



Wroclaw

Jo Caird offers an essential cultural guide to a city of vibrant street art and a unique approach to underground protest.



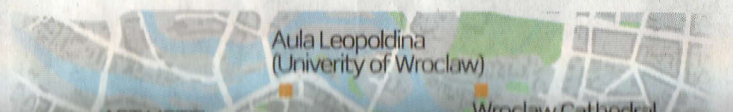
In Eighties Poland, as the Solidarity movement used civil resistance to fight for social change, the south-western city of Wroclaw started its own, unique brand of underground protest. Drawing dwarf figures on walls all over town and staging absurd happenings designed to mock the regime, the Orange Alternative attracted thousands of participants to its peaceful protests, as well as plenty of media attention.

Walk around Wroclaw today and you'll find proud memorials to the movement wherever you go, in the form of 150 diminutive bronze dwarf statuettes set into pavements across the city.

But when it comes to street art in Wroclaw, dwarves are just the start. The walk from my hotel into the handsome old town takes me past an arresting collection of huddled figures breaking out of the pavement, the work of Polish artist Jerzy Kalina. Later, on the islands in the River Oder,

on Ostrów Tumski – “Cathedral Island” – is calmer. Home to the city's imposing cathedral, as well as a handful of other religious buildings, this is a place of peace and contemplation. As dusk falls over the city, a lamplighter appears and goes about his work unhurried.

This is my cue to leave. I am due at the Opera Wroclawska, a grand classicist auditorium whose commitment to new and rarely performed work makes for a younger than usual audience.



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ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE

Wizzair (0906 959 0002; wizzair.com) offers flights to Wroclaw from Luton and Doncaster from £12.99 one way. Ryanair (0871 246 0000; ryanair.com) has flights to Wroclaw from various UK airports from £9.99 one way. From Wroclaw airport, city bus number 406 runs every 20 minutes to the central railway station.

PACKAGES

Regent Holidays (0117 921 1711; regent-holidays.co.uk) offers a three-night package to Wroclaw from £325 per person including b&b and return flight.

THE INSIDE TRACK

- ☛ There's a rowdy, tavern atmosphere at Rynek-Ratusz 2; 0048 71 344 7225; restaurant beneath the City Hall.
- ☛ Climb the bell tower of St Elizabeth's Church in the Market Square and old town.
- ☛ For fresh produce, cured meats, traditional household goods, the Hala Targowa (Market Square) is housed within a brutalist concrete shell.
- ☛ Opera Wroclawska (ul. Swidnicka 35) presents both classical and contemporary works. Maschera, this year's open-air “super opera” at the Olympic Stadium on June 15 and 17 (0048 71 35; tickets via Opera Wroclawska).
- ☛ Free Wi-Fi is available in bars and cafes.

WHAT TO AVOID

- ☛ There are about a dozen bars in the railway arches on Wojciecha Boguslawskiego, a 10-minute walk south of the city centre, but make sure you head to those to the east of Swidnicka, as the ones to the

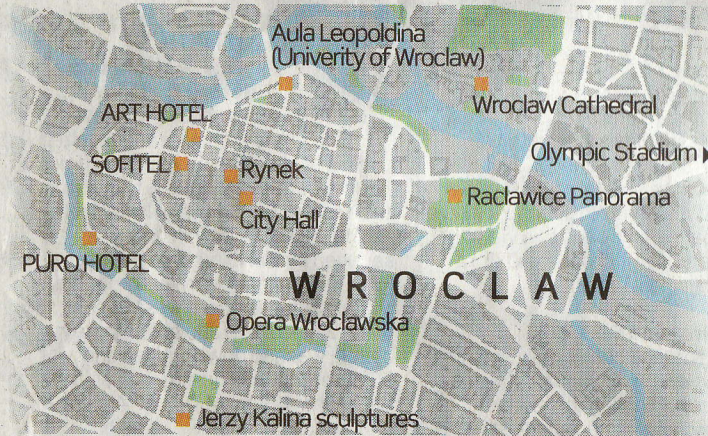
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I come across vibrant murals that make art out of the unremarkable buildings they adorn.

Several of the city's other important cultural treats are near the river. The bunker that houses the Raclawice Panorama doesn't look promising, but once inside and surrounded by the huge cyclorama, I am enthralled by this peculiar work. Produced at the end of the 19th century, and brought to Wrocław from Lwów after the Second World War, the battle painting is the city's most popular attraction.

On the south bank of the Oder, the university's elaborately decorated Baroque lecture hall, the 18th-century Aula Leopoldina, is a marvellous sight. My neck sore from craning to admire the trompe-l'oeil frescoes, I climb the university's tower for a different view, taking in the Oder and its islands from above.

The atmosphere across the river

Tonight's performance is *King Roger*, one of the few Polish language operas regularly staged on the international circuit. Each summer the company stages a “super-production”, the largest operatic performance in Poland, featuring hundreds of performers, European star names and, frequently, animals. This year's production, to be staged at Wrocław's Olympic Stadium, is Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera*.

The performance finished, I head to the Rynek, Wrocław's ancient market square, overlooked by the resplendent 14th-century City Hall, the heart of the old town and a picturesque and lively place for an evening drink. Engaging positively with the past while investing in the future can be a difficult balancing act for a city, especially one with such a turbulent recent history. Fortunately, Wrocław does it with panache.



Tall order: Wrocław's City Hall, above, traditional painted houses, above left, and a “protest” dwarf, above right

WHAT TO AVOID

- There are about a dozen bars in the railway arches of Wojciecha Bogusławskiego, a 10-minute walk south of the city centre, but make sure to head to those to the east of Świdnicka, as the ones to the west are decidedly dingy.
- The traffic around Wrocław

THE BEST HOTELS

Art Hotel £

Has a fantastic location just in a tenement building; 80 four-star rooms; elegant restaurant (0048 71

Puro Hotel ££

Located in the up-and-coming district of Śródmieście; rooms are sleek and modern; self check-in; funky bar and restaurant (from £52).

Sofitel £££

Contemporary design; 100 rooms, some offering views; gym (358 8300; www.sofitel-wroclaw-old-town.com.pl)

DID YOU KNOW?

Poland “gained” Breslau (Wrocław) and Danzig (Gdansk) in 1945, “losing” Lwów and Vilnius

THE BEST RESTAURANTS

Kuchnia Marché

This bright buffet restaurant serves Polish and international options all day for meals and snacks (www.kuchniamarche.com.pl).

Karczma Lwowska ££

Decorated like an old rural dining room; hanging from the ceiling, this restaurant serves Polish and Lvov cuisine; enormous views over the Market Square (www.karczmalwowska.com.pl).

Spizarnia £££

Modern European cuisine with a twist; range of classic cocktails and a good place to start an evening (www.spizarnia.com.pl).

GETTING THERE

Wizzair (0906 959 0002; wizzair.com) offers flights to Wroclaw from Luton and Doncaster from £12.99 one way. Ryanair (0871 246 0000; ryanair.com) has flights to Wroclaw from various UK airports from £17 one way. From Wroclaw airport, city bus number 406 runs every 20 minutes to the central railway station.



PACKAGES

Regent Holidays (0117 921 1711; regent-holidays.co.uk) offers a three-night package to Wroclaw from £325 per person, including b & b and return flight.

THE INSIDE TRACK

- There's a rowdy, tavern atmosphere in the wood-panelled bar at Spiz (Rynek-Ratusz 2; 0048 71 344 7225; spiz.pl), a microbrewery and restaurant beneath the City Hall.
- Climb the bell tower of St Elisabeth's Church for fantastic views over the Market Square and old town.
- For fresh produce, cured meats, traditional sweets and cheap household goods, the Hala Targowa (Piaskowa 17) is a shopper's paradise within a brutalist concrete shell.
- Opera Wroclawska (ul. Swidnicka 35; 344 5779; opera.wroclaw.pl) presents both classical and contemporary opera. Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera*, this year's open-air "super-production", takes place at the Olympic Stadium on June 15 and 17 (Aleja Ignacego Jana Paderewskiego 35; tickets via Opera Wroclawska).
- Free Wi-Fi is available in bars and cafés all over the city.

WHAT TO AVOID

- There are about a dozen bars in the railway arches on Wojciecha Boguslawskiego, a 10-minute walk south of the city centre, but make sure you head to those to the east of Swidnicka, as the ones to the west are decidedly dingy.
- The traffic around Wroclaw's ring roads is often very slow moving, so it's best to avoid taxis at rush hour.
- Trams are the fastest way to get around, but don't get caught out: you need to buy tickets before boarding, either from most news stands or machines at the larger tram stops.

THE BEST HOTELS

Art Hotel £

Has a fantastic location just off the Market Square in a restored tenement building; 80 four-star rooms, each individually decorated; elegant restaurant (0048 71 787 7400; arthotel.pl; from £37).

Puro Hotel ££

Located in the up-and-coming Jewish quarter, with plenty of great bars nearby; rooms are sleek and super modern; save time on arrival with self check-in; funky bar and restaurant (772 5100; purohotel.pl; from £52).

Sofitel £££

Contemporary design in the heart of the old town; five-star rooms, some offering views of St Elisabeth's Church; spa and gym (358 8300; accorhotels.com/pl/hotel-5345-sofitel-wroclaw-old-town/location.shtml; from £60).

THE BEST RESTAURANTS

Kuchnia Marché £

This bright buffet restaurant offers a wide range of Polish and international options; it offers excellent value and is open all day for meals and snacks (ul. Swidnicka 53; 343 9565; marche.com.pl).

Karczma Lwowska ££

Decorated like an old rural dining room, complete with bunches of hops hanging from the ceiling, this eccentric place specialises in traditional Polish and Lvov cuisine; enormous portions call for large appetites; good views over the Market Square; delicious dumplings (Rynek 4; 343 9887; lwowska.com.pl).

Spizarnia £££

Modern European cuisine with some dishes from farther afield thrown in; range of classic cocktails available, including coffees with a tippie; a good place to start an evening before exploring the other bars on this trendy street (ul. Wlodkowica 27; 341 4166; spizarnia.wroclaw.pl).



DID YOU KNOW?
Poland "gained" Breslau (Wroclaw) and Danzig (Gdansk) in 1945, losing Lvov and Vinus

above, traditional painted houses, above left, and a "protest" dwarf, above right