Saturday, April 21st...

Day's visit to Warsaw continues ... we just finished walking the Royal Route ... next is the Stare Miasto region and Castle Square.

Old Town Market Square in Warsaw ... The Old Town Market Square is by far the most popular place for resting and walking for both Varsovians and tourists. The old and charming architecture, quaint cafes and restaurants, small and enticing shops create a unique atmosphere that is not found in other cities in Europe. When the weather is warm, the square becomes filled with cafe tables and artists performing outside. Until the end of 18th century the Old town market square was the most important place in Warsaw. Regular fairs and festivities were held here. During World War II the market square turned into rubbles - but after many years of reconstruction it was restored to its original beauty.

The Old town is the best place for walks. Most of this area is closed to traffic and it a paradise for pedestrians. Most interesting walks are in the vicinity of the market square and Royal Castle square. Here you will find many narrow, cobbled streets with quaint antique shops, cafes, and beautiful old houses. Piwna Street takes you across much of the Old Town and passes through multiple tourist attractions. Almost every building you will see in the Old Town will be old with unique architecture. Old Town is a blend of different styles - from gothic to baroque.

This is what we came to see. Although rebuilt after World War II the reconstruction followed the historical precedent. After leaving St. Anne's Church ... and crossing the bridge path over Solidarnosc Street we enter the Plac Zamkowy (Castle Place)

The Royal Castle ... the royal palace and official residence of the Polish monarchs; a magnificent example of baroque style - it was built in the 14th century. The personal offices of the king, as well as the administrative offices of the Royal Court of Poland were located there until the Partitions of Poland. Between 1926 and World War II the palace was the seat of the Polish president.

In 1569 King Zygmunt III Waza moved his residence to the Royal Castle as Warsaw became the capital of Poland. Between 1598 and 1619 the king had the Royal Castle restyled into a polygon by Italian architects. In 18th century King Augustus III turned the East wing into Baroque style while King Stanislaw Poniatowski added the Royal library. The Royal castle served as both a residence for the kings as well as hosted Sejm sessions (Polish parliament).
History ... Partially destroyed by German bombers during the Invasion of Poland, it was heavily damaged by German bombardment and artillery fire during the Warsaw Uprising. The remnants were blown up by German engineers in September 1944 and were not removed until 1971. Reconstructions were started in the early 1970s and in July 1974 the clock on the tower began working again, on the exact same time at which it was stopped by the Luftwaffe bombardment. Nowadays it is used as a branch of the National Museum and for ceremonial purposes. During the Siege of Warsaw in 1939 many of the works of art from the castle were transferred to several basements around Warsaw and hidden from German authorities. They survived the war and were put on exhibition in their original place.

Interior ... the interior consists of many different rooms, all painstakingly restored with as much original exhibits as possible after the destruction of the Second World War.

The tour begins with the Council Chamber ... Poland’s first cabinet sat in session here. The King himself sat in the chair.

The Great Assembly Hall (the Ballroom) ... created in 1781; used for state ceremonies.

The Throne Room ... recreated in 1995. Back of throne is covered in regularly spaced eagles embroidered in silver with gold crowns. All original eagles plundered by Nazis ... one rediscovered in 1991 and used as model.

The King’s Bedchamber ... when he left the Castle in 1795, King Stanislaus Augustus took his bed with him. The bed shown is a reconstruction based on period pieces.

The Canaletto Room ... owing its name to a great Venetian painter, B. Bellotto, known as Canaletto. Paintings depict Warsaw and Wilanow.

One of many side galleries ...

The Knight’s Hall ... a.k.a. the Polish Hall of Fame – honoring Poles who served the country; a Polish Pantheon. Created in 1786.

In Lanckoronski Gallery ...
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The Green Room ... part of the King’s apartment. Served as sitting room and used for meetings with ministers and high-ranking courtiers.

The Yellow Room ... used as a small dining room. In 1771-1782 it was here that the famous Thursday Repasts were held to which the King invited poets, writers, and scholars.

The Marble Room ... created during the reign of Ladislaus IV (1640-1642). It was dedicated to the monarchs of the Jagellonian Dynasty. In 1769, Stanislaus Augustus dedicated the room to the memory of all Polish monarchs.

Frankly ... we were overwhelmed by the splendor of the castle ... the reconstruction after the war’s destruction ... and the fact that we were allowed to take photos inside. Perhaps because it’s a national treasure and a major tourist attraction such a luxury is allowable.

We leave the Royal Castle and briefly explore the architectural wonders of the square ... the Sigismundus Column ... and the sheer number of visitors milling around.

But our next destination awaits ... Rynek of Stare Miasto. We locate Swietojanska Street and head straight to Rynek ...
Syrena (siren mermaid), symbol of Warsaw. Legend has it that King Kazimierz got lost while hunting in area that is now Warsaw. By luck, a mermaid appeared and guided the hapless prince to safety by firing burning arrows.

Burgher house facades ...

Barbakan Warszawski (The Warsaw Barbican) ... a semicircular fortified outpost and one of few remaining relics of the complex network of historic fortifications that once encircled Warsaw. Located between the Old and New Towns, it is a major tourist attraction.

Two (not lost) passersby ...

Leaving Stare Miasto we head towards the direction of Nowe Miasto and the Barbican. (We do not visit Nowe Miasto directly). Turning west on Dluga Street we approach this historic fortification.

History ... The barbican was erected in 1548 in place of an older gate to protect Nowomiejska Street. The barbican had the form of a three-level semicircular bastion manned by fusiliers. It was 14 meters wide and 15 meters high from the bottom of the moat, which surrounded the city walls, and extended 30 meters from the external walls. Almost immediately after its inception, the 4-tower barbican became an anachronism serving virtually no practical purpose. This was largely a result of the rapid advancement in artillery power. It was used in the defense of the city only once, during the Swedish invasion of Poland, on 30 June 1656, when it had to be recaptured by the Polish army of Polish king Jan Kazimierz from the Swedes.

In the 18th century, the barbican was partially dismantled as its defensive value was negligible, and the city benefited more from a larger gate which facilitated movement of people and goods in and out of the city. In the 19th century, its remains were incorporated into newly-built apartment buildings (kamienica). During the interwar period, in 1937–1938, Jan Zachwatowicz reconstructed part of the walls and the western part of the bridge, demolishing one of the newer buildings in the reconstruction process. However, a lack of funds delayed the barbican’s planned complete reconstruction, and the 1939 invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany put the plans on hold.

During World War II, particularly the Siege of Warsaw (1939) and the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, the barbican was largely destroyed, as were most of the Old Town’s buildings. It was rebuilt after the war, during 1952–1954, on the basis of 17th century etchings, as the new government decided it would be cheaper to rebuild the barbican and the nearby city walls as a tourist attraction than to rebuild the kamienica apartments. In its reconstruction, bricks were used from historic buildings demolished in the cities of Nysa and Wrocław; most of the barbican was rebuilt save for two exterior gates and the oldest tower on the side of the Old Town.

The day was drawing to a close ... our feet were tiring and we elected to head back to the Metropol Hotel. Not wanting to retrace our route we made a circular loop ... anticipating more points of interest on the way back.
Recollections of Poland ... 2007
April 15th – April 28th and May 9th – May 13th
Part 4 ... Page 5 of 7

We pass through the restored Barbican gate ... come across a wedding party at a nearby church and a bizarre encounter involving the limo driver. Seems that a bunch of "hooligans" clothed in medieval dress were haranguing the driver and seeking a 'bribe' ... allowing him to pass unencumbered. The driver was having none of this and the menacing situation ended without escalation.

We proceeded down Dluga Street noting nothing of any importance until we reached the end of the street at Miodowa Street ... a World War II memorial.

Wystawa Powstanie Warszawskie ... 1944 Warsaw Uprising Memorial (description of uprising from a plaque at the memorial.) The Warsaw uprising against German occupation broke out on August 1, 1944. It was started by 23 thousand poorly armed soldiers of the Home Army of the Warsaw district under the command of General Antoni Chruscel, code named "Monter." Other underground units and Warsaw citizens joined the insurgents. Asserting control, civilian and military structures under the command of the Polish government in London began functioning openly, organizing administration, medical, services and rescue squads. A massive inflow of volunteers swelled insurgent ranks to 50 thousand troops. What began as an enthusiastic and spontaneous outbreak of fighting became a 63-day heroic struggle for liberation of the city by the home army's own forces before the Red Army, whose units had already reached the suburb of the Praga district, entered the capital.

To quell the insurrection, German troop reinforcements soon increased the 16 thousand-man local garrison to 50 thousand army, SS and police units, including units notorious for their cruelty and atrocities. The supremacy of the German military equipment was overwhelming. Air Force, Panzers and artillery were used against the insurgents' rifles, pistols, grenades and petrol bombs. High military technology and brutality battled hope and unswerving will to fight the enemy.

Fighting bravely, the insurgents captured the centre of the city with the Old Town and the Vistula embankment, as well as several other districts of Warsaw, but they failed to seize the bridges and the Okecie Airport. They succeeded in capturing some German arms and ammunition and some groups of insurgents went to the woods near Warsaw to continue their battle from there. But contrary to all expectations, the Red Army remained in their positions on the outskirts of Warsaw and did not assist the insurgents.

After 3 days of fighting, German forces seized initiative. Launching massive attacks by tanks and from the air, they started destroying insurgents' strongholds. They also began a program of mass extermination aimed at Warsaw's civilian population. Soon, the city was burning and the strength of the insurgent-held areas was weaker and weaker.

On September 14, the 1st Polish army, which formed part of the Red Army, entered the Praga district of Eastern Warsaw, its two battalions joined the insurgents and fought by their side in the Czerniakow area, but attempts to seize bridgeheads in the Powisle and Zoliborz districts failed.

Lacking food and ammunition and weakening by the Red Army's failure to cooperate, the Commander-in-Chief of the Home Army, General "Bor" Tadeusz Komorowski, surrendered on October 2, 1944. The insurgents became prisoners of war and the population of Warsaw was deported, some to labor and concentration camps. The deserted city was looted, destroyed and burned, and the Old Town, with its beautiful architecture was razed.

More than 40 thousand Polish insurgents and about 180 thousand civilians were killed or wounded. A large number of allied pilots flying air-drop missions were also killed. On the German side, an estimated 25 thousand troops were killed, wounded or missing in action.

The Warsaw uprising monument was unveiled on Krasinski Square, a site of fierce fighting, on August 1, 1989. It was designed by Prof. Wincenty Kucma and architect Jacek Budyn; erected with donated funds. It consists of two groups of sculptures ...
... and the other an “Exodus,” and withdrawal by canals.

We continued down Miodowa Street noting many governmental building along the route. Being a late Saturday ... everything as huttered. We pass a bridge over Solidarnosc Street (left)

We finally had to give up ... too much walking. In order to get back to the hotel it was either a 30 minute trek or the tram.

... we took the tram.

Near the hotel we found a non-descript dining room and ordered our supper ... with Tyskie beer, woda (water) and wino (wine):

Kotlet scharowany, ziemniaki, salata (cutlet, potatoes, salad) ...

... pierogis z grzybami i kapusta (pierogis with musgrooms and cabbage)
The walk back to the hotel was slow and leisurely ... for the night lights of Warsaw were bewitching ... 

Tomorrow ... more of Warsaw.

Two parks and palaces ... 

**Lazienki Park** ... one of the most beautiful parts of Warsaw - one of the most favorite places for walks for Varsovians and tourists. This romantic, landscaped park includes the Palace on the Water, together with various other palaces, pavilions, an amphitheater and two orangeries. The highlight of Lazienki Park is the **Palace on the Water**. It is one of the finest examples of Neo-Classical architecture in Poland.

**Wilanów** ... a borough of the city of Warsaw. It is home to the historic Wilanów Palace, the "**Polish Versailles**", and a second home to many Polish kings.