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Toruń – get Gothic

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History of Toruń

This 207 thousand stronghold city situated upon Vistula, is the self-governmental capital of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Province. It is the seat of the Sejmik – a regional council – and the Marshal of the Province. In 1233 it was founded by the Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights Herman von Salz and the local master of the Order. Initially, the town had wooden and earth fortifications, but in the mid 13th century they were gradually replaced by the system of defensive walls with gates and donjons. At that time, the castle of the Teutonic Knights was built. In 1264 a neighbouring, craftsmen settlement was granted municipal rights and was called Nowe Miasto (New Town).

[Toruń](#) ^[5] was situated at the overland routes and waterways, which was a great advantage for the development of trade. The townsmen traded with England, Denmark, Flanders, Lubeck, Ruthenians and Silesia. This was even easier when Toruń became a Hanseatic town in the end of the 13th century. The main commodities were: crops, cloth, linen, herring, salt and wine. The town flourished. At that time, numerous churches, granaries, houses and palaces were built.



Yet, the development was hampered by the domination of the Teutonic Knights, which lead to the appearance of the opposition Association of Prussian Towns. Consequently, the townsmen of Toruń rioted against the Teutonic Knights in 1454 and demolished their castle. This started a great war

between the Teutonic Knights and Poland that supported the Prussian towns. That year, king Casimirus Jagiellon incorporated Prussia to the Crown of Poland. The lands were now called the Royal Prussia. The war was concluded with a Treaty of Toruń and the town remained the dominion of the Polish king.

In the forthcoming centuries, Toruń saw sieges of the Swedes and sustained great damages during the so called Deluge in 1655 and the Northern War in 1703. After the partitions of Poland, Toruń suffered a huge downfall, separated from its former lands, and becoming a part of Prussia. For a few days in 1809, it was the capital of the Duchy of Warsaw, a Polish state created by Napoleon. In 1815 Toruń returned to Prussia, by the provisions of the Congress of Vienna. The city was vastly rebuilt. In the years 1878-1892 a huge ring of 15 forts were constructed, constituting a modern, artillery Fortress of Toruń.

In 1920 the city was freed by the troops of the Polish Army. Toruń became the capital of the Pomorze Province, which largely contributed to its industrial, social and cultural development. It was here that the first Polish marine school was located. In the years 1975-1998, Toruń was the capital of the Toruń Province. The city is proud of its theatres, Toruń Symphony Orchestra, Planetarium, international theatre festivals (such as Kontakt and Puppet Theatre Festival) and international music festivals (such as Probalтика and Song of Songs). In 1997 Toruń's Old Town was included on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, founded in 1945 as a continuation of the Stefan Batory University in Vilnius tradition, is one of the largest and most prestigious in Poland.

City Tour Torun

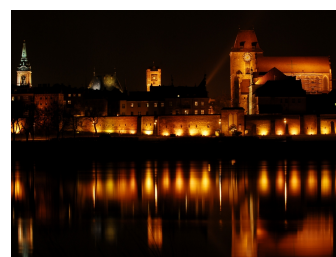
We will start sightseeing [Toruń](#) [6] from the Office of Tourism PTTK at the Rapackiego Square. We will go down the Fosa Staromiejska Street, crossing the Kopernika Street, to the Pod Krzywą Wieżą Street. We can see the medieval defensive walls on our right. They protected the town from the South, i.e. from the Vistula. The defensive walls were built in brick and stone in the second half of the 13th century. The stretch of walls at the beginning of the Kopernika Street walls date back to those times. In the 15th century the walls were made higher. In 1429 a monumental barbican was built and connected with the Old Toruń gate. A similar barbican was built in 1450, near the Chełmińska Gate, unfortunately not preserved to our times. The town was protected by double walls and a moat from the inland, and a single wall from the river. The walls were 4-8.5 meters tall and 0.9-2.2 meters thick. A stretch of walls separated Toruń from Nowe Miasto, now part of the city's Old Town. Together, there were 11 gates (preserved are the Mostowa Gate, Żeglarska Gate and Klasztorna Gate) and over 50 donjons (only 9 survived, in this number the famous Krzywa Wieża – Leaning Tower, Wartownia, Gołębnik, Żuraw, Monstrancja, Koci Łeb and three nameless towers).



The medieval walls, gates and donjons of the Toruń Old Town are marvellously illuminated, which exposes the structure of the Gothic walls and creates a unique air of mystery. Entering the Pod

Krzywą Wieżą Street we can see the 14th century Leaning Tower on our right. Initially it had no wall from the side of the town. Only in the 19th century it was rebuilt and adapted as a residence. The donjon was built on soft soil and over the centuries it leaned until it sat on a stable ground. Inside the town walls, the tower is 15 meters tall, and the part of it outside the walls is 17 meters tall. It leans 1.4 meter towards the Street. Therefore it is very hard to keep the balance, leaning against the tower with one's back. This object is most beloved by groups of tourists, who enjoy hearing the legends related to the tower. One of these legends is about a young Teutonic Knight, who fell in love with a beautiful girl from Torun and broke the vows of chastity. A jealous townsman turned him in to the Grand Master of the Order. The knight had to repent. His penance was to build a leaning house that would symbolise his immorality. We pass the Leaning Tower and get to a charming site, where the Bankowa, Pod Krzywą Wieżą and Piekary Streets meet. In here, numerous granaries were situated. This is because the Vistula river was near and it constituted the main route of transport. Some granaries are preserved in the following Streets: Podmurna, Mostowa, Rabiańska, Ciasna and Piekary. One of the most impressive is situated at the corner of the Piekary and Rabiańska Streets. Built around 1400, it is known for its genuine stepped gable.

Next to it, a 17th century baroque granary can be seen. It is unique with window casings shaped like bags of flower that used to be stored in this granary. Going down the Bankowa Street we will reach the Klasztorna Gate (also known as the Holy Spirit Gate), built in the 14th century. Outside the walls we can see Filadelfijski Boulevard and the river bank. This is a perfect site to take a walk and relax, favoured by tourists and locals alike. We turn left and go along the Gothic defensive walls. We pass a 14th century donjon. It is called Gołębnik (pigeon house), as postal pigeons of the 19th century Prussian garrison used to be kept in the upper storey of this tower. To the right, on the Filadelfijski Boulevard we can see Katarzynka, a motor boat that used to shuttle across the river, carrying tourists and locals, and was placed ashore in 2002. This boat featured in a Polish old school comedy, Rejs (cruise). We reach Żeglarska Gate from the 1st half of the 14th century, reconstructed in the 19th century. Standing in it, you can take a perfect picture of St. St. Johns' Cathedral. In the Żeglarska Street, on the right, there is an impressive facade of the Palace of bishop Stanislas Dąbski, richly adorned with stucco. The bishop of Wrocław bought it in 1691, stayed there and rebuilt it in the baroque style. It was originally a Gothic house, which is marked by a fragment of a Gothic arch, preserved on the first storey level.



We continue our walk outside the defensive walls. We pass the remains of the Łazienna Gate that lead into the present day Łazienna Street and we reach another 14th century donjon, Żuraw (crane). Indeed, a crane was installed on the upper storey of the donjon and it was used to carry the commodities stored in the nearby Szwedzki Granary. Next to the donjon, there is the Mostowa Gate, perhaps the most spectacular in Toruń, also called the Bell Gate, as a bell rang when it was opened or closed. It was built in 1432 by a constructor known by name: Hans Gotland. The gate went out straight to the wooden bridge on Vistula, built in the end of the 15th century. It was number two after the bridge in Kraków. If we take a look into the Mostowa Street, we will see on the left the huge Szwedzki Granary from 1719, presently a seat of hotels and restaurants. Returning out of the gate, we turn left, in between the walls. On the left, we can see two, joined donjons: Wartownia and Dwór Mieszczański. The former dates back to the 13th century. The latter was built in 1489, using the bricks

from the ruins of the Teutonic Knights' castle. Until 1882 it was the summer residence of the St. George Fraternity, then it was rebuilt. Presently it is the seat of the Vistula River Towns Association and the Toruń Twin Cities Association.



Next, we can go around the ruins of the Teutonic Knights Castle, under the arch that connected the castle the *dansker*, a tower with sanitary facilities, and then under the castle gate. To the right, on the other bank of the Toruń Stream, there is a complex of former castle mills, now hosting hotels and restaurants. To the left, the ruins of the castle are available for tourists. The Teutonic Knights constructed their castle soon after settling on the lands and locating the town of Toruń. Wood-earth fortifications were soon replaced by stone and brick and the castle was complete around the year 1300, yet still extended throughout the 14th century. It was untypical: erected on the plan of a closed horseshoe. When we enter the castle's courtyard, we can still see the remains of the two-wing building in front of us, and the octagonal tower to the left. *Dansker*, the sanitary tower, is behind the left wing of the castle. The surroundings of the castle served the economic purposes, with granaries, mills, bakeries, breweries, fish ponds, warehouses, stables, ferriers and a mint, as the Knights issued their own coin. The castle was reduced to rubble during the 1454 uprising of the townsmen, lead by the Association of the Prussian Towns. According to the legend, the townsmen managed to enter the castle with the help of the Knights' cook, whose name was recorded as Jordan. It has never been rebuilt. We pass the decorative plaque, commemorating the demolition of the castle in 1454, and take stairs down to the old moat that divided the castle and the Old Town.

We cross it and go up the stairs that lead to the Podmurna Street. In Middle Ages, this Street divided two neighbouring towns: The Old Town and The New Town. They were united in 1454 by the Polish king Casimirus Jagiellon. Podmurna Street is connected to the Mostowa Street by the Ciasna Street – the narrowest Street in Toruń. Mostowa 14, which is at the corner with Ciasna, is the Fenger's Palace. In here, a novelist and economist Fryderyk Skarbek was born (in 1742) and in 1825 it hosted young Fryderyk Chopin. More details can be found on the decorative plaques. We continue down the Ciasna Street towards the Łazienna Street. Numbers 4-6 (on the right) are 17th century granaries. Number 16, at the corner with Łazienna, is the Red Granary, or the Eskens' House. This is a former gothic house, built in the 14th century, rebuilt in 1590 in the renaissance style, when a beautiful sandstone portal was added, and rebuilt again in the mid 19th century. Presently a seat of the Historical and Archaeological Department of the Regional Museum in Toruń. At the opposite corner we can see the monumental building of the old Jesuits' School from the 17th century, rebuilt in the 19th century. In Middle Ages, the same spot was the seat of a school, attended by Nicolaus Copernicus.



We will turn right into the Łazienna Street and then left into Kopernika Street. On the left, we can see the soaring Cathedral of St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist. It is one of the oldest religious buildings in the region. The construction of the chancel started in the mid 13th century. The main body of the church and the presbytery were ready by the end of the 13th century. In the 14th century, chapels were added on both sides of the church. The chancel is decorated with magnificent paintings from the 14th and 15th centuries and a unique bronze plaque from the 1360s, commemorating von Soest spouses. In this church, the famous Polish Nicolaus Copernicus was baptised in a chapel, now called after him. There we can find the oldest bust of the astronomer from 1766. The church tower was built in the years 1371-1433. On it, facing to the river, there is the huge, rafters' clock. The clock has only one hand, the so called God's Finger. The church boasts its bell, Tuba Dei (God's Trumpet). Cast in 1500, it is Poland's oldest medieval ball and the biggest with its 2.27 meters of circumference and the weight of 7238 kilograms. We continue our walk down the Kopernika Street, crossing the Żeglarska Street. On the left, we can see three gothic houses. Number 17 is one of the most famous buildings in Toruń – Copernicus's House. It was bought by the Copernicus family in the second half of the 15th century and the best known Toruń dweller was born here on 19th February 1473. This 15th century building was rebuilt many times over the centuries. Yet, in the 1960s it was renovated and restored to its mediaeval shape. The stepped gable and the painted facade were reconstructed. The adjacent house was also renovated and now both houses seat the Museum of Nicolaus Copernicus. It exposes copies of the great astronomer's work, "On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres", facsimiles, paintings, coins, copies of the astronomer's tools and other mementos. Moreover, medals and stamps from around the world are shown, issued on anniversaries and celebrations connected with Copernicus. At the back of the Copernicus House, a maquette of medieval Toruń can be found, with comments in many languages. After leaving the museum we turn right into Św. Ducha Street and again right at the end of this Street.

We enter the Old Town Square. In the middle we can admire one of the largest medieval town halls in Poland. The large, square building of the Town Hall, with a courtyard inside and a 40-meter tower gives the visitors an exquisite view. The construction started with erecting the tower in 1247 and a market and cloth hall in 1250. The Town Hall was complete in 1279, yet it was systematically extending in the 14th century. It obtained its present day shape after the tower was made taller in 1385. The tower could boast two bells that rang when the town gates were opened at 6 a.m. and closed at 10 p.m. In 1603 a burger master ,Henryk Stroband, had the Town Hall decorated in renaissance style. Until present, four renaissance fleches can be seen on the corners of the hall, together with renaissance gables of the facades. Also the interior was renovated, and renaissance portals, mantelpieces and paintings were added. A hundred years later, the Hall was bombarded by the Swedes and had a fire. The interiors were devastated and the precious archives of the town and of the dominions of the Polish king in Prussia were burnt. In the years 1722-1738 the Town Hall was renovated. The Hall had various functions over the centuries. It was the seat of the town's

chancellery, court, jail, scales, wine cellar, and bread and cloth market. The most representative rooms are the King's Room, the Town Senate's Room and the Great Room (Mieszcząńska). It is here that one of the Polish kings, Jan Olbracht, died (on 17 July 1501). After World War II the interiors of the Hall have been the seat of the Regional Museum in Toruń, with a marvellous collection of religious art, artistic craft, as well as portraits of townsmen, gentry and kings.



The Old Town Square is a beautiful place with its old tenement houses with restaurants and tea gardens outside them, where tourists can eat and relax. Another large building on the Square is the Artus Court, situated in the middle of the Southern frontage of the Square. On the site of this 19th century building, there used to be a gothic court built in 1311. It was the seat of the St. George Fraternity, associating Toruń's patriciate. In the Great Room of that Gothic court, a Peace Treaty was signed (on 19 October 1466) between the Polish king Casimirus Jagiellon and the Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights Order, which concluded a great war between those states. As a result, Toruń became a dominion of the Polish king. This grand gothic building, adorned with 17th century paintings, was demolished in 1802. On this spot, a theatre was built in 1829, which was soon demolished as well. In the years 1889-1891, the present day building of the Artus Court was erected. Today, it is the seat of the Artus Court Cultural Centre and the Toruń Symphony Orchestra.

A landmark of Toruń, the statue of Nicolaus Copernicus catches the eye near the Town Hall tower. It was made in 1853 by Friedrich Tieck from Berlin. The natural-sized, standing astronomer is depicted with an astrolabe in his hand. On the monument's socle, a Latin inscription can be found, which translates into English as follows: "Nicolaus Copernicus from Toruń, moved the Earth and stopped the Sun and the Skies." At the corner of the Żeglarska and Szeroka Streets, you will meet a friendly looking, natural-sized donkey, eagerly photographed by the tourists. A similar Donkey used to stand here in the 17th century, with a tin finished, sharp back. Undisciplined town guardians were seated on it as a punishment. A cruel punishment indeed, especially that the culprit's legs were additionally loaded. Another sculpture on the Town Square is a tiny dog that you can approach and stroke. It is Prof. Filutek's Dog, still holding his bowler hat in its muzzle and guarding his beloved umbrella. Prof. Filutek is an absent-minded comic strip character invented by Zbigniew Lengren. His adventures were published weekly in the *Przekrój* magazine for over 50 years, beating the record of the Peanuts. This petite monument was designed by Zbigniew Mikielwicz from Toruń and unveiled in 2005, on the 87th anniversary of Lengren's birth. On the eastern frontage of the Square we can see the exquisite Under the Star House, with its genuine, baroque facade, added to this gothic building in 1697. In 1495 it belonged to Filip Kallimach, an Italian poet and humanist, who moved to Poland and inspired Polish Renaissance. Inside, we can admire a sculpture of the goddess Minerva and a decorative staircase, leading up to the 2nd floor, carved in one oak trunk. Next to it, a sculpture of a lion, holding a commemorative plaque can be seen. In the 1960s the house was renovated and is now the seat of the Department for the Art of the Far East of the Regional Museum in Toruń. On the frontage of the Square opposite to the Artus Court we will find the "Three Crowns Hotel" ("Pod Trzema Koronami"), with a truly royal welcome. The hotel boasts its renown guests from the past: Polish Queen Marysieńka, August II the Strong, king of Poland and Elector of Saxony, and tsar Peter the Great.

We leave the Old Town Square and go down the Marii Panny Street. There we can see the Franciscan

Church of the Assumption of Our Lady, built in the years 1343-1370, with the use of the remains of older walls. The oldest part of the church dates back to the 13th century. As a Franciscan church, it hasn't got a regular tower, a token of richness and pride, forbidden by the Order. Instead, we can see fleches. It is an example of a hall church, with the nave and the two aisles equal in height (27 meters). The chancel is oriented to the East. In the chancel, nave and aisles, numerous epitaphs can be found, commemorating houses of Toruń's patriciate (von der Linde, Mochinger, Stroband, etc.) The unique organ from 1607 is worth special attention, as it is one of the oldest in Poland. We will also spend a while admiring 14th century paintings and stalls from the turn of the 14th and 15th centuries. On the left side of the chancel, a mausoleum of princess Anna Vasa can be seen, built in the years 1636-1637. Coming back to the Old Town Square, on its western frontage we can see the post-evangelical church of the Holy Spirit, designed by Efraim Schröger and constructed in the years 1752-1756. The 64-meter tower was added in the years 1897-1899. In 1989 a fire took place and most of the church's furnishing was lost.



Between the church and the Town Hall there is the small Rafter's Fountain. The sculpture of the rafter, made by Georg Wolf from Berlin, was unveiled on the Town Hall's courtyard in 1914. It symbolises the importance of the Vistula river for the city. Moreover, little frogs that surround the rafter, children's favourites, tell us an old story about a brave rafter from Kraków. Long time ago, Toruń was plagued by frogs for three weeks. The desperate burger master offered the hand of his daughter as a prize for the town's deliverer. Iwo, in love with the girl, volunteered. He played his violin and the enchanted animals followed him out of the town. The town was saved and the rafter lived happily ever after with his beautiful wife. Here we end our historical trip to Toruń.