



BIELSKO-BIAŁA



An average-sized city – not small, yet not too big either, full of energy and with much potential, yet still cosy and safe. Becoming more beautiful year upon year and luxuriantly verdant. In whichever direction you cycle, you're in the woods within fifteen minutes or so. Mind you, your bike should be equipped with double the number of gears as many of the streets are hilly, so you need to be twice as fit. But the views make up for the effort – the Beskid mountains are beautiful all year round and very appealing for their recreational activities too.

In the town itself the beauty of bygone times is gradually being brought back to the surface. The Sułkowski Dukes' Castle has been transformed, the theatre gleams, the city hall impresses, and the Old Town draws us into an intriguing play of old and new. Looking up you spot architectural details, and when you look over fences you see villas and small manor houses inside their gardens. You can witness the flourish with which the city was built at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. You can also see more contemporary buildings constructed in the 21st century and the very well-maintained architecture of the Modernist era.

The towns of Bielsko and Biąta, united only since 1951, have complicated and intriguing histories. For centuries they were positioned on the boundaries of assorted state regions, to the extent that it is hard to remember whose borders the river Biąta marked and when. This borderland attitude and diversity have remained with

the citizens of Bielsko-Biata since then but with the addition of a receptiveness for all things new and different. They like to reflect upon the centuries of peaceful co-existence of various peoples, languages and faiths in Bielsko and Biata. They pride themselves on having the only monument in this part of Europe to Martin Luther (in the winter, when the statue is draped in snow, the children call him 'Martin Frosting'*). Visitors arriving here to work or study are welcomed, as are those who are drawn to the city and surrounding area because of its touristic and cultural attractions.

The financial media declares that Bielsko-Biata has potential and that business feels at home here. It was ever thus and we are reminded of the epithet 'city of a hundred industries' describing Bielsko-Biata. The citizens of Bielsko and Biata were always enterprising people, with their feet fixed firmly on the ground, caring deeply about earning their daily bread. They started off as spinners and weavers, then they built textile mills, followed by cars, planes and modern machinery. Today Bielsko-Biata is a city with well-developed automotive and IT industries. But spiritual needs have not been neglected either – 125 years ago they built themselves a theatre and invited Sissi, Empress of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, to its first premiere of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'. Now they buy tickets for concerts featuring artists of world renown, performers who are very happy to make appearances in the city.

And there you have this remarkable city.



* in Polish there is a play on words between Luther and Lukier (sugar icing)

Architecture

It is largely owing to its architecture that Bielsko is called Little Vienna. The main public buildings and town houses both sides of the river Biała are decorated with Viennese architectural features. They were designed by Viennese architects such as Emil von Förster and Karol Korn, creator of the city-wide landscape. From the railway station to the castle, from Krakowska Street to Cieszyńska Street, there is not a road in the city upon which we do not see something built by him. Yet Bielsko and Biała expanded and grew more beautiful at other times too. Chrobrego Square and the adjoining buildings are very easy on the eye. The Baroque Kałuża town house fuses beautifully with a modernistic building alongside, decorated with an enormous mural depicting a fragment of the city panorama.

Modern architecture is not being overlooked, setting a new trend for the city. And it is in Bielsko-Biała that Cavatina Hall has been created – a concert hall and recording studio, combining commercial functions with the promotion of art in a unique and contemporary building. It is the first construction of this type in this part of Europe.





Beskid Mountains

The gently sloping but decent-sized hills which surround the city from the south and east belong to the range of Silesian and Lesser Beskids. As many as seventeen peaks fall within the administrative borders of the city. The highest of these is Mount Klimczok, 1117 metres above sea level. You can get up to the slightly lower Mount Szyndzielnia by cable car, whereas on Mount Dębowiec you'll find a ski resort and ski lift, cableway park, as well as an all-year round toboggan run. There are ski slopes for those hungry for sport and adventure, mountain trails for lovers of hiking and caves for pot-holers.





Character

Its character is provided by the city's population. Hard-working, far-sighted, lively, prudent. Lovers of tradition, but also liking innovation and technical novelties. The telegraph was installed in 1850, a gasworks and gas lighting in 1862, a telephone exchange in 1884, an electrical powerplant – only the third such installation in Poland – in 1893, a modern city waterworks in 1895 along with the electric tram, at a time when horse-drawn vehicles still operated in Vienna. The people are fully involved in the activities of their communities, districts and city. They are friendly, on the go. When they leave here to forge a career for themselves, they make sure they do - like popular singer Maria Koterbska; Selma Kurz (soprano), prima donna at the Vienna Opera; pianists Jan Smeterlin, Andrzej Zubek and Jerzy Sterczyński; jazz vocalist Urszula Dudziak; the poets Jan Kupiec and Emil Zegladowicz; the actors Aleksandra Zawierusanka, Jerzy Zelnik; the astronomer Hugo von Seelinger and others.





Detail

Bees on the front of the city hall, a train pulling out of a tunnel on the wall of a tenement building on the corner of Cechowa Street, the Eye of Providence above the entrance to a small town house on Stojatowski Street, the city's coat of arms in various forms and configurations, a little devil having a wee by the castle, a fountain with a sculpture of three naked boys on Chrobrego Square, a sportswoman jumping into water at the Panorama swimming pool, chubby little kids above the Industrial College's portal, frogs and beetles on the Art Nouveau town house by the Wojska Polskiego Square – they not only decorate the city but also reveal a lot about it.

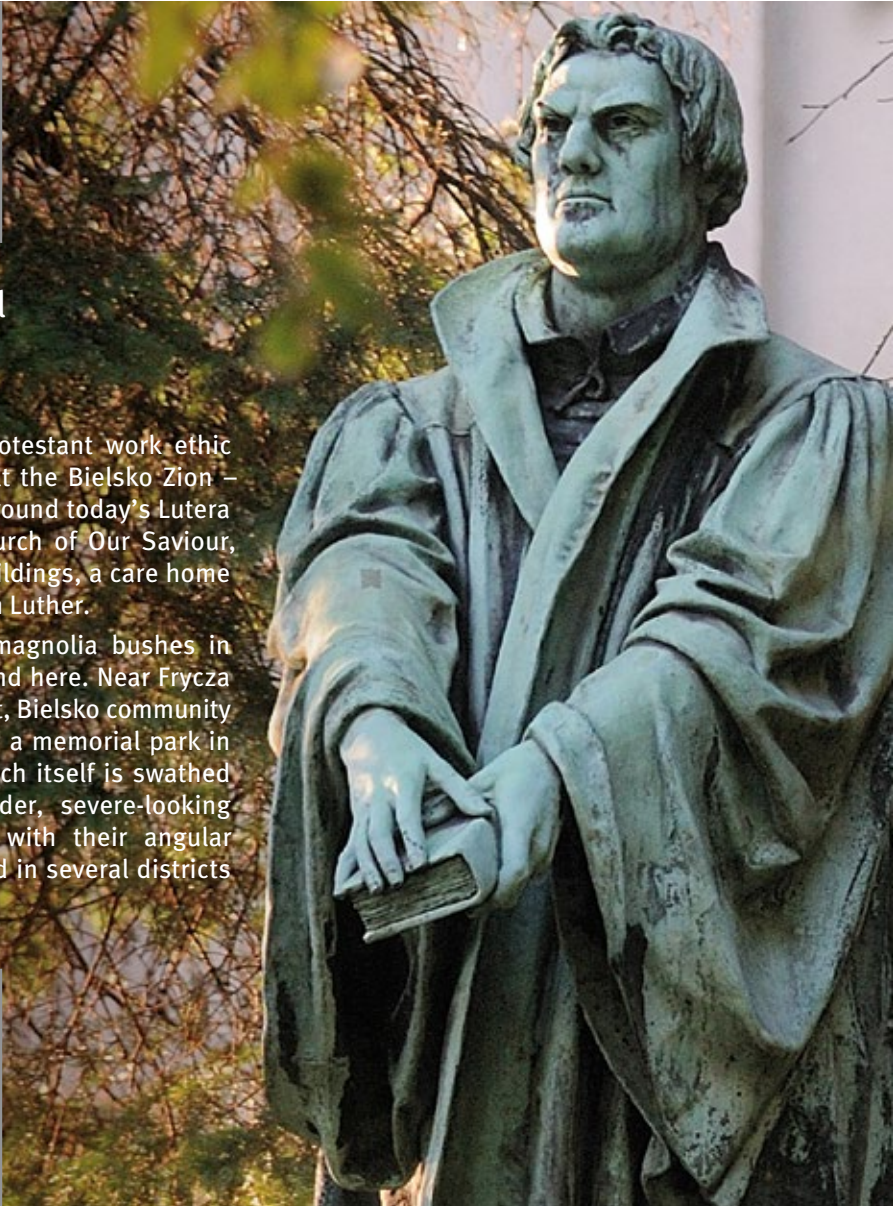




Evangelical Lutherans

They instilled the Protestant work ethic into the city and built the Bielsko Zion – a building complex around today's Lutera Square, with the Church of Our Saviour, impressive school buildings, a care home and a statue of Martin Luther.

The most beautiful magnolia bushes in the city are to be found here. Near Frycza Modrzewskiego Street, Bielsko community workers have created a memorial park in the old cemetery which itself is swathed in history. The slender, severe-looking Protestant churches with their angular spires are to be found in several districts of Bielsko-Biala.





Many Polish cities, and even cities beyond Poland, must envy Bielsko-Biała's rich and diverse cultural offerings. Tickets for jazz festivals need to be booked well in advance. The city hosts the Festival of Polish Composers, the only festival in the country dedicated entirely to the music of Polish composers. Every two years the most outstanding artistic photographers from all over the world travel to Bielsko-Biała to take part in exhibitions and artistic marathons during its FotoArtFestival. The Puppetry Festival is also held here every two years, at which theatres from all over the world present their triumphs and perform their diverse theatrical traditions. Every summer the city stages teem with local and national artists. The Days of Bielsko-Biała comprise numerous open-air and club concerts, theatre performances, multimedia shows, street parades, exhibitions, picnics, fairs, sports and recreational activities, thematic ventures and urban games. UrBBan Fusion is also a blend of many aspects of culture, where fashion and the art of sewing and styling uniquely combine in one space with photography, music, dance and history.





Games and Sport

Sport is an important feature in the lives of residents and visitors to Bielsko-Biała. There is something for everyone at any time of the year. Those who are seeking to do something active will find recreational areas, mountain bike trails, indoor and outdoor swimming pools and public sport fields. Team fans can also sit in the stands of sports facilities built to the highest standards. The largest of these is the City Stadium which can accommodate 15,000 spectators. There is also a multi-purpose hall with spacious stands located near Mount Dębowiec, and a small athletics stadium beautifully sited among the trees. The most popular teams in Bielsko-Biała play their matches in these locations. They include TS Podbeskidzie footballers, multiple Polish champions BKS women's volleyball players, BBTS men's volleyball team, and also Record, our premier league Record five-a-side indoor football players, whose successes are mounting up.

The city creates great conditions for the development of many sports disciplines, from the most popular to the quite niche. As a consequence, Bielsko-Biała is a city brimming with the excitement of sport and full of active people who care about their fitness and a healthy lifestyle throughout the year.



History

The residents of the city on the river Biała are becoming more and more fascinated by its history. Archaeologists search for the earliest traces of urban life, historians remain fascinated by the Sułkowski family's exploits, the golden age at the turn of the centuries, as well as the war and pre-war years which completely altered the composition of the city's population. Historical clubs have their hands full. Trips, historical games and re-enactments, as well as the more traditional lectures, talks and discussions are tremendously popular.





Information Points

These are on hand in the city and are clear and visible. A system of signposting allows tourists to know exactly where they are on any of the nine themed trails and how far they have to go to get to the next feature of interest. Each feature – be it a building or a place – is provided with a plaque on which there is a period photograph along with a historical summary in both Polish and English. Getting your full bearings is made easier by ten illuminated maps. At the city Information Tourist Centre you can be given advice where to stay overnight or where to listen to music. You can also borrow tour guide audio headphones there and visit the city on your own.



13. JAZZOWA JESIEŃ W BIELSKU-BIAŁEJ

Jazz

Over the last twenty years Bielsko-Biała has become a city renowned in Poland and abroad for its spectacular jazz events with performances of world class standard. Two important jazz events take place here – Autumn Jazz (*Jazzowa Jesień*) and the LOTOS Jazz Festival – Bielsko Jazz Blizzard (*Bielska Zadymka Jazzowa*). Stars of renown and maestros play at both festivals, attracting audiences from beyond the city and surrounding areas, nay, even audiences from abroad.

With the city having an image associated with jazz, the residents of Bielsko-Biała feel pride and a sense of identity. A consequence of this is that one of the newly created roundabouts in the city was named the Bielsko Jazz Roundabout and a spatial installation symbolizing JAZZ was constructed upon it.





Knowledge Acquisition

Bielsko-Biała is a leading centre of education in the region. Over a dozen or so thousand students attend the public University of Bielsko-Biała and other private establishments. Robotics, information technology, theology, English philology, business and law - the choice of subjects is extremely wide. But it is not only the young who study. An important target group for the Bielsko colleges are students of the University of the Third Age. Senior citizens have a thirst for knowledge and communal activities.

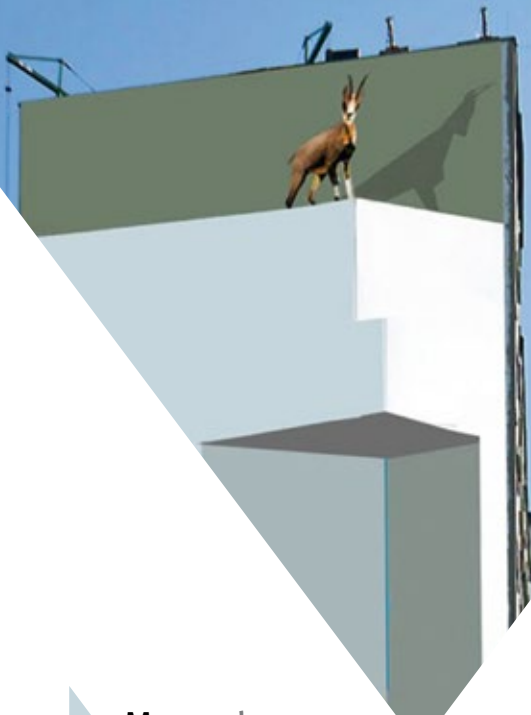




Location

Bielsko-Biała's location on the map is variously described by some as being sub-Beskidian, by others as the borderland between Cieszyn Silesia and Lesser Poland. The distance from here to the neighbouring Czech Republic and Slovakia is a smidgeon over 30 kilometres. It's as close to Vienna and Budapest as it is to Warsaw. The terrain tends to be on the hilly side and there are no flatlands but such skylines only add to the picturesque-ness of the landscape. Owing to its proximity to the mountains, the dry, blustery *halny* wind gusts down the valleys and often howls round the city. It is said that the *halny* has inspirational properties and heralds a change in the weather.





Murals

There are many examples of art not only in the galleries but also on the streets right across the city. Unique murals appear on the sides of buildings representative of decorative wall painting on a monumental scale – a shepherd carrying a lamb, a sharp-eyed owl looking down, a mountain goat, Irena Sendler’s memorial tree and others. They distract you from the hustle and bustle of everyday life and allow your thoughts to roam free. The Bielsko Gallery BWA runs several art projects, the results of which can be seen in the shape of murals and other visual art forms throughout the city.





Nature

Woodland covers 20% of the city but there are so many more green spaces in Bielsko-Biała. Statistically, for every inhabitant there are 150m² of greenery, in other words a small garden's worth. The most visited forest is known as Cygański Las (Gypsy Woods) through which trails lead to the nearby mountains and to the recreational area called Błonie. On nice days the woodland paths teem with ramblers and those striding through with their Nordic Walking poles.





On Two Wheels

There are more and more bikes in the city – on the streets, cycle paths, woodland tracks and mountain trails. Several thousand people take part in the biannual Bielsko cycle rallies which take place in the spring and autumn. Cycling as a recreational activity is becoming trendy, hence the increasing network of cycle paths and the self-service system of BBbike hire in place in the city since 2014. Businessmen in suits pedalling uphill on the green and white city bikes is becoming very much more a typical Bielsko sight. Fans of mountain biking can take advantage of the competitive Enduro Trails cycle tracks beautifully incorporated into the slopes of Mounts Szyndzielnia, Kozia Góra and Dębowiec.



Perfectly Delicious!

To mark the 70th anniversary of the formal merging of the towns of Bielsko and Biąta, our city and its residents have been given a present – our very own cake! There is symbolism to be found in every aspect of the delicacy’s name, shape, colour and composition. The two white meringues call to mind Bielsko and Biąta. The white cream in the middle is the River Biąta that flows between them. “KaramBBa”, inscribed on a chocolate calling card, is full of significance, being a variation on the legendary cry of Don Pedro, a spy from the Land of the Rain People, in which the initials “BB” obviously denote our city.

Only local and natural products are used in the production of the cake and it can be made only in licenced confectionary shops and cafés.



Quiet Moments

Crowds of shoppers stream through the elegant shopping centres, supermarkets brimming with abundance and discount stores. Many of these shoppers are from neighbouring towns, even from beyond the southern borders. Fans of trendy clothes will find here fashion galleries of Bielsko designers, such as Natasha Pavluchenko, who have found success far beyond the borders of our city and the country itself.



Regions Beyond

The areas around Bielsko-Biała offer entertainment for everyone. You can go to the mountains – setting out from Szczyrk to Mount Skrzyczne, and from Ustroń to ski resorts Czantoria and Równica. Trails leading from smaller towns and villages lead to Mounts Rysianka, Barania Góra or Hala Lipowska. Lovers of water can have fun at Żywiec, Międzybrodzie or Goczałkowice lakes. You can also relax by visiting the Castle Museum in Pszczyna with its surrounding park and bison farm, while in Żywiec it is worth visiting the Habsburg Castle and the Żywiec Brewery Museum.

In winter, the surrounding regions turn into a paradise for skiers, with the ski resort in Szczyrk taking the lead.





Storytime Bielsko-Biała

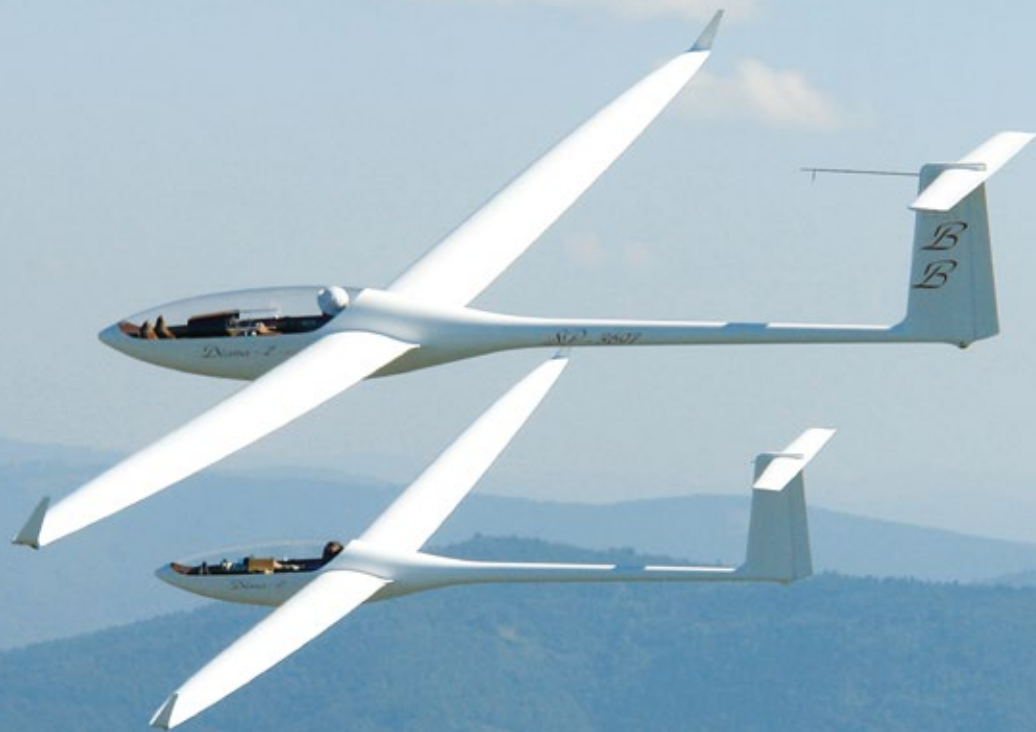
You'd have to look hard to find a more 'storytime' Polish city. Bielsko-Biała is the cradle of classic Polish film animation. Extremely well-known storytime heroes such as Bolek and Lolek, Reksio, Baltazar Gąbka and many others were born here. More and more statues of storytime characters are appearing in Bielsko-Biała, and the streets and squares containing these storytime charges together form the "Bielsko-Biała Storytime" trail. On this trail you can meet Bolek and Lolek, Reksio, Pampalini the animal hunter, the Wawel Dragon, Bartłomiej Bartolini of the House of Green Parsley and Don Pedro de Pommidore.



Theatres

The municipal theatre is one of the most beautiful and best flaunted buildings in Bielsko-Biała. It was designed by Viennese architect Emil von Förster and constructed for the city's communities in 1890 with money raised from local revenue. This building, topped by the figure of Apollo, staged German productions for many years; the history of Polish theatre in this building began in 1945 with a production of 'Cracovians and Highlanders'. In recent years there is a lot to be heard all over Poland about the municipal theatre in Bielsko and all of it is good.

The Baniałuka Puppet Theatre is one of the oldest and most important puppet theatres in Poland. Its players are often invited to the most prestigious festivals and have been awarded numerous prizes. The theatre's rich repertoire includes performances for youngsters, older children and adults, and is distinguished by spirited stage work and important themes at all times.



Up in the Air

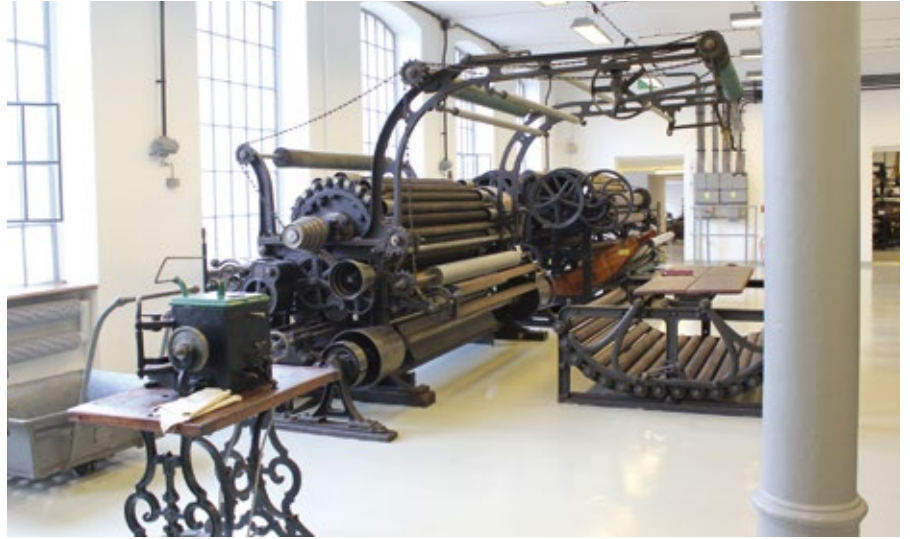
We often look up at the sky, as well as the wealth of objects flying across it.

Planes and gliders take off from the sports airfield at Aleksandrowice. Parachutists land on it, paragliders fly over it. Its busiest period is at the end of summer during a 'flying picnic' organised by the aeroclub. Ferocious F16s hurtle across the sky with a roar. Silent gliders, including those which have been actually made in the city, usually dominate the skyline. The most frequent flyer to appear in the skies above Bielsko is many time world gliding champion Sebastian Kawa.



Views of the Old Town

The Old Town is successfully regenerating and coming alive. The crucial time was the redevelopment of the marketplace, around which eateries and restaurants with their obligatory pavement cafes and colourful parasols began to appear. Art galleries, boutiques, wine bars and antique shops are to be found in the beautifully renovated town houses by the marketplace itself and the narrow alleyways nearby. There's a small brewery here which makes its own beer. Open air concerts are held in the summer in the Old Town, as well as the Christmas Fair in the winter.



Wool

It was originally wool which made Bielsko-Biała prosperous, and it was wool which formed the basis of this prosperity. Weavers, clothiers, fullers forged the city's growth over several centuries. In time, thanks to the industrial revolution fuelled by steam, industrial workshops were transformed into powerful textile mills. The commodity produced here was of the highest quality. The trademark "Bielsko Wool" was known all over the world. A small part of this past and this important feature of the city's identity is preserved today in the Weaver's House (*Dom Tkacza*) and the Old Factory (*Stara Fabryka*) museums.



Yiddish

It's provided by the city's inhabitants. Hard-working, far-sighted, lively, prudent. Lovers of tradition, but also liking innovation and technical novelties. The telegraph was installed in 1850, a gasworks and gas lighting in 1862, a telephone exchange in 1884, an electrical powerplant – only the third in Poland – in 1893, a modern city waterworks in 1895 along with the electric tram, at a time when horse-drawn vehicles still operated in Vienna. The people are fully involved in the activities of their communities, districts and city.



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