

A Trip of Life!

Polska 2007 – Part I

I started writing it there; my summer adventure in room 305 in student dormitories of Politechnika Gdańska. Every day there I had some time to think about many things; home, future, friends, people who were friends or who I had special relationships with. Fascinated by its wonderful nature, kind people and well-planned active city; Gdansk gave me the opportunity to widen my horizon and enabled me to examine my capabilities. Yes, Gdansk specifically, and Poland generally were both an awesome and worthy experience!

Time flies! We always have to make use of our time, otherwise we will lose.

Summer passed away and a new academic year has commenced. Yes, there is something special about this year; it is my final year at university. I still cannot tell what will happen to me afterwards, I may work, continue for a master degree outside my home country, or maybe get married, who knows!

I made it! Along all the difficulties and challenges I faced, I was able to overcome them all. I cannot hide that many surprises popped up; however I believe that surprises change normal stories to cool adventures.

The adventure started when my plane on the Turkish airlines from Istanbul to Warsaw was delayed for around half an hour! The transition from Amman to Warsaw was gradual because it was via the city of Istanbul. In Ataturk International Airport you can notice Turkey's transition to Europe but at the same time you still feel that you are close to our region by means of culture and religion.

The case is totally different in Warsaw with no doubt. Now I am officially in Europe. Specifically, in mid-east Europe which has recovered from communism, and redirected towards Western Europe. Poland joined the EU officially in 2003 but it still does not use the Euro currency, and there are many construction and renovation projects of infrastructure (roads, fast-train tracks, trams...) which are funded by the EU.

The delay in Turkey was dangerous since I had to be at specified time in Warszawa Centralna (The main train station in Warsaw), otherwise I would loose my train to Gdansk which I already had booked on the internet. The surprise continued at the visa control in Warsaw Frederic Chopin Airport when two people in front of me in the queue had to talk with the police officer for around another half an hour! Sorry, did I say "talk"? Actually, they did not speak polish neither English very well. Finally, the officer did not let them in, so my turn came and I continued directly to the baggage claim.

Panic started! Filled with madness, I began searching the lanes but without any results. Then I went to the lost baggage section and a man told me “no baggage from Turkey here”! At that time, I took a deep breath and murmured the name of Allah and started to look back in the lanes again.

I found my bag lying upside down in one of the lanes. I grabbed it and head directly out to smell the air of Warsaw! In my way out a man came and asked “Taxi, taxi?” I answered him back directly “No thanks, taxi outside.” since I read about those men on the internet through the preparation phase; they charge you triple the money than normal taxis. He kept saying “it’s the same, it’s the same”. I do not think so!

So I took a taxi directly to Warszawa Centralna. I had less than an hour for my train.

But how would I get to my train now? Everything seemed totally different for me!

Standing alone in the middle of the building wondering what to do or where to go, observing all the people moving everywhere and hearing a totally different language, time was passing and for a second I felt that I was going to loose my train!

However – and not going through the details – I managed to get to the right place on time and I found two people who looked at my age and asked them “Gdansk train?” and one of them answered “We are going to Gdansk too, you are in the right place”!

The train was delayed for half an hour, but you cannot imagine my relief when I found my seat on the train and sat down beside other people who seemed students all also at my age, and one of them helped me to get my big bag up to its right place.

The journey started from Warsaw to Gdansk, I was really exhausted and I still could not believe how I reached the train. You know, everything in theory appears easy, but when it comes to practice it is something totally different.

I reached Gdańsk Wrzeszcz train station and I met Ania and Stephan from IAESTE-Poland and met another trainee like me, Julian from Belgium who appeared to be in the same train that I was in.

Before going to Poland, I was afraid of three things. Unfortunately, I only remember two of them now! Maybe the third did not show up in Poland so I forgot about it! The language was the first thing. During my preparations for Poland's trip I met Kinga online; a Polish lady from Warsaw. I met her through a website that connects people who want to teach and learn different languages. Thanks to my Italian teacher and friend Aya who directed me to that website. Kinga helped me to know some basic phrases and sentences in Polish and gave me some advice to keep in mind while I am in Poland. I really appreciate her help.

Even though, the language was still the main problem especially at work. Few engineers and those who were supervising me talked English with me only. But when they were talking to each others they used their own language, and this affected my ability to enroll entirely in some issues that we were working on.

I have to be honest here, and I am sure that my polish friends will not be angry on me, but generally speaking, Polish people are weak in English. Old people do not know it; they may know Russian or German. Young people either do not speak it at all or speak fair enough. There are exceptions of course and gladly most of my polish friends speak it very well, so we all had the opportunity for two months to practice our second language.

One of the worst nightmares about the language issue occurred in my train trip to Warsaw after one month of my arrival. I was participating in the IAESTE meeting there and I had some problem in the ticket. Although the ticket controllers seemed young but they did not speak a word in English, neither 5 people in the train cabinet that I was in, neither 2 other people who were close enough! Finally, we found someone who barely spoke it and we started communicating with help of body language and the problem was solved!

Nevertheless, I really liked the people there, and especially in Gdansk. People there are cheerful and always willing to help even if they did not speak English. Several times I was at the tram stops or other parts in the city and people came to offer help when I seemed that I needed it.

Moreover, my Polish friends who I should name them here: Arek, Radik, Stephan and Ania they all offered help and at the same time we all had fun to the max with my first room mate Julian, Chris from England, Jonas from Switzerland, Kristin from Denmark, Sara from China, Balhasan from Tunisia, and finally my second room mate Ozgur from Turkey.

We were all one group and we spent most of the time together going out after work and changing some air. We made trips, parties, gathered for lunch and dinner and experienced Poland together!

Zaid Asfour

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Polska 2007 – Part II Coming Soon!