

# Poland As an Example:

Involving & Showcasing Military Heritage in Tourism

# Outline of Presentation

- How did we get here – Poland At War Tours story.
- Poland At War Tours business model.
- How to design attractive & meaningful military heritage tours.
- How to interpret complex or difficult history for different types of visitors.
- Examples of Polish military heritage sites that successfully combine education of history & visitor engagement.



# Poland At War Tours Story

How did we get here?

[WWW.POLANDATWARTOURS.COM](http://WWW.POLANDATWARTOURS.COM)

# How Did We Get Here?

- Always interested in military history – Particularly Australian.
- Left Policing in 2012 – Best decision of my life!
- 2014 - set up private psychology practice.
- 2018 – Finally have the opportunity to do WWII tour of Germany.
- First 3 days are in Poland which I had no knowledge about at all.
- I fell in love with the history, the country, & didn't want to leave.
- Returned August 2019 & then Christmas/ NY 2019/20.
- Frustrated by lack of depth of tours/ knowledge/ coherence of the broader story.
- End of January 2020, Krakow train station – Why don't I do it myself?
- Returned to Australia.
- March 2020 – Covid begins lockdowns in Australia.
- I had my Covid project.
- Began operating 2022 & properly in 2023.



# How Did We Get Here?

- I was telling anyone who would listen the story of Poland in WWII.
- I saw people were fascinated; however,
- Are you crazy?
- Who is going to want to do such tours?
- Who is going to do a 14-day tour?
- Poles – What are you doing here?
- Poles – People are interested in our history? 🤔
- I could not be the only person on Earth who would be interested?
- My overall business philosophy:





**If you build it, they  
will come.**

W. P. Kinsella

quotation

# How Did We Get Here?

- I decided to build the kind of tours I would want to do.
- Remember “who would want to do such tours?”
- 2023 – 6 tours
- 2024 – 24 tours
- 2025 – 33 tours
- 2026 – 20 booked or in the process – Into the black?
- 2026 – First serious group tour – 18 people
- 2026/7 – Expanding in Germany & Baltics.

# Business Model

# Business Model – A Quick Word!

- I maintain I am an ex-Police Officer, who is a Psychologist, trying to be a tour operator!
- It was supposed to be a hobby business!
- However, be careful what you wish for...



# Business Model - Approach

- I aim for the 5-star version – not in accommodations but history!
- It is not military history but a study in human behaviour.
- Education – “Never Forget!”
- Of course I want people to enjoy themselves, but...
- This is not why people come.
- Curiosity, to learn, to see for themselves, to experience it, heritage.

# Business Model

- I have overall knowledge of the Polish story across the country.
- Guides/ Museums have expert local knowledge.



# Business Model – Types of Tours

- Majority are bespoke – Private tours.
- Group tours with set itineraries – Finally coming to fruition.
- Semi-set tours – Suggested itineraries that can be individualized.
- Day tours, e.g., Wolf’s Lair, Auschwitz.
- Walking tours.
- Logistics for other tour operators.
- Whatever people would like.



# Business Model – My Role

- Polish registered company.
- I am the only employee.
- Build Itineraries & quotes for potential guests.
- Set up booking/ payment platforms.
- I guide sometimes, e.g., Warsaw Ghetto, area around Auschwitz.
- Provide transportation where necessary.
- General admin, emails, accounting etc.



# Business Model - Guides

- I could not do any of this without my amazing guides.
- There is a sense that we are all in this together.
- Guides are contracted to run tours – B2B arrangement.
- Guides Invoice me at the completion of services.
- Extremely knowledgeable.
- Professionals - Licensed where possible & where necessary.
- Historians, PhD's, & employees of museums.
- I try to make life as simple as possible for them & pay straight away.
- Many of them have become very good friends.
- “Transfer of trust”.

# Business Model - Logistics

Built business & personal relationships over time throughout Poland & broader Europe:

- A single travel agency in each country for hotels & transport.
- Other tour operators in other countries (e.g., UK, Germany, USA).
- Transportation companies.
- Individual hotels.
- Europcar.
- Museums & locations, e.g., Stalag Luft 3.
- External marketing company.
- External accounting firm.



# Business Model – Feedback Guests



- “I had no idea.”
- Overwhelming - There is so much information.
- “I need to lie down for a bit.”
- Perspective.
- “I’ve got to come back and see more.”
- Silence!



# Designing Attractive & Meaningful Military Heritage Tours

# Principles

I try to determine any major themes of interest:

- Military
- Occupation
- Resistance
- Holocaust
- Communism
- Cultural
- Genealogical



Capt. Witold Pilecki - "The

# Principles

- Then I try to build a story.
- The order of site visits on the tour – Westerplatte or an Old Town.
- Which direction will you travel in, e.g., guest requirements.
- Assign themes to days – Warsaw Ghetto & then KL Treblinka.
- Build in less intense days here and there – Old Town or Salt Mine.
- Sometimes logistics get in the way & you do the best you can:
  - Museum closed day.
  - Distance/ Location.
  - Guide not available.

# Principles

- I tend to spend a lot of time communicating with guests.
- To ensure they are getting exactly what they want, but also
- I want to them to be aware of:
  - The site they want to visit.
  - How that site relates to other sites they might think of visiting.
  - What else is around the site – to avoid disappointment.
  - Add extra sites – Auschwitz – Judenramp, Little Red House.
- This is not the hard sell, but to enhance the experience.
- You have knowledge they don't. They are relying on your expertise.

# Principles

- People arrive with varying knowledge.
- Don't assume knowledge.
- Do a quick check in with them on their knowledge.
- Ask them what they would like to know or learn.
- What are you hoping to get out of your tour?
- **Important:** The journey to a site, a coffee, a beer, is a wonderful way of building background knowledge. For example:
  - Warsaw Rising/ AK Museum's – What is the Armia Krakowa & why the Uprising?
  - Auschwitz – how and why did the Holocaust happen?
  - Wolf's Lair – Why was it built and why here?



# Example Itinerary

Interpreting complex or  
difficult history for different  
types of visitors

# Types of Guests

- Some people are more interested than others.
- Some people are more invested than others.
- It is more personal for some people than others.
  - Victims
  - Families
  - Perpetrators
  - People coming for perspective
  - People seeking to meet their hero
- All require sensitivity.



Wojtek – The Soldier Bear

# Sensitivity

- We make it a point to always start from the position of sensitivity.
  - To the guest.
  - To the history.
  - To the site.
- We take the history very seriously.
- If something can be helpful, I tell the guide.
- Without question, people who choose to come on my tours get it!
- Can be very overwhelming:
  - Read body language.
  - Check in with how they're going .
  - Do we need to change something.
  - Take breaks where needed.
  - Allow silence.



# Facts Based

- Trust in the facts as you/ we know them:
  - They are the North Star.
  - They will be reinforced across multiple sites & guides.
  - Some people will check.
- If we don't know, we say so and seek to find out – Been valuable.
- If we get it wrong, we are happy to be corrected.
- Rarely, but sometimes, guests think they know better.
- I try to use gentle persuasion, some of my guides use a hammer!
- Again, the facts will be the guiding light.

# Build the Story

- Again, I try to build a background story.
- This is not necessarily done well by museums in my experience.
- As much as is possible, transition the guest to the time & place, “Imagine...”
- For example, On the way to Auschwitz I will give a short history of antisemitism.
- More than happy to answer any questions they might have.
- My Polish guides share family stories or conversations they’ve had with survivors.

[WWW.POLANDATWARTOURS.COM](http://WWW.POLANDATWARTOURS.COM)



# Family Experiences

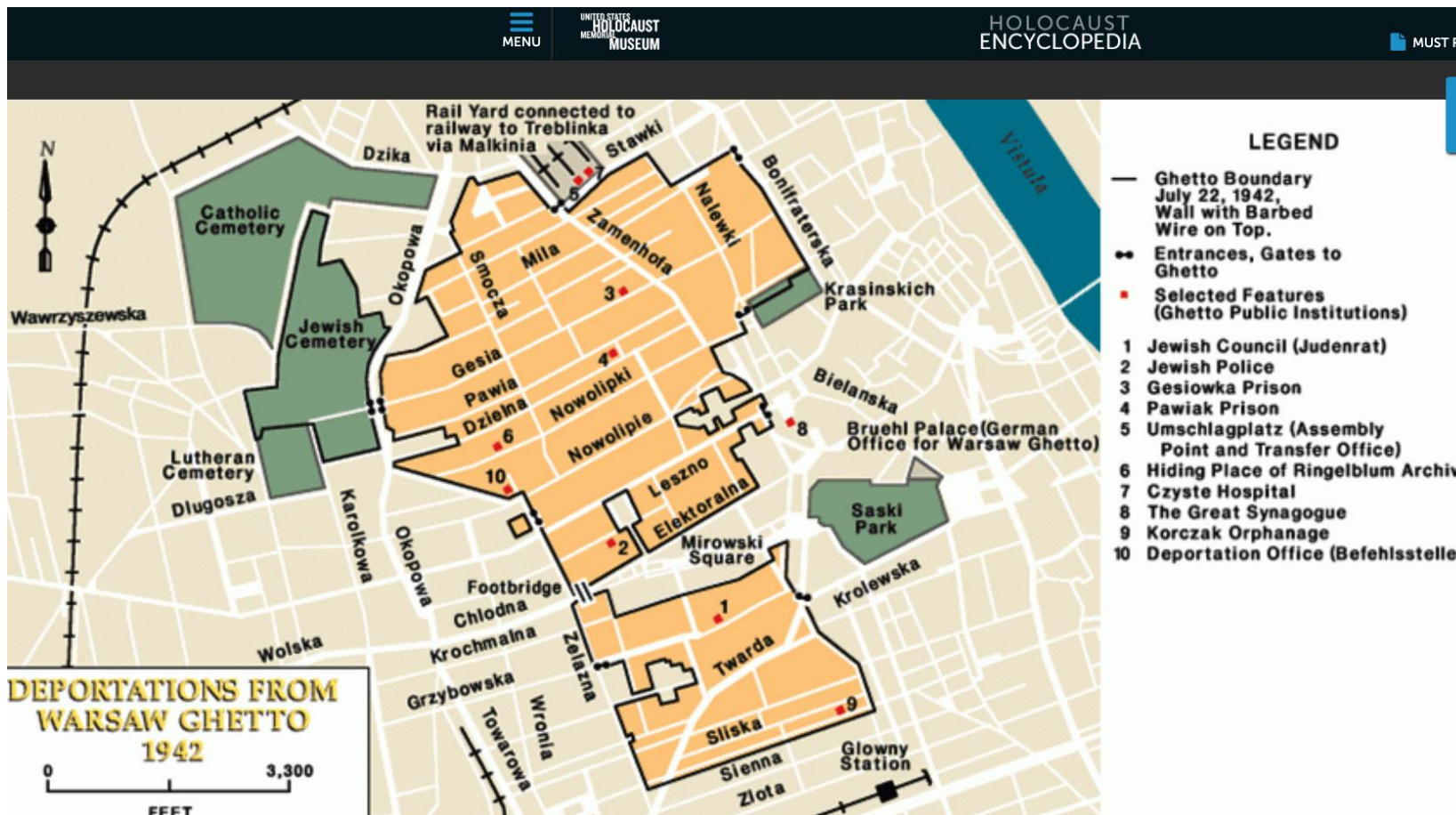
When it comes to a family experience:

- Read their research.
- Spend time on researching the tour.
- The more they see you understand, the more comfortable they will be.
- It is going to be emotional for them so more important to get it right.
- Where necessary, engage in expectation management.
- What can you surprise them with?
- Take it at their pace, check in with them.
- What can you value add? Can you teach/ show them something unexpected? What might their family member have experienced?

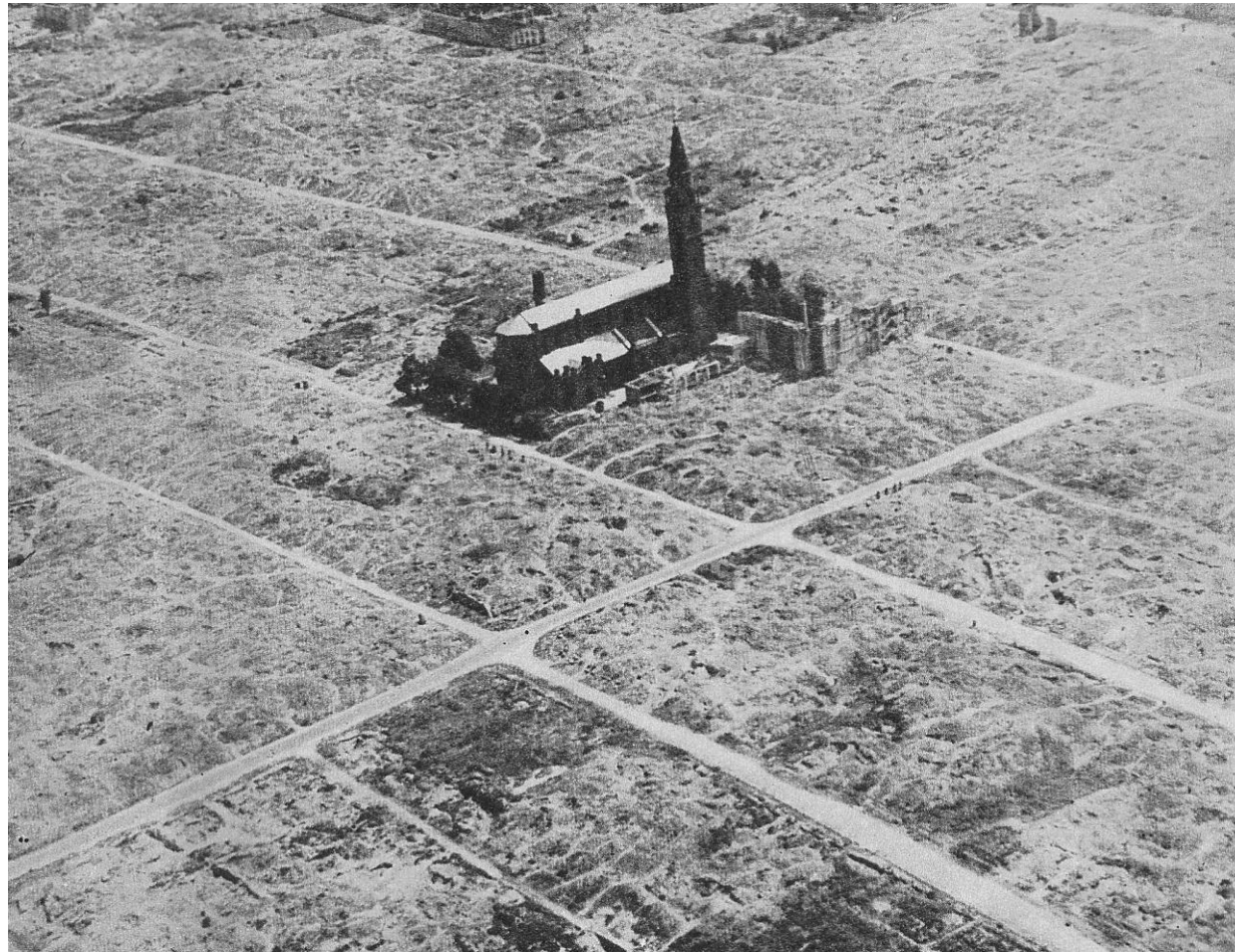
# Polish military heritage sites that successfully combine education of history & visitor engagement

The Warsaw Ghetto

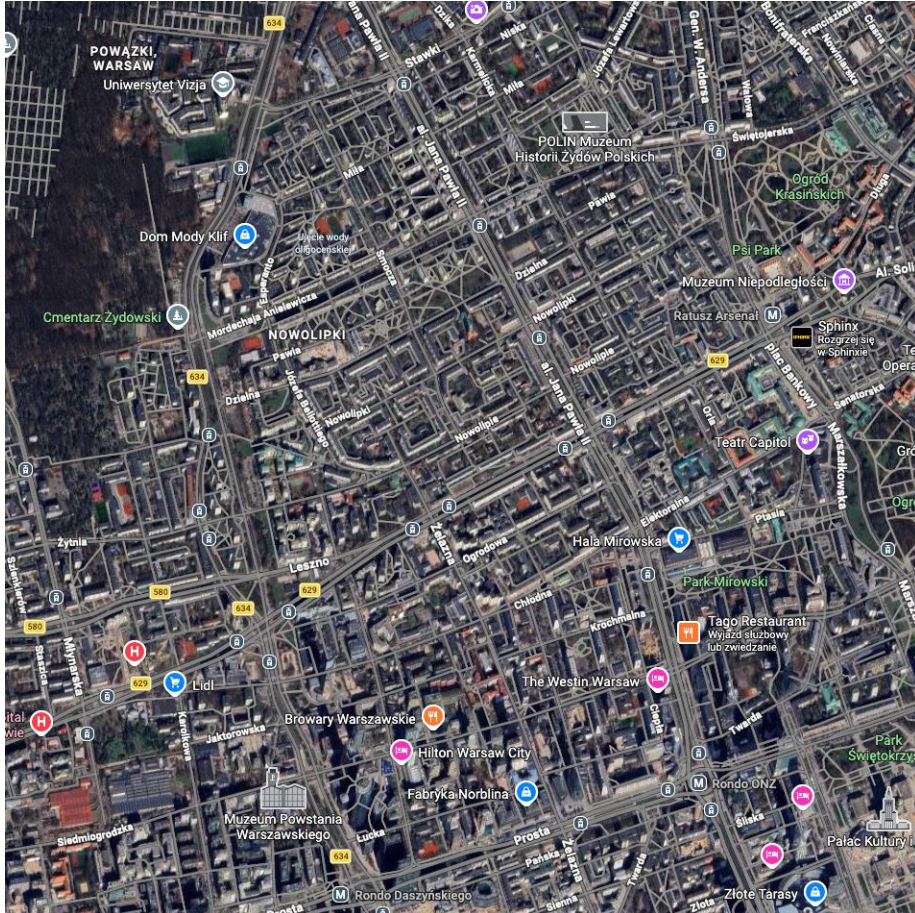
# Warsaw Ghetto 1940



# Warsaw Ghetto after Liquidation



# Warsaw Ghetto Today



# How do you tell the Story of the Ghetto?

- Largest of all Ghettos in Occupied Europe.
- Established October 1940 – Sealed 15 November 1940.
- 340 hectares (840 acres)
- Brick wall around the ghetto 3m high at its lowest.
- 18km in total.
- Up to 460,000 people = 9.2 people per room.
- 300,000 died by gas in Treblinka or bullet on the streets.
- 92,000 died from disease and starvation.
- Almost the entire ghetto was razed to the ground in 1943.
- On websites it tells people there isn't anything to see!



# What did the wall look like?



# How Buildings Were Used as Walls



# What did the Great Synagogue look like?



# How did they live?



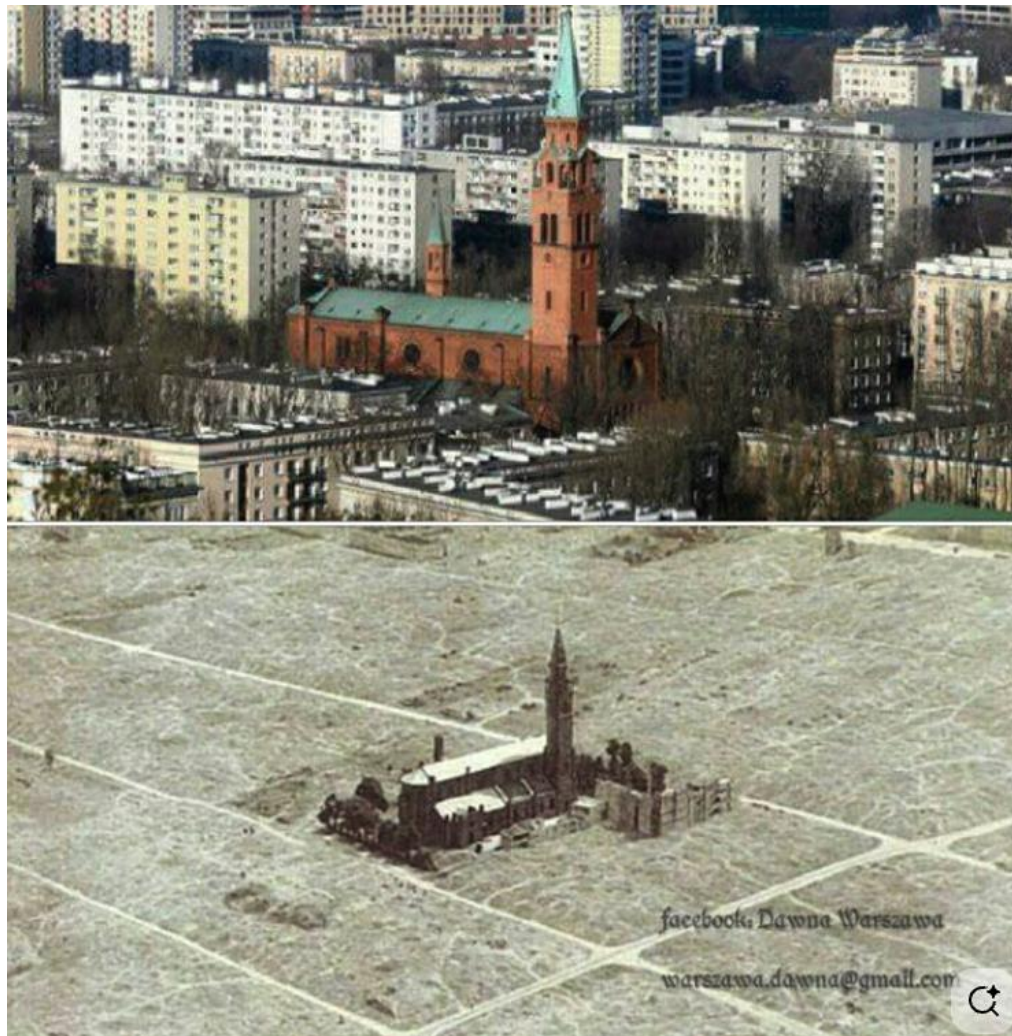
# Bridge between Small & Large Ghettos



# How do we know about the Ghetto?



# Destruction of the Ghetto



# How did the Jews live before the Ghetto?



# How were the Jews transported to Treblinka?



# 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising



# Memorial to the Ghetto Heroes



# Summary

- How did we get here – Poland At War Tours story.
- Poland At War Tours business model.
- How to design attractive & meaningful military heritage tours.
- How to interpret complex or difficult history for different types of visitors.
- Examples of Polish military heritage sites that successfully combine education of history & visitor engagement.

