



**WELCOME
CENTER**



WELCOME TO IBB!

**A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS
AND RESEARCHERS**



**INSTITUTE
OF BIOCHEMISTRY
AND BIOPHYSICS
POLISH ACADEMY
OF SCIENCES**



**WELCOME
CENTER**



**POLISH NATIONAL AGENCY
FOR ACADEMIC EXCHANGE**

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INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS
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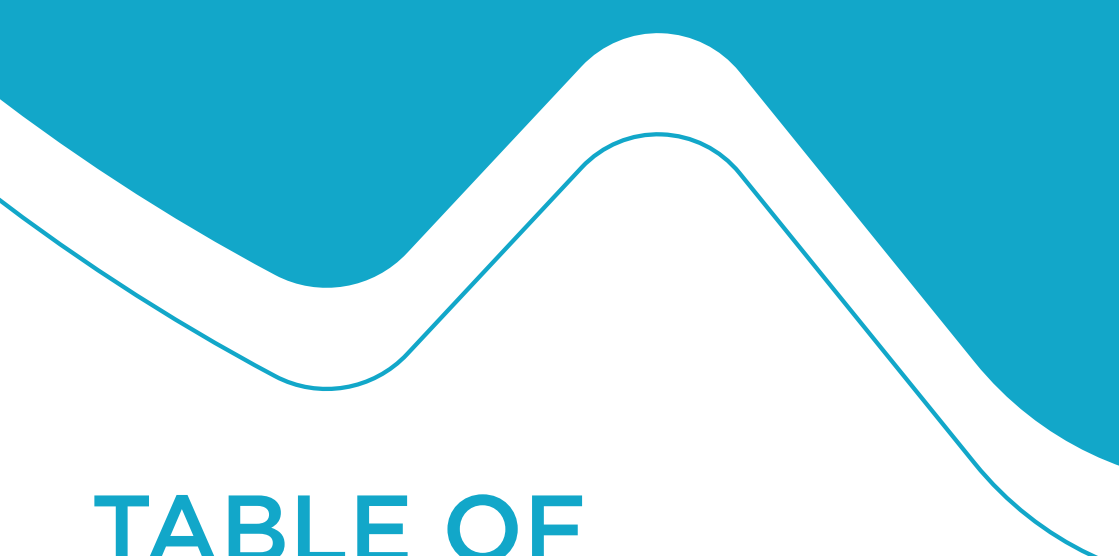
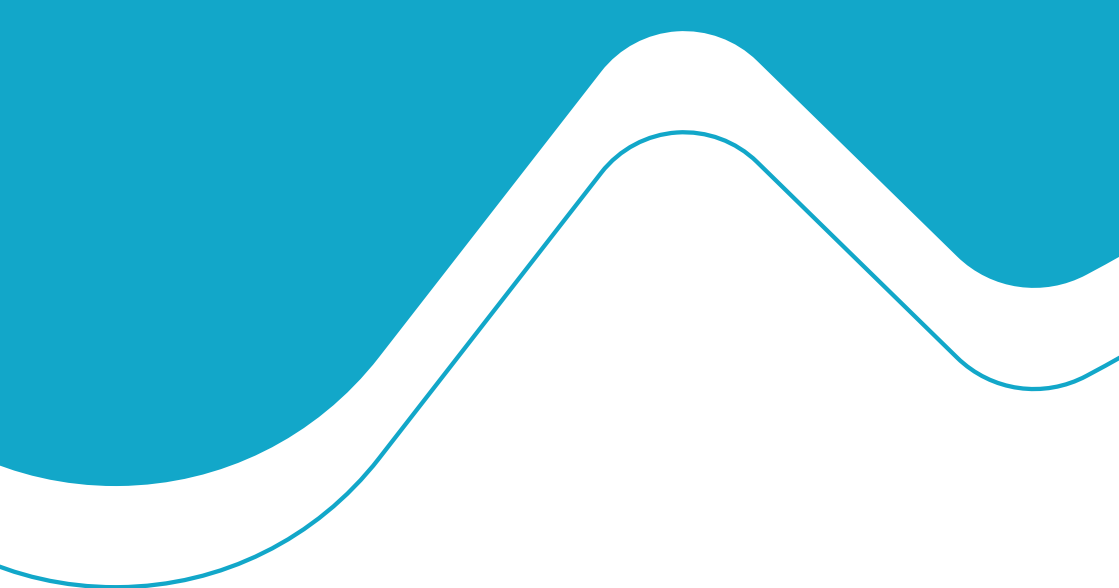


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Welcome to IBB!

– a practical guide for international students and researchers

Tips & information to help you settle in Warsaw and in Poland

Moving to a new country can be both exciting and challenging - and it often comes with a lot of questions. This guide was made to help you navigate your first weeks in Warsaw and in Poland and make your transition smoother.

- How do I legalize my stay?
- What should I keep in mind when renting a flat?
- How does the healthcare system work?
- How to handle daily tasks - and how do I get things done in Warsaw?

On the next pages, you'll find answers to these and many other practical questions. We've gathered useful tips, cultural insights and information based on the experiences of other international guests at IBB.

This is just a starting point. If something's unclear or you need a hand - don't worry, you don't need to figure it all out alone. The Welcome Center and the IBB community are here to support you along the way.

We're happy to have you on board. We hope your time at IBB will be inspiring, productive - and full of good moments, both in and beyond the lab.
Welcome to IBB!



**WELCOME
CENTER**

Welcome Center

The Welcome Center is the main information and support point for international members of the IBB community. Got a question? Need some help? Or maybe just want to chat and share your experience? Whether you've just arrived or have already spent some time here, you're always welcome to reach out or drop by.

What We Do

- **Onboarding and Practical Guidance**

We support you in navigating your first steps at IBB – from submitting HR documents and completing internal formalities to managing everyday matters. We'll walk you through the process, share tips from other researchers, and point you to reliable resources, so you feel well-prepared and confident during your stay.

- **Relocation and Legalisation Support**

We guide you through key official procedures in Poland – including applying for a residence permit (TRC), registering your address, getting a PESEL number, setting up a Trusted Profile (Profil Zaufany) or enrolment to public health insurance.

- **Intercultural Support**

We organise intercultural workshops where you can learn more about Polish culture, reflect on cultural differences, and share your experiences with others. It's a great opportunity to connect, gain new perspectives and feel part of the IBB community.

- **Events and Integration**

We coordinate social events, short trips and cultural activities – often co-created with our international guests. Intercultural Easter, the Indian Festival of Lights, the Persian New Year, city sightseeing, cooking workshops, or even singing evenings – these are just a few examples of our past initiatives.

- **Internationalisation of IBB**

Beyond personal support, we're also working on improving infrastructure and communication at IBB. We focus on practical solutions – such as

bilingual signage, better access to information in English, orientation tools for newcomers, targeted staff trainings and international promotion of the Institute. Our goal is to make IBB a more inclusive, open and international place to work and study.

Have an idea, want to organise an event, or share something from your culture? Let us know – we'll be happy to support your initiative and help bring it to life at IBB!

Getting started at IBB and in Poland

Starting your journey at IBB – and in Poland – comes with a few essential formalities. These first steps are important to help you settle in, get access to the infrastructure, and begin your work or studies smoothly. Below, you'll find a checklist of what to expect in your first days and weeks.

First steps at IBB

✓ HR and Administrative Formalities

- Submit **necessary documents** to the HR Department (e.g. employment contract, diplomas, certificates)
- Sign **internal documents and consent forms** provided by HR and the Doctoral School Office (for PhD students)
- Get familiar with **internal regulations and procedures**

✓ OSH Training and Medical Check-up

- Complete **online health and safety training**
- Participate in **in-lab training** with your supervisor
- Undergo an **initial medical check-up** (occupational medicine)



✓ Access and Infrastructure

- Receive your **magnetic access card** for IBB facilities
- Get access to your **IBB e-mail account and intranet**
- Get familiar with **internal IT platforms and systems**

✓ IBB Orientation

- Get to know your **lab, research group or team**
- Locate **key places at IBB**: labs and research facilities, lecture rooms, library, and administration offices
- Familiarise yourself with the **doctoral/research plan**
- Join the **WhatsApp group** for international researchers at IBB

✓ Benefits – check your options at IBB

- Sign up for a **free Polish language course**
- Get a **Multisport card** for discounted access to gyms and sports facilities across Warsaw and Poland

- Use **free medical services** at IBB
- Apply for a **private insurance** plan available through IBB's group policy
- Use the **gym** available on site

First steps in Warsaw/Poland

✓ Documents and Legal Stay

- Get your **PESEL number** (Polish ID number)
- Register your **temporary address** at the City Hall
- Apply for a **Temporary Residence Card (TRC)** – if you're a non-EU citizen
- **Register your stay** – if you're from the EU/EEA/Switzerland
- Set up your **Trusted Profile (Profil Zaufany)** – to access e-services and sign official documents online

✓ Banking, Insurance and Access

- Open a **Polish bank account**
- Get a **Polish SIM card**
- If you're a non-EU PhD student, sign a **voluntary agreement with NFZ** and register for public health insurance
- Register on the **PUE ZUS portal** – to access your health insurance details and manage contributions online (for PhD students)

✓ Everyday Mobility and Digital Tools

- Get a **public transportation card (Karta Miejska)** and buy monthly tickets with discounts
- Download useful apps: **Jakdojade**, **mObywatel**, and others (see further chapters of our guide)



Formalities and Legal Stay

Whether you're here for a few months or a few years, it's important to ensure your stay is legal and properly registered. In this section, you'll find essential information about the PESEL number, registering your address and stay, setting up a Trusted Profile, and applying for a residence permit if needed. Sounds complicated? Don't worry – the Welcome Center will guide you through the process step by step!

PESEL Number

PESEL is the Polish national identification number. The acronym stands for “**Powszechny Elektroniczny System Ewidencji Ludności**” – which translates as the Universal Electronic System for Registration of the Population. It is automatically assigned to every Polish citizen at birth and is used for a wide range of official and administrative purposes.

As a foreigner residing in Poland, you can also get a PESEL number. It's not mandatory, but **we highly recommend obtaining one**, as it simplifies many practical matters – like opening a bank account, accessing healthcare or using online government services.

Once assigned, your PESEL becomes your personal identifier in most public systems, including:

- healthcare (NFZ clinics, hospitals),
- insurance (ZUS),
- tax offices,
- banks,
- municipal and immigration offices.



HOW TO GET A PESEL NUMBER?

You can apply in person at any City Hall (Urząd Miasta)
– usually in the district where you live. The one nearest to IBB is:

Urząd Dzielnicy Ochota

You will need:

- ✓ completed application form (available at the office or online)
- ✓ valid passport or national ID

The number is usually issued on the spot, along with a printed confirmation. Keep this confirmation – some institutions (like ZUS or banks) may ask for it later.



Good to know:

- ✓ Your PESEL is assigned for life – it never changes.
- ✓ The application is free of charge.

Temporary Address Registration

If you're staying in Poland for a longer period, you should register your address (zameldowanie na pobyt czasowy) at your local City Hall (Urząd Miasta).

You will need:

- ✓ **Passport**
- ✓ **Rental agreement (your name must be on it)**
- ✓ **Residence card or visa (if you're a non-EU citizen)**

Trusted Profile (Profil Zaufany)

The **Trusted Profile** (*Profil Zaufany*) is a secure digital identity that lets you access many public services online – without visiting an office. It works through the **Electronic Platform of Public Administration Services (ePUAP)** and allows you to:

- Submit official forms and applications online
- Book appointments at government offices
- Sign documents electronically
- Access your medical data and insurance status

Anyone with a **PESEL number** – including foreign residents – can create a Trusted Profile free of charge. It's widely accepted by Polish institutions such as **NFZ, ZUS,** and **Tax Offices.**

Creating a Trusted Profile is highly recommended, especially if you're staying in Poland for more than a few months. It makes handling everyday formalities much easier.



HOW TO GET IT:

Apply online via the **ePUAP platform**, then confirm your identity in person at any ZUS, Tax Office, or selected banks.



Once you have your Trusted Profile, you can also use the mObywatel mobile app – a secure digital wallet for your ID, medical info, and more.

Registering of Stay – EU/EEA/Swiss Citizens

If you are a citizen of the **European Union, Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein, or Switzerland**, and plan to stay in Poland for **longer than 3 months**, you are legally required to **register your stay** at the **Voivodeship Office (Mazowiecki Urząd Wojewódzki)**.

Although it's a formal obligation, the process is **free of charge** and relatively simple.

What you will need:

- ✓ **Passport or national ID**
- ✓ **Document confirming the purpose of your stay (e.g. employment contract, PhD admission documents)**
- ✓ **Proof of valid health insurance**
- ✓ **Confirmation of sufficient financial resources (e.g. bank statement or scholarship confirmation)**



The exact list of documents depends on your status (researcher, PhD student, employee, etc.). Full details of requirements and procedure are available here: **en.migrant.wsc.mazowieckie.pl**

Temporary Residence Card (TRC) – Non-EU Citizens

If you're a **non-EU citizen** and planning to stay in Poland beyond the validity of your visa (or current residence permit), you must apply for a **Temporary Residence Card (TRC – Karta Pobytu)**.

You can apply any time during your legal stay – but no later than on the last day of your visa or permit. Due to long waiting time, we **strongly recommend** starting the process **soon after your arrival**.

There are different types of TRCs, depending on the purpose of your stay (e.g. doctoral studies, employment, research). The Welcome Center will help you choose the right option and guide you through the necessary steps.



Note: Once you submit your TRC application, your stay in Poland remains legal – even if your visa expires while you're waiting for the decision.



Where to apply:

Mazowiecki Urząd Wojewódzki w Warszawie – Wydział Spraw Cudzoziemców
(Mazovian Voivodeship Office – Foreigners' Department)



How to apply for a Temporary Residence Card (TRC):

1. **Create an account** on the state platforms – **INPOL** and **MOS** (both are available in English).
2. **Submit your electronic application** for the relevant type of TRC.
3. **Collect all required documents** – some must be prepared by you, others will be provided by IBB.
4. **Pay the application fee** – the amount depends on the type of TRC.
5. **Book an appointment** at the Mazovian Voivodeship Office.

or, if booking isn't possible:



6. **Send your documents by post** or deliver them to the registry office. You'll receive a notification when to come for your appointment.
7. **Visit the Voivodeship Office** to submit the your documents and have your fingerprints taken.
8. **Wait for the official decision** and the invitation to collect your card.
9. **Pay for the residence card (after receiving approval).**
10. **Collect your TRC in person at the Voivodeship Office.**
11. **Remember to check the expiry date and plan ahead when it's time to renew it!**

In Case of Rejection

Negative decisions are rare when the application is complete. If it does happen, you will be notified by post. You have **14 days to appeal** or **submit a new application**. The Welcome Center will assist you with the appeal process.



More information is available at:
<https://en.migrant.wsc.mazowieckie.pl/>

Healthcare

In Poland, you can use either the **public healthcare system** (free of charge with insurance) and **private medical services** (paid directly or via private insurance).

Public Healthcare (NFZ)

The public system is managed by the National Health Fund (NFZ). To use it, you must be enrolled and registered in the ZUS (Social Insurance Institution) system.

- ✓ **Employees at IBB are enrolled in NFZ automatically from the first day of their employment contract. The HR department takes care of the paperwork and monthly contributions on your behalf.**
- ✓ **PhD students from EU/EEA countries can access public healthcare using their European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). Make sure it is valid for the entire duration of your stay.**
- ✓ **PhD students from outside the EU should enroll in NFZ by signing a voluntary agreement and paying a monthly contribution (reimbursed by IBB). You'll need to register ZUS and declare your payments every month.**

The NFZ system covers:

- general medical care (e.g. appointments with GPs),
- visits to specialists and diagnostic tests,
- hospital services,
- ambulance transport in emergencies
- prescription medications – most are paid, only some are partially reimbursed

Some waiting times may be long – especially for non-urgent specialist visits.

Your Family Doctor (GP)

Once you're insured in the NFZ system, you should choose and register with a **General Practitioner (GP)** (in Poland family doctor - lekarz rodzinny) at a **primary care clinic** (przychodnia) of your choice. This doctor will be your **main point of contact** for everyday health concerns such as fever, infections or prescriptions, and will issue **referrals** to specialists, diagnostic tests, or hospital care when needed.

You can register:

- **in person** – at the reception desk of the clinic
- **online** – via your Patient Internet Account (Internetowe Konto Pacjenta – IKP)
→ to use the online option, you'll need a **Trusted Profile (Profil Zaufany)**

It's best to choose a clinic close to where you live. While not all clinics offer English-language support, many do – so make sure to ask if the GP or staff speak English before registering.

Emergencies

In urgent medical situations, you can always get help – also outside regular clinic hours. You can:

- **Call 112** – the European emergency number (available 24/7, with multilingual operators)
- **Go to the nearest hospital emergency department (SOR)** – for serious or sudden health issues
- **Visit night and holiday care point (nocna i świąteczna pomoc lekarska)** – for urgent but non-life-threatening problems when regular clinics are closed (evenings, weekends, holidays)

When you register with a family doctor, you'll be informed which night care clinic is assigned to your clinic. It's usually located nearby.

If you're at IBB, the nearest night and holiday care point is just 5 minutes away:

Szpital Banacha – Entrance D, ground floor
ul. Banacha 1a, Warsaw

Bring your **ID and PESEL** if you have one. If not, your **passport** will be also accepted.

Pharmacies (Apteki)

Pharmacies are easy to find in Warsaw – just look for the **green cross** symbol. Many pharmacists speak basic English, and if needed, you can always show a note from your doctor or use a translation app.

- **Most everyday medications** – such as painkillers, cold remedies or allergy medicines – are available **without a prescription**.
- **Antibiotics and specialised treatments** require a **prescription form a doctor**, usually issued in **digital form** and linked to your **PESEL number**.
- If you have public insurance, **some medications are partially reimbursed by NFZ** – the price reduction is automatically applied at the pharmacy.

Some pharmacies are open 24/7 – just search **“apteka całodobowa”** in Google Maps to find the nearest one.



If your local pharmacy is closed (e.g. late at night or during a public holiday), look for a notice posted on the door or window. It will indicate the nearest pharmacy on duty (apteka dyżurna) where you can get help outside standard hours.

Private Healthcare

Some people in Poland choose to **combine public and private healthcare** – using the public system for basic services, and turning to private providers for **faster access** to specialists, diagnostics, or more flexible appointment times when needed.

There are two main options:

- You can **book a single private appointment** with a doctor of your choice. Prices vary depending on the clinic and type of service.



- You can also **sign up for a private subscription plan** (monthly or annual), which gives access to a network of clinics and services such as **shorter waiting times, diagnostics, preventive check-ups, or online consultations.**

Popular private healthcare providers with large medical networks include **Luxmed, Medcover, Enel-Med, CMP,** and **PZU Zdrowie.** Many of them offer English-speaking doctors and online booking.

If you're interested, IBB also offers access to a group private medical plan. You'll receive more information about this during your onboarding. Participation is optional and depends on your individual needs and preferences.

On-Site Healthcare at IBB

IBB also provides basic free medical consultations for staff and PhD students. You can book appointments with internist/cardiologist and the dentist.

Additionally, you can access up to five free psychotherapy sessions per year, available in person or online (via phone or video call). Consultations are offered in English, Polish, or Ukrainian, depending on your preference.

Life in Poland

Time Zone

Poland is located in the Central European Time Zone (CET). This means:

- UTC+1 from late October to late March (standard time)
- UTC+2 from late March to late October (summer time / Daylight Saving Time)

Daylight Saving Time begins on the last Sunday of March, when clocks move one hour forward, and ends on the last Sunday of October, when clocks move one hour back. This system is used in most European countries.

You'll notice a big difference in daylight hours:

- In winter, the sun may set as early as 3:30 PM
- In summer, it can stay light until after 9:00 PM

To check the current time difference between Poland and your home country, you can use online time zone converters or apps like Time.is or World Clock.

Weather

Poland has a temperate climate with four distinct seasons:

Spring (March–May)

Typical temperatures: 5–18°C

- Starts cold – March often still feels like winter
- Weather can change quickly – from chilly to pleasantly warm
- Days get noticeably longer
- Good to have: rain jacket, layers

Tip: Spring is one of the most beautiful seasons in Poland – take every chance to spend time outdoors. Blooming parks, botanical gardens and green spaces all around Warsaw are at their best during this time.

Summer (June–August)

Typical temperatures: 18–30°C

- Warm or hot, especially in July
- Occasional thunderstorms
- Long days – daylight until 9 PM
- Good to have: light clothes, sunglasses, sunscreen

Tip: Summer in Poland brings the warmest and most pleasant weather of the year – it's a perfect time to plan a holiday in nature. Many people take this opportunity to relax by lakes, in the mountains, or at the seaside. You might consider doing the same!

Autumn (September–November)

Typical temperatures: 8–18°C (early), 0–10°C (late)

- Starts mild and often sunny, especially in September and early October
- Gradually becomes colder and wetter, with cloudy skies and falling leaves
- Shorter days and a noticeable shift in daylight
- Good to have: coat, umbrella, warmer layers

Tip: Autumn is one of the most spectacular times to visit the mountains or explore the city's green spaces. During the so-called Golden Polish Autumn (Złota Polska Jesień), forests and parks are filled with colourful leaves and soft golden light, making it a perfect time for walks, hiking and a short break from the city.

Winter (December–February)

Typical temperatures: -5 to +5°C (can drop below -10°C during cold spells)

- Cold and damp, sometimes snowy
- January is usually the coldest month
- Short days – sunset around 3:30 PM
- Good to have: warm coat, hat, gloves, winter boots

Tip: Winter in Warsaw isn't just about cold weather – it's also the season of cosy cafés, snow-covered parks, outdoor ice rinks and Christmas markets. Don't miss the chance to enjoy the festive lights and winter atmosphere across the city!

Vitamin D – Because of the limited sunlight for many months of the year, it is recommended to supplement vitamin D all year round. It's a simple way to support your energy, immune system, and overall well-being.

Public Holidays

Poland celebrates a number of **national and religious holidays**, when people typically have the day off. **Public institutions, shops, and services are closed**, and daily life slows down noticeably.

Date	Name	Notes
1 January	New Year's Day (Nowy Rok)	Public holiday
6 January	Epiphany (Trzech Króli)	Religious holiday
March/April	Easter Sunday & Monday (Wielkanoc)	Dates vary each day
1 May	Labour Day (Święto Pracy)	Often part of a long weekend
3 May	Constitution Day (Święto Konstytucji 3 Maja)	Historic national day
June	Corpus Christi (Boże Ciało)	Date vary, always on Thursday
15 August	Assumption of Mary (Wniebowzięcie NMP)	Religious holiday
1 November	All Saints' Day (Wszystkich Świętych)	People visit cemeteries
11 November	Independence Day (Święto Niepodległości)	Historic national day
25–26 December	Christmas (Boże Narodzenie)	Two days of national holiday



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Plan ahead: When a holiday falls close to a weekend, people often take an extra day off to create a “long weekend” (długi weekend). That’s something you can do too – it’s a great chance to rest, travel, or simply enjoy a break from everyday life.

Extra tip: During long weekends, many locals leave Warsaw – the city becomes quieter and more peaceful. It’s the perfect time to enjoy a slow walk, visit popular places without crowds, or just relax in a calm atmosphere.

Good to know:

- On public holidays, public transport runs on a Sunday/holiday schedule
- Most supermarkets and shopping malls are closed
- Some small convenience stores, petrol stations and selected pharmacies remain open
- It’s always a good idea to check opening hours and service availability in advance

Emergency Services and Alerts

If you ever find yourself in an emergency – whether it's a medical situation, fire, accident or other danger – the most important number to remember is:

112 – General Emergency Number (EU-wide)

This number connects you to a **multilingual dispatcher**, who will ask what happened and send the appropriate service: ambulance, police or fire brigade. You can use this number from any phone, and **you don't need to speak Polish** to call it.

Main emergency numbers used in Poland:

Service	Number
General emergency number (EU-wide)	112
Ambulance	999
Fire Brigade	998
Police	997
Municipal Guard (Straż Miejska)	986
Mountain Rescue (GOPR/TOPR)	985

Alert RCB – Government Warning Messages

If you use a **Polish SIM card**, you may occasionally receive **Alert RCB messages** on your phone. These are official **safety alerts** sent by the **Government Security Centre (RCB)**.

They are used to warn the public about **extreme weather conditions** such as storms, strong wind or heatwaves, as well as **serious accidents** like gas leaks, road closures or large fires. In some cases, they may also alert you to **public safety threats**.

Messages are usually in **Polish**, but they are **short, clear, and easy to understand**. Receiving them means your phone is correctly connected to the national alert system. **You don't need to reply or take any action** – unless the message specifically instructs you to do so.

Practical arrangements

Mobile Phones

Getting a Polish SIM card is one of the first things you should do after arrival. It will allow you to communicate easily, receive official messages (e.g. from the bank or Voivodeship Office), and access online services.

Most people start with a **prepaid SIM card** (na kartę). It's a simple, flexible and affordable option that works well for everyday use without any long-term commitment.

How to get started

You can buy a **prepaid SIM card** (na kartę) at official mobile operator stores (e.g. Orange, Play, Plus, T-Mobile) or in selected convenience stores and newsagents (like Żabka or Relay).

To activate the SIM card, you'll need to **register it using your ID**, such as a **passport** or **residence card**. Registration is done on the spot. Once registered, your number is active and ready to use.

Topping up and using your SIM

You can top up your SIM easily – in shops, online, or through mobile apps. Most prepaid plans include:

- **unlimited calls and texts** within Poland,
- **mobile data packages** (10–30 GB for around 30–40 PLN/month),
- optional **international call** or **roaming** packages.

Tip: Ask in the store about the offer that best fits your needs – packages and prices may vary depending on the operator.



Note: If you're planning to stay longer and want a larger data plan or a phone deal, you can consider a mobile contract (abonament). This typically requires a residence permit (Karta Pobytu) and a longer commitment (usually 12 or 24 months).

SWITCHING PROVIDERS LATER? No problem – you can keep your number when changing to another operator.

Bank account

To receive your **salary or scholarship at IBB PAN** – and to manage everyday expenses like rent, phone top-ups, or online payments – you'll need a **Polish bank account**. The process is straightforward, but there are a few things worth knowing before you go.

Nearby banks

There are several banks with branches near IBB, including: **ING, Santander, Millennium, Alior Bank, and PKO Bank Polski**. All of them offer services for foreigners, but **procedures may vary** depending on the bank and specific branch.

What to keep in mind when opening an account

- **Fees and conditions** – Opening an account is usually free, but some banks charge monthly maintenance fees unless you meet simple conditions – like using your card regularly or receiving a minimum deposit. Also, check whether **ATM withdrawals** are free, and if so, from which machines – fees may vary depending on the bank and card type.
- **Online banking & language support** – Digital banking is widely used in Poland, and most banks offer **mobile apps** for everyday use – from checking your balance and making payments, to topping up your phone or managing your card. Not all banks offer online banking or mobile apps in English. Make sure to check this before opening your account.



- **Location** – It's a good idea to choose a **bank with a branch or ATM near your home or workplace**. There are several options close IBB, including: ING, Santander, Millennium, Alior, and PKO Bank Polski. All of them provide services for foreigners, but specific procedures may vary depending on the provider.
- **Polish phone number** – Most banks require a **Polish mobile number** to activate online banking and confirm operations such as transfers or login. That's why it's best to get your SIM card first.

What documents do you need?

Requirements **differ between banks**, so make sure to check the exact list before your visit. You will usually need:

- Passport or national ID
- Proof of address in Poland (e.g. hotel confirmation or rental agreement)
- Visa or residence permit (if applicable)
- Employment or scholarship confirmation
- PESEL number

Once your account is ready, don't forget to inform the HR department – it's needed for salary or scholarship transfers.

Currency and Payments

In Poland, the official currency is the **Polish złoty**, abbreviated as **PLN** and sometimes written as **zł**. One złoty is divided into 100 smaller units called **grosze (gr)** – similar to cents or pennies.

You'll most often come across:

- **Banknotes:** 10, 20, 50, 100, 200 and 500 zł
- **Coins:** 1, 2, 5 zł and 1, 2, 5, 10, 20, 50 gr

Exchanging Money

You can exchange foreign currency in several ways:

- **Kantors (currency exchange offices)** – usually offer the best rates, especially in city centres, near stations or malls. They typically don't charge extra fees and display current rates clearly.
Avoid exchanging money at the airport – rates there are usually much worse.
- **Banks** – may offer less favourable exchange rates and additional service fees.
- **ATMs** – widely available and accept most international cards (Visa, Mastercard, etc.).
When withdrawing cash, always **choose PLN**, not your home currency – this helps avoid hidden conversion fees from your bank or card provider.

Payment habits in Poland:

Poland is very digital when it comes to payments. In many places, you won't need cash at all.

You can pay by:

- **Credit and debit cards** – widely accepted in stores, restaurants, public institutions
- **Mobile phone** – apps like Google Pay, Apple Pay, and the Polish system **BLIK** are widely used
- **Cash** – still useful in small shops, local markets, or outside the city – it's a good idea to always carry at least a small amount with you

Most daily transactions – shopping, transport, rent payments, topping up your phone – can be done **quickly and securely by card or online**. It's efficient, user-friendly, and widely trusted in Poland.

WHAT IS BLIK?

BLIK is a very convenient, safe, and popular mobile payment system used widely in Poland.

It allows you to:

- pay in shops, cafés, and online stores
- withdraw cash from ATMs
- send money instantly to another person

You don't need a physical card – just generate a 6-digit code in your banking app and use it to confirm a payment or withdrawal.

You can also use BLIK to send money directly to someone's bank account using their mobile phone number (if both of you have BLIK activated). Transfers are instant and available 24/7 – perfect for splitting bills or paying someone back on the spot.

To use BLIK, you need:

- a Polish bank account
- your bank's mobile app
- and a quick one-time activation of BLIK in the app

Most Polish banks support BLIK – just check in your app or ask at the bank branch.

Life in Warsaw

Accommodation

Finding a flat in Warsaw can take some time and flexibility – especially at the beginning. Offers vary in terms of price, standard, location, and what's included in the rent. Many ads are posted in Polish and can be quite brief, so the process may feel confusing at first.

To make it easier, here are a few key things to keep in mind when looking for a place to stay.

Types of rental offers

In Poland, apartments are usually described by the number of rooms (pokoje). The most common options include:

- **Room (pokój)** – a private bedroom in a shared flat, with shared kitchen and bathroom.
- **Studio / One-room flat (kawalerka)** – small apartment with a kitchenette or separate kitchen.
- **Apartment (2 or more rooms)** – may include bedrooms and a living room. Be careful: in Polish listings, **“2 pokoje”** may refer either to **two separate bedrooms**, or to a **bedroom plus a living room** (counted as the second room).

Where to search for flats or rooms

- **Online platforms:** OLX.pl, Otodom.pl, Gumtree.pl, Gratka.pl – use filters (e.g. district: Ochota, price range, number of rooms) and Google Translate if needed.
- **Student housing portals:** nestpick.com, erasmusplay.com – good for international students.
- **Facebook groups:** Search “Warsaw apartments”, “mieszkania Warszawa”, or “flats for rent Warsaw”. Many posts include English.
- **IBB community:** Ask colleagues or post your request via email: ibb-social-bounces@ibb.waw.pl or in the **WhatsApp group for foreigners at IBB.**

What to Check When Renting

- **What's included in the rent?** – Check carefully what the **actual cost** is and which items are included (see below).
- **Deposit** – Most landlords ask for a **security deposit**, usually equal to one month's rent. Ask **when and how it will be returned** at the end of the rental period.
- **Condition of the flat** – Inspect the **furniture and equipment** carefully during the visit. Take **photos of any damage** – this can help avoid disputes later. The list of equipment is often listed in contractor annex – make sure it fits the reality.
- **Noise and surroundings** – Ask about **neighbours, nearby construction or street noise** – these things are rarely mentioned in ads but can affect your comfort.
- **Private landlord or agency?** – Check who you're renting from – **directly from the owner** or **through an agency**.
Agencies usually charge a **commission fee**, often equal to **one month's rent**, paid once when you sign the contract. This cost comes on top of the deposit and first month's rent.
- **Written contract** – Always sign a written agreement – it protects you legally and is **required to register your stay or apply for a residence permit**. If you're sharing the flat, make sure **each tenant is listed by name**.
- **Language of the contract** – It's best to sign a bilingual contract – with both Polish and English included in one document. The English version will help you fully understand the terms, while the Polish version is required when applying for a Temporary Residence Card (TRC).
If you only have a contract in English, a sworn translation will be needed later.
- **Terms and notice period** – Check how long the agreement is valid, what's included in the rent, and **how much notice** is required if you want to leave before the end date.

What's included in the rent?

Rental listings in Poland often show only the base rent, but additional monthly costs are usually mentioned further down in the description. Read the full listing carefully to avoid surprises.



CZYN SZ NAJMU = main rent to the flat owner (usually what you see in the headline price)

CZYN SZ ADMINISTRACYJNY = administration fee (water, heating, waste, etc.) – sometimes included in the headline price, but in many ads it appears only in the detailed description.

MEDIA = utilities such as electricity, gas, internet – almost always paid separately and not included in the headline price

Tip: To understand the real monthly cost, read the full description, not just the title.

Example: Ad says: 2000 zł

But in the description:

→ + 600 zł admin fee

→ + 300 zł utilities

= 2900 zł total monthly cost

Najem Okazjonalny (Occasional Lease)

This is a **specific type of rental agreement** that's becoming increasingly popular among private landlords in Poland. It offers them **extra legal protection** and requires a few **additional steps** from the tenant. In everyday life, it doesn't change much for you – but it's good to understand what it means in case your landlord suggests it.

As a tenant, you will need to:

- **Sign a notarised declaration** confirming that you agree to leave the flat if officially requested
- **Indicate another address in Poland** where you could relocate if needed
→ This is just a **legal formality** – you're not expected to actually move there.

Sounds challenging? No worries – with a bit of time, effort and patience you'll definitely find something that works for you. You might consider connecting with other international members of the IBB community and renting a flat together – it can be both budget-friendly and a great social option. Just keep in mind that the process may take a couple of weeks, so try not to leave it to the last minute!

Everyday Services

Grocery Shopping & Local Food

You'll find plenty of options for buying food in Warsaw – from budget supermarkets to local markets and small convenience stores.

Supermarkets and stores

The most common supermarket chains are **Biedronka**, **Lidl**, **Carrefour**, **Auchan**, **Kaufland** and **E.Leclerc**. They offer a variety of products at different price levels.

Small convenience stores like **Żabka**, **Carrefour Express**, or **Freshmarket** are open late and often on Sundays, but tend to be a bit more expensive.

Tip: Many supermarket chains offer discounts, loyalty points or personalised deals if you use their mobile app (e.g. Żappka, Lidl Plus, Biedronka app, Carrefour app).

Local Markets (Targi) and Food Cooperatives

In addition to supermarkets, Warsaw has many **open-air and indoor markets** where you can buy fresh fruit and vegetables, bread, honey, cheese, herbs, flowers, and handmade products directly from **local farmers and vendors**.

Popular options include:

- **Bazarek przy Banacha** – in Ochota, close to IBB
- **Hala Mirowska** – traditional indoor stalls in Śródmieście (central Warsaw)
- **Bazar Różyckiego** – a mix of old and new in the Praga district

Most vendors accept **cash**, though card payments are becoming more common.

You can also explore **food cooperatives** (*kooperatywy spożywcze*) – community-based initiatives that promote **ethical shopping** and **direct access to local producers**. Prices are often **higher than in supermarkets**, but reflect the true cost of sustainable, small-scale production and fair trade.

One well-established example is **Kooperatywa Dobrze**, which runs two small, member-supported grocery stores in **Śródmieście** and **Mokotów**, offering fresh and organic food with a focus on sustainability and local sourcing.

EXTRA TIP: TOO GOOD TO GO

If you want to save money and reduce food waste, try the app Too Good To Go. It lets you order surplus food from restaurants, bakeries and cafés at reduced prices, then pick it up at the end of the day. A great way to discover local spots – and help good food not go to waste!

Sending and Receiving Mail & Parcels

Poczta Polska – Poczta Polska is Poland's official postal service, with branches across the country. It handles:

- Standard mail (letters, documents)
- Domestic and international parcels
- Registered deliveries (with confirmation of receipt)
- Some basic financial services (e.g. paying bills or sending money)

It's often used to send or receive official letters – for example from immigration or government offices.

What is an awizo?

If you're not home when the postman tries to deliver registered letter or package, they may leave a **delivery notice** called an **awizo** in your mailbox.

It's usually a small printed slip (sometimes with handwritten info) that tells you:

- where and when to pick up the item,
- and how long it will be kept at the post office.

Don't ignore these notices!

An awizo can easily be mistaken for a flyer or advertisement – but it might be an important letter from a public office, for example about your residence permit (TRC), visa, or bank. Always check everything in your mailbox carefully.

You usually have **7 to 14 days** to collect the post before it's returned to the sender.

Parcel Lockers and Delivery Alternatives

In addition to the post office, many people in Poland use **private delivery services** – especially for online shopping.

One of the most popular systems is **InPost** – self-service parcel lockers (*paczkomaty*) available 24/7.

- Lockers are located near shops, metro stations, and residential buildings
- You get a text or app notification with a **PIN or QR code**
- Just enter the code at the locker to **pick up or send a parcel** – no queues
- Used by most online stores and platforms

Other Delivery Options

- **Courier services** (e.g. DPD, DHL, GLS, FedEx) – home delivery
- **Pickup points in shops** – e.g. Żabka, Inmedio, kiosks
- **Poczta Polska parcel lockers** (Pocztex Automat) – less common than InPost

Second-Hand and Smart Online Shopping

Looking to save money, reduce waste, or simply avoid overpaying for things you don't need brand new? There are many ways to shop smart – from second-hand platforms to free local giveaways.

- **OLX** – second-hand items like books, furniture, bikes, electronics, or home goods.
- **Allegro** – one of the most popular online shopping platforms in Poland, with a wide range of new and second-hand products (electronics, books, clothing), often with good deals
- **Vinted** – great for buying and selling second-hand clothes or shoes
- **Facebook groups** – check out “Uwaga śmieciarka jedzie – Warszawa” (Watch out, the garbage truck is coming - Warsaw) – a local group where people give away items they no longer need – especially when moving or cleaning out their apartments. Everything offered is free.

Waste Sorting

Polish waste segregation includes **five main categories**, each with a designated color:

- **Plastics & Metals** – yellow bin
- **Glass** – green bin
- **Paper** – blue bin



- **Bio (organic waste)** – brown bin
- **Mixed waste** – black or grey bin

Sorting areas are usually shared within apartment buildings and are clearly color-coded. In some places, you may need a key or access card to enter.



Scan the QR code to view the city's official sorting guide or download a visual leaflet.

Where to Dispose of Old Electronics?

- Drop off **used batteries** or **small electronics** in special bins at larger stores (e.g. Media Markt, Leroy Merlin, some supermarkets)
- Take **larger items** to a **PSZOK** (Punkt Selektywnej Zbiórki Odpadów Komunalnych – City Recycling Point)
- **Never throw e-waste in the general trash** – it's harmful to the environment and not allowed.

Getting Around – Local Transport in Warsaw

Public Transport

Warsaw has a well-organised and affordable public transport system. It's fully integrated – one ticket gives you access to buses, trams, the metro, SKM city trains, and even some regional trains. Public transport runs from early morning until late at night, with selected lines – including night buses – running throughout the night.

Tip: Download the "JakDojade" app (available in English). It's the easiest way to plan your journey and buy mobile tickets.

Tickets and Passes

You can buy tickets:

- from machines at metro stations or on some buses/trams,
- in kiosks or convenience stores,
- via mobile apps like **JakDojade** or **SkyCash**.

Tickets are time-based (e.g. 20, 75, 90 minutes) and valid for transfers during that time.

If you use transport often, consider:

- **Monthly pass (bilet miesięczny)** – unlimited rides within your zone (Zone 1 covers most of Warsaw)
- **Three-month pass** – slightly cheaper per month

To use a long-term pass, you'll need a **Warsaw City Card (Karta Miejska)** – a plastic travel card where your ticket is stored.



You can get it at any **ZTM Passenger Service Point** (e.g. at metro stations) or order it **online**. You can **deactivate your pass** if you leave Warsaw and **reactivate it later**.

Important: Ticket inspectors appear randomly. Always **validate your paper ticket** or **activate it in the app** before you start your trip. Fines are high for travelling without a valid ticket.

Cycling

Cycling is a popular and convenient way to move around the city. New bike lanes are added regularly, making it easier and safer to get around by bike.

Warsaw also has a public bike-sharing system called **Veturilo**, available from **spring to autumn**. It's a convenient way to get around the city.

To use Veturilo, just **register at veturilo.waw.pl** and pay a small one-time activation fee. The **first 20 minutes of every ride are free**, and you can pick up and return bikes at any Veturilo station across the city.

Looking for a Bike?

If you're thinking of getting your own bike and search for an affordable, sustainable option, check out the **Open Bicycle Workshop** (otwartywarsztatrowerowy.pl) in Warsaw. They renovate and sell second-hand bikes, and also offer a free space with shared tools where you can repair or clean your bike yourself. It's a great way to get a bike, fix one up, and support a local community initiative.

Taxis and Ride Apps

You'll find both traditional taxis and ride apps in Warsaw.

Traditional taxis are reliable, but make sure it's a registered company – look for a visible logo and price list in the window.

Ride apps like **Uber**, **Bolt**, or **FreeNow** are often cheaper and more convenient. You can pay by card and track the car in real-time.

Safety and Comfort

Warsaw is generally a **safe, clean, and well-organised city**. You can get around comfortably and explore different parts of the city – from cultural and historical sites to green areas and less touristy neighbourhoods.

Ochota district, where IBB PAN is located, is **quiet and residential**, with good public transport connections, plenty of green spaces, and all the essential services nearby.

As in any big city, it's important to take basic precautions – especially in crowded areas, near nightlife spots, or when moving around late at night. While using public transport, keep an eye on your belongings and avoid leaving bags unattended.

Also, be sure to follow traffic rules, even as a pedestrian. Crossing on a red light – even if no cars are coming – may result in a fine. These rules are taken seriously and help keep everyone safe.

If you ever feel lost or unsure – just ask. People may be a little shy if they're not confident in English, but they're usually willing to help.

Discover the city

Warsaw has a lot to offer – whether you're into culture, history, food, nature, or simply enjoy wandering around, there's always something to discover. This is our subjective and incomplete list of ideas – just a few things we think are worth trying, visiting, or experiencing. **See what calls out to you – and enjoy exploring!**

Discover the classics and some hidden gems

Take in the view from the top of the **Palace of Culture and Science**, the city's most iconic building. Follow the **Royal Route**, lined with historic churches, the Presidential Palace, and the University of Warsaw and stroll through the **Old Town**, carefully rebuilt after World War II. Visit the Warsaw Uprising Museum to understand a key part of the city's story, and stop by the Maria Skłodowska-Curie Museum to learn more about one of Poland's most famous scientists.

Cross the river to discover **Praga**, one of the few districts that kept its original architecture. Walk the backstreets, look for murals and courtyard shrines, and enjoy local cafés and alternative art spaces.

Curious about why wooden Finnish houses ended up in Warsaw? Visit the Jazdów neighbourhood – a peaceful, green enclave in the city centre. Originally built as temporary housing after WWII, it's now a unique space for community projects and cultural events.

Relax in nature and discover Warsaw's green side

Warsaw is one of the greenest capitals in Europe – full of beautiful parks, several city forests, and even wild riverside areas. In **Łazienki Park**, you can meet peacocks and squirrels, or relax in the **Botanical Garden**. **Pole Mokotowskie** is one of the locals' favourite picnic spots, and it's just a 10-minute walk from IBB!

Don't miss the **rooftop garden at the Warsaw University Library** – a unique green hideaway with views over the river. On the other side of the **Vistula**, explore the wilder riverbanks or rent a **kayak** to see the city from the water (available in summer months).

Need a quick break from the city? **Head to one of Warsaw's city forests**, like **Las Kabacki** or **Las Bielański** – both perfect for a peaceful walk, jog, or short hike, and easily accessible by public transport. For a full day in nature, visit Kampinos National Park – the second largest in Poland.

Take part in Warsaw's cultural life

Warsaw offers a wide range of cultural events and art spaces, many of them accessible even without speaking much Polish.

Discover contemporary art at **Zachęta National Gallery** or the **Museum of Modern Art**. In May, join the **Night of Museums (Noc Muzeów)** – when dozens of museums and cultural institutions stay open late with free entry (a great experience if you don't mind the crowds!). Enjoy **live jazz in the Old Town** during summer weekends or explore international cinema at the **Warsaw Film Festival** (October) or **Millennium Docs Against Gravity** (May).

For something more local, check out your nearest **Dom Kultury (Cultural Centre)** – like **OKO** in Ochota – which often hosts workshops, exhibitions, and neighbourhood events.

Get the local experience

Spend time by the **Vistula River** – in spring and summer, the boulevards come alive with bars, cafés, food trucks, and open-air events. Watch the sunset from a **sandy riverside beach** or one of the footbridges.

Try a classic **milk bar (bar mleczny)** for traditional Polish food at low prices – like pierogi or tomato soup. Bar Bambino or Bar Prasowy can good places to start.

On November 1st (All Saints' Day), visit **Powązki Cemetery** – a historic site that



becomes beautifully lit with thousands of candles, offering a moving glimpse into Polish culture.

In winter, enjoy seasonal traditions: skate at one of the city's public **ice rinks** – like those near the Old Town or Palace of Culture – and enjoy the **festive light displays** in the city centre. Don't miss the **Royal Garden of Light at Wilanów Palace**, with its magical illuminated installations.

Want to discover more?

These websites are great sources of tips, inspiration, and up-to-date information about what's happening in the city:

- **go2warsaw.pl/en** – official Warsaw tourism portal: attractions, events, tips
- **inyourpocket.com/warsaw**– practical guide with maps, reviews, and recommendations
- **spottedbylocals.com/warsaw** – insider tips and less obvious places, shared by residents
- **waw4free.pl**– free cultural events happening around the city (in Polish, but easy to browse)

Cultural Adaptation & Integration

A New Country, a New Culture – Finding Your Way in Poland

Moving to a new country is a big step – even if it's something you've carefully planned. At first, many things may feel unfamiliar: the language, social habits, daily routines, or even how people interact. It's completely normal to feel a bit disoriented or overwhelmed in the beginning.

This initial confusion is often part of a broader process of adaptation that many people experience when living in a different cultural environment. It is called **culture shock**, and it is natural response of your mind and as they adjust to a new way of life.

What does it feel like?

You might feel:

- unusually tired, sad, or overstimulated,
- drained by the new information and expectations,
- homesick or nostalgic for familiar routines and people,
- unsure how to behave, express yourself, or interpret local cues.

The good news? **It's temporary**, and there are clear stages most people move through as they adapt.

Adaptation Phases

1. The Honeymoon Phase

Everything feels exciting and new. You're curious, enthusiastic, and eager to explore. This is often a very positive time.

2. The Frustration Phase

You may start noticing things that feel frustrating or strange. Misunderstandings in communication, differences in how people handle time or social interactions – these may start to bother you. Homesickness can also appear here.

3. The Adjustment Phase

You begin to understand how things work. You find strategies to manage everyday situations and build confidence in unfamiliar situation.

4. The Acceptance Phase

You feel more grounded. You may still miss your country sometimes, but you're comfortable in your new environment and know how to navigate it.

These stages don't always happen in a straight line – you might move back and forth between them, and that's completely normal.

Tips for Smoother Integration

A few things that might help:

- **Acknowledge how you feel.** It's normal to have ups and downs. Recognising your emotions – whether it's excitement, frustration, or homesickness – is the first step to feeling better.
- **Connect with others.** Stay in touch with friends and family back home, and try to build new connections here – it can help you feel more at home in your new environment. Join integration meetings or intercultural workshops at IBB, take part in local events, or use small everyday moments to connect – even a quick chat can make a difference.
- **Stay open and curious.** Even small things – like trying local food, learning a few Polish words, or visiting a neighbourhood market – can help you feel more connected and open doors to new experiences.
- **Give yourself time.** Everyone adapts at their own pace – and that's perfectly okay. There's no single “right” timeline, so take it step by step, without putting pressure on yourself to feel settled or “fully adjusted” right away.
- **Reach out.** If you feel overwhelmed, don't keep it to yourself. There's always someone you can talk to – a friend, a colleague from your lab, someone from the Welcome Center, the PhD student council, or simply someone you trust and feel comfortable with. You don't have to go through it alone.

- **Take care of your mental well-being** If stress, anxiety, or low mood persist or start to affect your daily life, don't ignore it. If needed, seek professional support. IBB offers **free psychological consultations** (in English, Polish, and Ukrainian). You can also contact a doctor or mental health professional directly.
- **Treat this time as a chance to grow.** Cultural differences and the overall experience of life in a new country may challenge you, but they will also broaden your perspective and enrich your journey. Over time, things that once felt unfamiliar will become part of your everyday life, and many of the initial struggles will turn into stories you'll laugh about. New friendships, familiar places, and daily routines will slowly bring a sense of comfort.

REMEMBER: feeling comfortable in a new place isn't about fitting in perfectly – it's about getting to know the culture, understanding differences and gradually finding your own way within it.

And do not forget - at IBB, you're part of a diverse and welcoming international community. Many people here have walked a similar path – they know what it's like to start fresh in a new country. You'll find others who are happy to share their experience, offer practical tips, or simply take a moment to talk. We're here for each other – so don't hesitate to reach out whenever you need support.

Polish Language

Polish may not be the easiest language to learn – yes, it has tricky grammar and unusual sounds – but it can also be fun, useful, and a great way to feel more at home. You don't need to speak Polish to survive in Warsaw, but learning even a few basic phrases can go a long way and help you connect with locals.

Free Polish Courses at IBB

You can sign up for free Polish language classes organized at IBB. It is a great way to start learning together with others from the IBB community.



Online Learning Tools

- **www.popolskupopolsce.edu.pl** – Free interactive platform for beginners
- **Polish Language Cheatsheet for Beginners** - Quick and helpful language tips
- **Duolingo** – free app, very friendly for daily practice
- **Memrise** – fun and user-friendly, with native speaker recordings
- **Clozemaster** – useful for building vocabulary through context

Tandem Language Exchange in Warsaw

Learning is easier (and more fun) with others. Tandem exchanges allow you to practise Polish with native speakers who want to learn your language in return, or simply meet with others who want to practice together.

Where to start:

- **Tandem app** – find language exchange partners near you
- **Meetup.com** – search for “language exchange” or “Polish-English tandems”
- **Facebook groups** like Warsaw Language Exchange or Expats in Warsaw
- **University events** – some student organisations host open language meetups

Useful Polish Words and Phrases

POLISH	ENGLISH
Cześć! / Dzień dobry	Hi! / Good morning
Do widzenia / Na razie	Goodbye / See you
Dziękuję / Proszę	Thank you / Please
Tak / Nie	Yes / No
Przepraszam	Excuse me / Sorry
Nie rozumiem	I don't understand
Mówię trochę po polsku	I speak a little Polish
Nie mówię po polsku	I don't speak polish
Czy mówisz po angielsku?	Do you speak English?
Ile to kosztuje?	How much is it?
Gdzie jest...?	Where is...?
Potrzebuję pomocy	I need help
Jestem naukowcem	I'm a scientist
Studiuję / pracuję w IBB PAN	I study / work at IBB PAN
Mam spotkanie / eksperyment	I have a meeting / experiment
Karta pobytu / PESEL / zaświadczenie	Residence card / PESEL / certificate
Tramwaj / przystanek / bilet	Tram / stop / ticket
Lekarz / apteka / ubezpieczenie	Doctor / pharmacy / insurance
Pierogi / żurek / ogórek kiszony	Dumplings / sour rye soup / pickled cucumber
Na zdrowie!	Cheers! (or: bless you)
Wszystko w porządku?	Is everything okay?
Powodzenia!	Good luck!
Miłego dnia!	Have a nice day!



Things That Surprise Foreigners in Poland

Living in Poland often means encountering small (and sometimes funny) cultural surprises. Here's a lighthearted look at some of the things our international colleagues noticed:

Personal Space & Small Talk

Polish people don't always do small talk or smile at strangers — but they're warm and helpful once you connect.

Directness

You might notice that people speak in a very direct way — it's usually a sign of honesty and clear communication, not rudeness.

Cigarette Culture

Smoking is not allowed inside restaurants, cafés, bars or public buildings. Most venues have designated outdoor smoking areas if needed.

Slippers & House Rules

Many Poles wear slippers at home and expect guests to take off their shoes. Bring your own or use the guest pair!

Traditional Cuisine

You might be surprised by how much people love soups, pickled foods, and mayonnaise-based salads! These are classic staples of Polish home cooking – especially at family gatherings.

Name Days (*optional*)

Apart from birthdays, many people celebrate their name day (*imieniny*) – based on the calendar. If someone brings cake to the lab, that might be why! (And yes, in Poland, it's the person celebrating who brings the sweets.)

Everyday Complaining

If you ask “How are you?”, don't be surprised to hear some grumbling – about the weather, health, work, or politics. Polish people may joke that *narzeka* (complaining) is the national sport. But often, it's more of a social ritual than real frustration – and even a way to bond.



Want to go discover more?

Check out **culture.pl** for articles about Polish society, customs, and cultural dos and don'ts.

First-hand impressions from other foreigners at IBB

Wondering what it feels like to start out here? Check what some of our international guests have said :)



Seyma, Turkey

The biggest surprise after moving to Poland... In winter, sun sets at 3.30 pm and you feel like days last more than 24 hours. In summer, sun sets at 9 pm.

The thing that helped me adapt and feel at home was... Learning a little bit Polish. Making friends.

A place in Warsaw where I go to feel good... Pole Mokotowskie

My favourite Polish word is... “Pączki” and “tłusty czwartek”.. I have three favourite words. Why? I think words speak for themselves :)

What I forgot at home and regret? Çaydanlık (newcomers from Turkey will understand :))

Advice that I would give to newcomers from abroad... Especially for those who come from Mediterranean region, Poland is a cold country. But that definitely does not apply during summer. I advise you to make good use of the summer by planning trips, activities, making friends, etc. Working a little less for 3 months in summer can help you maintain your mental health during the long winters ;)



Raymi, Bolivia

The biggest surprise after moving to Poland... People not smiling back in the streets was a big cultural shock to me. Public transport being amazingly good and cheap.

The thing that helped me adapt and feel at home was... Getting close with the locals helps a lot. Also, pierogi felt like a bite size empanada.

A place in Warsaw where I go to feel good... Vistula, or any park that has some sort of lake inside (there are a lot).

My favourite Polish word is... I can't say the actual one, but spoko is a close second.

What I forgot at home and regret? Many things... Like my cat, my guitar, more winter clothes, food, warm weather, etc. Nothing that I can't find again here (except the cat).

Advice that I would give to newcomers from abroad...

Be patient and keep an open mind. Many things will feel overwhelming at the beginning, but everything comes around after a while.



Darshanbaabu, India

The biggest surprise after moving to Poland... People might seem reserved at first, but once you start talking to them, they are incredibly warm and helpful. I was impressed by how well the roads are maintained and how strictly people follow traffic rules – especially that when a person approaches a zebra crossing, vehicles will wait for them to cross, which makes both driving and walking feel much safer and more organised.

The thing that helped me adapt and feel at home... The accommodation provided by IBB for the first three months – it gave me stability and time to get used to life in Warsaw without extra stress.

My favourite Polish word is... “Dzień dobry” – simple, polite, and always a good way to start a conversation. I also like “Co tam?” – friendly and casual. “Jestem” (I am) - a powerful little word that expresses presence and identity in the simplest way possible.

What I forgot at home and regret? I didn't exactly “forget” them, but leaving behind my family and friends was the hardest part of moving. No matter how exciting a new place is, nothing quite replaces the people who know you best.

Advice that I would give to newcomers form abroad... Say yes to new experiences, even if they feel unfamiliar at first. Try the food, learn a few words of the language, and don't hesitate to ask questions. Curiosity is always appreciated. What feels foreign today will soon become part of your everyday life, shaping memories that make Poland feel like home. I am in my home and enjoying in my way.



Satya, India

The biggest surprise after moving to Poland... the weather, can be very unpredictable sometimes :p

The thing that helped me adapt and feel at home was... having good company at the lab and the institute :)

A place in Warsaw where I go to feel good... parks, there are a lot of them, so spoilt for choice!

My favourite Polish word is... Na zdrowie, I love the sound of it, hehe.

What I forgot at home and regret? ...no particular object, most things are available here but I can feel a bit homesick occasionally. But that is fixable.

Advice that I would give to newcomers from abroad... ...don't worry too much, things might be difficult but you will always get help where you need it the most :)



We hope this guide will make your first steps in Poland – and at IBB PAN – a bit easier. Come back to it when needed. For more detailed instructions and updates, log in to the Welcome to IBB website.

Or just drop by the Welcome Center Office – room 43, building B.

Good luck – or as we say in Polish: Powodzenia!
See you around IBB! :)

This brochure was prepared by **Aleksandra Kania**, Coordinator of the IBB Welcome Center

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