

# ONE DAY, ONE PLACE



Photos by Yvonne Gordon / Special to The Chronicle

Warsaw skyscraper Złota 44, designed by Polish-born architect Daniel Libeskind, rises above Soviet-era buildings.

## WARSAW

# Once-gray capital airs newfound zing

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 Socialist-Realist style rebuilding, Warsaw has been undergoing an evolution in recent years. Gleaming new glass and steel towers like Złota 44, designed by Polish-born architect Daniel Libeskind, sit happily alongside the Palace of Culture and Science, a socialist-realist style "gift" from the Soviet Union in 1952. It's not just the city's skyline that has been changing over recent years, with a quirky creativity evident in everything from fashion designers to visitor experiences, and former industrial areas undergoing a creative revival.

If you want to tap into the city's creative energy — and also create a few things of your own — here's the perfect way to spend the day in the Polish capital.

— Yvonne Gordon, travel@sfchronicle.com



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

### IF YOU GO

- E Wedel Chocolate Lounge:** Szpitalna 8, Warsaw, [www.wedelpijalnie.pl/en](http://www.wedelpijalnie.pl/en)
- Robert Kupisz:** Mokotowska 48/204, [www.robertkupisz.com/en](http://www.robertkupisz.com/en)
- Loft 37 shoes:** Mokotowska 52A, [www.loft37.eu](http://www.loft37.eu)
- Mo61 Perfume Lab:** Mokotowska 61, [www.mo61.pl](http://www.mo61.pl)

- Charlotte:** Plac Zbawiciela, [www.bistrocharlotte.pl](http://www.bistrocharlotte.pl)
- Zapiecek:** Krakowskie Przedmies cie 55, [www.zapiecek.eu](http://www.zapiecek.eu)
- Prasowy:** Marszałkowska 10/16, [www.prasowy.pl](http://www.prasowy.pl)
- Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews:** Anielewicza 6, [www.polin.pl](http://www.polin.pl)

- Neon Museum:** Building 55, Soho Factory, Min ska 25, [www.neonmuzeum.org](http://www.neonmuzeum.org)
- Museum Czar PRL:** Min ska 22, [www.czarprl.pl](http://www.czarprl.pl)
- Warszawa Wschodnia:** Building 46, Soho Factory, Min ska 25, [www.gessler.soho-factory.pl](http://www.gessler.soho-factory.pl)
- Warsaw information:** [www.warsawtour.pl](http://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 perfume, picking scents from the rows of bottles on the shelves. 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.



### MIDDAY

Head over to Charlotte for coffee and a spot of people-watching in this French-themed cafe and bakery on Plac Zbawiciela (Savior Square) — nicknamed "hipster square" by locals. Order croissants and smother them with orange, strawberry 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 colorful burgher houses in Old Town Square and the Royal Castle were completely reconstructed from photographs, with work finishing only in 1984. For a spot of lunch, handmade pierogi — dumplings filled with meat, cheese or vegetables — are a good bet at Zapiecek (if you can handle the grandmotherly staff uniforms), or drop into a Milk Bar like Prasowy — one of the popular Soviet-era canteens that used to be state run, serving wholesome food to workers at low prices, and are now having a revival.

### AFTERNOON

The Polin 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. Its innovative way of taking visitors through the different time periods, via eight galleries with multimedia, animation and video storytelling, makes it unmissable and won it European Museum of the Year in 2016. Try interactive exhibits such as minting your own medieval coin or printing pages from historic books.

Before dark, take a bus, tram or taxi to Praga, a formerly rundown district 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, and here you'll find the quirky 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 memorabilia from the Polish People's Republic years 1952 to 1990, when Poland was under communist control, but it's also a nostalgia trip for anyone who grew up in the 1960s, '70s or '80s, with old household items like TVs, radios, phones and vacuum cleaners guaranteed to cause giggles for Millennials.



### EVENING

Finish off the evening in Warszawa Wschodnia, a funky restaurant in a former warehouse in Soho Factory. The restaurant is divided in two, with a circular bar counter enclosing a food preparation space 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.