

Country of the Week: Poland

After spending decades under communism, Poland has made great economic strides in the past 15 years.

BASIC

Poland, a country in Eastern Europe, is this week's Country of the Week. **Have you heard of Poland? Do you know what people from Poland are called?** (*Poles.*) In the last 10 or 15 years, Poland's economy has been growing fast. Poland has about 38 million people, but many more Poles live in other countries, including our own. One U.S. city, Chicago, claims to have more Polish residents than any city outside Poland. Poland's capital city is full of many historic and beautiful buildings as you see

in the bottom photo. **What is Poland's capital city?**

(*Warsaw.*) Poland also has a lot of beautiful countryside, like the mountains shown in the top photo, and miles of coastline on the Baltic Sea. For much of its history, Poland was located between two large countries, Germany and Russia. This caused many problems for the country. Let's learn more about the history of Poland. NEXT



GENERAL

This week we head across the Atlantic Ocean to Poland. **Where in the world is Poland?** (*In Eastern Europe.*) For much of the 20th century, Poland was part of the communist region controlled by the Soviet Union, and when it became independent in 1990, life still was a struggle for many. Poland's air was very polluted in some areas, the people earned little money, and they often had to stand in long lines to buy basic items. **What do we call people from Poland?** (*Poles.*) But the country has made a lot of progress, and today, it is seen as an economic success story. Poland has about 38 million residents, but many more people of Polish descent live in other parts of the world, including the United States. **Does anyone know the U.S. city that**

claims to have more Polish residents than any city outside Poland? (*Chicago.*) **Do you have Polish ancestors?** In the bottom photo you see a picture from the city of Warsaw, Poland's capital. Believe it or not, this beautiful city was almost entirely destroyed during World War Two. But the Polish people are very proud of their history and culture, and after the war, they slowly and carefully rebuilt many of its historic areas. Poland also has a lot of beautiful countryside, like the mountains you see here, and miles of coastline on the Baltic Sea. But throughout much of its history, Poland was located between two large countries, Germany and Russia, which caused many problems. **Can you guess why?** (*Nearby countries often wanted to take over parts of Poland.*) NEXT

ADVANCED

This week NewsCurrents travels to the nation of Poland. **Where is Poland located?** (*In Eastern Europe.*) This country has much tragedy in its history, but also a rich cultural tradition that has bound its people together during the worst of times. And in recent years it has become one of Europe's economic miracles. Fifteen years ago, Poland's economy was in tatters, its air was unbreathable, and Poles often had to stand in long lines to buy basic items. Today Poland is a member of the European Union and has one of Eastern Europe's strongest economies. Still, it has a higher rate of poverty and homelessness than most Western European countries, and still bears the marks of the decades it spent as part of the Soviet Bloc. **What form of government and economic**

system did Soviet countries live under? (*Communist.*) Today, about 38 million people live in Poland, but millions more live in other parts of the world. In the United States alone, there are about 10 million people of Polish descent. **Do you have Polish ancestors?** Poland's capital, seen in the main photo, is Warsaw. Warsaw is sometimes called "phoenix city" because it was almost completely demolished during World War Two, but painstakingly rebuilt through efforts of its citizens. Poland boasts beautiful landscape, like the mountains seen in the photo, and miles of coastline on the Baltic Sea. But historically, Poland's geographic location has caused it great difficulties. **What two large countries was it wedged between for much of its history?** (*Germany and Russia.*) NEXT

Country of the Week: Poland (cont'd)

Poland experienced great devastation during World War Two.

BASIC

Many great artists, writers, and scientists have been from Poland, including the man shown at top left, Nicolaus Copernicus. Copernicus was born in 1473 and he is thought to be one of the greatest astronomers of all time.

What is an astronomer? (*Someone who studies the objects in outer space.*) Later, Poland spent more than a century being controlled by other countries. But this made Poles work even harder to keep their own language and culture. **Do you understand why?** World War Two, which began in 1939, was an awful time for Poland. Millions

died and Warsaw was destroyed by bombs, as you see in the big

photo. After the war, Poland was controlled by the Soviet Union for many years. But an independence movement started growing, led by a trade union, or workers' rights group. The man in the bottom photo, Lech Walesa, became Poland's president when it got its independence in 1990. **Would you like to visit Poland?** END



GENERAL

During the 15th and 16th centuries, Poland's culture was thriving, and it produced many famous artists, writers, and scientists. One of the most famous is the man at top left, Nicolaus Copernicus. Copernicus was born in 1473 and he is considered one of the greatest astronomers of all time. **What is an astronomer?** (*Someone who studies the objects in space and their relationship to Earth.*) Copernicus is credited with the modern idea that the planets orbit around the sun.

In the late 18th century, nearby countries and empires became greedy for Poland's land, and Poland was carved up into regions. The country of Poland did not exist on the European map for 125 years, but in a way, this made Poles even more determined to preserve their own language

and traditions. **Do you understand why?** Poland finally got its independence back in 1918. But after World War Two broke out in 1939, Poland was the center of much tragedy. It was caught between two great powers that were trying to expand: Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Nearly a quarter of all Poles died in the war, including more than a million Polish Jews. The center photo shows Warsaw, nearly destroyed toward the end of the war. After the war, Poland was under Soviet rule. Gradually, an independence movement grew, led by a trade union known as "Solidarity." A trade union is a group that works for workers' rights. The Solidarity movement grew, and in 1990, its leader, Lech Walesa, shown in the bottom photo, won the presidency. **Do you think Poland's history has made its people stronger?** END

ADVANCED

Poland went through a golden age during the 15th and 16th centuries, at one point expanding its borders so that it was the largest nation in Europe. Its culture flourished and produced such luminaries as Nicolaus Copernicus, shown at top left.

What is Copernicus known for? (*He is credited with the modern idea of the solar system in which the planets orbit around the sun.*) During this period, the country was tolerant of religious dissent, allowing it to avoid the religious turmoil that spread over much of Europe. It had one of the largest Jewish populations in Europe. In the late 18th century, the country was partitioned between Prussia, Russia, and Hapsburg Austria. For 125 years, it disappeared from the map of Europe. It regained independence in 1918, but World War Two was a particular nightmare for Poland,

caught between the Nazis and the Soviets. **What do you know about Poland's role in World War Two?** Nearly a quarter of all Poles died in the war, including more than a million Polish Jews. In the face of brutal treatment, the Poles fought back valiantly in several renowned uprisings, including the famous Warsaw Ghetto uprising where Jews fought against the Nazis rather than being taken to concentration camps. The center photo shows Warsaw, destroyed by Nazi bombs. After the war, the country's borders were redrawn yet again and it came under Soviet rule. Gradually, an independence movement grew, led by an independent trade union known as "Solidarity." In 1990, Solidarity leader Lech Walesa, shown here, won the presidency. **How do you think Poland's struggles have helped shape it as a nation?** END