

# 1: Introduction

The exhibition "For Here and to Go: Warsaw's Cuisine" tells the city's culinary history. We show how meals were prepared and served, the most popular dishes, and the places where people dined out. The exhibition presents how these customs changed over the centuries, reflecting social, cultural, and political evolution. Archaeological discoveries, everyday objects, archival materials, photographs, and works of art – both historic and contemporary – guide us through this important sphere of life, from the Middle Ages to the present day. A drawing project by Marta Tomiak is part of the exposition, too. Her illustrations, created specifically for the exhibition, are displayed in every section and play a key role in the narrative.

We recount nearly eight centuries of the history of food in Warsaw in six sections, focusing on the changes in home cooking and dining out. We demonstrate how cuisine has influenced customs, interpersonal relationships, and urban spaces from the medieval times until today. In the section dedicated to home cooking, we show how kitchens have evolved, how technological advancements were used, and how meals were consumed at home. The section devoted to dining out focuses on feeding the city's poorest residents and eating at the time of wars and crises. Next, we present street food and dining options accessible to the majority of residents. The ultimate section of the exhibition is dedicated to picnicking, eating amidst nature, and the pleasure of consuming food.

As part of the exhibition, we have also arranged two play and learn spaces for our youngest visitors in the rooms 3 and 6, thematically linked to each section.

## 2: The evolution of a kitchen

In a medieval bourgeois townhouse, there was no separate room designated for a kitchen. Archeological and architectural research has not found such spaces, nor are there any written records on the subject. Kitchens, as we understand them, were found in castles and monasteries, where meals were prepared for large groups of people. In urban homes, cooking was done in multifunctional rooms using large

fireplaces, where the fire was lit at floor level, and a high chimney hood was installed that couldn't possibly catch all the smoke. Despite this, the same room was used not only for cooking but also for eating and sometimes even for sleeping. The fireplace, aside from its culinary role, served to heat and light the room.

Over time, the space for preparing meals was moved to a separate building in the courtyard or to the hallway of the townhouse. Such a stove, used for cooking over an open flame, with a vent passing through three floors of a stairwell, can still be seen in the townhouse at 34 Old Town Market Square, which belongs to the Museum of Warsaw. In all likelihood, it was built during the renovation of the building approximately in 1620. A painting from the early 17th century by the Flemish artist Frans Snyders depicts the interior of a kitchen from that era. In the foreground of the painted scene, there is a well-stocked pantry and a woman preparing food. The scene serves as a symbolic warning against excess. Oysters and birds skewered on a spit represent carnal pleasures, while a monkey hidden in a dark corner personifies the surrender to sensory impulses. In the background, a second, more modest female figure is cooking a simple meal from local products, symbolizing a healthy and moderate way of life, reflecting the Protestant ideal.

We can learn about meal preparation in the Middle Ages from iconographic sources. In paintings and engravings, an iron cauldron hanging on a hook with adjustable height is often visible, as well as a low spit or grill standing over the fire, with a vessel underneath to collect dripping fat. Such an artifact is also on display at the exhibition. A 14th-century trough, made of grey ceramics, was discovered during archaeological research at the back of a townhouse at 14 Wąski Dunaj Street. The most popular type of kitchenware was ceramic pots of various sizes. Each pot had a specific purpose, which was due to its porous texture—for example, a pot used for a sour dish could not be reused for cooking milk, as the milk would curdle. Glazing the pots, which also added to their aesthetic value, might have helped solve this problem to some degree by making them easier to clean and reducing the absorption of food particles and smells into their walls. Pots with food were placed directly in the fire using a forked branch or, for better stability, set in an iron ring with legs. Three-legged pans were also popular until the 18th century, used for stewing, frying, or preparing sauces. Various types of ceramic kitchen vessels from archaeological research in

Warsaw, dating from the 14th to the 18th century, are displayed in the first room of the exhibition.

The 19th century saw a breakthrough in the evolution of cooking processes. Industrial development and technological innovations led to numerous solutions that made kitchen work easier. The first major innovation was the introduction of stoves with closed combustion chambers, which eliminated the inconveniences of using an open flame. As a result, different types of cooking vessels, made from various metals, began to be used. In the mid-19th century, the first gas stove, invented by James Sharp, was showcased at the Great London Exhibition. Later, towards the end of the 19th century, Austrian Friedrich Wilhelm Schindler patented the first electric stove. However, this invention became widely used only after World War II and gained true popularity even later, in the early 21st century.

Illustrating these changes, this section of the exhibition presents a gas stove from the collection of the Museum of Warsaw and an ornate, cast-iron single-burner stove from the collection of the Warsaw Gasworks Museum. Additionally, through iconography—paintings, graphics, and photographs—we show how the appearance of kitchen spaces evolved historically, taking into account the social context. Visitors can familiarize themselves with the appearance and furnishings of a 19th-century kitchen through photographs taken by employees of the City of Warsaw Conservation Office, depicting kitchen furniture and fixtures from Warsaw tenement houses. The interior of a working-class kitchen in the Wola district during the interwar period is presented in the photographs of Aleksander Minorski, while postwar kitchen layouts are documented by Zbyszko Siemaszko. A contemporary kitchen is represented by Pola Dwurnik's painting titled "A Stunt Woman" which portrays it as a professional cooking laboratory—well-equipped, functional, and modern.

### **3: Easier and faster**

Food preservation is a process aimed at extending the shelf life of food. The primary cause of food going bad is microorganisms, and preservation methods are designed to limit their growth as much as possible. Since ancient times, various preservation techniques have been used, which can be divided into physical methods—such as

using low or high temperatures, sugaring, salting, or drying—and biological methods, which take advantage of natural fermentation processes. In more recent times, chemical methods have also been discovered, involving the addition of certain chemical compounds to food products that destroy microorganisms.

Meat, mushrooms, fruits, grains, and even cheese were dried in the open air. Smoking was done over a fire or in specially prepared smoking pits. Vegetables were preserved using brine pickling. There were also 'confits', namely salted meats cooked slowly in their own fat. Next, the meats were left to cool in the fat which solidified, allowing them to last several months. Until the 20th century, icehouses were commonly used, consisting of underground boxes with double walls filled with ice harvested from water reservoirs during winter. Such a device was discovered during archaeological research along the W-Z Route in Warsaw. At the exhibition, visitors can see an architectural drawing of the Zamoyski Palace on Krakowskie Przedmieście, with an icehouse marked in it. Early domestic refrigerators worked in a similar way—one of such early refrigerators is also on display.

Food preserved in hermetically sealed cans and subjected to thermal processing was first used by Napoleon's army. By the second half of the 19th century, canned food gained popularity, initially as a luxury item. A major breakthrough in food preservation came with the discovery of pasteurization in 1864, which involved heating food to below 100°C to inhibit the growth of harmful microorganisms while maintaining the product's taste and nutritional value. Another relatively recent invention is freeze-drying, first applied during World War II to produce food for the U.S. military. In this process, frozen products are transformed into a powder in laboratory conditions, which, when dissolved in water, becomes edible again.

A modern method of food preservation—the one that is considered natural—is high pressure processing. A product sealed in, say, a glass bottle, is subjected to high pressure, which destroys microorganisms.

Many kitchen devices were developed to make meal preparation easier and faster. Just like the process of cooking, technical innovations accelerated in the 19th century, driven by industrialization. At this time, wealthier middle-class homes saw the introduction of coffee grinders, ice cream machines, and, later, devices such as

slicers and mixers. At the exhibition, we display such devices, provided to us by the Silesian House Museum in Ziębice.

Conveniences also extended to the methods of food storage, particularly in terms of cooling. From the second half of the 19th century until the first half of the 20th century, special kitchen furniture known as 'cold cabinets' were used. These cabinets, located under the windows, allowed for air circulation from the outside, helping to maintain lower temperatures inside the cabinet and thus keeping perishable products cool for a short time. In wealthier homes, cold cabinets were accompanied by iceboxes, which were additionally equipped with an ice container. Over time, free-standing icebox-style cabinets also appeared.

The appearance of the cold cabinets can be seen in photographs of Warsaw kitchens from the second half of the 19th century and the interwar period, provided by the City of Warsaw Conservation Office. Due to economic reasons, this solution remained popular in the following decades, including the interwar period and even in the immediate post-World War II years. Kitchens designed during that time were still equipped with cold cabinets. They disappeared for good in the 1960s as refrigerators became more widely available.

Refrigerators first appeared at the beginning of the 20th century—initially gas-powered, like the one on display from the Warsaw Gasworks Museum collection, and later electric. During the interwar period, only the wealthiest residents of Warsaw could afford a refrigerator.

Meals could be fixed quicker thanks to the availability of semi-prepared products or ready-made dishes, initially available in restaurants and, later, with the advent of industrial food processing, in stores. One of the first Warsaw companies to produce ready-made preserves was the Pakulski Brothers company. A drawing by Marta Tomiak displayed in the exhibition is dedicated to the company's operation.

In earlier eras, making preserves at home rendered meal preparation easier; over time, ready-made products became more accessible. The popular practice of home canning and pickling in the 19th and 20th centuries gradually gave way to store-bought products by the end of the 20th and early 21st centuries. However, there has been a recent surge of interest in making homemade preserves. In recent years, pickled foods have become particularly popular—not only the traditional cabbage and

cucumbers but also other fruits and vegetables such as cauliflower, radishes, watermelons, and apples.

The 19th century also brought significant changes in child nutrition, especially in the area of infant formula. Glass bottles with rubber nipples became available, making it much easier to feed infants. Moreover, medical knowledge improved, and safety and hygiene principles became more widespread. A major breakthrough was the development of modified milk formulas at the end of the 19th century, following the study of the composition of human breast milk. To illustrate this topic in the exhibition, we present packaging from ready-made milk formulas and nutritional supplements, along with a feeding bottle.

## **4: 365 Dinners**

What we eat is an important part of culture and an expression of identity. Changes in culinary customs have been related to cultural, religious, social, economic, aesthetic, and political transformations. Both in the Middle Ages and in modern times, it was common to have two meals a day—an early lunch and dinner. From the Middle Ages until the end of the 17th century, the dominant flavour in Polish cuisine was spicy, achieved through exotic spices like saffron, pepper, ginger, cinnamon, and nutmeg. For poorer citizens, garlic and onion were common substitutes. There was also a great fondness for sour, vinegar-like flavours. At the same time, sour flavours were combined with sugar or preserves. Foods such as meat, fish, vegetables, and even scrambled eggs were sweetened. Cereal products—bread and groats—constituted about 70% of the food ration for most of the population. Local vegetables were eaten in the form of soups, broths, and bryjas (a buckwheat mash).

Meat and fish, whether boiled, roasted, or fried, were commonly found on the tables of the more affluent classes, while the poorer people consumed them only on special occasions, usually content with just fat or cracklings. The main beverage for all age and social groups was low-alcohol beer, sometimes mixed with pieces of bread or cheese to make a sort of beer soup. Until the end of the 17th century, about one-third of the year was designated for fasting. During these periods, the consumption of meat, eggs, and dairy products was forbidden. However, there was no restraint on

consuming alcohol or sweets. Even during fasting periods, grand banquets were held, featuring numerous fish dishes or beaver tail, which was considered a fish. On the tables of wealthy city residents, fish dishes were often shaped to resemble venison. These were true culinary masterpieces.

A new culinary trend arrived from France in the 18th century. It broke away from the earlier practice of combining contrasting flavors. The fundamental principle of this new cuisine became the focus on preserving the natural taste and appearance of the dishes. Local herbs began to be used, and vegetables gained greater popularity.

Throughout the Middle Ages, the primary tool for eating and serving food remained the knife. Both knives and spoons, made of wood or metal, were brought by diners themselves. An exhibit showcases a decorated, carved horn-handled knife, discovered during archaeological research at Castle Square. Portions of food were taken from a shared dish, with rectangular or round wooden boards, or simply pieces of bread, serving as plates. Solid foods, at least until the mid-17th century, were most often eaten with fingers, even though individual plates were already common by that time. Various types of bowls were typically made from clay, wood, or, from the 15th century, pewter. In wealthy burgher households, imported glass drinking vessels began to appear from the Middle Ages. There is a small but valuable early-dated fragment of a goblet on display.

The Saxon prince Augustus II's accession to the Polish throne in 1697 marked the beginning of a transmission of new cultural patterns to Polish lands. During this period, the 'dining room' became more widespread, increasingly appearing in noble manors and wealthy burgher homes. A new way of setting the table was also adopted. In Warsaw, porcelain and faience tableware began to gain popularity, replacing the previously common pewter vessels, which started to disappear from inventories in the second half of the 18th century. The use of forks became common as well. The changes were initiated by the highest court circles and were subsequently emulated by lower social strata, according to their needs and means.

The widespread adoption of the coal stove simplified and democratized cooking—it became easier, faster, and more accessible. This invention also contributed to the development of other fields, such as culinary guidance. Thanks to the efforts of many authors, the concept of a family meal consisting of one, two, or three courses—a

soup, a main course, and a dessert—became popular. Around the mid-19th century, cookbooks and household management books by women began to appear in the publishing market, including works by Karolina Nakwaska, Anna Ciundziewicka, and Wincentyzna Zawadzka. However, the most popular author in this field was Lucyna Ćwierczakiewiczowa. Her book titled *365 Dinners for 5 Zlotys*, first published in 1860, became a true bestseller. The exhibition features the second edition of this popular book. It stood out among similar publications for its comprehensive approach to cooking and its lively language. Its originality lay in including seasonal dishes and planning meals for every day of the year. Another strength was the flexibility of its suggestions, allowing readers to choose a simpler yet always nutritious and varied menu.

In culinary publications, there was also an emphasis on the culture of eating and building connections through shared meals. At that time, professional work occupied men's days, which shifted the time for communal meals from midday to evening. In poorer working-class families, meals were often not cooked at all due to a lack of resources for kitchen equipment and time for cooking, especially if both spouses worked professionally. These families typically ate separately, often in the street or in the cheapest dining establishments.

After World War II, social and political changes, including the widespread employment of women, led to many families no longer having shared meals on a daily basis. On working days, adults often ate in collective dining facilities—such as company cafeterias, milk bars, or fast-food establishments—while children ate at nurseries, kindergartens, and schools. However, most families continued to observe the tradition of shared Sunday and holiday meals.

The political changes of 1989 also impacted home cooking and gastronomy. On one hand, technological advancements and the availability of various kitchen appliances have made home cooking faster and easier, often involving all family members, including the youngest. It has become more of a leisure activity, offering opportunities to explore new flavors and acquire new skills. On the other hand, dining out has become increasingly accessible and popular, both at restaurants and through food delivery services. In recent years, there has also been a trend towards using pre-prepared meals or services specializing in diet-specific meal planning. As a result,



shared family breakfasts, lunches, or dinners are increasingly limited to weekends, family celebrations, or holidays.

The changes in family meal practices are illustrated by a table featuring Warsaw tableware from different eras and a drawing by Marta Tomiak depicting scenes of meal consumption from the Middle Ages, the modern era, the 19th century, and the People's Republic of Poland (PRL) period.

## **5: Modesty**

Since the Middle Ages, numerous charitable institutions have been in operation in Warsaw. Hospitals, serving the role of almshouses for the poor, disabled, elderly, and orphans rather than of medical facilities, were the most important charitable institutions. Their funding came from endowments by founders, donations from more affluent city residents, and alms. Most of these institutions were managed by the municipal authorities.

The oldest hospital in Warsaw was the New Town's St. Spirit Hospital, founded before 1388. It is also the one for which the most written records have survived. Other important institutions included the Holy Virgin Mary Hospital on Przyrynek Street in the New Town, established in 1411, and the St. Spirit Almshouse *intra muros* on Piwna Street. The latter, founded by Princess Anna Bolesławówna in 1442, was better endowed than the others, with amenities such as fishponds, orchards, and a mill, and was aimed at a somewhat better clientele.

Overall, several such institutions operated simultaneously in Warsaw, each accommodating between a few and several dozen people, mostly elderly women. Admission to these hospitals was not easy due to limited spaces, and impoverished residents constituted a high percentage of the city's total population. Often, hospital administrators required an 'entry fee' from residents, and the support of a candidate by the City Magistrate was also significant.

The modern concept of caring for impoverished residents involved providing them with modest yet hunger-satisfying food. Hospitals had their own kitchens and pantries. The hospital food typically included bread and meat (served 3-4 times a

week), as well as groats, dumplings, peas, sauerkraut or fresh cabbage, turnips, carrots, and occasionally onions, cucumbers, mustard, and pickled beets. Dishes were seasoned with bacon or butter, and during fasting periods, with flaxseed oil. During these times, residents were also fed inexpensive salted herring, as well as sour rye soup and borscht. The main beverage was low-alcohol beer. During holidays, the menu included better quality meat and fish, eggs, cakes, and dried fruits. The exhibition features a weekly menu from 1598 from the St. Spirit Hospital located outside the city walls.

In addition to the hospitals run by the municipality, Warsaw had charitable fraternities composed of wealthy burghers, merchants, craftsmen, nobility, and clergy, including both women and men. The most significant was the Warsaw Brotherhood of Mercy, founded in 1590, which established its own hospital dedicated to St. Lazarus. Food for the residents primarily came from gardens and land donated by benefactors. The Brotherhood also hosted an annual meal for the poor on Holy Wednesday or Thursday and sometimes provided regular food aid to individuals, e.g. the impoverished burgher Anna Funkowa. The City Magistrate also supported sick and poor residents with alms in the form of food—bread, beer, and occasionally meat—in cases of plague or famine. Additionally, the so-called ‘funeral dinners’, often specified in the wills of wealthier burghers, served as post-funeral feasts for a number of poor people.

The conditions for charitable institutions in Warsaw remained largely unchanged until the second half of the 18th century.

From 1814, the Warsaw Charity Society became the most important philanthropic institution in the capital, with members including wealthy burghers and aristocrats. In the 1840s, the Society distributed 150 portions of Rumford soup daily to the city’s poorest residents and sold affordable ‘5-grosz’ meals. In the second half of the 19th century, the Society established a network of cheap kitchens for those without cooking facilities or unable to afford more expensive dining options. By the end of the 19th century, the Society was assisting around 100,000 people annually. Today, Warsaw has several free meal programs for those in need, operated by non-governmental organizations, church groups, and local government units.

Among the exhibits in this room, it is worth noting the projected photographs depicting the interiors of cheap kitchens, inns, and tea houses in Warsaw in 1915. These images are part of a larger collection documenting the activities of the City of Warsaw Citizens' Committee. The photos come from the collections of the National Museum in Warsaw and consist of over 300 glass negatives in the 18x24 cm format. This collection documents the Committee's activities in 1915, including images of the headquarters of various sections and the aid facilities organized by the Committee—kitchens, inns, shelters, children's homes, stores, etc.

The only author known by name is Jan Piszczatowski; identities of the other contributors remain unidentified. The documentary photographs depict both the dining areas of cheap kitchens with people eating, and the kitchen staff and interiors. The Committee ran kitchens for various social groups—for intellectuals, labourers, artists, as well as for children and infant feeding stations.

The modest kitchen of the working-class during the interwar period is also depicted in a drawing by Henryk Grzybowski, who was associated with pre-war Bródno district. The drawing, titled "People in Line for the Kitchen for the Poor and Unemployed", from 1955, provides a visual as well as descriptive account of the kitchen's operations.

"Kitchen for the poor and the unemployed on 11 Listopada Street. In the years 1927/28/29 I used to walk from N. Bródno to get soup. Mother [...] was sick. The route from Nadwiślańska Street was over 5-6 km one way. I had no money for the tram. [...] The kitchen was located in the basement of a building that still stands today. It typically prepared pea soup with bacon, bean soup with dumplings, cabbage soup, and sometimes had pieces of cracklings floating on top. Additionally, I received a portion of bread for each member of the family. The line of people waiting to be served soup was around 100 individuals."

This section of the exhibition focuses on food during times of crises and wars, illustrated by photographs of kitchens taken by an anonymous photographer in a transit camp for Warsaw's displaced population during and after the Warsaw Uprising. This camp, located in Pruszków, was in operation from 6 August 1944 until 16 January 1945.

## 6: The City Feeds Its Residents

The tradition of selling ready-to-eat meals in urban centers dates back to Roman times. In medieval cities, including Warsaw, many of the poorer residents—such as seasonal workers, widows, and small artisans—lived in single rooms without access to their own kitchens, leading to the development of ready-made food sales. Street food was also popular with travellers who visited the city during cyclical fairs and markets. Warm and cheap meals were sold at stationary stalls, located in high-traffic areas like city gates or around the market square. Vendors also used mobile carts, often equipped with ovens. A popular “fast food” in the Middle Ages was flatbreads made from flour and fat, stuffed with meat, fish, and sometimes vegetables. Sweet wafers and bagels were also popular. There were even shops where people could bring their own ingredients and order a takeaway flatbread. In large cities like London and Bristol, entire streets were dedicated to shops selling ready-made meals. In Bristol, street food vendors were even organized into their own guild, reflecting the high demand and popularity of such food, despite its not-so-great reputation.

In the early modern period, the popularity of street food among the poorer segments of society did not diminish. People purchased warm soups, primarily tripe, hot sausages, and doughnuts. Street food in Warsaw was mainly sold by women. The places where warm meals were sold were called “pot kitchens under the sun” or “inns beneath the clouds”. One such “outdoor canteen” was the space under King Sigismund’s Column. Scenes with a soup vendor at this iconic spot in the capital are depicted in late 18th-century drawings by Jan Piotr Norblin, which are displayed at the exhibition.

In cities and their vicinities, numerous inns operated, and since the end of the 15th century, they served not only as lodging for travellers but also as dining establishments and social meeting spots over alcohol. An example of this can be seen in the tavern run in the second half of the 17th century by Mr. Billiński, located in the basement of one of the tenement houses that lined Castle Square in Warsaw.

In the second half of the 19th century, due to the influx of people into Warsaw related to industrialization, the demand for quick meals—both street food and cheap eateries—such as small food stalls, taverns, small food shops, and from the 1860s,

affordable kitchens—rose significantly. Many residents couldn't afford to cook at home and often lacked the time, so they ate in the streets or in the cheapest venues. Street food remained popular, with dishes such as tripe stew in cups, pretzels, and doughnuts—some filled with savory fillings. Heated sausages were also in high demand. Several objects displayed at the exhibition illustrate this, such as Józef Rapacki's graphic titled Sausage Seller and a Legless Invalid, and a 19th-century shop sign depicting a man eating a warm sausage.

Tea rooms, dairy restaurants, and 'bavaries' (places where beer was served to accompany a small meal) were also popular.

The cheap food industry primarily developed in working-class districts such as Wola, Praga, and the Jewish quarter of the city. These areas saw the growth of affordable eateries like simple food stalls, taverns, and small bars, where one could drink alcohol and order a small dish.

Another form of accessible food came in the form of a "deli"—delicatessen shops where customers could get a reasonably priced meal prepared from the products sold in the store. Famous 'delis' included those run by Stepkowski, Bocquet, Sowiński and Szulc, Rozmanith, Bryliński, Lipkan, or Riedel. Each establishment specialized in different dishes, such as snacks, sausages with cabbage, tripe, herring, or sandwiches.

A drawing by Włodzimierz Bartoszewicz gives an idea of such an establishment, depicting the interior of the pre-war dining venue run by Antoni Salis. Operating from the 1920s until the outbreak of World War II, this bar was located in a tenement house at 4 Zgoda Street. It was one of Warsaw's first eateries where take-out dishes could also be ordered. Initially, it was a small deli offering ready-to-eat meals, including roasted poultry and venison, pâtés, and simple, popular Warsaw dishes such as tripe soup, various vegetable and fish salads, sausages, and frankfurters. As the business expanded, Salis added a second space to create a dining area for customers to enjoy their meals on-site. The menu expanded to include soups like broth or borscht with croquettes. The interior was furnished with small tables featuring marble tops and Thonet round stools, while the walls were lined with black-and-white tiles. The Salis bar became particularly popular among women, who both

bought ready-made dishes to save time and effort, and enjoyed light snacks which they consumed in the venue itself.

After World War II, as part of the planned economy, the authorities promoted the development of collective dining. The network of milk bars and fast-service eateries was expanded, along with support for workplace, school, preschool, and nursery cafeterias. These venues served a standardized menu featuring popular dishes such as pierogi, pancakes, tomato soup, cucumber soup, or broth, as well as potatoes with a cutlet and salad. In reference to this era, we present a painting by Józefa Wnukowa titled Milk Bar from 1954. The painting dates back to a time when the government endorsed the growth of collective gastronomy as a solution to the challenges women faced in balancing paid employment with traditional domestic responsibilities. The painting, while maintaining the prevailing Socialist Realist style of the time, also bears elements of post-impressionist colourism, which remained popular during that period.

In the 1980s, significant changes occurred in street food culture with the introduction of new street dishes like zapiekanki (grilled baguettes topped with mushrooms and cheese) and hot dogs.

However, the real revolution in eating out happened after 1989. Numerous eateries offering meals for every budget quickly emerged. Ethnic cuisines such as Italian, Vietnamese, and later Japanese, Thai, Mexican, and Turkish, became popular. During this time, vegetarian and later vegan restaurants also started appearing, with one of the oldest still in operation being “Vega”, located on Solidarności Avenue and operating since 1992. Today, Warsaw has the most meat-free eateries in the entire European Union. A trend developed where dining out became part of city life. Moreover, ready-to-eat meals and companies specializing in preparing dishes, often providing entire daily menus tailored to individual needs, became available.

## **7: A Picnic by the Vistula River**

The vast majority of Warsaw residents were unable to take longer vacations away from the city. Nevertheless, less affluent inhabitants commonly took advantage of the available opportunities for a short respite in nature. They tried to emulate the higher social

circles for whom spending leisure time outside Warsaw was a way of life. Bielany, in particular, was very popular among Warsaw residents. Stanisław August Poniatowski initiated the tradition of celebratory Pentecost festivities at the Camaldolese Monastery in the Bielański Forest. Events included competitions, performances, concerts, feasts, and illuminations. The royal court was accompanied by aristocrats, landowners, and wealthy burghers. The common people who arrived in large numbers watched the elite's entertainment and enjoyed attractions prepared especially for them. People of all social classes enjoyed the festivities side by side.

The popularity of picnics in Bielany lasted throughout the 19th century but, over time, the fair took on a distinctly folk character. On Pentecost Sunday, tens of thousands of Warsaw residents arrived at the forest by boats on the Vistula River, by omnibuses, carriages, or on foot. The main attractions of the Bielany festival were feasts, choral singing, dance parties, the Ferris Wheel, carousels, puppet theaters, magician shows, and shooting ranges. People ate food they had brought with them or purchased on-site, such as tripe, pea soup, and hot sausage. Beer tents were very popular. Often, people would get into brawls that required police intervention. The Bielany picnic is depicted in, among other things, Franciszek Kostrzewski's work from 1900, presented at the exhibition, and also in the photographs by Henryk Poddębski from a later period.

Saska Kępa also had a rich tradition as a leisure spot. Starting in 1735, King Augustus III Sas organized festivals and holiday celebrations there. By the turn of the 20th century, Saska Kępa became a favorite picnic spot for the less affluent segment of the society. Visitors enjoyed local snacks, music, dancing, and lively performances. Popular drinking spots included establishments like "Prado," "Pod Kotwicą," and "Pod Dębem." The proximity to the river offered opportunities for bathing, and regular steamboat services transported people to the opposite bank from the start of the May season. Just like in Bielany, picnics in Saska Kępa were characterised by a high degree of moral freedom.

In the second half of the 19th century, the custom of having communal meals outdoors in the spring and summer was established. In Warsaw, various leisure spots developed for different social groups. The working class celebrated in Młynów, in the gardens in the area of Czyste, and in the Pole Mokotowskie park; the wealthier strata preferred Saska Kępa and suburban locations. They brought provisions such as

roasted meats, bread, and fruits from home, and bought pretzels, doughnuts, sausages, or sandwiches from street vendors. Konrad Brandel captured picnic scenes in Warsaw at the end of the 19th century in his photographs, depicting members and supporters of the Warsaw Rowing Society relaxing in gardens of *Saska Kępa*, or labourers in *Młynów*. Although more and more city residents would eat outdoors, for the wealthy elite, eating outside without a proper setting was considered unacceptable.

During the interwar period, picnicking remained popular for health reasons. Doctors recommended spending time outdoors, taking water and sun baths to boost vitality. The picnic spots expanded to include beaches along the Vistula River.

After World War II, the tradition of individual picnicking partially declined. Instead, authorities encouraged residents to participate in communal festivals as part of state celebrations, such as 1 May and 22 July. The festival menu included roasted sausages or blood sausage, sometimes soups, ice cream, and cotton candy. Sunday picnics became popular, and with the introduction of free Saturdays, picnicking on Saturdays also became common in suburban areas.

Today, picnicking is making a comeback, and new forms of it are emerging. Popular forms of outdoor relaxation that include eating are: barbecuing by the Vistula River or Czerniakowskie Lake, having picnics in parks, and spending time in beer gardens along the Vistula boulevards. Breakfast markets organized in *Żoliborz* or *Mokotów*, as well as other outdoor events combined with tasting new flavours and dishes, have become new ways to spend leisure time in the city.

This section of the exhibition, which also marks the conclusion of the entire exhibition, ends with contemporary works by female artists.

In her photo reportage *Warsaw Beach* from last year, from which a selection of photos is presented in the exhibition, Anna Bedyńska captures how Warsaw residents spend their leisure time by the Vistula River. Like an anthropologist or sociologist, she highlights the preferences to eat outdoors, different types of grilled foods, and picnic accessories. Warsaw beaches are democratic and accessible to everyone, which inspired the author's sociological and anthropological observations—and for us, culinary ones as well. Grilling and sharing meals and snacks have long been integral to beach outings. These practices reveal differences



in diets, serving methods, and eating habits. Some people grill meat, others grill vegetables; some bring prepared sandwiches and fruits. Some pack their picnic provisions in picnic baskets with dishes and cutlery, others use aluminum trays and plastic cups. There are even those who elegantly set up tables for their meals.

In this section, we bring installation by Bettina Bereś, titled *The Reception outdoors*, thus transforming it into a garden table. The work is a reference to the family history of her mother and mother's brother from childhood—one evening, the siblings sneaked into an empty room with a table set for a reception and began to feast on the elaborate dishes served on it. With a touch of irony, the artist evokes this memory through pickled porcini mushrooms, “nothing” soup, and mayonnaise herring, embroidering their names onto the tablecloth.