

TY Poland Trip 2020 by Mary Walsh (Rang Leahy)

Packing is always the most difficult thing to do before going somewhere. I either always pack too little or too much, and in this case, I packed too little. "Bring lots of layers!" We were reminded again and again leading up to the trip abroad. Yet silly me decided to ignore that and only bring two or three jumpers, not knowing I'd want to be wearing two or three jumpers at one time!

Tuesday morning rolled around and people, including myself, used this morning off as an opportunity to have a lie-in before jetting off to a cold country later that evening. Conveniently, our school had the day off anyways due to the teacher's strike! Leaving packing until the last minute always sounds like a good idea until you've to leave the house in an hour and you have nothing packed. Luckily enough I gathered everything I needed and made it down to the community centre for one o'clock, where the bus was going to collect us and bring us to the airport.

The bus was delayed but we still arrived at the airport early, with loads of time to get something to eat and have a look around the shops. We left Dublin at half 6. Due to the time difference we didn't arrive to Kraków Airport until about 10. We were all starving and exhausted. Our tour guide brought us to this restaurant near our hotel that served Jewish food. There weren't many students that enjoyed the meal, as it was food we wouldn't normally eat in Ireland, but everyone gave the meal a try! We stumbled up to our assigned rooms, exhausted from travelling. I can't speak for anyone else, but I was out cold the second my head hit my pillow.

We were woken suddenly at half seven to the sound of Mr Boyle's wake up calls on our doors for us to get up for breakfast. A few moments later Mr Boyle returned with our phones they had taken the night before. We were told the night before that breakfast was on from half seven to nine, so we had plenty of time to get ready and go down and eat before facing the day.

Nine o'clock had rolled around and I was wrapped up from head to toe, ready for the tour of the city. We were split into two groups as there was so many of us. We started the morning by learning about the myth of the dragon,

which of course wasn't true, but it was still interesting to hear the tale. We could go for lunch ourselves, though we were warned to not eat too much as we would be getting something to eat later on again.

After getting something to eat, our group made our way to Schindler's Factory and Museum. Here we learned about the history of Oskar Schindler, his factory, and how he managed to save so many Jewish people from dying. There are a few spots in the museum which are recognisable to those who watched *Schindler's List*, as they were used in the movie, for example Schindler's office table and the stairs leading up to his office.

While the other group went to Schindler's Museum after us, we went for another bite to eat. Once they were finished, we all met back up and went to a big shopping centre. One of the good things about the currency in Poland was that everything was cheaper. Therefore, lots of people, including myself took this opportunity to buy presents for their friends and family. We returned to the hotel for dinner, which surprisingly was nice, before we left again to go bowling. It was a good way to end our first day and everyone went to bed exhausted, again surprisingly!

Thursday was the eeriest day of them all. We travelled to Auschwitz, both the concentration camp and the death camp. They were only about five or ten minutes away from each other. For the tour of the concentration camp we were given a headset, this prevented our tour guide and other tour guides from shouting in such a sad and historical place. We were shown displays of all the glasses, luggage, clothes, hair and more from those who were imprisoned in the camp. Seeing all their belongings sent shivers down my spine, reminding me how real and upsetting the Holocaust was.

Auschwitz-Birkenau was the death camp. It was a lot more of an open space. Seeing where the Jews spent their final days before being sent to the gas chambers was horrifying. In my opinion, even though it is very sad to see, I fell everyone should visit this site once in their life, if they are able to. The bus home was very quiet because of what we saw that day.

To lift our spirits, after dinner, the teachers had planned for us to go to a jump park, where we jumped on trampolines and into ball pits and what not for an hour. Exhausted from the day's events, we returned to the hotel and packed our bags, so that we would be able to embark from the hotel at half 8 to visit one more place, before returning home.

Our last leg of the tour was the saltmines. Everything in the mine was made of salt, including the Cathedral located 135 metres underground. The gift shop there was the last chance for people to get presents for someone at home. We arrived at the airport with plenty of time before we had to catch our flight home. The airport was very small with not many places to sit down and eat, so some of us just sat around and waited until we went to our gate.

Our flight wasn't until half three. The time difference worked in our favour and we landed in Dublin Airport at half five. We arrived back to Kingscourt for half seven, where our parents picked us up. The trip was a good bonding experience with my classmates, but it was also very educational, especially about World War 2 and the Holocaust.

I learned that I bonded well with my roommates, the people in my group, the rest of the year group and the teachers that went on this trip to Poland. I learned that our year group can be positive and cheerful when we want to be, but we are also able to take things seriously, and not joke about serious situations, such as at Auschwitz or anytime we learned about the Holocaust during the walking tours.

For any 3rd years reading this I would 100% say jump on board if you get the opportunity to go away with your year group!! (The teachers aren't too bad either as travel companions!!! 😊)