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FOR PEOPLE WHO LOVE TO *read*, LOVE TO *eat*, AND LOVE TO *travel*



Poland

WHERE ON EARTH

Warsaw and

Dish it Up and Pour it On

If Charles Darwin had been a culinary biologist, the evolution of Polish gastronomy would have flummoxed him. A gaping hole breaks the evolutionary chain between 1945 and 1989, when communist austerity and extreme shortages forced the cuisine to hibernate. State shops carried little that could be used for imaginative cooking — after all, what can you do with stale crackers, a withered potato, or tinned meat? It's an ingredient challenge that would stump today's most talented contestant-chefs.

by LAURA SUTHERLAND

...in the last five years the
scene has exploded ...

POLAND

Krakow

*THIS PHOTO Night, Wawel
Castle, St Andrew's Church.*



LAURA SUTHERLAND



«**OBVIOUSLY THINGS HAVE CHANGED SINCE THEN,**

but over the last decade, the branches of the Polish culinary family tree have spread with particular vigour. Creative young chefs have returned to their roots and blend recognizably Polish dishes with new techniques and ingredients, serving staples like trout, venison, and wild boar, but lighter and flavoured in new ways.

Take our first dinner in Warsaw at trendy Signatures restaurant inside our ultra-cool downtown hotel, the H-15 Boutique. My foraged mushroom soup was a perfect blend of deep fall flavours; and my entrée, pheasant confit, chestnut purée, and baked beetroot with blackcurrants was a palate-awakening old-world-meets-new dish that kicked off a two-city culinary and craft beer exploration with panache.

One of my favourite practices in a new town is to book a bus or boat tour, or in the case of Warsaw, a walking tour to get the lay of the land and some historical insights. So the next day we rendezvoused with guide Hanna Dzielinska, and as we walked, she made sure we understood the shifting forces that have shaped Poland, taking us through parks where Finnish workers lived to rebuild the city after the Nazis destroyed it in WW2 and past modern monuments to freedom of the press.

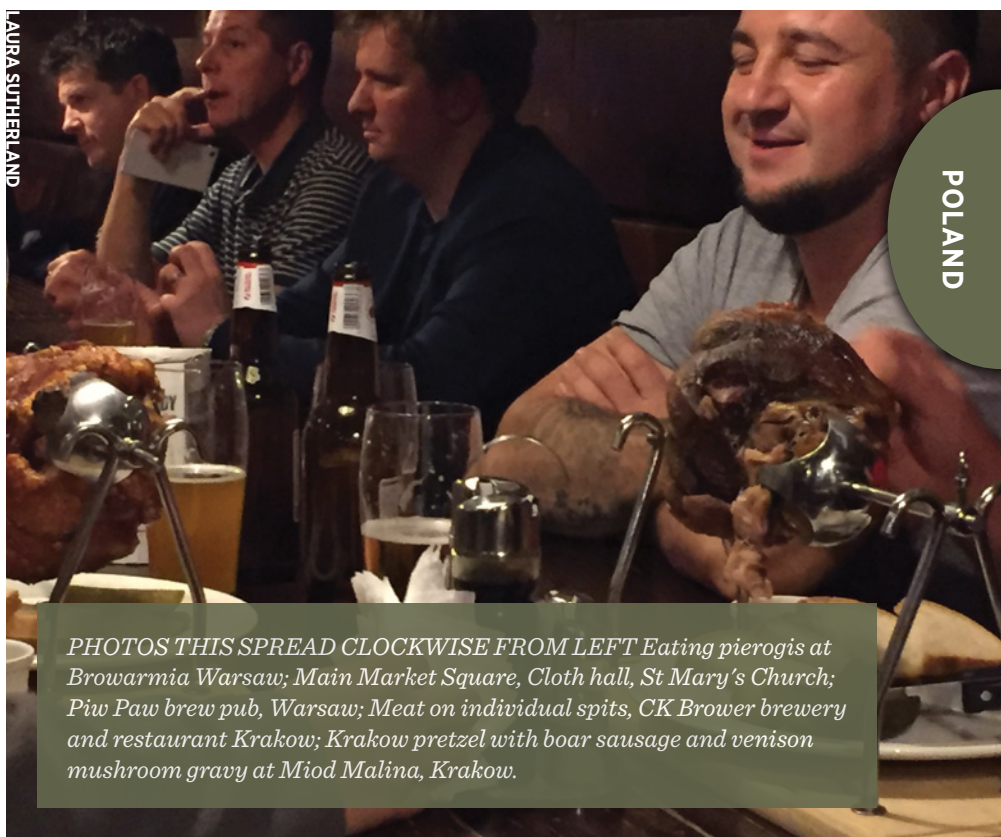
Lunch was at Opasly Tom, a restaurant that once housed an important bookstore where anticommunist intellectuals hung out. Today, Poland's leading female chef, Agata Wojda, is at the helm. Her grilled zucchini salad with pine sauce, fresh herbs and smoked goat cheese and entrée of halibut in carrot

sauce accompanied by freshly pickled cabbage and red lentils were modern and adventurous with a nod to a Polish grandmother's kitchen garden.

Later that day as we explored the reconstructed 17th-century old town, we joined the crowd watching a live video broadcast of a young Polish pianist's performance in the Chopin Competition. It inspired us to sit on as many nearby "Chopin benches" as possible so we could push the buttons on the seats to hear the famous local composer's music. Across the promenade, Browarmia Krolewska restaurant/brewery looked inviting so we stopped to sample their beer and hearty Polish comfort food, like pierogi, kielbasa, pickles, stuffed cabbage and borscht.

After prepping our palates with Browarmia's crisp pilsners and hefeweizens, it was time to dig deeper into Warsaw's craft beer scene. The craft beer movement has been slower to hit Poland but in the last five years it has exploded. Brewers have revived and updated centuries-old recipes for smoked beers, sweet dark beers, and wheat or potato brews. Some are brewing uniquely Polish beers with locally sourced hops and other ingredients, while others borrow techniques and inspiration from contemporary American or venerable European traditions.

At PiwPaw Beer Heaven, the learning curve was fast, thanks to their 96 taps and a strong representation from award-winning Polish craft breweries like Pinta, Ale Browar, Kormoran, Artezian, and Pracownia Piwa. For pennies we could sample any beer in tiny stemmed taster glasses, so we

LAURA SUTHERLAND
LANCÉ LINARES

POLAND

PHOTOS THIS SPREAD CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Eating pierogis at Browarmia Warsaw; Main Market Square, Cloth hall, St Mary's Church; Piw Paw brew pub, Warsaw; Meat on individual spits, CK Brower brewery and restaurant Krakow; Krakow pretzel with boar sausage and venison mushroom gravy at Miod Malina, Krakow.

tried a surprising variety of Poland's latest brews, including six different smoked beers.

Next stop was Kufle i Kapsle with 12 carefully selected taps, an impressive bottle selection and a highly informative owner and staff who are the guys behind the Warsaw Beer Trail and Beer Festival. Ask them anything about the Polish indie beer scene and they'll know the answer.

Where Warsaw feels modern and edgy, Krakow — just a three-hour train ride away — feels like a vibrant living, breathing antique with the largest and best-preserved medieval market square in Europe. The city was founded along major European trade routes and grew wealthy from the amber and salt mined in the region. Amber is still for sale everywhere, and a tour of the world's oldest salt mine nearby is a compelling way to work up an appetite.

Our hotel — the Golden Tulip — was adjacent to the ring of pretty parks that have replaced the fortified walls and moat that once encircled the old town. At CK Brower restaurant and brewery a few blocks away, we marvelled at the muscled young men next to us eating football-sized hunks of meat skewered on individual spits and drinking from a table-top five-litre cylinder of beer with its own tap. But we behaved ourselves with a tasting flight of the brewery's beers and feasted on grilled mountain cheese with bacon, cranberry and horseradish, another salute to Poland's traditional cuisine.

A tour of the old town and market square the next day took us to the hilltop Wawel Castle complex, first built in the 11th century and rebuilt in the Renaissance. We fortified

ourselves at nearby Pod Barenem, a restaurant known for Polish food that makes particular use of seasonal produce, sampling the Krakow barley soup and wild boar tenderloin in forest sauce, which is red wine, honey and forest herbs like juniper berries. Unlike the rest of Western Europe, Poland is still forested and the nation's forests provide game and foraged foods of all kinds.

Feeling thirsty, we headed to Viva La Pinta, a pub representing one of Poland's best-loved craft breweries. There are always eight Pinta beers on tap and six from other Polish microbreweries, most popular of which is the very first beer Pinta made — the highly hopped and aromatic Atak Chmielu.

My favourite brewpub was Multi Qlti — a hip beer bar with an orange and gray mid-century-modern vibe where the output of Poland's trendiest breweries features heavily in the tap rotation. I had to try Piwoteka's herring flavoured beer (only mildly fishy), the Bazyliszek Psycho IPA made with wormwood, and Podgorz Space Sheep — a crowd favourite with an irresistible name.


Chopin looms large in Krakow, too, and a number of beautiful old churches offer free concerts of his and other composers' music almost every night of the week. We'd planned to attend one, but lingered too long at Lubicz Brewery and Restaurant over their Bock beer, a style recognized since the 16th century, and exceptional dishes like roast duck with apples glazed in local cider.

Since we'd missed the concert, we had time to dash into cavernous bar and brewery Stara Zajeźdźnia located in a »



«former tram terminal for a beer. We could only imagine it the next night when 500-plus soccer-crazy fans would belly up to the country's longest bar to watch Poland's national team play on the pub's enormous screen.

Our final meal was at Miod Malina Restaurant. Dressed in tones of saffron and raspberry with elegant fireplaces and folk art touches, it serves Polish specialties, like sour rye soup with white sausage and boiled egg and the huge O-shaped Krakow pretzel filled with boar sausage and topped with venison mushroom gravy.

Like much of the food we encountered in Poland, the dishes paid homage to the country's forests and fields, traditions and innovations — past, present, and future. 



MAKES ABOUT 1 QUART

Cytrynówka

Polish Lemon Vodka

SIMILAR TO ITALIAN limoncello, this recipe for the classic Polish drink is from a Warsaw cooking school called "Polish Your Cooking" that offers classes in English and Polish.

Lemons 10-12 medium

Sugar 2 ½ cups

Vodka 95 % alc. by vol. (190 proof), 2 cups

- 1 GRATE** the bright yellow peel off of the lemons with a lemon zester or microplane. Put it in a one-quart jar with the vodka, cover and set aside to infuse for 5 days.
- 2 WITH** a sharp knife, peel the white lemon pulp off of the remaining lemon and discard the white part (the less white part, the less bitter the eventual Cytrynówka).
- 3 CUT** the remaining lemon into small pieces and mix with sugar in a second one-quart jar. Cover and set aside to infuse for 3 days.
- 4 SQUASH** the lemon pulp (you can use a potato masher) in the jar. Cover and set aside for another 2 days.
- 5 STRAIN** the liquid from both mixtures (squeeze the lemons well before throwing out — there is a lot of juice in them).
- 6 COMBINE** the two liquids and stir until well mixed. Pour into bottles, cork and set aside for another couple of days.
- 7 CHECK** if it isn't too strong for you, if it is — add some mineral water and stir it. Shake the bottle before pouring into glasses.



...Unlike the rest of Western Europe, Poland is still forested...

PHOTOS OPPOSITE SPREAD FROM TOP LEFT
Horse-drawn carriages at the Main Market Square;
Kufle y Kapsle brew pub in Warsaw.

Browarmia Restaurant and Brewery
www.browarmia.pl

Hanna Dzielinska Tours
www.dzielinska.com

H15 Boutique Hotel
www.h15ab.com

Kufle i Kapsle
www.kufleikapsle.pl

Opasly Tom Restaurant
facebook.com/OpaslyTom

PiwPaw Beer Heaven
www.skelp.piwpaw.pl

Signature Restaurant
www.signaturerestaurant.pl/en

Browar Lubicz
www.browar-lubicz.com.pl

CK Browar
www.ckbrowar.pl

Golden Tulip Hotel
www.goldentulipkrakowcitycenter.com/en

Miod Malina Restaurant
www.miodmalina.pl

Multi Qlti Tap Bar
www.multi-qlti-tap-bar.ontap.pl

Pod Barenem Restaurant
www.podbaranem.com/en

Restaurant Browarna Browar Lubicz
www.browar-lubicz.com.pl

Stara Zajezdenia Restaurant and Brewpub
www.starazajezdniakrakow.pl

Viva La Pinta
www.browarpinta.pl

Wieliczka Salt Mine
www.wieliczka-saltmine.com

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LAURA SUTHERLAND is a travel writer based in Northern California. You can contact her at LauraSutherland.net and follow her [@WanderandTaste](https://twitter.com/WanderandTaste).



Cook

SERVES 4

Cream of Pumpkin Soup

FROM CHEF AGATA Wojda at Opasly Tom Restaurant in Warsaw. This soup was my husband's all-time favourite.

Pumpkin 2 lbs, peeled and chopped

Apple 1, peeled, cored and chopped

Water 4 cups, divided

Butter ¼ cup

Honey 1 Tbs

Cream Cheese 3 oz

Salt and Freshly Ground Black Pepper to taste

Truffle Oil¹ to taste

Parmesan Cheese for garnish

- 1 PUT** the chopped pumpkin, apple and butter in a deep baking dish. Add enough of the water to half cover the pumpkin apple mix. Bake at 350°F until tender, about 45 minutes.
- 2 ALLOW** the mixture to cool slightly then spoon into a blender along with the honey, cream cheese, salt and pepper, and remaining water. Blend until velvety texture.
- 3 TO** serve, pour the soup into bowls, drizzle with truffle oil, sprinkle with grated parmesan cheese and serve.

¹ If you don't have truffle oil, use extra virgin olive oil.