

## Weekend in... Gdansk, Poland

Outside, it's minus 2C and snow covers the square in front of Schopenhauer, a tiny café in the centre of Gdansk not far from the Motlawa River. Inside, it's warm and cheery, with exposed red-brick walls and the chatter of locals. We're munching on bagels filled with smoked sausage and fried egg, drinking piping hot coffee and pondering a quote from Arthur Schopenhauer, who was born on this street in 1788. "The world is my representation," says a sign on a wall.

It's meant to mean that the world exists only as each person sees it (or something like that). We puzzle over this for a while and then consider another quote widely attributed to the German philosopher: "All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident."

That's the thing about a trip to Gdansk in winter: you have a lot of time in cosy cafés and bars to ponder the meaning of life (perhaps after a vodka or two).

Many might ridicule a midwinter trip to a Polish port — it is, after all, very cold — yet it's a great time to go if you're after a bargain break to a fascinating city with a rich history. While in the summer Gdansk is often overrun with tourists, in winter the spiritual home of Solidarity, with its old docks and industrial reputation, is very quiet indeed. The result? Cheap hotels — a stay at the five-star Hilton is from about £90 in mid-January (with an indoor rooftop pool, sauna and spa) — and cut-price flights. A return trip with Wizz Air can be as low as £50. So for about £180 each, you can have three nights in a five-star hotel with flights thrown in.

A great way to get your bearings without feeling the freeze is to take one of the hop-on, hop-off buses that depart from the curious Amber Museum, with its centuries-old bugs trapped in the fossilised tree resin found in the Baltic Sea. The commentary begins by covering the city's time as one of the richest ports in the Hanseatic League, and explains the dominance of the Teutonic Order (which was sent packing in 1466). Prussian control, ending when the Free City of Danzig was established in 1920, is covered next, followed by Solidarity's strikes.

We pass the famous shipyard gates that became a symbol of protest against Soviet influence as well as the Monument to the Fallen Shipyard Workers of 1970, which remembers the 44 workers killed in riots. We trundle past giraffe-like cranes to Westerplatte,



Gdansk Old Town and the Motlawa River

where the Nazis first attacked Polish troops, beginning the Second World War — a chilling thought on a chilly day.

Afterwards we visit St Mary's Church, an enormous 14th-century building restored after it was bombed during the war, and take a stroll along Ulica Długa ("long lane"), lined with gloriously ornate 17th-century merchants' houses. Then we dive into a steamy tavern in a side street before finding ourselves in a crowded dumpling restaurant called Pierogarnia Mandu.

This is a revelation. The dining room is packed with millennials and ageing hipsters eating apple and cinnamon dumplings, goose and onion dumplings, wild boar dumplings, pork and chilli dumplings... there are an awful lot of dumplings. A feast for two comes to £17.

From here we go back for a swim in the Hilton's rooftop heated pool, the perfect finish to a December day in a chilly Polish port. Splash out on a winter weekend in Gdansk for a nippy, penny-pinching break. At first we may have laughed at the idea, but by the end, as Schopenhauer said, it somehow seemed to make sense.

**Tom Chesshyre**

### Need to know

Wizz Air ([wizzair.com](http://wizzair.com)) has return flights from Luton from about £50. A day-long pass on a hop-on, hop-off bus costs £13 ([city-sightseeing.com](http://city-sightseeing.com)). Schopenhauer café/bar is at Swietego Duchy 119/121. Pierogarnia Mandu is at Ulica Elzbiecanska 4/8 ([pierogarnia-mandu.pl](http://pierogarnia-mandu.pl))

### The budget hotel



#### Stay Inn Hotel

By St Mary's Church, this is a colourful little crash pad with a buzzy restaurant serving pizzas. Rooms are comfortable, although "economy" rooms are tight; it's best to pay for a larger one. Doubles cost from £33 ([stayinngdansk.com](http://stayinngdansk.com))

### The luxury hotel



#### Hilton Gdansk

By the Motlawa River, the Hilton has a big atrium with a glass lift to modern spacious rooms decorated in neutral colours. The highlight is the rooftop bar and pool, with brilliant views. Room-only doubles are from about £90 ([hilton.com](http://hilton.com))

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