

# *The Mennonite Experience in Poland History Tour 2024*



Marienburg Castle – Photography by Mark Jantzen

***July 12 – July 20, 2024***

***(With an optional Kraków extension July 20-24)***

*Sponsored by the Mennonite-Polish Studies Association*

[mla.bethelks.edu/information/mpsa.php](http://mla.bethelks.edu/information/mpsa.php)

*Tour Leaders: Mark Jantzen, John D. Thiesen, and Richard Thiessen*

*Arrangements in Poland: Travpol Travel Agency, Warsaw*

## Tour Overview

Poland was the refuge and homeland for generations of Mennonites during years of intolerance after the Protestant Reformation. As a result, the history of Poland is part of the history of many Mennonites around the world. As early as the 1530s, Anabaptists from Holland and the lowlands of the Rhine and North Germany found a sanctuary in the Polish Commonwealth. Unlike Switzerland and the Holy Roman Empire, Poland rejected the brutal religious persecutions plaguing Western Europe. As a result, along with others seeking religious freedom and economic opportunity, many Dutch and German Mennonites settled in Poland, and remained there until later migrations took some to Ukraine and others to the American Midwest and southern Manitoba. A large number of Mennonites remained along the Vistula River until the end of the Second World War. Surprisingly, most Mennonites have overlooked these centuries in their own history, even though the years of refuge in Poland constituted a much longer stay than the later years of residence in Ukraine.

This tour is designed to acquaint persons of Mennonite descent, and other interested persons, with the country that provided their ancestors a safe and secure homeland for so many years from the sixteenth through the twentieth centuries. We will visit the significant sites of both Polish and Mennonite history, discovering the quintessential beauty of Poland as seen through the lens of Anabaptist/Mennonite history and learning how the sojourn in Poland shaped Mennonites in North America. Get ready to experience the amazing beauty and the astonishing significance of Poland as the homeland of our Mennonite ancestors.

A special feature of the tour this year will be a commemoration event at the Olender (Mennonite) Ethnographic Park of the 1874 emigration to North America of Elder Wilhelm Ewert and others from the Obernessau congregation.

## Itinerary

*(Subject to minor changes based on participant interest and shifts in the tour schedule)*

Day 1 – July 12, Friday - Arrival at Frederic Chopin International Airport in Warsaw, the capital city of Poland. Enjoy a “Welcome to Poland” dinner. Overnight stay in Warsaw.

Day 2 - July 13, Saturday – City tour of Warsaw including UNESCO Old Town and its lovely architecture, the Royal Route, Warsaw University, the Holy Cross Church where Chopin’s heart is kept, the Nicolas Copernicus monument, the foreign embassies district, Royal Łazienki Park, the former Warsaw Ghetto established by Nazis in 1940, and the modern part of the city. After lunch we will try to include a Chopin piano recital or similar cultural performance. Overnight stay in Warsaw. Lunch provided, dinner on your own.

Day 3 - July 14, Sunday – After breakfast, we leave Warsaw and drive through the scenic and picturesque countryside along the Vistula River. We visit the former Mennonite settlements of Deutsch Kasun and Deutsch Wymyschle, where Mennonite villagers lived until the war. We also stop at the former Mennonite Church at Wielka Nieszawka (Obernessau) and will see the open-air museum, Olender Ethnographic Park, devoted to Mennonite heritage. The museum will be hosting a special event to commemorate the emigration of Elder Wilhelm Ewert and others in 1874. Ewert was one of twelve delegates who visited North America in 1873 to find a new homeland for Mennonites who wanted to maintain the belief and practice of non-resistance. We will stay overnight in the UNESCO city of Toruń, Copernicus' birthplace. A short walking tour of the city and dinner in a local restaurant. Dinner provided, lunch on your own.

Day 4 - July 15, Monday – We drive north today towards Gdańsk. We visit Culm, where Mennonites paid to build a military-training junior high school in 1776 as the price of maintaining their military exemption. We will also travel to other villages and hamlets where Mennonites formerly lived and attended the Vistula Valley churches at Przechówko, where we will visit the newly renovated cemetery, Montau, and see the Nickelstein, the only monument Mennonites ever erected in Poland. Time permitting, we may explore some other Mennonite cemeteries which still exist (Schönsee, Tragheimerweide). We arrive in Gdańsk (Danzig) for dinner and overnight stay.



Day 5 - July 16, Tuesday – After breakfast, city tour of Gdańsk including the Golden Gate, Town Hall, Neptune's Fountain – symbol of Gdańsk, Artus' Court, St. Mary's Church, Long Market with Green Gate and the Crane along the Motława Canal, Three Crosses Monument – an homage to dockyard workers killed in anti-Communist protests, and the Westerplatte, the place where World War II started (if time permits, we may also see amber production today). We will also see the former Mennonite church building here in Gdańsk which was built in 1819. After lunch, drive through villages in the Gross Werder

around Tiegenhof or time in Gdańsk for exploring on your own. Lunch provided, dinner on your own back in Gdańsk.



Day 6 - July 17, Wednesday – After breakfast, we will tour the massive castle of the Teutonic Knights in Malbork (Marienburg), UNESCO site and one of the largest brick castles in the world. We will visit the important cemetery in Heubuden and additional villages. Dinner will tentatively be in Mielenz/Miłoradz hosted by the club Dawna Wozownia (The Former Coach Shed). Overnight stay in Gdańsk.



Day 7 - July 18, Thursday – Today we will visit the Werder Museum in Nowy Dwor (Tiegenhof) with an interesting exhibition of Mennonite history and other villages. Tentative program on Low German by Prof. Tomasz Wicherkiewicz from the University of Poznan. Lunch at the Mały Holender in Tiegenhagen. We will see the city of Elblag (Elbing) where two former Mennonite church buildings survive. Overnight stay in Gdańsk.

Day 8 - July 19, Friday – After breakfast, we leave Gdańsk and begin our trip back to Warsaw by stopping en route at the Stutthof Concentration Camp and Museum. We travel back to Warsaw followed by our farewell dinner in Warsaw. Overnight stay.

Day 9 – July 20, Saturday – After breakfast, we check out of our hotel. Departure transfer to Chopin International Airport in Warsaw to reach your flight home or other destination.

## The Kraków Extension



Day 9 - July 20, Saturday – After breakfast, we leave Warsaw for Kraków, the former royal capital of Poland and one of the most beautiful cities in Europe.

En route, we visit Auschwitz/Birkenau, the notorious Nazi extermination camp. Overnight stay with dinner on your own in Kraków.



Day 10 - July 21, Sunday – *The Treasures of Kraków*

Kraków is a royal city with a long and rich tradition, majestically situated on the Vistula. Left unscathed by World War II, this city of culture is a living museum of magnificent

palaces and historical treasures. There are 300 ancient buildings and 58 churches and palaces in the Old Town. One can walk along the Royal Route starting from the Barbican and finishing at Wawel Hill, known as the “Polish Acropolis,” with its Castle and Cathedral, where Polish kings were crowned and buried. In the Old Town you can explore the oldest and longest mediaeval square in Europe, the Main Market Square. St Mary’s Church is there.

Morning walking city tour will include:

The Cloth Hall – Built for market stalls in the thirteenth century, today the Cloth Hall houses the Gallery of Nineteenth-Century Polish Art. Recommended place to buy souvenirs, silverware, leatherware, wooden carvings, and colorful dolls.

Collegium Maius – Established in 1364 by the King Casimir the Great, this is the oldest part of the famous Jagiellonian University. Nowadays, it houses the Museum of the History of the Jagiellonian University. Its valuable collection includes the copies of Copernicus devices and an impressive, arcaded courtyard from the fifteenth century.

St. Mary’s Church – One of Poland’s most beautiful and ornate churches with gorgeous stained-glass windows, lovely wall paintings by Jan Matejko and a magnificent Gothic altarpiece. Carved by Wit Stwoszcz between 1477-89, it is one of the biggest altars in Europe. Famous bugle call every hour on the hour.

Wawel Hill – With its Royal Castle and Cathedral, this is the seat and the coronation site of Polish kings. One of the most important historical buildings in Poland, it houses precious works of art and splendid collection of Flemish tapestries. It is a great example of different styles in art and architecture through the ages.

Afternoon at leisure for exploring or shopping on your own. Dinner in a stylish Polish restaurant.

Day 11 – July 22, Monday, Kraków and Wieliczka Salt Mines

Morning tour of Wieliczka, the oldest European salt mine, situated 13 km from Kraków. Wieliczka is an impressive underground world of salt chambers, halls, galleries, fabulous salt lakes and beautiful sculptures carved from the rock salt. It offers a fascinating journey through airy chambers carved from the rock salt on three levels between 64 and 135 meters below the ground. On the world scale of sites, it is exceptional and is one of the wonders of Poland. There are 380 steps down, if you wish to walk down, but an elevator bring you back up to the surface. There will be some free time in Kraków in the afternoon.

Jewish-type dinner to the sound of Klezmer music in a local restaurant. Overnight stay in Kraków.

### Day 23 – July 11, Tuesday, Kraków – Warsaw

After breakfast, we check out of our Kraków hotel and travel back to Warsaw, perhaps stopping on the way to see Częstochowa, known for the blackened picture of St. Mary in the Jasna Gora Monastery, popularly called the miraculous "Black Madonna." This is the most important place of worship in Poland. Częstochowa is recognized as a spiritual capital for the Poles.

Overnight stay in Warsaw.

### Day 13 – July 24, Wednesday

After breakfast, we check out of our hotel in Warsaw and journey back home.

## **Tour Leaders**

This tour is led by Mark Jantzen, Professor of History at Bethel College, John D. Thiesen, Co-Director of Libraries at Bethel and Archivist at the Mennonite Library and Archives, and Richard Thiessen, Executive Director of the Mennonite Heritage Museum in Abbotsford, BC, Canada. Mark and John founded the Vistula Mennonite Studies Association in 2002 and have published extensively on the history of Mennonites in the Vistula River valley. Richard has been actively involved with the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO) for the past twenty years. He has a keen interest in Mennonite genealogy and has been the creator and manager of the [www.mennonitegenealogy.com](http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com) website since its creation in 1995.

This tour carries on with gratitude the tradition established by Peter J. Klassen, the founder of the Mennonite-Polish Friendship Association, and continued after his retirement by Alan Peters of the California Mennonite Historical Society. The Mennonite-Polish Friendship Association and the Vistula Mennonite Studies Association at Bethel were combined in 2016 as the Mennonite-Polish Studies Association. This tour also incorporates Mark's experience leading student and other tours to Poland since 2004. Our intention is to explore the Polish Mennonite roots of tour participants and to visit many of the villages where ancestors of tour participants once resided. To assist with finding the relevant places, John will prepare a genealogical report for each tour participant with roots in Poland.

The local Polish arrangements have been managed by the Travpol Travel Agency in Warsaw, directed by Andrzej Puchacz. His agency provides a wide range of excellent tours in Poland and is particularly experienced in arranging Mennonite tours. You can visit their website at: [www.travpol.pl](http://www.travpol.pl).

## Tour Information

The cost of the tour is for the “land portion” only. Since most tour participants in the past have made this tour a part of a larger European experience, visiting other parts of Europe on their own either before or after the tour, we ask that tour participants make their own travel arrangements to and from Warsaw. If you need advice regarding your own arrangements, please let us know.

The tour will be limited to 36 persons due to bus, hotel, and restaurant limitations. Once the quota of 36 persons has been filled, any additional reservations will be placed on a waiting list, in the order received, in case of cancellations. The minimum number of participants required for the trip to take place is 20 persons.

Virtually all tour-related communications are made by email. If you do not have an email address yourself, please indicate the email of a nearby relative or friend that we can use to send tour newsletters and other correspondence to you.

### Price List per Segment

Tour Costs – Mennonite Tour (July 12-20) (a minimum of 20 tour participants is required)

US \$2,300 per person, double occupancy

US \$350 single supplement

This price includes lodging for eight nights, half board, travel by motor coach, entry fees where required, English-speaking Polish guides, and all gratuities for organized group activities. Any additional privately arranged excursions, and the gratuities associated with them, would be an additional personal expense.

Tour Costs – Kraków Extension (July 20-24) (a minimum of 16 participants is required)

US \$1,100 per person, double occupancy

US \$200 single supplement

This price includes transportation costs to and from Kraków, lodging for 4 nights (3 nights in Kraków and 1 night in Warsaw), half board, entry fees, English-speaking Polish guides, and all gratuities for organized group activities.

As mentioned above, these costs do NOT include air fare to and from Warsaw. Also not included is any travel or cancellation insurance protection that you will want to secure on your own. Those are arrangements you will need to make on your own as we cannot provide refunds if you find you are unable to travel for any reason.



## **Schedule of Payment**

Reservations can be made by emailing Mark Jantzen at [mjantzen@bethelks.edu](mailto:mjantzen@bethelks.edu). A non-refundable deposit of US \$300 per person (or US \$400 if you are also reserving a spot on the Kraków extension) is due when you register to reserve your spot on the tour. Once the tour group maximum of 36 persons is complete, additional registrants will be placed on a waiting list in the order that their registrations and deposits are received. Deposit checks should be made out to Bethel College with Menno Tour 2024 in the memo line and mailed to Mark Jantzen, Bethel College, 300 E 27th St., North Newton, KS 67117. Canadians should send bank drafts made out in US dollars.

The final payment is due March 1, 2024.

## **Additional Information**

Those traveling alone should be prepared to pay the appropriate costs for the “single supplement” portions of their tour costs or make arrangements to room with another person traveling alone to qualify for the “double occupancy” rate.

Once reservations have been made, and a deposit has been received, additional information, including a suggested reading list, informative maps, travel suggestions and information, genealogical assistance, and periodic newsletters will be sent by email to all tour participants by the tour leaders. If you have any questions, please contact Mark Jantzen at [mjantzen@bethelks.edu](mailto:mjantzen@bethelks.edu) or by phone at (316) 284-5354 or John Thiesen at [jthiesen@bethelks.edu](mailto:jthiesen@bethelks.edu) or by phone at (316) 284-5360 or Richard Thiessen at [richard.thiessen@gmail.com](mailto:richard.thiessen@gmail.com) or by phone at (604) 613-6356.

Please note that starting in 2024, North Americans will need to apply online for ETIAS travel authorization to fly to the European Union, including to Poland. Tour members will be given all the necessary information for this simple but necessary step.

The tour does involve walking tours through a number of the cities and the various sites visited. Many of the "old town" portions of ancient cities are not accessible by bus, with many streets and city squares reserved for pedestrians only. We also leave the bus to visit historical sites, remote old cemetery locations, and other sites of interest. Tour participants should be able to manage a significant amount of walking.

Please note that slight modifications of this program might be necessary if unforeseen circumstances arise.