

## POLISH RIVERS



Rivers in Poland are revered for their place in the history of the nation. Poland's rivers have been used since early times for navigation. The Vikings, for example, traveled up the Vistula and the Oder in their longships. In the Middle Ages and in early modern times, when the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was the breadbasket of Europe, the shipment of grain and other agricultural products down the Vistula toward Gdańsk and onward to other parts of Europe took on great importance.

The longest rivers are the Vistula (Polish: Wisła), 1,047 kilometres (651 mi) long; the Oder (Polish: Odra) which forms part of Poland's western border, 854 kilometres (531 mi) long; its tributary, the Warta, 808 kilometres (502 mi) long; and the Bug, a tributary of the Vistula, 772 kilometres (480 mi) long. Since the mountains which are the source for these rivers are in the south of Poland, the Vistula and the Oder flow north into the Baltic Sea, as do numerous smaller rivers in Pomerania. The Łyna and the Angrapa flow by way of the Pregolya to the Baltic, and the Czarna Hańcza flows into the Baltic through the Neman.

While the great majority of Poland's rivers drain into the Baltic Sea, Poland's Beskids are the source of some of the upper tributaries of the Orava, which flows via the Váh and the Danube to the Black Sea. The eastern Beskids are also the source of some streams that drain through the Dniester to the Black Sea. These rivers flow out of Poland to the east, then south.

The Wisła (Vistula) is so beloved that patriotic songs such as "Płynie Wisła Płynie" have been written in its honor: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B29t6xDsL9k>

Below is one of several legends focusing on the Wisła (Vistula).

**THE WARSAW MERMAID** -Once upon a time (which is when these things always take place) lived two mermaids in the Baltic Sea. These half-fish, half-women were beautiful sisters who had spent their whole existence in the sea, before apparently getting bored of the life aquatic. One day they both decided to come ashore. The first sister headed up to the Danish straits, and so she sits at the entrance to the port of Copenhagen to this very day. The other sister swam first to the port of Gdańsk, from where she decided to swim the river Vistula to its end. Fortunately for our story, the mermaid decided to rest on a sandy bank on the foot of what is today Warsaw's Old Town and, she loved it so much that she chose to stay.

Soon though, fishermen from the neighboring village began to notice that someone was letting the fish out of their nets. Annoyed, they decided to capture the culprit and punish him. They didn't expect to find the mermaid, however, and as soon as they heard her beautiful voice, they vowed never to harm her (another reminder that men can be so easily swayed by a cute Polish chick). Soon, the mermaid would fill every evening with her gorgeous songs to the merriment of the villagers.

One day, a rich merchant was walking by the Vistula and spotted the mermaid. He had the bright idea, as merchants do, to capture her and show her off at a fair, making himself a fat profit in the process. He tricked her and threw her in a wooden shed, but her cries for help were so loud that soon a young (and undoubtedly handsome) fisherman's son heard her, and with the help of friends set her free. The mermaid, grateful for their aid, promised to defend them and their village- which would later grow into the beloved city of Warsaw.



One of many statues around Warsaw of the Mermaid, protector of the City