

First Week Survival Guide for International Students

MS in Poland Resource Guide



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For International Students

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Your first week in Poland can be both exciting and overwhelming. This guide will help you navigate the essential steps needed to set up your student life successfully.

Arrival Essentials

****Exchange currency**** to have Polish złoty (PLN) for immediate expenses

****Purchase a local SIM card**** for your phone (Orange, Play, T-Mobile, or Plus)

****Download essential apps:****

- Public transportation app for your city (e.g., jakdojade)
- Maps (Google Maps or Mapy.cz)
- Banking app (once you have a Polish bank account)
- Taxi apps (Uber, Bolt, Free Now)
- Food delivery (Pyszne.pl, Glovo, Uber Eats)
- Translator app (Google Translate)
- **Notify your family** of your safe arrival
- **Locate the nearest pharmacy** (Apteka) and grocery store
- **Familiarize yourself** with your neighborhood and campus location

TIP: Keep digital copies of all your important documents (passport, visa, acceptance letter, insurance) in a secure cloud storage that you can access even without internet (save offline copies).

University Registration

****Attend orientation**** sessions (usually mandatory)

****Complete formal registration**** at the university's international office

****Submit required documents:****

- Original acceptance letter
- Passport and visa
- Health insurance certificate
- Passport photos (usually 2-4)
- Original educational certificates
- **Collect your student ID card** (legitymacja studencka)
- **Activate your university email** and online student account
- **Register for courses** if not automatically enrolled
- **Get your class schedule** and campus map
- **Tour the university facilities** (libraries, computer labs, cafeterias)
- **Join the international student organization** or buddy program

IMPORTANT: Your student ID (legitymacja) is extremely valuable! It provides discounts on public transportation (51% discount), museums, cinemas, and many other services. Keep it with you at all times.

Legal Requirements

****Register your residence**** (meldunek) within 3 days if staying in private accommodation (dormitories usually handle this for you)

****Visit the Voivodeship Office**** (Urząd Wojewódzki) to start your temporary residence permit process if staying longer than 90 days

****Register with your country's embassy or consulate**** in Poland (recommended but optional)

****Validate your health insurance**** (NFZ office for EU students with EHIC; private insurance validation for non-EU students)

****Obtain a PESEL number**** (Polish national identification number) - useful for many administrative procedures

WARNING: Failing to register your residence or apply for a temporary residence permit within the required timeframe can result in fines or legal complications. Don't delay these essential legal steps!

Financial Setup

****Open a Polish bank account**** (recommended banks for students: mBank, Santander, PKO BP, Millennium)

- Required documents typically include:
- Passport

- Student ID
- Confirmation of address (residence registration or dormitory confirmation)
- PESEL number (if already obtained)
- **Set up online banking** and download the bank's mobile app
- **Inform your home bank** about your stay in Poland to avoid card blocks
- **Understand currency exchange options** (banks, kantors, and online services like Revolut)
- **Create a monthly budget** in Polish złoty (PLN)
- **Learn about scholarship payment procedures** if applicable

Transport and Navigation

****Purchase a public transportation pass**** (1-month or 3-month student pass is most economical)

****Download transportation apps**** specific to your city

****Learn the routes**** between:

- Your accommodation and university
- University and city center
- Accommodation and nearest grocery stores, pharmacy, and medical facilities
- **Understand the ticket validation system** for buses and trams
- **Learn basic Polish expressions** for asking for directions

NOTE: Each Polish city has its own public transportation system and ticket types. In major cities, you can usually buy tickets through mobile apps, ticket machines at stops, or from kiosks.

Healthcare and Insurance

****Save emergency numbers:****

- General emergency: 112
- Ambulance: 999
- Police: 997
- Fire brigade: 998
- **Locate the nearest hospital** with an emergency room (SOR - Szpitalny Oddział Ratunkowy)
- **Find your university's medical facility** or recommended clinic

- **Register with a primary care doctor** (lekarz rodzinny) if covered by NFZ insurance
- **Verify what your health insurance covers** and how to use it
- **Keep insurance documents** and emergency contact information easily accessible

Social Integration

****Attend welcome events**** for international students

****Join university clubs**** or sports teams

****Connect with your assigned buddy**** or mentor if your university offers this program

****Explore student groups**** on social media

****Meet your neighbors**** and classmates

****Familiarize yourself with Polish etiquette**** and customs

TIP: Polish people may seem reserved at first, but they are usually very helpful, especially if you show interest in their culture and language. Learning even basic Polish phrases can make a significant difference in how you're received.

Practical Matters

****Purchase household essentials**** if not provided in your accommodation

****Locate laundry facilities**** (in dormitories or laundromats)

****Learn about waste sorting**** rules (recycling is mandatory and strictly regulated)

****Set up utilities**** if living in private accommodation (internet, electricity, water)

****Find affordable shopping locations**** (Biedronka, Lidl, and Żabka are popular budget options)

****Identify student canteens**** (Bar mleczny or university cafeterias offer inexpensive meals)

Emergency Contacts Emergency Services

- **Universal European Emergency Number:** 112
- **Ambulance:** 999
- **Police:** 997
- **Fire Brigade:** 998

University Contacts

- **International Students Office:** [Save your university's contact]
- **Student Housing Office:** [Save your dormitory's contact]
- **University Security:** [Save campus security number]

Personal Contacts

- **Buddy/Mentor:** [Save your assigned buddy's contact]
- **Embassy/Consulate:** [Save your country's representation contact]
- **Landlord:** [If in private accommodation]
- **Health Insurance Provider:** [Save their emergency assistance line]

IMPORTANT: Program these numbers into your phone and also keep a written copy in your wallet. Consider creating a contact named "ICE" (In Case of Emergency) with your emergency contact's information.

Common Challenges and Solutions Language Barrier

- Use translation apps
- Carry a small phrasebook
- Ask if someone speaks English before starting a conversation
- Learn basic Polish phrases for everyday situations

Homesickness

- Stay connected with family and friends
- Join international student communities
- Establish a routine
- Explore your new environment
- Participate in cultural activities

Administrative Hurdles

- Seek help from the International Office
- Bring a Polish-speaking friend to difficult appointments
- Request written instructions when possible
- Take photos of important information or locations

Cultural Adjustment

- Observe and learn local customs
- Ask questions respectfully
- Participate in cultural events

- Be patient with yourself

TIP: Remember that culture shock is normal and usually follows four phases: honeymoon, frustration, adjustment, and acceptance. The frustration phase often hits during weeks 2-3, so prepare yourself mentally and remember that these feelings are temporary.

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