



Gdańsk & Eastern Pomerania

Cities and castles of northern Poland – with Warsaw

4–11 August 2025 (ML 752)

8 days • £3,940

Lecturer: Dr Hugh Doherty

Some of the finest achievements of medieval architecture in Northern Europe.

Several UNESCO world heritage sites, among them Toruń and Malbork Castle.

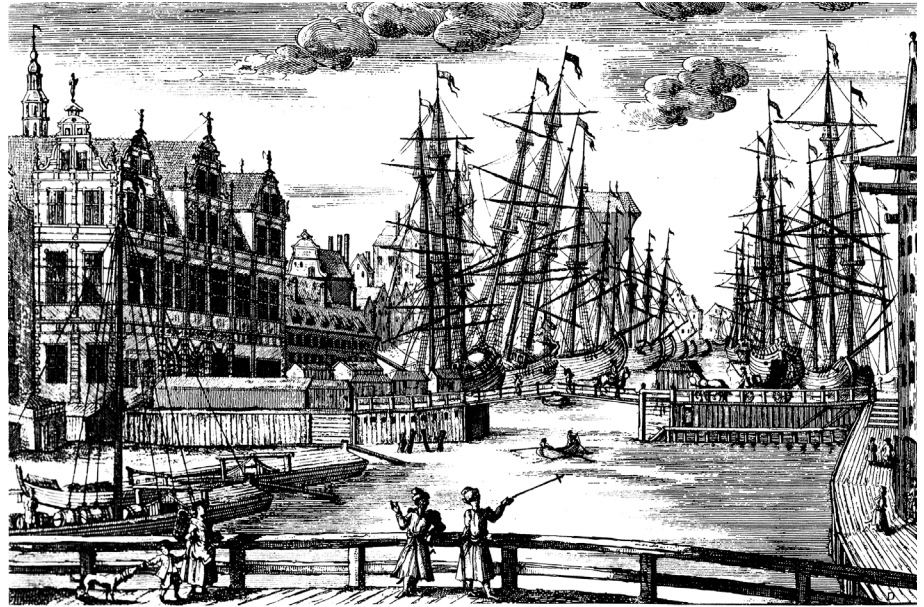
Examine the legacy left by the Teutonic Order and the Hanseatic League.

Gdańsk and the region of eastern Pomerania possess a fascinating history and a complex identity. Power shifted variously over the last millennium between the Piast dynasty, the Teutonic Order, the Hanseatic League, the Kingdom of Poland and the strange phenomenon of Prussia. Each left behind an eclectic group of remarkable monuments: castles, churches and monasteries, palaces, urban spaces and town houses.

Gdańsk (Danzig), the great Hanseatic port on the Baltic, is one of the finest sights in Northern Europe. Its fortunes bear witness to the fiercely contested history of these lands. First mentioned in the tenth century, the settlement became a stronghold of the Polish Piast rulers. In the fourteenth century the Teutonic Order took over the town and its hinterland and began the Germanisation of the region. They constructed a fortress and a number of Brick Gothic buildings (among them the world's second-largest brick church), and made the city a member of the Hanseatic League.

The following centuries saw a continuous struggle between the Polish and Prussian rulers for control of the city. Gdańsk suffered extensive damage during the Second World War, but was painstakingly rebuilt to rescue the former historic beauty of the old town and the harbour. Today, Gdańsk is at once a monument to its maritime and international past as well as a bustling and ambitious modern city with much to see, explore, and savour.

The city of Toruń (Thorn), once a rich military stronghold and thriving cultural and economic centre, offers a fine assembly of medieval, Renaissance and Baroque architecture. It came to prominence when the early medieval settlement was turned into a fortress by the Teutonic Knights, who were brought to Poland to assist in the subjugation of the Pomeranian pagans. The Knights were followed by the mendicant orders,



Gdańsk, early-18th-century copper engraving.

who continued to expand the city and built vast churches in the Brick Gothic style. A member of the Hanseatic League, Toruń soon established itself as an important trading post and centre of manufacturing, which is reflected in the surviving fabric of the city.

Though geographically removed from the tour's primary focus, it would be remiss not to include a sojourn in Warsaw, Poland's vibrant capital. A fascinating blend of turbulent history and cultural treasures, it provides counterpoint and context, as well as the magnificent collection of medieval art in the National Museum, an essential ingredient in this tour.

Itinerary

Day 1: Toruń. Fly mid-morning (LOT Polish Airlines) from London Heathrow to Warsaw. Drive beside the Vistula via Płock to Toruń. Dinner and first of two nights here.

Day 2: Toruń. Picturesquely located on the banks of the Vistula River, Toruń is one of the most attractive and least spoilt of Europe's medieval towns. Visit the ruins of the first Teutonic castle to be built in Poland and the church of St James, with its monumental, five-storey tower crowned with a pair of hip roofs. The Old Town Hall is an outstanding achievement of medieval civic architecture. Overnight Toruń.

Day 3: Chełmno, Gniew, Gdańsk. Downstream along the Vistula lies Chełmno, the first political and administrative centre of the Teutonic Order. On a hilltop site, the town is very well preserved, with medieval walls, fine Gothic churches and a splendid Renaissance town hall. Continue to the commanding castle at Gniew, one of Poland's first privatised monuments. Arrive in Gdańsk early evening. First of three nights here.

Day 4: Gdańsk, Oliwa. Morning walk in and around the Long Market (*Długi Targ*): the imposing Gothic-Renaissance Town Hall, the Artus Court – with its magnificent 16th-century Renaissance stove – and the vast Brick Gothic Church of St Mary (1343). After lunch visit the National Museum's branch for early art, which houses Hans Memling's *Last Judgement* altarpiece. Drive to the medieval cathedral in the suburb of Oliwa. Overnight in Gdańsk.

Day 5: Malbork, Frombork. Drive to Malbork Castle, an awesome structure of three linked castles comprising the largest medieval fortress in Europe. Continue eastwards to Frombork – the resting place of astronomer Copernicus and scene of many of his observations. Frombork retains a brick fortress and cathedral perched on the coast. Final night in Gdańsk.

Day 6: Gdańsk, Warsaw. Walk along the

Gdańsk & Eastern Pomerania
continued

picturesque waterfront to the Crane (1442), a defining symbol of Gdańsk and a relic of the city's great trading age. After the war it was rebuilt and donated to the Polish Maritime Museum, of which it remains a part today. Drive to Warsaw via Grunwald, the site where the Teutonic Knights were defeated in 1410. First of two nights in Warsaw.

Day 7: Warsaw. Explore the marvellously rebuilt old centre followed by the Royal Castle. A Renaissance and later building whose magnificent interiors have also been scrupulously reconstructed and enhanced with original furnishings and paintings. After lunch visit the National Museum, a magnificent collection of Polish art which is particularly strong on the medieval and Romantic periods. The rest of the day is free; there are many museums, galleries and historic buildings to choose from. Overnight Warsaw.

Day 8: Warsaw, Wilanów. With its spreading layout and splendid Baroque interiors, the country palace of Wilanów was built by King Jan Sobieski in the 1680s, though during the next two centuries fine furnishings, pictures and an English park were added. Drive to Warsaw airport for the return flight to London Heathrow arriving late afternoon.

Lecturer

Dr Hugh Doherty. Lecturer in medieval history at the University of East Anglia. He was taught at the Universities of London, Cambridge, and Oxford, and was a research fellow at Jesus College, Oxford. He specialises in the period, 700–1200, and publishes on western kings, secular élites and their records. He is a keen believer in the value of exploring and understanding the architectural fabric, material culture and landscapes of the past.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £3,940 or £3,730 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £4,520 or £4,310 without flights.

Included: flights (economy class) with LOT Polish Airlines (Boeing 737 Max 8); travel by private coach; hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts; 2 lunches and 6 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions for places visited; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer, tour manager and a Polish national guide.

Accommodation. Hotel Bulwar, Toruń (hotelbulwar.pl): 4-star in a converted building with modern interiors by the Vistula river. **Radisson Hotel & Suites, Gdańsk** (radissonblu.com): 4-star hotel on the riverfront; all rooms have river views. **Hotel Bristol, Warsaw** (www.marriott.com): elegant 5-star in an art deco building, 10-minute walk from the Royal Castle. *Single rooms throughout are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? A good level of fitness is essential; this tour involves a lot of walking in the historic centres so you will be on your feet for lengthy stretches of time. There is also a lot of standing in museums and churches. Some days involve a lot of driving, particularly the sixth day, but there are also two days with no coaching. Average distance by coach per day: 85 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.

Combine this tour with *The Hanseatic League, 24–31 July 2025.*