

The Co-Cathedral Basilica

Kołobrzeg



The basilica is located on the right bank of the Parsęta River and marks out the town centre in the mediaeval arrangement of the old town. One-way streets allow tourists to reach it from the south, that is from the Parsęta River, along Narutowicza Street and from the north – along Katedralna Street, but the most comfortable way is from the west, along Armii Krajowej Street. There are paid parking zones in this part of the town. The basilica's tower, visible from a distance, is a useful landmark.

When the town became established in a new place after its foundation in 1255, a construction of a large church started at the end of the 13th century. The works lasted more than one hundred years, yet still in the 15th century not everything was finished. For instance, towers looked completely different. There were two separate towers, which were joined into a one tower complex. Most likely, already during the construction works, a construction disaster occurred and almost 40-metre high pillars tilted. They did not,

DETAILED INFORMATION

ADDRESS

Mariacka 5, 78-100 [Kołobrzeg](#)

PHONE

+48 94 352 61 50

WWW

www.bazylika.kolobrzeg.pl...

E-MAIL

parafia@bazylika.kolobrze...

COORDINATES

54.1757090497, 15.5746559648
54° 10' 33", 15° 34' 29"

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however, overturn; they were stabilized and stand there up to this day, as much as 62 centimetres out of plumb. They rouse sincere astonishment among tourists. A collegiate church, a co-cathedral, a minor basilica – all these designations can be applied to this church, which is a monumental example of red brick Gothic and, simultaneously, the oldest and the largest from the most important historic monuments of Kołobrzeg. It is not tall (74 m), but it stands out due to its width – it is the only Polish five-aisle church. Beside the nave and the aisles, there are also side aisles created after developing a part of buttresses.

The last Evangelical pastor, Paul Hinz, foreseeing the destruction during the Second World War, secured valuables, paintings and the elements of the church's interior from bombarding. They survived the battle of Kołobrzeg in March 1945, hidden in cellars, sheds, and villages around Kołobrzeg. The basilica itself was ruined. Only a presbytery, towers, and a part of walls survived. Tower cupolas were destroyed as well as roofs, windows, and interior. The building was rebuilt in the 1980s and the 1990s, after the authorities of the People's Republic of Poland handed it over back to the Church, which took place in 1976.

The basilica was initially a Roman Catholic church and after the Reformation, from the 1530s till the end of the Second World War – a Protestant church. Nowadays, it is Roman Catholic again, for of this denomination were people who settled there after incorporating these lands into Poland as a result of the Second World War.

The majority of the precious items that survived returned to the basilica. Tourists can find a candlestick, candelabums, a baptismal font, paintings, stalls, and tombstones. Some of these historic items go back to the 14th century. In 2000, a pipe organ were brought from the Netherlands and started to be used. In 2013, an overlook was opened for tourists in the church's tower. In order to see a panorama of the town, tourists have to mount 216 steps or use a lift. Stained glass windows, which create a cycle of Marian sanctuaries, are still being completed; in 2015, only one was missing – one located nearby the altar, from the northern side.

Tourist can visit the basilica for 20 minutes, just as well they spend there more than 2 hours. Even during the shortest visit inside the church, the tilted pillars in a row on the right (looking from the main entrance) cannot pass unnoticed. The latest geological research

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proves the presence of a layer of unstable sands under this part of the church. What is more, a watercourse flowing there was discovered. Thus, the explanation that columns located on such an unstable ground had tilted by themselves already during the construction works in the late 14th century becomes more and more certain. Then, which does not have to be guessed at due to the written sources, there were attempts made in order to prevent the pillars from tilting on. They have been fastened together with clamps and joined with oaken beams near the vault. They do not go on tilting. Heading right from doors, in the rear part of a southern side aisle, one can find a board with pictures of the cathedral before 1945 and damaged after 1945. There is also a portrait of the above-mentioned pastor Paul Hinz. Along the southern aisle, we reach a seven-branched candelabrum from 1327. The only such a preserved Gothic candelabrum in Poland was cast from bronze by Jan Apengeter on the model of a Jewish menorah. For several reasons, however, it cannot be called a menorah: first, it is not made of gold; secondly, it has not been cast in one piece; thirdly, it does not imitate an almond tree but a vine; finally, the figurines of the 12 Apostles ultimately make it clear that it is a Christian candelabrum, not a menorah. This almost 700-year old work of art was found in the 1950s in the vaults of the basilica by workmen who did not realized how precious it was. Had it not been for the intervention of a historian Jan Frankowski, who came to Kołobrzeg from Cracow, the candelabrum would have ended up in a scrap yard. More than 900 kilograms of bronze! Jan Frankowski knew what he was dealing with and bought various parts for a few bottles of vodka, had it restored, and in 1981, the renovated candelabrum returned to Kołobrzeg richer by this dramatic story. Four metres tall and almost as wide, the object is without any doubt the pride of the church.

Walking towards the candelabrum, we pass paintings hanging on the wall. There are medallions of the founders visible in the paintings of "The Healing of Naaman" and "The Prostration of Three Kings". And there is a curiosity. In the latter painting, Szymon Adabar included himself and both his wives. Painters also included much of symbolism and hidden messages in the paintings. These images narrate unbelievable stories to their viewers. The proof of this is "The Danse Macabre" also known as "The Knight on the Cemetery", which concerns the fundamental issues of good and evil, life and death, salvation and

damnation. So we have a scene in which the knight is praying in the face of advancing forces of evil symbolized by a dragon on a red banner of the attacking troops. His ardent prayer was answered and the dead came out of their graves in order to help him. One skeleton is armed with a paddle, another with a drill, third one with scissors, and other with the attributes which they used to use in their professions. The painting is like an epitaph of the knight, known by his name and surname, because they are revealed by an inscription, which, translated from German, says: "Ask God for the soul of Severt Grantzin". At the end of the wall, by the descent into the crypt of Cardinal Ignacy Jeż, there is yet another interesting painting – "The Virtuous Woman" from the late 15th century. Though it is seen against the light falling through the window and the details are hard to notice, it is enough to take a picture, even with a phone that we carry with us, and then magnify it to see what is shown within the frame. The woman depicted in the painting has her mouth locked by a padlock and her ears wadded with keys; she is girded with a snake and has horse's hooves instead of feet. There is a little bird shown on her breast. The woman holds a cross in her hand and looks at it. The symbolism of the painting says that woman shall not talk too much or listen to gossip. She should stay stably on the faith's ground, with her eyes fixed on the Holy Trinity. She must not allow sin to approach her and she ought to bravely take care of the hearth and home.

On weekdays, side entrances are closed, so visitors necessarily have to go back to the main entrance. It is a stroll full of impressions. It is worth focusing on the altar, presbytery, and nave. In these places, there is an accumulation of precious items. The oaken canons' pews are the oldest ones in Poland, coming from 1340. They differ from the town councillors' pews from the 15th century not only in material from which they were made – these are made of linden tree – but also in colour and ornamentation. The burghers' pew is beautifully colourful with woodcarving depicting the Sybil of Tybur with the Emperor Augustus, a Maria with Child, a sinner devoured by a devil-dragon, a knight and a bishop. Moreover, the woodcarver – most likely coming from the Cistercian Order – found a place for ornamental motifs of military character, such as armours, shields, helmets, etc. On the left from the altar, there is a baptismal font from 1355, richly embellished, cast from bronze by Jan Alart. Its ornaments are arranged in a narrative consisting of 26 scenes from the life of the Christ. The altar triptych –

“The Last Supper”, “The Adoration of the Magi”, and “The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne and Saint Nicholas” – whose parts are located on the left and on the right of the altar and in the presbytery, was made about 1500. The bas-relief “The Last Supper” is the only piece of the 17th-century altar destroyed during the Napoleonic War of 1807. If we raise our eyes, we will be able to see chandeliers hanging from the vault, now fitted with energy saving fluorescent lamps. The most impressive one, called “The Crown of the Schlieffens” comes from 1523. It is made of wood in a form of an elongated octangle, gold-plated and painted, embellished with figurines of angels. Its central placed is taken by the Mother of God with Child and John the Baptist. These figures are protected by a canopy resembling a firmament. Experts say that the most valuable of the hanging candlesticks is a more than 100 years older “Crown of the Holks” (1420). It is inconspicuous but distinguished with the elaborateness of its brazen details. This chandelier is hanging closest to the altar. This is all what is worth noticing in the basilica in Kołobrzeg. There are also other paintings, tombstones, vaults, and a pillar. What requires a few words of explanation is the crypt of the first bishop of the diocese of Koszalin-Kołobrzeg (established in 1972), Cardinal-nominate Ignacy Jeż (1914-2007). He died in Rome after his nomination without accepting the Cardinal’s hat. He himself chose the vaults of the basilica in Kołobrzeg as his resting place, and, taking this fact in consideration, he supervised the removal of the old boiler room that was no longer necessary, for the church had been already connected with the urban heating network. The basilica, although historic, is a living church in which, from time to time, items worthy to be seen by tourists arrive. Someone, who visited the church in the 1990s, is going to find it somewhat changed these days.

On weekdays and Sundays the first Mass starts at 7.00 am, the last one – at 7.00 pm (in July and August at 8.00 pm).

Media

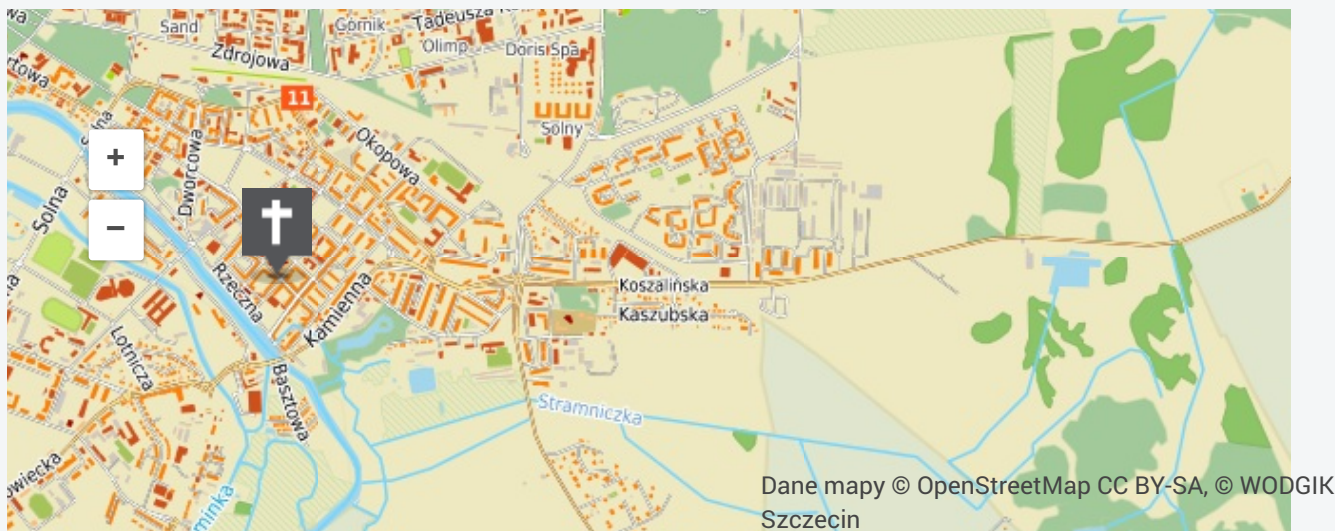
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