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Hotel Zamek Joannitow, a Castle Hotel in Poland's Lakes Region

Posted on Wednesday, October 30th, 2013 by Katie Hammel

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Located in the Odra region – the Germany/Poland border and the land on either side of it – Poland's Lubuskie region is one of deep dark forests, rolling fields of wheat, and sparkling blue lakes. Its "Pearl" is the map-dot village of Łagów where the tower of a 14th century castle overlooks two lakes and a small collection of houses and shops.



Łagow from the castle tower

While the exterior of the castle is dominated by the tower, inside, the 14-rooms of the [Hotel Zamek Joannitow](#) are spread throughout two floors on four wings, with a large interior courtyard at their center. Additionally, the hotel offers a restaurant, café, an amphitheater, and meeting space.

I stayed just one night at the hotel, on a short stopover in the Lubuskie region as I made my way from Warsaw to Berlin. Łagów is off the beaten path – a 30 minute ride from Świebodzin, which itself is a three-hour train ride from Warsaw (or just over two hours from Berlin) – but that's why it appeals. While people have been living in the region for a thousand years, and Germans and Poles have long known it as an excellent summer retreat, it remains largely unknown to Americans. You don't need to know Polish to get by, but it helps (as does a smattering of German).

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The castle tower as seen from the lake

Upon arrival, I was offered the choice of a standard room or the "Torture Room," in which the bed's wooden frame was designed to restrain its occupant's hands and feet, and where a variety of ghastly implements hung from the walls. I declined and was much happier with my room, which was small but not cramped and opened onto the main courtyard, which come nightfall, was lit with twinkling lights – competition for the millions of stars that shone so brightly overhead in the darkness of the countryside.



The simple but comfortable bed in my room at the Hotel Zamek Joannitow

Inside my room, the tile-floored entryway (off which sat the utilitarian bathroom) led through a second door into the main room, which had a fireplace, a high ceiling and a curtained window that opened to the garden. A small round table sat between two chairs, and a 90's-era TV sat on a small shelf in the corner, but otherwise the only other furnishings were a large wooden wardrobe, two nightstands, and the queen-sized bed (which in true European style, was two twin beds pushed together). A worn rug covered the floor and a painting of entwined lovers hung above the

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bed's wooden frame. Luxurious and modern, it was not, but it was warm and comfortable. I slept with my window open that night, lulled to sleep by the silence.



My room opened onto the interior courtyard

The next morning, I climbed to the top of the tower to take in the view. The sun's rays twinkled on the lakes on either side of the castle, a lone boat bobbing in one. The leaves of the beech trees, just beginning to turn, sprinkled red, orange and yellow throughout the otherwise green landscape, while the dollhouse buildings of the town below belched woodsmoke into the cold morning air. Most people visit Łagów in the summer to take full advantage of its lakes, but I imagine it's at its most beautiful when it's ablaze with color in late October. While it was early fall when I visited and temperatures were quickly dropping, I was still able to enjoy the lakes as well (though I passed on a swim).



The road through the Lagow town gate leads to the Hotel Zamek Joannitow

Both lakes are ringed by trails used for walking, biking, and horseback riding. After a lazy outing in

a motorboat (paddleboats and kayaks are also easy to rent at several shops on the lake), I hopped on a bike to circle the smaller of the two lakes, a 10-kilometer ride through sun-dappled beech forest. The area is home to 300 species of birds, including white-tailed eagles, and the lake supports a variety of fish; it's also one of the best places to dive in Poland, with visibility of up to 50 feet below the surface.



The view of the lake in front of the hotel

While there is plenty to do in Łagów to keep visitors busy outside the castle walls, the hotel offers several entertainment options as well. On summer Saturday nights, they host dances in the open courtyard, and – among other things – can arrange for guests to enjoy magic shows, knight contests, and even an evening bonfire and beer on the castle tower.

If you go:

Room rates start at 200 Polish zloty, which is around \$65 US.

Łagów is located roughly halfway between Warsaw and Berlin, 30 minutes from the Świebodzin train station. Guests arriving by train can arrange a taxi for the ride to the Łagów. The cost is around \$45 each way.

I was a guest of the [Hotel Zamek Joannitow](#) but all opinions are my own.

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