



Gdansk trip, September 2006

By Gazza.

Twenty miles from Hel

Gdańsk September 2006

This was to be our first visit to Poland after various false starts where I'd had the move planned out but had failed to find flights for the right price; moves to Krakow, Warsaw and Wrocław had all slipped by the wayside but, suddenly, Gdańsk had bubbled to the top of our list, courtesy of our recent visit to Lübeck, and the fact that Gdańsk was yet another Hanseatic trading city with all the fancy gables this entails. I had planned to book the trip immediately but we were still awaiting confirmation of leave - no problem I thought, Ryotscare fares don't usually go up that much - but catastrophically, when I went to book the flights the following week, the fare had shot up from £40 to £50; "Cheers then, this never happens" I muttered, and we decided to wait for one of the regular sales Ryanair have to get it at a lower price...

Within a week a sale had materialised and so, once again, I entered the details into the Ryotscare website... and saw that, despite the sale, our flights had gone up again to £55 return - "That's some sale!" I thought, bitterly; this was more than we usually paid (our guide price is £40-£45 return all-in) and so we dithered for a few days until it became clear we weren't going to get our trip for our usual pittance and, reluctantly, I paid £55 each for the journey. I know this may sound cheap to many of those who don't do a lot of flying with budget airlines and - thinking about it - I suppose it is, but we've been spoiled over the last few years and now expect £40 return to anywhere in Europe! To make myself feel better about shelling out so much (in relative terms) for the Gdańsk trip I indulged in a little retail therapy and had soon acquired returns to Riga in October (£35) and Krakow the following February (£27) so I felt much better about the trip already!

My research hadn't located very much beery at all in Gdańsk; the city's Helvelius brewery closed in a few years back courtesy of Żywiec (aka Heineken) with production transferred to Elbląg 30km Southeast and, almost uniquely for our city visits, there was no brewpub for us to drink - and more importantly, eat - at; we'd not been in this situation since Bratislava almost 18 months previous and I felt at a bit of a loose end with no beer tourism to indulge in! Obviously Gdańsk has other attractions, including the world-famous Lenin shipyards where the fall of Stalinism all across Eastern Europe was precipitated in the 1980's by charismatic (and impressively moustached) leader Lech Wałęsa's Solidarity union, in conjunction with the Kutna Hora steelworks in Krakow, by a series of strikes which brought the Polish government to it's knees and ushered in first capitalism and, now, EU membership. There was also a reasonably-sized tram system to scoop and a deliciously castellated old town to look at, so I was sure we wouldn't get too bored.

Thursday 21st September 2006.

The Blackshirts of security control.

We were flying from Stansted for the first time in more months than I could remember, but it still felt only days ago since we'd last cruised along the A14 in the middle of the night en-route to the airport. Safely in the world's favourite carpark, we took the bus to the terminal not sure what we'd find there; with all the recent security alerts and restrictions on hand baggage after the "liquid bomb" scares we'd had to leave our trusty rucksacks (with which we've travelled many thousands of miles in the last three years) behind owing to them not fitting into the new reduced baggage size restrictions, and I'd even had to invest in a slightly cheap-looking rucksack for this trip in order to fit in the new stringent hand baggage limits of 45 long, 35 wide and 16 deep. I was also taking my new Sony A100 DSLR on it's first overseas trip and, troublingly, when it was in it's case and the case in the bag, there wasn't much room for anything else despite having pared down my stuff to a bare minimum - no water and a

minimum washkit - although we both carried an extra change of clothes as we couldn't take any hand-wash liquid owing to the restrictions!

We'd arrived very early just in case the security procedures had produced queues snaking out of the doors but, despite there being a larger queue than usual, it seemed as if the airport had actually got it's brain in gear and all the security checkpoints were open despite the time being pre-06:00 in the morning! I'd already checked in online so we didn't have to go through with the onerous pantomime of finding the check-in desk, queuing for an age, then finally being allocated a boarding number of 400 or so - in fact, we had numbers 1 and 2 for what must be the fifth time now - and so joined the shortest-looking queue for the security area.

Our day got off to a dismal start as, entering the main queue area, a large sign proclaimed what was prohibited on board, including many things I'd thought were still permitted, and the list included our tub of talc which we'd brought as the weather forecast had given unseasonably warm weather in Pomerania... nowhere on any of the websites giving lists of what couldn't be taken had I seen talc on the list and I was forced to conclude that the government was using the current security climate as an excuse to piss off ordinary passengers and bring down the number of people flying by any means necessary in order to meet it's carbon emission targets - or that's how it appeared to us at that point, anyhow - ooooh, so cynical before 06:00 in the morning... Once at the x-ray machine things went just as badly, as I had to remove my boots and then have my bag searched and explosives checked for some obscure reason - I mean, do I look like a fucking terrorist? Was I shouting "Allah Akhbar" or glorifying some armed struggle? Was I fuck - wankers, the lot of 'em.

Eventually we got through the Nazi security checks and had a well-earned espresso (double, naturally, given the time was still only 06:00) before walking the ten miles - or so it seems - to the Ryanair terminal where, being very early, we sat up in the quiet hall and watched the planes come and go for a while. Just before we were due to go to the gate I was accosted by a woman doing a survey about the airport; our flight was called before I'd finished answering all the spurious questions but we weren't going to get crap seats for the sake of a questionnaire so we headed off down the stairs with the woman following and shouting the remaining questions down the steps at me... talk about taking a job far too seriously? "Just make the answers up, love..." I shouted back at her!

Once at the gate we discovered there was no provision for boarding in number order and the usual "Ryotscrum" was in progress; cheers then, what the fuck is the point of having sequence numbers if they don't use them? Why not just have everyone stripped to the waist and fight it out, bare knuckle style, to see who boards first? I was so pissed off at this shambolic boarding method that, internet boarding passes in hand, we bypassed the throng of normals jostling for position and presented our sheets to one of the stewardesses who, sociably, allowed us past to board immediately with an apology that we hadn't been called first; result!

Another country in the book.

The plane was unexpectedly wedged for a Thursday departure to Gdańsk; I still can't understand where all the people come from who fly with the cheap airlines as, whenever we travel, the planes are generally pretty well full and sometimes totally so! It seemed that we were fully boarded around time but, as usual, some tossers were missing when they staff did a TOB (total on board) check and so, most amusingly, their bags were offloaded - DENIED!!! What made this even better was that they seemed to be part of a stag party! We finally left around 15 minutes late and were treated to a great view as we traversed the European mainland, passing over Amsterdam then Hamburg, then onwards to the Polish coast where we executed a tight turn and descended slowly, giving us a superb view of the three cities of Gdańsk, Sopot and Gdynia as well as the huge shipyards and the Baltic coast, all bathed in a glorious Autumn morning's sun.

We were soon on the tarmac and, once through the passport control, we elbowed our way through the mass of relatives milling around the arrival gate before locating the very necessary ATM located at the far end of the hall; we decided to withdraw 180 złotych each (around £30) which I hoped would last us through the two days we were there - I knew Poland was supposed to be cheap, but I didn't know exactly how cheap that cheap was going to be and so, just in case we couldn't find any ATMs around Gdańsk, we'd have enough ching to cover all eventualities. We then located the tourist information stand where the very helpful young lady furnished us with four 24-hour public transport tickets for 9.10 złoty each (one each for both days) and reluctantly accepted a 100 złoty note in payment; I wasn't surprised to see that the attitude to large notes was the same as in Czech where getting rid of the big denomination notes can be a struggle at times!

Our tickets in the bag - always the first obstacle when abroad - we exited the terminal building into the excessively warm sunshine and found the bus stop where we could pick up the next bus "B" to Gdańsk; these run twice an hour in the week and generally once an hour at weekends and holidays, not the best airport service I've ever seen, although I was prepared for it owing to my thorough research beforehand. Within five minutes we were on our way on the well-filled bus after punching our tickets in the machines on board (although sometimes I wonder why I bother, as we didn't see an inspector the entire time we were there!) and were treated to a run into the city following the tramlines for a good part of the way; it was so tempting to leap off the rancid bus and take a tram into the centre, although we'd decided that, as the airport buses were so infrequent, we would first make sure where it left from to save time excessive flapping on Saturday morning.

The proverbial undiscovered gem.

We alighted at Brama Wyżynna and, after consuming the butties we'd brought with us, looked around for the bus stop we'd be using Saturday morning. Luckily it was fairly easy to locate, being alongside the LOT offices with their lurid copper-coloured windows, looking like a miniature version of the GDR parliament building in Berlin! (Well, the glass is the same colour). I then shouldered my new camera and gave it a thorough work-out as we wandered along Ulica Długa gazing at the gloriously restored Hanseatic houses; there is a photo inside the golden gate of the state of the old town after both the Russians and Nazis had given it a thorough going-over with bombs and shelling in 1945 and it's inconceivable, after seeing the UK's post-war rebuilding attempts in such concrete wastelands as Coventry and Plymouth, that such beauty could arise from the destruction meted out to the city at the end of the war; such has been the quality of the restoration that's it impossible to tell what is new and what is surviving from times past and we were both amazed that this beautiful city wasn't known far more widely for it's historical centre - although the same could be said for Olomouc in the Czech Republic where the only tourists you'll be rubbing shoulders with will be, ironically, Poles and Germans!

We walked as far as the riverfront and saw that this was like some fantasy in brick with soaring, castellated gables rising high above the riverside and the huge wooden Gdańsk crane lurking moodily over the water and looking strangely similar to the Holstentor in Lübeck with it's twin round towers. The weather was undoubtedly helping the atmosphere along as the sun blazed down from a perfect blue sky without a cloud to be seen, and it was warm - too warm for September, and the thought crossed my mind that maybe we should buy some suncream - although I figured we'd survive two days without it as, hopefully, the sun was far enough towards it's winter path to shower us with too many rays...

By the time we'd had a perfunctory wander around the riverside and surrounding lanes the time was pushing 14:00 and so we crossed onto the Spichrze island to find our hotel for the night; this island was, in olden times, the main centre for milling and it's not as touristy - yet,

although this is changing - as the other parts of the city and so, I hoped, would be quieter. We'd been forced to abandon our preferred option of staying in one hotel for the duration of the stay as the Gotyk House - which I'd discovered on the excellent [In your pocket](#) webguide - had no rooms free on the Thursday; this had meant we'd have to stay elsewhere for the first night, but after finding the Biala Lilia on Spichrze island I'd decided that we may as well have a night in each and scoop two good hotels rather than the usual one.

As we walked along the main street on the island, however, there was no sign of the hotel and the thought crossed my mind that maybe I might have cocked up for the first time and booked something which didn't actually exist! On studying the map, however, it transpired that we were one road too far south and we soon found the handsome townhouse opposite a tacky new tourist hotel overlooking an archaeological excavation site of some old mills. We were soon checked in and trudging up the four flights of stairs to the very top of the building where we had a view of the new hotel, the excavation and... trams running along the main road 100 metres in the distance! I'd forgotten about our fetish of seeing trams from the bedroom window and was very pleased that we'd be able to hear them as we - hopefully - drank beers in the room that evening, assuming we could find any beers, of course! The room was excellently fitted out and modern for the very modest 245złoty (£42) price I'd paid although it did seem to have a worrying beigeness to almost everything, including the particularly beige carpet...

After a quick sit-down and relax we stomped back down the stairs and out into the gloriously sunny afternoon which was still unseasonably warm although, with the time now having passed 15:00, it was definitely a lot more pleasant as we headed out towards the waterfront in search of beer shops and architecture. As we stopped just outside the door to shoulder our rucksacks, however, a car passed by partly on the pavement and was unnervingly close to us - I've no idea if someone was deliberately trying to run us down or not but it was a pretty good attempt if so... We walked along the entire riverside, noticing immediately something to scoop - a little ferry which shuttled across the Motława between the crane and museum on the other bank; this would have to be done at some point we decided! On we went, and I was loving Gdańsk so much more than I had ever imagined - the buildings were, in the main, beautiful gabled Hanseatic trader's houses and the whole place had a sense of being somewhere very much on the up and, as yet, not overrun with tourists although there were quite a few ambling along the waterside gawping at the buildings. There also seemed to be far more tour groups than most places we've visited recently with groups of saddos following someone along like a bunch of sheep!

Trams and beer.

We found a shop at the far end of the waterside on Rybacki, so I bought a couple of bottles of beer for around 50p each which sounded a bit more micro than the usual stuff we'd seen everywhere so far; Kompania Piwowarska Dębowe Mocne (7%) and Amber Harde Mocne (7.2%), although I didn't know as yet what they were and, in particular, that Amber was a local micro and would be the beery find of the trip... We carried on, past a typical example of Socialist concrete art, past another small shop where I bought a bottle of Żywiec Helvelius Kaper (8.7%, now from Elbląg, although originally from Gdańsk's now-closed brewery) and on to the Polish Post memorial which comprised of an injured postman handing his gun to what looked like someone riding an explosion in a metal foundry, although our attention was drawn by a cat who wandered around the quiet cobbled square; our attempts to foster better Polish feline relations were thwarted as he wasn't keen on being petted too much, and sidled off towards some houses nearby.

By common consensus it was time we scooped some trams, so we walked through a residential area and then past some impressive buildings including an old mill with a massive roof which seemed too big for it (it's now a small shopping centre although some mill wheels are still inside and the race runs alongside, albeit without the water wheel which must have

been enormous) and some half-timbered houses completing the picture postcard-like view. The buildings soon degenerated into modern concrete eyesores the closer to the train station we got, but I was looking for something else; according to my research there was supposed to be a beer shop along Karmelicka, although it seems to have vanished under the steamroller of rampant commercialism and plastic tat, so we plunged down into the underpass below the rail station towards the tramstop where we could scoop a few trams; after all, with no scoopable beer seen so far (only multinational crud everywhere) there wasn't much else to do and, besides, we'd walked far enough and deserved a sit-down!

I'd printed off a tram network map from the internet as per usual as, in our experience, finding maps of tram systems had been virtually impossible in most cities we'd visited recently and we needed to know where we were going; one thing that became immediately obvious was that tram stations weren't keen to divulge their name and it was a while before we realised that the name is inside the shelter above the timetables. The trams run in pairs - or sometimes threes - and are similar to the Czech Tatra T6 design (if you know what I'm on about then consider yourself sad!) although I think they were built in Poland by Konstal in Chorzów and called [114Na](#); they are single-ended which means at the end of the line there needs to be a loop to enable the tram to turn round and go back the way it came which results in some rare track to scoop - if you're lucky, which we weren't...

Unfortunately for us there were quite a lot of trackworks in progress, in particular the bit behind the station where the whole road had vanished under a building site, so we'll definitely have to go back and scoop the track when it's back in service! We took one tram to the current end of the line and got a few photos as a steady stream of trams stormed into the depot, around the loop, and then back out again; it was certainly an intensive service in rush hour at Zajezdnia... We then took a tram down to the southern terminus of Siedlce which turned out to be by the side of a busy road and with nothing there to entertain us - and an annoyingly sparse service back - although we'd seen a potential beer shop alongside stop Ciasna called Żabka and so leapt off the tram to see what was available for scooping; we only had three bottles for the room that night and hoped for at least another five or six to make up the numbers!

The shop turned out to be well stocked with beers from the larger producers and, had we been able to carry them, we could have been away with fifteen scoops easily - but as it was we were as restrained as possible and managed to buy eight bottles, although I wasn't sure that any of them were particularly rare. We also conspired, by stacking the bottles on the counter, to confuse the Ada behind the till with the result she charged us twice for one particular bottle, but the total bill - with a bottle of water - still only came to around 14złoty and so, happy that we had a decent number of scoops to drink whilst we relaxed that evening, we headed back into the centre for a walk around and to take some photos of the buildings illuminated at night - and to find some food, as by this time we were starving!

Pierogi and Piwo.

We took the next tram back to the hotel where, en-route, we acquired a typically rambling and pissed-up "old-style" Eastern-European state who sat behind us and tried to attract Sue's attention by slapping her shoulder and mumbling something in Polish! After a while he became bored with this, getting no reaction, and so went back to gibbering away to himself and the rest of the tram in general who, like us, simply ignored him. We dropped the bottles back at the hotel to avoid lugging them around with us all evening and then spent a couple of hours just wandering around the old town gazing at the buildings, most of which had been lit in a spectacular manner, something that most places just don't seem to have been able to pull off in a way which shows their architecture off to it's best. We'd found some potential places in the Rough Guide to eat although, as we walked along Lektykarska, a cute little cafe jumped out at us as being the one - it served [Pierogi](#) (a kind of Polish ravioli I wanted to try) and, even better, was called Cuda Wianki; maybe the name swayed our puerile sense of humour, but it

seemed the perfect place to get some food before starting on our room beers.

The café was a tiny little place with a two small rooms but we managed to get a table by the front window and studied the menu enthusiastically for Polish specialities to scoop, and found plenty - we had a soup to start (Sue had mushroom, I had barszcz, or beetroot soup) before both having Pierogi as a main dish. My wild mushroom and game Pierogi were delicious and very tasty with plenty of flavour and not at all stodgy as I'd feared they might be. I'd asked for a Żywiec with the meal (it was the best option) and I got one - but not from the taps on the bar as I'd expected - it came from a can! Unimpressed but not too concerned, as I didn't expect the beer to be any good whatever the dispense method, I fought my way down the glass and came to the conclusion that I'd had a lot worse but it could do with a bit of flavour, as it didn't really have any to speak of!

We'd hoped to scoop the famous Polish cheesecake, Sernik, but the kitchen lights were now off and so, deciding to head back to the hotel and make a start on our veritable crate of scoops, we paid the bill (only around £2 each!) and said our goodbyes - before spotting a whole crowd of cats milling around the little park opposite! Sue managed to give a tabby one a chin-rub, although the rest were less enthusiastic about human contact and slunk away as we approached. Our feline experience complete we returned to the hotel via Ulica Długa and the old armoury where, amazingly, we found a supermarket had been installed in the ground floor and, as a major bonus, it seemed to have a large beer section too! Resolving to visit this well-located scoopfest the next day, we continued our perambulation along the main thoroughfare whilst I did my best to fill my camera's memory card with images of the gorgeous buildings all around. Nearing the hotel, as we walked through the main square, we saw the slightly surreal sight of a bloke taking his goat for a walk as it were the most natural thing in the world - only a couple of tourists stopped to stroke the goat's nose - so, deciding that this was enough surreality for one evening, we were soon back at the hotel and clomping up the four flights of stairs back to our lofty room.

As usual when abroad we searched the TV channels for something worth watching and, although we didn't find anything as good as Tallinn's punk and alternative music TV channel, we did find a few which passed the evening as we drank our scoops; one particular music one called 4funTV seemed to switch between appalling modern "in der house" type shite and pretty decent ska-punk bands, most of which seemed to be Polish or German, with little of the homogenised global dross usually seen on such music channels. In between videos there were short cartoons which were either "Inspector Erector" (a private investigator who seemed to regularly get a massive boner whilst on his surveillance), a sex-mad plumber, or our favourite "[Piešek Leszek](#)" who was a strangely-drawn dog whose world seemed to involve either himself or a cat losing their testicles in a variety of ways... this may sound a little strange, but I can assure you it made the evening a lot more bearable!

Arranging the bottles into some semblance of order, I noted that we had ten beers to drink and whether we finished them depended a lot on what they tasted like - if they resembled the Żywiec I'd had earlier then I doubted we'd be finishing many of them! Noticing with concern that most of the beers were brewed by multinationals, and ensconced in our overtly beige room with trams hissing over the bridge one hundred metres away and a bollock-less cartoon dog on the TV, we began our Polish scooping campaign in serious!

First up was Lubelske Perla Goolman Jasne (5%) which kind of set the tone for the rest of the evening; pale, bland, slightly sweet and grainy with little hop or interest to recommend it. Okocim Zagłoba (5.5%) was next and it was as I'd expected from Okocim (owned by Carlsberg) - very bland, cereally and sweet with zero character. Żywiec (Heineken) Warka Jasne (5.7%) was uncapped and, unexpectedly, was slightly grassy, adding a touch of interest, although still sweetish and with a toffee-malt finish. Kompania Piwowarska (SAB Miller) Zubr jasne (6%) came up next and, expectedly as befits an SAB-Miller owned brewery,

was toffeeish and bland with the slightest hint of grassy hop. We were skipping through the bottles now and, aided by a decent burst of Ska on the TV, we carried on with Lubelske Perla Goolman Gold in its little 330ml bottle (the rest were all 500ml) which was a strange, syrupy, yellow beer and reminded me of the awful Pivovar Union Smile in Slovenia! More Kompania Piwowarska was next, the Dębowe mocne (7%, mocne meaning strong) which was above average, having a smooth malt and syrup flavour and a touch of complexity in the finish.

Żywiec Tatra mocne (7%) was now opened, although this didn't live up to the previous midlight (as opposed to a highlight as it wasn't that good) being very bland and utterly forgettable; "How can they brew 7% beers with almost no taste?" I asked myself, as I selected the next beer. Brouwar Amber Harde mocne (7.2%) was a lot better, as befits a local brewer although we didn't know that at the time, and had a good malty, hoppy-ish and fairly bitter finish with a pleasant grassiness in the aftertaste from a decent use of hops - something the other brewers could learn from! Our last beer was the Żywiec Helvelius Kaper (8.7%) from Elbląg which was deep amber and smelt like treacle toffee mixed with industrial solvents, although it thankfully tasted better than this; the strong alcohol and toffee flavour with some treacly maltiness was, in our opinion, a tad too harsh and overpowered by the warming alcoholic heat in the finish, although at least the beer had some taste and character, something sadly lacking in almost all the beers we'd scooped that night.

Our beers finished, apart from one we'd reluctantly decided to keep until the next day as by now we'd had enough, we decided to get some well-needed doss in preparation for another full day of tourism as we planned to scoop in the ferry to Westerplatte the following day, a trip which - apparently - gave a great view of the famous Gdańsk shipyards.

Friday 22nd September 2006.

Westerplatte - second time lucky.

After a good night's doss in our beige room we awoke to the sound of trams swooshing over the bridge. Pulling back the curtains, it transpired that we had been, and still were, extremely lucky with the weather and the day had dawned clear and sunny with promise of equalling the previous day's heat - although the humidity was very low, which would hopefully prevent the expected high temperature becoming sticky and unpleasant. We went down for breakfast and found a superbly well-stocked buffet laid out in a cosy little room and so, with a hunger born of determination to get my money's worth, I piled my plate high with bread rolls stuffed with warm hotdogs smothered in mustard and ketchup from very familiar squeeze bottles. These were soon consumed and I went back for more bread rolls with an assortment of the random cheeses and hams on offer from the table as well as a few more hotdogs! After three or four platefuls I was stuffed and so we slogged back up the stairs (one flight less than normal, as the breakfast room was on the 1st floor) to pack our bag for the day's touristy meanderings; unusually for us we had to check out rather than follow the usual procedure of leaving our bags in the hotel, although I hoped this would be worth it for the stay in the Gotyk house.

We settled the bill and headed out to take some photos of the waterside and crane from Spichrze island, but first we checked the departure board for the ferries on the riverside and noticed that the next one to Westerplatte was 11:00; this gave us 45 minutes to get some photos, scoop the cute little ferry over the Motława, and then walk back to the quay and buy a ticket - result! We strolled past derelict mills until these gave way to mills under development into houses and shops; the tentacles of consumerism were reaching further out of the centre and I hoped the lovely old buildings wouldn't be demolished and replaced by some modern disposable concrete eyesores although, luckily, it seemed as if the largest development in the area was a restoration rather than a demolition and so, hopefully, this area of Gdańsk won't become a blight on the superb architecture of the riverside and its glorious array of random

gables and ancient brickwork.

I located an excellent spot for some photos and, letting the little ferry go as we didn't want to run for it, we walked to the water's edge and admired the view - it looked even more stunning from the opposite bank and I was once again amazed that Gdańsk wasn't on more tourist itineraries - although this is probably a good thing! The one problem we had now was not knowing the little ferry's timetable and, as the time ticked towards 10:45 with the boat still firmly moored at the other bank, we began to get a bit twitchy; if we missed the 11:00 Westerplatte then we'd have to wait an hour for the next one; not that walking around the old town was a problem, but we could actually see the ferry sat on the berth and I'd have been gutted if we'd missed it by a minute or so - which seemed to be what was going to happen! Then, just as we were about to give up hope and head for the centre via the bridge leading to Długi Targ, the little vessel fired up its engine and chugged across to our bank, so we boarded and immediately the ferry set off back to the opposite side of the river. The fare for this short crossing was 1złoty and, all things considered, I'd pay 18p to scoop a ferry any time of the day - although the distance we travelled was probably about 25 metres in total, hardly a major move!

With ten minutes to spare before the Westerplatte ferry departed we felt reasonably smug as we promenaded along the waterfront towards the ticket desk although, predictably, our mood didn't last long. As I asked for the tickets, the woman behind the counter told me the next ferry was 12:00, despite the timetable behind her clearly saying there was supposed to be an 11:00 sailing - cheers then, all that fretting for now! There was nothing for it but to have a wander around some of the streets we'd not yet seen and return in an hour, so off we went with the aim of finding our hotel, the Gotyk house; this proved an easy mission to accomplish, although it seemed to be sited on the most touristy street we'd yet seen - Mariacka was a rash of stalls selling amber jewellery (amber is a speciality of the Baltic as it's washed up by the sea on most beaches along the coast) and touristy-looking cafes, although we had to admit that the hotel itself was excruciatingly cute and situated right next to the church at the top - and less touristy - end of the street; if it was as good as it looked then we were in for a right treat!

The Lenin Shipyards.

We had a quick espresso in a very nice little cafe on Mariacka before ambling back down to the ferry terminal to buy a ticket. This time there were no unexpected cancellations and we were soon ensconced aboard Elzbeth, waiting for departure, with the sun burning the back of our necks. We were sat right at the rear of the boat on the left-hand side in preparation for some frenzied photography of the shipyards where worker power changed history not too many years ago; seeing those grainy pictures of Lech Wałęsa - and his outrageous moustache - being held aloft by his comrades as the Stalinist government caved in to the workers' demands was one of the last century's defining moments, and it was hard to believe that we would soon be sailing past where it all happened and the world changed forever.

The ferry chugged away from the dock more or less to time with a reasonable complement of tourists aboard and gave us a superb view of Gdańsk's glorious waterfront - I can't think of many other cities I've been to with such a picturesque quayside - before heading out into the river Motława proper and, already, the huge cranes could be seen thrusting up into the sky just around the next bend. As we serenely proceeded northwards the Hanseatic splendour of the city centre gave way to slightly more ramshackle warehouses before, rounding a bend, there was the shipyard sprawling along the bank; a mass of cranes, corrugated iron buildings and random bits of ships in the process of being made, repaired or dismantled whilst all around was the smell and sound of heavy industry - sulphur, grease and fuel oil, engines, hammering and the clanking of metal on metal - this was a working yard and not some industrial museum or abandoned Communist ideology, that was for sure!

I'd seen photos of the shipyards on the internet but wasn't prepared for the sheer scale of them; they stretched from the suburbs of Gdańsk most of the way along the river towards the Baltic and, as we passed yet more ships in various stages of repair or demolition, I looked back towards the city and saw the bristling mass of cranes which merged into each other like some tangled Meccano set marching along the banks, some with their buckets swinging to and fro as they emptied ships of their cargo of coal at the sulphur plant, some waiting for their next duty, and some moving enormous lumps of metal as ships were born or died. I was utterly transfixed by this monument to industry, having seen little like it anywhere else, and it was a major disappointment when the yards and factories eventually thinned out, although they didn't vanish altogether and the banks were still dotted with mammoth cranes and enormous metal structures. We passed the chain ferry at Nowy Port, something we hoped to scoop later on, and then passed the Socialist monument to the start of WW2 - the first salvos of the war were fired at the Polish garrison here in 1939 - before executing a u-turn almost at the entrance to the Baltic sea before heading back the way we'd come.

We only had a single ticket to Westerplatte, and I was a touch concerned; I'd not thought it necessary to check where the ferry terminal was but now, as we approached the wrong side of the bank, I wished that we had; I'd assumed we'd dock near to the chain ferry but that was a good mile or so back towards Gdańsk and we now needed to somehow get there... We considered staying on the boat and pleading ignorance of having a single but, rejecting that idea, we disembarked and asked the crew how to get back into the city. They'd obviously not been asked this question very often as two of them discussed our predicament at length before advising us to take the bus from the road we could see alongside the quay; with no other option, but with valid public transport tickets, we decided this was our move of choice and, after having a quick look at the Baltic from what seemed to be a picnic field, we found the bus stop and waited for the promised vehicle which, apparently, would be along in five minutes - although, looking at the road with its rusted old railway tracks and potholes, we couldn't believe a bus would appear!

Right on time, the bus arrived, so we piled aboard for the trip along deserted country lanes back into the centre; well, the roads were flanked by overgrown trees and bushes, but from somewhere people were waiting at most of the stops and I couldn't work out where they were coming from, as they weren't tourists or factory workers but locals taking a trip into the city... We then turned onto a dual carriageway and sped over the railway, past the sulphur factory we'd seen earlier from the boat, and then alongside some tramlines - it was time to get off, as a tram is infinitely preferable to a plastic bus as a means of transport! We alighted at the first convenient stop and, after some slight confusion as to which way we were going, we boarded a tram heading for the city. We bailed out at the stop closest to our hotel from the previous evening and walked back into the centre where - with the time around 13:30 - we figured we might be able to check into the Gotyk house and dump one of our bags.

A sociable welcome and a beast of a ferry.

We made our way via Ulica Długa and Piwna to the huge brick citadel of St Marys before taking the superbly atmospheric crooked lane round the flank of the citadel to Mariacka. We rang the doorbell of the hotel, seeing with concern that the sign outside read "the best B&B in Gdańsk" - had I cocked up and booked us into a tourist tat place - and what exactly did "B&B" mean? All our concerns evaporated, however, on being greeted by what must be the most pleasant, sociable and downright prettiest hotelier I've ever met! I forget her name, but she was either a supremely good actor or was a naturally very friendly person; she showed us to our room, which had a superb view of the street and church next door and was excellently fitted out, before insisting we had a jug of coffee on the "patio" which was the little area in front of the door where, as we sat at the little garden table supping the very welcome scalding hot drink, I was secretly relieved that I'd gone with my instincts and booked us in here. I nipped out to the ATM nearby to get some money for the room and, when I returned, it was time to

head off for another session on the Konstal trams - and this time, we were determined to get to Nowy Port and scoop the chain ferry in which we'd seen earlier from our Motława cruise!

Back at the tramstop we caught the first one heading for Nowy Port with the aim of scooping as much track as possible, although the network around there is quite confusing with a number of routes within routes and so we had to do first one loop, then backtrack, then do the other one - everything's got to be scooped! Eventually we approached Nowy Port itself but, just before the station, the tram terminated and stormed off into the depot just along the road, depriving us of 50 metres of track! We had a quick look at the depot and watched a converted tramcar shunting others around for a while before checking out a shop over the road from the tramstop as I could see beers inside! This turned out to be a very farsighted move, as the beers I acquired were Braniewski Barkas Jasne (6.1%) and Ciechanów Kartési Zókónik (7.8%), both quite large scoops, although I didn't know this at the time but I suspected as much. We then set off along a path towards the Motława in the hope of finding the ferry we'd seen earlier as, obviously, it needed to be in the big orange book!

Walking along the riverside gave us a great view back towards Gdańsk and the shipyards with the cranes bristling along the banks, as well as the fort at Nowy Port and - just a little further back towards the centre - there was the chain ferry shuttling between the banks laden with vehicles, just ripe for the scooping, although we didn't yet know if foot passengers were carried. After an amble along the bank we arrived at the ferry - predictably, just as it departed - and saw that it was only supposed to run every half an hour; if this was true, we should have run for it as we didn't really have an hour to spend scooping a boat in! The tariff board was also a cause of confusion as, on first inspection, we couldn't see a price for foot passengers but there was one for dogs! After consulting with the Polish dictionary, however, we deduced that what we'd assumed was dog was in fact pedestrians and, in another bit of luck, the ferry immediately started back from the opposite bank in blatant disregard for the schedule, although I suspect the mammoth queues of vehicles waiting at each bank was a motivational factor in deciding its frequency.

We squeezed aboard the vessel between the cars and found a sociable vantage point up some steps and, within five minutes, we were off! The boat made a decent noise as it chugged across the surprisingly wide channel before we arrived at the opposite bank, where we were collared by the ticket collectors who scurried along the lines of vehicles whilst the ferry was in motion in a desperate attempt to ching up everyone on board! We'd decided to do the ferry straight back and so we stayed in our vantage point as the vehicles aboard were unloaded and a fresh lot welcomed aboard; the timetable of two departures an hour had obviously been forgotten as we set off as soon as the last car was squeezed aboard and chugged back to the Nowy Port bank. This time we managed to avoid being chinged the paltry 0.75złoty and, once off the ferry and having squeezed through the throng of impatient cars queuing for it, immediately saw where we were; almost opposite the tram depot!

"All we want is some food!"

We took a tram back to the centre and returned to the hotel to sort ourselves out for the evening. As per usual we were now hungry and so studied the lists of restaurants and cafes in the Rough Guide in search of inspiration; we don't like poncey and/or pompous places, much preferring the down-to-earth style, and so all places which sounded too posh were immediately eliminated from our list! After a few minutes we'd decided on the Mestwin which, interestingly, was billed as a Kashubian restaurant - this had to be scooped in as we both required the cuisine all-time... Being situated about as centrally as it's possible to be it was a matter of minutes before we were approaching the door, although things didn't sound good - hefty dollops of "oompah" and revelry were blasting from the door and we were in two minds whether to turn around and find somewhere else (which I wish we'd done) but, seeing two people eating outside, we decided to give the place a chance and sat down in a suitable table.

After a few minutes no-one had been out and so I ventured inside to see what was happening; the room was absolutely wedged with people sat at the long tables having what seemed to be a great time, although I didn't reckon much on our chances of getting any sustenance from here in a hurry!

Eventually we acquired two glasses of Tyskie Gronie (well, it was a scoop) and sat waiting for something to happen. This materialised in the form of two musicians (or they might have been waiters, I couldn't quite decide) from the restaurant who sat with us, swigging thirstily from glasses after some undisclosed exertions inside; we managed to talk about the usual things such as where we were from in a halting combination of German, English and Polish, but it soon became clear that we weren't going to get any food here and so we made preparations to leave. I paid for our beers - we could so easily have just wandered off without doing so had we been typically English - and shuffled off disappointedly to see what else we could find that looked worth eating, whilst observing yet more feral cats which slunk around the streets and avoided getting too close to us despite Sue's best efforts to entice them over!

It was soon decided that we would have a look at a place we had rejected the previous night after finding our eventual dining venue and so, by now absolutely starving, we trotted along to Piwa where the Pierogarnia u Dzika was located. This was another *Pierogi* restaurant and it looked a lot more upmarket than Cuda Wianki which we'd eaten at the previous night but, after studying the menu, having read the recommendations in both the Rough Guide and In your Pocket, and seeing that it was reasonably priced (and egged on by our hunger), we decided to take the plunge and in we went. Immediately we'd walked through the door I knew that we'd made a good choice, as despite the cheap prices, this was a nice-looking place with lots of happy customers at the tables speaking in a mixture of English, German and Polish - and if Poles ate here then it must be OK, I reasoned!

An efficient waitress guided us through to a vacant table where we studied the menu; inside, alongside the seemingly omnipotent *pierogi*, there were various meat dishes available and my eye was caught by the wild boar, as I'm always up for munching on rare animals as my Donkey ragout in Sardinia a few years back confirms, although funnily enough neither of us were tempted by an item on the menu which was translated as "Slugs - 6 pieces"; an additional comment had been posted below clarifying that these molluscs were in fact snails, but we still weren't up for munching on molluscs despite them being winning animals... my thoughts drifted briefly back to the drunken Glaswegian we'd met in the Pot Still in Glasgow during our February trip who had claimed that, as God had created the world and everything in it and given humans dominion over the animals, animals were "all for eating"... maybe so, but I drew the line at slugs!

Whilst Sue sampled the Duck in cherry sauce I eventually went for a Polish staple - *Bigos* - to start, followed by the Boar, although this was a hard choice to make owing to the multitude of fillings offered in the restaurant's *pierogi*, some of which sounded very tasty and, for the look of the place, the price of food was very reasonable indeed. Despite the restaurant being noticeably full our starters soon arrived, and I munched contentedly on the beige spicy cabbage and sausage mass in my dish; this was very tasty indeed, I decided, and proceeded to demolish the large portion at a high rate of knots. The main course was equally competent and I contentedly munched away on the boar and its accompaniments with great pleasure. We eventually left, full and satisfied, and burped our way across to the Great Armoury where the extremely well-hidden supermarket lurked with what had looked like, from the passageway through the previous night, a decent selection of bottled beers with which we could bump up the tally of winners on the trip back in the room - this seemed to be the best way given the pitifully limited range of beers in the bars we'd looked in so far!

Another night in.

The Great Armoury is a deliciously ornate building with a Gothic edge to the styling and, after acquiring a few photos of it bathed in spotlights, we headed inside to see what beers we could harvest from the supermarket. The alcohol section was soon located and I was pleased to see a decent selection of scoops were available for us to purchase including, interestingly, several from the local Browar Amber - a bock and an unpasteurised strong lager called Żywe - as well as some other random beers from various producers giving us a total of five which, with the two we still had from the previous evening, would give us a tally of 17 scoops for the trip; not too bad considering there had been no brewpub or even decent beer bars to plunder!

Ten minutes later, back in the cosy surroundings of the Gotyk house, we searched for some decent TV to watch but had to settle for 4FunTV again with its predictably dire play list which comprised of extensive tracts of "uuuuh, in der house, yo biotch" shite followed by occasional half-hours of alternative stuff, mostly Polish or German, and - to our horror - no Piesek Leszek to liven up the evening! Lacking our fix of badly drawn bollock-less domestic animals we had to make do with the occasional dose of Inspector Erector (which, it must be said, really is no substitute) to accompany the beers. With no glasses in the room we had to be inventive in our choice of drinking vessels and so, with two empty water bottles, we soon had our glasses for the evening so poured the beer from its bottle into our makeshift glasses which had the added advantage of taking some of the excessive gassiness out of it!

We began with Braniewski Barkas jasne which we'd seen around a fair bit (apparently it's a reincarnation of a brewery culled by Żywiec a few years back) but, despite it not being a multinational brewery, they were obviously aiming for the same market as the beer was very average indeed with some of the sweet maltiness Polish beers seem to have as default - but little else of interest. We swiftly moved on to Unibrew Poland Brok export (6%) which, predictably, was yet another cereally, bland, pale lager and instantly forgettable; this tasting session was turning into a test of blandness endurance! Next up was the other rare bottle we'd acquired from the shop at Nowy Port - Chiechanów Kartési Zókónik (7.8%) - and I had high hopes for this one, being a small brewery and reasonably strong... well, it did become the first beer of the night to achieve more than one out of five, but it was still lacking interest, having a character of boiled-sweets which led to a sweet maltiness and then a toffee-malt finish that left it feeling a little underpowered for the strength.

Next was local beer Amber Żywe niepasteryzowane (6.2%) for which I had the highest hopes of all the beers we'd bought thus far; it was the first unpasteurised beer we'd clapped eyes on and, additionally, it was from a local brewery! It poured a burnished copper colour and immediately I could smell the fresh maltiness which had been lacking from all the other beers until now. The flavour was similarly characterful with a fresh maltiness, some grassy hops, followed by a long, bitterish, toffee-malt finish and was by far the best beer we'd had during this trip despite only scoring 3/5, which says something about the beer quality in Gdańsk...

It felt as if we'd rounded the final turn, so I cracked open Okocim Palone (5.5%) which was a lovely ruby colour but, unfortunately, the colour didn't follow through into the palate as it was clearly just a pale jasne lager with some caramel dumped into it at some point during the brewing process! Next... We'd saved Amber Kozlak bock (6.5%) until last as it promised to be the most flavoursome beer of the six we had - well, it looked decent enough with a luscious deep red colour, although the flavour wasn't as good as the beer's appearance, having a disappointingly average dry-ish malty taste with some caramel, toffee and malt; not bad, but certainly not brilliant!

That was it, our scooping in Poland was completed until the following February when we were booked for Krakow (where we should have a much better time in our scooping), and to say the overall standard of beer had been poor would be to lavish unnecessary praise on the mainly industrial slops we'd consumed over the last couple of days with the notable exception of the beers from Browar Amber...

Saturday 23rd September 2006.

No alcohol on the plane!

With an early flight to catch (11:25) we were standing at the bus stop next to the copper-glassed LOT office waiting for the 09:14 "B" bus to the airport. We'd had a very decent breakfast in our room before reluctantly packing our stuff away and shouldering the heavy rucksacks for a last admiring wander along Długa, and were now at that point in the trip where everything is done and we just wanted to skip the next five hours and be back at home... unfortunately, this wasn't an option, and so there we were waiting for a bus in the noticeably chilly morning air; Autumn was coming, which didn't bode well for our visit to Riga in three weeks' time!

The bus arrived five minutes late and we climbed aboard for the 30-minute ride to the airport along with a fair proportion of the queue at the bus-stop; luckily we managed to get two seats and so were spared the duress of grimly hanging on to a badly-placed strap as the bus hurried along bumpy roads and lurched around corners. I must have dozed off somehow as, suddenly, I awoke and saw we were storming along a tree-fringed road and there, just ahead, was the familiar detritus of airport perimeters; hangars, rows of shoddy industrial units, hotels and car-hire lots. We were soon checked in and passed through security where I had to remove my belt and Caterpillar boots; it was interesting to see why they usually set off the metal detectors at Stansted as, in the soles, were hefty metal plates! It wasn't until we were in the crowded departures gate that we heard the flight was late although, owing to the Polish accent of the broadcaster, we couldn't tell if it was an hour or two - cheers then! The screen gave little away except for indicating the flight was "delayed" and saying something about "Planowany"; I laughed when I saw this, as surely it meant the plane had been delayed somewhere in order for the authorities there to arrest Planey for spying and throw him in a cell with the local Albanian "Mr Big"? (It actually means "planned", but that's not half as interesting).

To pass the time we had a gander around the duty-free shop; Sue bought some chocolates for work (which turned out to be made by Cadbury Poland - multinational tossers - and I'm informed they were the same shite quality as Cadburys is in the UK!) whilst I selected two 50cl bottles of Vodka to scoop in at home, one of which was Zubrowka which has a strand of Bison Grass in every bottle; I remember this from the time Fletch brought some back from Poland and recalled that it has a - let's say - interesting character to it and I wanted to see if I thought the same of it after five years! I stood at the till (made in Altrincham, surreally!) before the matriarchal cashier, seeing my boarding card, grunted "no alcohol to UK" and removed my bottles to the shelf behind her : cheers then, nothing like a bit of advance warning! Feeling a little robbed, I returned to the boarding gate to see that the plane was now expected within ten minutes so, avoiding the brats playing "let's see how much noise we can make and how many people we can annoy", we settled down to wait.

Our 737 finally arrived and we were soon aboard, where we learnt that the delay had been due to fog at Stansted; Gdańsk airport had known this, so why hadn't they let us know before herding us all into the tiny departures area? Lack of information is sometimes more annoying than knowing a flight is going to be late in my opinion! After an eventless couple of hours we were back in Stansted, although arriving back in daylight was a strange feeling; we decided to avoid the road works on the A14 and chanced on the M25/M40 being clear (which, in the main, they were) and were home late afternoon, a good 8 hours after being at the bus stop in Gdańsk. If I could invent a time machine which could abolish - or re-allocate more usefully - this appalling waste of everyone's time and resources then I'd be a rich man, although I suspect my plane scoops book would be a lot less full... maybe not, then!

Conclusions.

First of all, let me set something straight; we didn't go to [Gdańsk](#) in order to fill my book with winners, we went to see the place - which, it must be said, is absolutely enthralling and mixes Hanseatic splendour with gritty 20th century social upheaval seamlessly - and I think Gdańsk is one of our non-beer trips I'm most pleased about alongside Alghero in Sardinia. Obviously I wanted to scoop any beer available, but I wasn't expecting that much winner-wise - with good reason, as it turned out - and for what must be the first time in a couple of years no beer managed to score higher than 3 out of 5 on the Gazza scale, and of the 17 beers we scooped only one managed to score this high, with 7 of the others barely scraping 1 out of 5. This is a totally pitiful performance and indicative of what happens when Multinationals manage to get a stranglehold on a market; they fool customers into thinking they're getting good value when actually they're paying over the odds for industrial slops, then wring everything they can get from the punters and treat them like imbeciles who will simply consume what they're given - which, unfortunately, seems to be the situation in Gdańsk at present with only the local Amber brewery offering any relief from the monolith of multinationally-owned, industrially-made, identikit crap on sale almost everywhere.

Let me put it this way - don't go to Gdańsk in search of excellent beer because, in our experience, there simply isn't any. Go instead for the past and more recent history of the place and to get there before tourism tightens it's greasy tentacles around the city and soils it forever with tacky shops and fast-food bars; yes, there are tourists there and yes, there is some tat for sale but it's all pretty low-key at present and a wander along Długa in to step back in time in a way that isn't possible in most of the other Hanseatic cities, a fact all the more remarkable when you see the photos of the aftermath of war under the golden gate and realise that almost all of what you see is reconstructed... the next time you visit Coventry or Plymouth ask yourself why we couldn't do the same - was it really that much beyond us, the country which at one time had coloured around a third of the world pink on maps? That proliferation of concrete sterility was the start of our national decline into accepting third-rate for everything and it still hangs around our necks today in the shape of Big Brother, Carling "extra cold", ready-meals and turkey twizzlers; "The customer wants what the customer gets" has come home to roost in the UK of A.

Sorry about that, got a bit carried away with my rant there... but it's true, just wander around the centre of Gdańsk and see how perfectly the restoration was carried out and wonder why we have nothing like it anywhere in the UK - yes, we have some beautiful towns and cities, but how many of those which were subjected to the Nazis' *blitzkrieg* have emerged looking anything like half-decent? OK, I'll shut up now - let's suffice it to say that I'd recommend anyone to visit Gdańsk, see the Hanseatic gabled buildings, but most of all don't neglect to take a cruise along the Motława to stare amazed at the sheer size of the shipyards and see where history was made not so very long ago in the 1980's, when the whole political landscape of Europe was re-written by the shipyard workers of Gdańsk (and Krakow's Kutna Hora steelworks) and their leader with the unfeasibly bushy moustache. Go, you won't regret it at all - and if you do, you have no grasp of history or place and may as well just live in the Wellington in Birmingham for your scoops as obviously nothing else is of importance to you!

As for the other two cities in the [Trójmiasto](#) ([Sopot](#) and [Gdynia](#)), we didn't have time to visit either of them and so I can tell you little; the best thing is probably to read a Rough Guide and the excellent In your Pocket guide to see if it's worth your while visiting either or both of them - there's no better beer in either of them as far as I know and so I can only recommend that you visit them for their individual attractions, which is should be easy using the SKM electric train which runs between Gdańsk and Gdynia every ten minutes or so for, I assume, very little cost. Maybe next time we'll have a look...

Getting there and getting around there.

Just a few years ago getting to Gdańsk by air would have meant a change at one of the major hubs and then a rip-off national carrier's flight but, thanks to the Internet and cheap airlines, you now have a choice of carriers and departure points in the UK. [Wizzair](#) started it all a few years back and now fly to Gdańsk from Prestwick, Liverpool and Luton; [Ryanair](#) have recently joined the fun (despite It's boss once saying "Who wants to go there and stare at the shipyard wall?") and fly from Stansted. Other travel options are limited as Gdańsk is a fair way from any of the other entry points into Poland, although a train from Szczecin or Bydgoszcz is a possibility. Trains within Poland have been decimated in the last few years as the cold wind of Capitalism sweeps through what should, and indeed once was, a public service and the Polish rail network is now a pale shadow of it's former self, although Gdańsk can still be reached from much of Poland - see [here](#) for more details.

Of course, you could always go by [Eurolines'](#) coaches (24 hours from London), who offer connecting services from many points in the UK for a coach forwards to Gdańsk - although, being a bus (albeit a posh one), I've never felt desperate enough to take advantage of the undeniably cheap fares on offer; if anyone has, please let me know what it's like! The other options are ferries which arrive from Nynäshamn (operated by [Polferries](#)) or Lübeck although these are only realistically useful if you're on a more extensive tour around the area so I won't go into any more detail than that.

In common with many Eastern European cities Gdańsk still has a thriving [tram network](#); trams never went out of fashion in the Communist bloc as they were seen, quite rightly, as a supremely efficient method of getting people to where they want to be and, although the Poles' love now seems to have shifted to the car, the tram system is still being maintained and refurbished at present. The vehicles, for those saddos who want to know such things, are reasonably old home-made vehicles which bear a passing resemblance to Tatra T6's although they're actually [Konstal 114Na's](#). With hardly any beer worth drinking around the area the trams are of no practical use for the beer scooper except as a method of seeing more of the city and maybe visiting the occasional beer shop although, with a [24-hour ticket](#) (for all Gdańsk transport) being 9.10złoty from the Tourist information desk at the airport, they are definitely worth £1.50 for a few trips around the city's suburbs to see how the real locals live.

Gdańsk also has an extensive bus system (also valid with 24-hour pass, see above) with a so-so service (line [B](#)) running to the airport; this runs approximately twice an hour during work days and once an hour at weekends - not the best airport connection I've seen, to be honest. Another line ([110](#)) runs to the airport, but this drops you in Wrzeszcz which means you'll need to take a tram or another bus (or the SKM electric train) into Gdańsk proper, which is OK if you're not in a rush. Apart from that, the best way to get around is to walk - Gdańsk is an eminently walkable city and the old centre can be crossed on foot in ten minutes, although the suburbs stretch miles into the surrounding countryside in the usual Soviet way with plenty of identikit blocks of flats once you get away from the centre.

Hotel gen.

We stayed in a different hotel each night for the simple reason the one we wanted was full on the Thursday and so needs must... both were very good in their own ways, with the [Willa Biała Lilia](#) (house of the white lilly) being a modern, very comfortable and excellent value hotel situated on the quiet Spichrze island just over the canal from the Green gate although, having no lift, we had to stomp up four flights of stairs to reach our lofty perch! The room was excessively beige but very well fitted out with all mod-cons. Credit cards taken.

The other was classed as a “B&B” although you’d be hard pushed to know the difference in service; the [Gotyk House](#) is in a stunning position right beside the hulking St Marys’ basilica and is located in one of the oldest buildings in the city. The room we were in was modern yet tastefully decorated and the hostess was delightfully friendly and couldn’t do enough for us, although note that it’s cash only here. Both hotels are highly recommended by us and I’d not hesitate to use either again; both cost around 250złoty for a double with breakfast (approximately £40) which is an absolute bargain in both cases.

Pub and beer shop gen.

Gdańsk isn't a fruitful hunting ground for scoops; almost every single bar we looked into has been trussed up tight by the multinationals and only serves their uninspiring dross - Tyskie and Lech (both SAB Miller) or Żywiec (Heineken) are the most commonly seen. If you scoop beer in bottles (and, let's face it, if you don't then you're not going to score a fat lot in Gdańsk) then you have better options in the form of supermarkets and shops which generally sell a small range of beers, although these do vary and it's worth poking your nose into as many shops as possible in search of elusive scoops - the one at Nowy Port was particularly productive.

Żabka, ul Kartiska 78.

A beer shop in the eastern suburbs; take trams 9, 10 or 11 towards Siedlce and alight at the Ciasna stop; the shop is around 50 metres further along the road following the tramlines on the left-hand side; sells lots of commoner beers for fairly cheap prices.

The **supermarket** in the Great Armoury.

Cose to the Golden gate, this well-hidden and useful supermarket sells everything you'd expect a supermarket to sell, plus some of the rarer local Amber beers including the pretty good Amber Żywe (6.2%) unpasteurised beer in bottle - the best of the 17 scoops we had!

A café opposite the hotel Gotyk house on Mariacka sells Amber beers.

A shop opposite Nowy Port tramstop (it's back a bit towards the chain ferry on the opposite side of the road from tramstop) sells some interesting beers including Ciechanów and Braniewski (a brewery recently re-opened independently after being culled by the all-consuming monster which is Heineken/Żywiec).

A shop at the northern end of Rybackie sells a decent range of beers including Amber.

The **Bomi** supermarket in the basement of the Madison Park complex, ul. Rajska 10, is a pretty safe bet for a load of bottled beers although we didn't have time to visit.

Beer Gen.

As I've said, the beer around this area isn't a convincing argument to visit Gdańsk, although Amber does makes some decent beers and they can be had on draught in the occasional bar in the centre. So, for what it's worth, here's a list of the beers we scooped and, as usual, the ever-controversial score each earned.

Amber, Bielkówek, ul. Gregorkiewicza 1, Kolbudy. ()

The find of our trip; Amber make a fair go of brewing beers that don't have too much flavour to put off the locals but still have enough to be interesting to those who care about such things. The Żywe was the pick of all 17 beers we scooped in the weekend.

- Harde Mocne 7.2% - Decent, tasty, slightly hoppy and well-balanced beer. ()

- Kozlak Bock 6.5% - Not as good as hoped, but still a solid, dark red, toffee-ish malt brew. (🍺🍺)
- Żywe 6.2% - Very impressive and full of character; grassy hops, bitterness, and a good maltiness made this the beer of the week. (🍺🍺🍺)

Braniewski, ul. Morska 4, Braniewo. (🍺)

A re-incarnation of a brewery closed by Żywiec (Heineken), I wish this company every success in bringing brewing back to Braniewo – but please, lads, a few more hops!!

- Braniewo Barkas 6.1% - Unfortunately, a bland and very forgettable pale lager. (🍺)

Ciechanów (Gambrynus), ul. Kilińskiego 8, Ciechanów. (🍺🍺)

Regional brewery whose beers have a good reputation.

- Kartési Zókónik, aka Ciechan Mocne 7.8% - We expected a lot from this but it wasn't that much better than the other standard lagers; some "boiled sweets" flavour with a sweet maltiness and then a toffee-malt finish with more sweetness. (🍺🍺)

Dojlidy (SAB Miller), Ul. Dojlidy Fabryczne 28, Białystok (🍺🍺)

One of the many tiny parts of the global mega-corps which is SAB-Miller, this brewery produces beers under various labels.

- Zubr Jasne 6% - Reasonably toffeeish yet bland with a hint of grassy hops in the finish. (🍺🍺)

Elbląg (Elbrewery), (Heineken), ul. Browarna 71, Elbląg (🍺🍺)

Home of the infamous "EB" beers and, since Gdansk's Helvelius brewery closed, home to those too; how very multinational.

- Hevelius Kaper 8.7% - Amber beer with a strong meths and industrial solvent aroma with some toffee. Taste is better, with treacle toffee, malt, alcohol, toffee, caramel and a strong, cloying finish. (🍺🍺)

Koszalin (Brok), (Royal Unibrew), ul. Spoldzielcza 8, Koszalin (🍺)

Confused as to the "Royal Unibrew" name? Well, it's easy – we know them better as Faxe, those huge cans of pissy Danish lager which still infest supermarket shelves. They are frantically buying whichever brewer will accept their shekels to try and become one of the big boys before – ahem – the big boys gobble them up. Good luck, chaps...

- Brok Export 6% - A cereally, bland, golden lager. Next. (🍺)

Lubelskie (Perla), ul. Bernardyńska 15, Lublin, (🍺)

Independent brewery making a vast range of beers in all manner of styles; maybe if they stuck to making a few good beers they could stop pissing around making crap like these two?

- Goolman Gold 6% - Very strange, bright yellow, syrupy-sweet fluid. (🍺🍺)
- Goolman Jasne 5% - Pale, bland, maybe a slight hint of sweetness, malt and grassy hop? (🍺)

Okocim (Carlsberg Polska), ul. Bokserska 66, Warszawa (🍺)

Part of the bloated, all-consuming monster which is Carlsberg - and tasting like it, too.

- Zagłoba 5.5% - Very bland, pale, cereally, sweet beer. (🍺)
- Palone 5.5% - Ruby coloured, but surely it's just Zagłoba with caramel in it? (🍺)

Tyskie Browary Książęce (SAB-Miller), Szwajcarska 11 st., Poznan (🍺)

It's so good you can even get it in McSpoons these days...

- Dębowe Mocne 7% - Smooth, syrupy, strong beer with a hint of interest. (🍺🍺)
- Gronie Tyskie 5.6% - Totally bland sweetish fluid. (🍺)

Warka (Heineken), ul. Gosniewska 65, Warka (🍺🍺)
Yet another piece of Heineken.

- Jasne Pelne 5.7% - Slightly grassy but still with the Polish malty sweetness. (🍺🍺)

Żywiec (Heineken), various breweries throughout Poland. (🍺🍺)

I don't know if the beers are brewed at the original plant in Żywiec or one of their other conquests, so I'll leave it up to you to guess as I don't really give a toss.

- Jasne 5% - Bland, sweetish, no real flavour. (🍺)
- Tatra Mocne 7% - Averagely balanced with a nasty solvent hint to the flavour. (🍺)

Beers of the weekend.

On one hand the first place was an easy choice as almost half the brews we managed to scoop were poor, but deciding the other two was slightly more difficult. As usual, if you disagree then let me know!

- 1) **Amber Żywe niepasteryzowane** (6.2%) - Decent unpasteurised brew with a good toffee-ish, hoppy character.
- 2) **Amber Kozlak bock** (6.5%) - A bit restrained but more interesting than most other beers we had.
- 3) **Elbląg (Heineken) Helvelius Kaper** (8.7%) - As much as it pains me to reward Heineken for closing Gdańsk's only brewery, this beer - whilst being rough and ready with strong alcohol - was at least characterful and so it sneaks into the top three by default!

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