remind us how difficult the language barrier is to clearly state our intentions.

Saturday, Sept. 8

After breakfast we drove several hours to a festival promoting agriculture and the work of the ODR. This was quite interesting.

Many vendors had set up display and we have fun taste-testing berries, cheeses, yogurt, and other items. They served string cheese tied in knots and braided.

I am always impressed with their decorative touches such as many plants and arrangements incorporating flowers, tree leaves, vines, berries, and small apples. The place was packed with visitors and was held inside and outside the ODR buildings in that area.

Unfortunately the livestock competitions will not be con-

ducted until the following day. I would have enjoyed seeing if the competitions were similar to those at our fairs and the state farm show.

Lunch was held inside a former castle, now belonging to the ODR. A band played while we were lead into huge rooms similar to those at the White House.

Tables were spread with the most elaborate displays of regional foods. Heavy white linens, stemware and fine china were used.

We, dressed in clothes appropriate for a fair, felt quite conspicuous surrounded by government professionals dressed in three-piece suits, and tailored suits.

The food was superb and over abundant. I noticed that the Americans seemed to be about the only people eating. The Polish were drinking vodka and sipping many of the other wines and beer available.

Several artists demonstrated their work and sold it. It's too bad we don't have more room to bring home the pottery, rugs, and other items available for purchase.

We had another long trip to a new area. It has been raining for several days and is unseasonably cool for this time of the year. The temperatures dropped to the 40s and most of us are layered with clothing but are still cold.

The ODR in this area is in disrepair and the people do not seem as friendly. We noticed many older people and it becomes evident that the rooms are being used as a home for senior citizens and perhaps mentally handicapped.

We are glad to leave that place as it reminds us of a Communist-controlled area. We are not sure why there is a big difference among so many ODRs except some are managed locally and some with greater government help.



Wawel Hill and castle was another stop for the group.

Sunday, Sept. 9

Today we faced a 12-hour drive to a new area. We hadn't been served coffee for breakfast the first time this happened and planned to stop at a place along the way.

However most places are closed on Sunday and we did not find a place open until 11:30 a.m. We purchased only beverages as we planned on a lunch break within a short time.

However it was 4 p.m. before we stopped for lunch at the insistence of our group leader. The drivers were distressed that the restaurant was too pricey, but we

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## Poland

were happy to pay the difference.

We hadn't been aware that such a nice restaurant existed in the country. Even by American standards the restaurant was upscale, with beautiful mahogany woods and carpeting.

They had both Polish and English menus and it was delightful to be able to eat more typical American food such as grilled salmon and creamy potatoes.

The agrotourism place where we are staying is very nice, but four of us stay in an adjacent building because the house is full.

The house is heated, but for us four, there is no heat. Still we are grateful for the newness and spaciousness of the place and being apart from the main group gives us more a feeling of independence.

Monday, Sept. 10

Today we were picked up by bus to attend a national symposium on rural tourism as an element of rural development.

The large modern gymnasium with cork flooring and many windows is set up similar to a convention that would be in the states. Balloons, banners, and vendors with stands surround the room.

The speakers are Polish-speaking and our interpreter sits at a table trying to interpret in a low voice so as not to disrupt the speaker. It is extremely difficult to understand with the background noise.

A video of Poland's farmland, equipment production, and other businesses is shown. Czeslaw Nowak, a professor from the ag-

riculture university that we met earlier, graciously explains the credit assistance and other programs available to farmers who are involved in agrotourism.

We need to go to a different building for lunch. We walk in the wind and rain to tour a local flour mill. The equipment was the finest 40 years ago and is adequate for their needs.

Czeslaw is a storehouse of information.

Tuesday, Sept. 11

After a typical breakfast of tomatoes, cheese, pickles, hard rolls, and a hardboiled egg, we departed from the delightful agrotourism farm where we had spent two nights.

The driver had a difficult time finding the way as there was a road detour. We had a winding drive through the countryside along the lake area.

We stopped to see several different agrotourism farms, and can see that they vary greatly in style, and amenity, at a 5 p.m. lunch, and met with 40 Ukrainians attending a conference on regional development.

The program needed to be interpreted in three different languages and it was very difficult to understand.

After the meeting we traveled to another agrotourism farm for a nine o'clock dinner and bed. After the meal, our host told us we could watch BBC world news, which is the first English speaking news we have been able to hear since our arrival.

The news of the bombings and destruction is quite distressing. We are overwhelmed with concern for the thousands of people who have been affected by these disasters.

We are concerned about our own flights home. 'When I get home, I am never leaving again' is my reaction. We stay up past midnight watching the news. Fortunately, I sleep well.

The morning news sheds little more light on what has happened. We leave our host family, mostly hating to leave their television — our only contact with the outside world.

We have not been able to call home or e-mail for a week, and are not sure if we will be able to hear any more English speaking news programs.

The Polish, however, are very gracious in expressing their sympathy for what has happened to the U.S. They know what it is like to experience such destruction.

I think of the Polish. Compared to them we have a higher standard of living and a stronger economy. But this isn't because we are smarter or harder working.

Instead, we our interior borders have been protected from enemy destruction. Imagine having the same destruction that has happened in the U.S. happening repeatedly as has happen to Poland.

I question whether or not we will remain as determined, enduring hardships of need for as many decades that they have. I pray we won't need to face it.

During the morning we have teaching sessions with the Towarzystwem Rozwoju Dzierzgonia. The mayor and the international relations director tell of their strides in overcoming environmental issues for which they have earned international awards.

"But our biggest problem is lack of money and 32 percent unemployment," the director said.