



Excerpt from:

Amazing Poland: 50 Things to See and Do

by Neil Bennion

21 Find your peace in the Churches of Jawor and Świdnica

Oh hey – are you a fan of timber-framed religious buildings?!

No?

To be honest, that kind of ruins what I was going to say. Which was that you should definitely head to southwest Poland to see the Churches of Peace in Jawor and Świdnica.

I must admit, it probably sounds a bit boring – churches but wooden! – but they aren't on the UNESCO World Heritage List for nothing. Indeed, they're the largest churches of their kind in the whole of Europe.

In the 17th century there was a wide-ranging conflict between Catholic and Protestant states that resulted in the deaths of as many as 8 million people – the 30 Years' War. After the war, Lutheran Protestants in Silesia wanted to build churches in parts of Silesia ruled over by the Catholic Habsburg family, an idea that obviously created more than a little tension.

The Lutherans were given the go ahead to build, but with certain restrictions. Let's call them the "you're definitely not building fortresses now, are you?" restrictions. They had to be built using materials such as timber, straw and mud, construction had to take place within a year, and, according to one local I spoke to, they had to be built more than a cannon's shot away from the city walls, a measurement which I'm sure was purely coincidental.

Despite there being no IKEA in the area, all three churches were successfully completed in the required time frame. They are known as the Churches of Peace after the series of treaties which brought the war to an end – The Peace of Westphalia.

Of the three original churches, two still stand to this day – one in Jawor ("YA-vor") and another in Świdnica ("shveed-NEET-sa") – whilst the third, in Głogów ("GWOH-goof"), burnt down. Which is probably just as well, because preserving these things looks like a real pain, and two is definitely enough to be going on with (by which I mean 'which is a great shame').

The one in Świdnica (kosciolpokoju.pl | [plac Pokoju 6 – map](#)) was built in the baroque style, and features a breathtaking altar of carved figurines. Parts of the church have recently undergone expert renovation, including the organ – a mammoth task given it comprises some 3,909 pipes.

The church in Jawor (kosciolpokojujawor.pl | [park Pokoju 2 – map](#)), meanwhile, has multi-level balconies that rise up vertically on both sides, giving it a sense of both intimacy and theatre. It was designed to accommodate 6,000 worshippers, which seems like a rather frightening number for a building made of timber. You wouldn't want everyone to sit down at the same time, let's put it that way.

It would seem facile to pick a favourite between 17th Century timber-framed churches, especially as they were both designed by the same person (Albrecht von Saebisch), so let's go ahead and do it. If you only have the time (or inclination) to visit one, I recommend the one in Jawor. Whilst the one in Świdnica has the more impressive ornamental features, it was the one in Jawor that gave me the goosebumps, partly because of the wall of balconies but also because the famously primitive means of construction were that much more obvious.

If you do visit Świdnica, I recommend Zajazd Karczma Zagłoba (zagloba.info | [Wroclawska 46 – map](#)), both for food and accommodation. As with pretty much anywhere that has 'Karczma' in the name, it's cosy and traditional with rustic wooden furniture. The staff are super-friendly, too. Whilst in town, you can get an excellent view of the whole area from the tower in the market square (access: free). On a side note, Świdnica is the town where Manfred von Richthofen (The Red Baron) grew up, when it was still part of Germany.



The balconies in the Church of Peace at Jawor

Jawor is the smaller town, with correspondingly fewer options for visitors. Hotel Willa Nowa (willa-nova.eu | Moniuszki 10a – [map](#)) is decent, friendly and clean (if a little tired) and is well located for the church, whilst the restaurant on the arcaded main square (Restauracja Ratuszowa) gets good reviews (restauracjaratuszowa.pl | Rynek 1 – [map](#)).

As an alternative to staying in town, you could base yourself in Wrocław, where there are more options all round.

If you just can't get enough of religious wooden buildings then consider checking out the UNESCO-listed Wooden Churches of Southern Małopolska (whc.unesco.org/en/list/1053), in the area south of Kraków and Rzeszów, and also the Wooden Tserkvas of the Carpathian Region in Poland and Ukraine (whc.unesco.org/en/list/1424) in roughly that same part of the country.

From Wrocław, Świdnica is an hour away by (infrequent) train (15zł), while Jawor is best accessed by bus (1hr, 15zł). Getting between the two towns is possible by both bus (1h, 11zł) and train (40m-1hr, 11zł), but you'll need to plan carefully if you hope to see both in the same day.