Casting off its formerly austere, gray image, today’s Warsaw is a city of creativity and energy. After a troubled past and near total destruction during World War II, followed by a period of Soviet domination, Warsaw has been undergoing an artistic evolution in recent years.


Poland was under communist control, from 1952 to 1989, and during the Soviet era, between 1945 and 1990, when most of the infrastructure was built. The country was divided into two, with the eastern part of the country being a part of the Soviet Union.

Warsaw’s artistic evolution includes the Neon Museum in Soho Factory, displaying rescued neon signs with eye-catching typography and graphics.

Warsaw information: www.warsawtour.pl

**EXPLORE THE TOWN**

**MORNING**

Start the day by customizing your own hot chocolate in the historic E. Wedel Chocolate Lounge, where you first pick from three bases (bittersweet, milk or white), then add one of 12 flavors ranging from rose petal to chile, and finish with a topping like cream, sauce or rum.

Then take a stroll along Mokotowska, where you’ll find cool Polish designers like the grungy Robert Kupisz or Loft 37 shoes, where you can design your own shoes, choosing the style, materials, colors and finishes. At Mo61, you can create your own perfumes, picking scents from the rows of bottles on each table. With guidance from the staff, you first pick a base, such as sandalwood or sea salt, add a flower note layer such as jasmine or rose, and finish with an aromatic note like ginger or pink pepper

**LUNCH**

Head over to Charlotte for coffee and a spot where a crowd is watching in the French-themed cafe and bakery on Plac Dzwonki (Savior Square)—renamed “hipster square” by locals. Order cocktails and smother them with orange, strawberries or white chocolate spread from the huge jars on each table. Next, head over to the Old Town, a colorful area of the city that dates to the 13th century but was rebuilt after being destroyed in World War II and now has UNESCO status.

It might be hard to believe that the center of a bustling housing in Old Town. Square and the Royal Castle were completely reconstructed from photographs, with work finishing only in 1986. For a spot of lunch, handmade Polish plongi—clumps filled with meat, cheese or vegetables—are a spectacular at Zapiecek (if you can handle the grandmotherly uniforms), or drop into a Mleko like Prasowy—one of the popular Soviet-era cafes that used to be state-run, serving wholesome food to workers at low prices, and are now having a revival.

**AFTERNOON**

The Polish Museum of the History of Polish Jews, set in a futuristic-looking building of glass, copper and concrete built on the site of the former Warsaw Ghetto, tells the history of Jews in Poland over 1,000 years rather than focusing solely on the Holocaust years. Interactive ways of telling stories through the different time periods, via exhibits packed with multimedia information and video storytelling, makes it unmissable and won’t European Museum of the Year in 2015. Try interactive exhibits such as minting your own medieval coin or printing pages from national books.

Before dark, take a bus, tram or taxi to Praga, a formerly rundown district on the east side of the Vistula River, which is now undergoing an artistic evolution. Soho Factory is a former factory that is being transformed with creative agencies, designers, studios and exhibition spaces. There you’ll find the newly opened Neon Museum, which has rescued some of the city’s beautiful neon signs from the past, with their eye-catching typography and graphics.

Nearby at Museum Czar PRL, you’ll find neon from the Polish People’s Republic (1952 to 1990) and some lot of shoes at the Old Town’s historic E. Wedel Chocolate Lounge. The restaurant is divided into two, with the left side for counter ordering, a food preparation area where you can watch the chefs prepare your food. After a day of interactive experiences, it’s nice to sit back and watch someone else do the work.

**EVENING**

Finish off the evening in Warszawa Wschodnia, a busy restaurant in a former warehouse in Soho Factory. The restaurant is divided into two, with a cuisine of fast food and international dishes on the menu. It’s a popular spot for locals and tourists alike. It’s open until late, and the decor is modern and stylish.

**NEON MUSEUM**


Warsaw information: www.warsawtour.pl