



It's Time to Celebrate Our Furry Companions

International Cat Day, celebrated on August 8, is a global tribute to our feline companions, honouring their charm, independence, and playful spirit. Established in 2002 by the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), the day also raises awareness about the welfare and protection of cats worldwide. Whether they're curling up on windowsills or confidently patrolling their territories, cats have a unique ability to comfort and entertain. On this day, cat lovers share adorable pictures, adopt shelter cats, and support feline-focused charities. It's a purr-fect reminder to appreciate the joy and companionship that cats bring into our lives.



What Poland Left Me With

Ghetto Heroes Square was perhaps the quietest place we visited. Seventy bronze chairs stand across the square, marking the site of the former Kraków Ghetto. They represent the belongings left behind by Jewish families who were forced from their homes and deported during the Holocaust. There are no grand sculptures or dramatic memorials, just empty chairs, and the silence they leave behind.

#TRAVELOGUE



Zurek was the other dish we fell completely in love with. September had brought a slight chill to the air



with its red brick façade was an architecture marvel, took us to Sopot, any city built around water just slows us down. We spent an afternoon by the Baltic Sea with fresh fish, local beer and nowhere

Divija Singh

Some journeys begin months before you pack your bags. Mine began during a three-hour layover at Warsaw Airport. I was on my way to Paris earlier that year, but something about those few quiet hours in Warsaw stayed with me. I couldn't explain it then. I only knew I wanted to return.

A few months later, with my Schengen visa nearing its expiry and my mother's seventieth birthday approaching, I asked her, "How about Poland?" It became my birthday gift to her, and perhaps, an unexpected gift to myself.

Poland wasn't a destination many people spoke about. Very few had travelled there or had stories to tell. Perhaps, that was exactly what drew us there, the chance to experience somewhere unfamiliar. To understand Poland, I realised, you first have to understand its history. Few countries have endured what Poland has. In the late eighteenth century, it disappeared as an independent nation



from the map of Europe for 123 years after being partitioned between Russia, Prussia and Austria. It regained its independence only in 1918, only to be invaded again by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in 1939. Warsaw was reduced to rubble during the Second World War, with nearly 85%



of the city destroyed. Yet, from those ruins, Poland rebuilt itself with remarkable resilience. The Holocaust forever altered Poland's social and cultural fabric. Before the war, Poland was home to Europe's largest Jewish community; today, only a small community remains, a quiet reminder of a history that continues to shape the country.

The French have a word I have always loved, flâneur. A flâneur is someone who wanders without urgency, discovering a city simply by walking through it. That is exactly how I like to travel. Of course, I always have a short list of sights I want to see and food I refuse to leave without trying. But once that is done, I put away the map and simply walk. The cafes tucked into side streets, the neighbourhood bakeries, the conversations overheard, the parks and bars filled with locals rather than tourists, that is when I feel I have truly begun to know a place.

Warsaw rewarded exactly that way of travelling and curiosity. The first thing I noticed was the space. European capitals often feel crowded with tourists; Warsaw never did. The city moved at an unhurried pace. Wide boulevards gave way to cobbled lanes, restored facades stood alongside reminders of another era, and there was a quiet confidence about the city.

I always tend to stay near the Old Town when in Europe, the charm it holds is hard to beat. Warsaw was calm and understated, beautiful without trying too hard. What fascinated me most was its architectural landscape. The meticulously reconstructed

Old Town, rebuilt after the Second World War, is a harmonious blend of Renaissance, Baroque and Gothic architecture, recreated with remarkable fidelity to its original form. Just beyond it, elegant Neoclassical buildings along the Royal Route give way to gleaming contemporary skyscrapers and reminders of the city's Socialist Realist past. It is this contrast that stayed with me most, a city where history and modern life sit comfortably alongside one another.

At the heart of the Old Town stands Warsaw's beloved Syrenka, the legendary mermaid armed with a sword and shield, a symbol of the city's courage and resilience. By evening, the square came alive with people, cafes and music. I loved the hustle and bustle, and we settled down for what would be our introduction to Polish cuisine.

This is where we discovered pierogi, Poland's iconic handmade dumplings, traditionally filled with everything from potatoes and cheese to mushrooms, meat or seasonal fruits. Soft, comforting and wonderfully versatile, they are as much a part of Polish identity as pasta is to Italy.



and the occasional shower; and this comforting soup made from fermented rye flour, served with smoked sausage, boiled egg and potatoes, was exactly what we found ourselves craving. By the end of the trip, we were ordering it almost everywhere we went.

As someone who happily orders pork over almost anything else, and plans holidays around what to eat next, Polish food was impossible not to fall in love with.

Poland's kielbasa is more than just a sausage; it is part of the country's culinary identity. With centuries of shared borders, trade and history, Poland and Germany have long influenced each other's cuisines.

Poland's sausage-making tradition is distinctly its own. Smoky, beautifully seasoned and predominantly made from pork, every variety we tried was exceptional.

Our next stop was Gdansk, a train journey that introduced us to a completely different side of Poland, which won us over because of its maritime history with quiet confidence, and became my mother's favourite place.

Walking along the Motława River, the medieval Żuraw wooden crane, once among the largest port cranes in Europe, still stands as a reminder of the city's centuries as one of the Baltic's great trading ports.

A short twenty minute train ride, from Gdansk railway station,



in particular to be. Some places don't ask you to sightsee, they simply ask you to stay a little longer. We wandered along its famous wooden pier before settling down to fresh fish and local beer, seafood is what stood out here being around the water, there are fish restaurants on both sides of the streets serving literally just fish and chips, the freshest catch.

Another thing I love about travelling is the coffee breaks far outnumber my usual quota, if I see a pretty café, I just have to stop, and then chat and chat about my day, recall all that we did and make plans for the next.

Wrocław was not part of our original plan. I had read about it almost on a whim, and I am so glad we decided to include it. It turned out to be one of the highlights of the trip.

The city's famous dwarfs added immensely to its charm. As you walk through Wrocław, you find yourself doing two things at once, taking in the sights while constantly looking out for the tiny bronze dwarfs tucked away in the most unexpected corners. At first, it feels like a game, but you soon discover that they represent something far more meaningful. The dwarfs trace their origins to the Orange Alternative movement of the 1980s. During communist rule, anti-government graffiti was often painted over by the authorities, so activists began painting dwarfs over the covered-up spots as a humorous form of protest. Today, more than 800 bronze dwarfs are scattered across the city, transforming a symbol of quiet defiance into one of Wrocław's most beloved traditions. We managed to spot around forty of them, though, I suspect we walked past many more without even noticing.

The frescoed ceilings inside the churches were equally unforgettable. I spent so much time looking up at them that I was convinced I'd return home with a crick in my neck.

Kraków ended up being my favourite city in Poland. We stayed near Kazimierz, the city's historic Jewish Quarter, while the magnificent Old Town was just a short walk away. The contrast between the two was fascinating. The Old Town was grand and bustling, while Kazimierz felt more intimate, with its cafés, independent galleries, bookshops and bars tucked into almost every corner.

Once the centre of Jewish life in Kraków for centuries, Kazimierz



fell silent after the devastation of the Holocaust. In recent decades, however, it has been revitalised into one of the city's most vibrant neighbourhoods, where synagogues, cafés, galleries and restaurants exist side by side. It is a place where history isn't hidden, it quietly lives alongside everyday life. Kazimierz, also offered a glimpse into Poland's Jewish culinary heritage. We tried a comforting bowl of cholent, the traditional slow-cooked Sabbath stew whose simplicity belied its depth of flavour. In a neighbourhood where history is woven into every street, even the food seemed to carry stories of the community that once thrived there.

One of the purest ways to understand a country is to eat the way its people do, that brings me to one of Poland's iconic institutions, the Milk Bars (Bar Mleczny), originated in the late 19th century but became an important part of everyday life during the communist era. They were government-subsidised canteens serving simple, affordable Polish food to workers, students and families. Today, many still operate, preserving traditional recipes and offering a glimpse into Poland's culinary and social history.

While Poland is often synonymous with vodka, it was the country's beer culture that won me over. Brewing traditions here date back to the Middle Ages, and every city seemed to have another brewery worth discovering. From crisp lagers and wheat beers to rich porters and fruit-infused brews, there was always something new to try. Kazimierz, with

its lively bars and breweries, was the perfect place to experience that side of Poland. Almost every memorable meal ended the same way, with a small glass of wiśniówka, Poland's traditional cherry liqueur. Sweet, gently warming and never overpowering, it felt less like an after-dinner drink and



more like a quiet ritual of hospitality. Yet, Ghetto Heroes Square was perhaps the quietest place we visited. Seventy bronze chairs stand across the square, marking the site of the former Kraków Ghetto. They represent the belongings left behind by Jewish families who were forced from their homes and deported during the Holocaust. There are no grand sculptures or dramatic memorials, just empty chairs, and the silence they leave behind.

Poland didn't leave me with postcard memories. It left me with perspective.

A country that has rebuilt itself with such quiet dignity teaches you that resilience doesn't always announce itself.

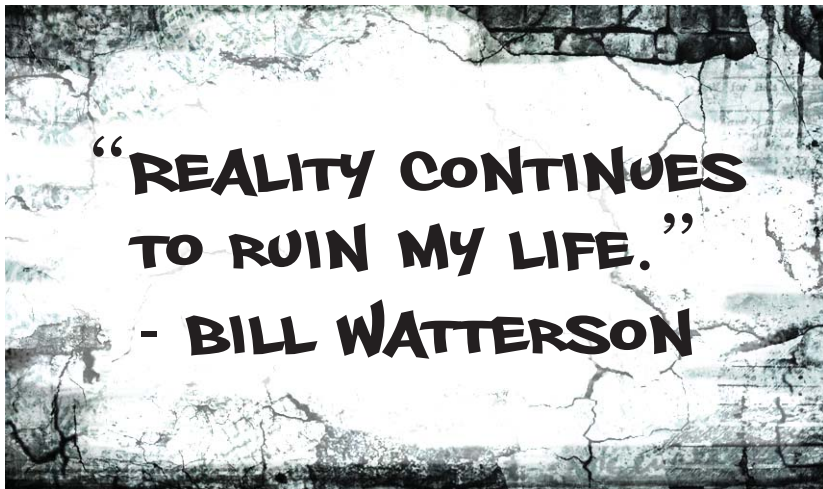
I travelled to Poland expecting another European holiday. I came back carrying a history I hadn't expected to feel so deeply. Perhaps, that is what stayed with me most, a country that wears its history with honesty, preserves its traditions with quiet pride and is completely comfortable in its own identity.

That, more than anything else, is what Poland left me with.

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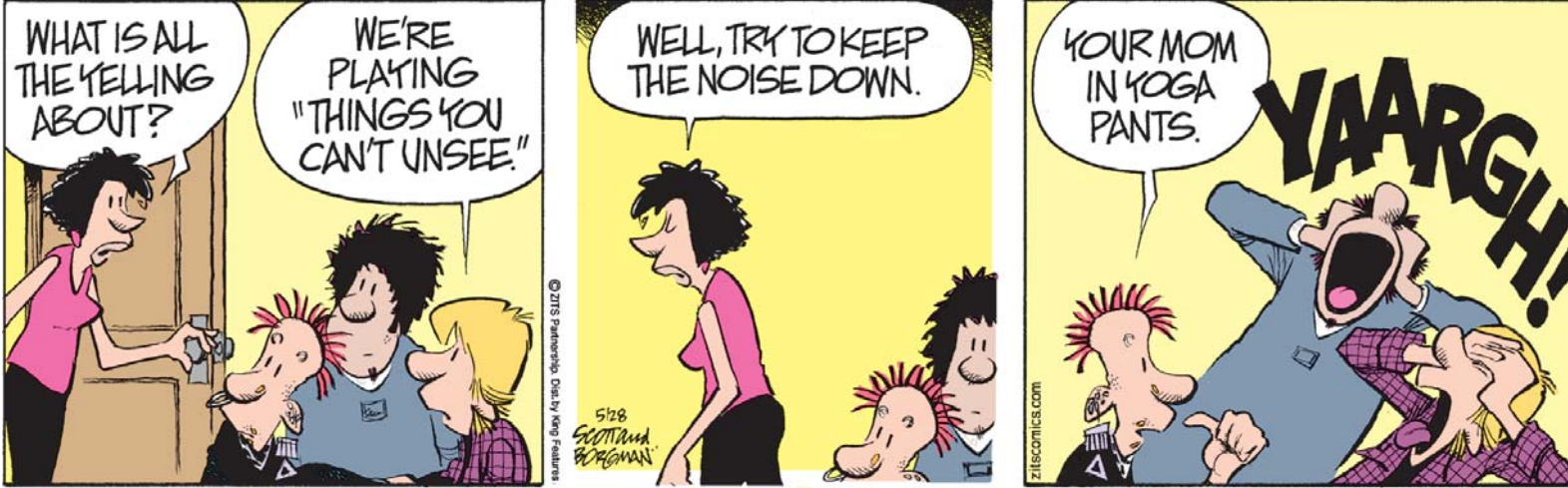


BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman