

Famous Warsaw Legends

Photo	Main figure	Description*
	Polish Mermaid	<p>The Warsaw Mermaid Statue Presented as half fish and half woman. Images of a mermaid have been used on the crest of Warsaw as its symbol. From the middle of 14th century. <i>Legend tells that once upon a time two mermaid sisters swam to the shores of the Baltic Sea from their home in the depths. They were truly beautiful, even though they had fish tails instead of legs. One of them decided to swim further towards the Danish straits. Now she can be seen sitting on a rock an the entry to the port of Copenhagen. The second swam to the seaside town, Gdańsk. And then, up the Vistula River (...)then she came out of the Water (...) to rest. She liked it so much that she decided to stay. The fishermen who used to live in this area noticed that when they were fishing, someone was agitating the waters of the Vistula River , tangling their nets and freeing fish from their traps. They decided to catch the culprit and get even with him once and for all. But when they heard the enchanting song of the mermaid, they gave up their plans and came to love the beautiful woman-fish. From that time, every evening, she entertained them with her wonderful singing. But one day, a rich merchant strolling on the banks of the Vistula River caught sight of the little mermaid. He decided to catch her and keep her as a prisoner, and then make money by showing her at fairs. The merchant quickly put into practice his wicked scheme. He caught the mermaid by a trick and held her as a prisoner in a wooden shed, with no access to the water. Her cries were heard by a young farm-hand (...), who with the help of a friend freed her one night. The mermaid, in recognition of the fact that the inhabitants had come to her aid, swore that if they were ever in danger, she would come to protect them. That is why the Warsaw mermaid is armed with a sword and a shield, for the protection of our city. (According to book “Warsaw in short” by www.warsawtour.pl)</i></p>

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	Wars and Sawa	<p>In one version King Kazimierz Odnowiciel, while on his way from Kraków to Gniezno, came across a poor fisherman's hut. The hungry king found his way to the hut thanks to the smoke and the smell of fresh food. As he was having some fish from the night's catch, the fisherman told the king the story of his family which had just recently grown bigger thanks to the arrival of two marvellous twins. The poor fisherman and his wife could not baptise the babies, though, because there was no church in the area. The king, who had really enjoyed the meal, wanted to pay the peasants with gold, but they, according to the old Polish tradition of hospitality, refused to take any payment. Then the king asked them for one more favour – he asked to be the twins' godfather at their baptism that he would organize. An altar was set up on a hill, and a priest commissioned by King Kazimierz named the twins Wars (the boy) and Sawa (the girl). And King Kazimierz announced that Piotr Rybak (Peter Fisherman) would from then on be called Piotr Wars, the royal fisherman, the father of Wars and Sawa, and the owner of the vast forest. The king also told him that one day, when a village began to take shape near his hut, that he should give it a name derived from his new surname – and that the village would carry that name forever.</p> <p>Another version of the legend says that a long, long time ago there was a tiny hut standing at the shores of the Vistula River. Wars, a fisherman, and his wife Sawa lived there. One day a hunt was organized in the area and Prince Ziemomysł, the owner of the estate, got lost in the forest. He wandered around for many days and many nights and he finally reached the fisherman's hut. Wars and Sawa made the stranger welcome and in the morning the grateful prince said, 'You didn't hesitate to take in a stranger and save him from hunger, cold and wild animals. Therefore this land will forever be called Warsaw, so your kindness can never be forgotten'.</p>

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	Basilisk	<p>A legend says that in the basements of the buildings located at the Old Town lives a Basilisk. It guarded the treasures once stored there, and every man who tried to reach them was killed by the gaze of the Basilisk, which turns men to stone. He was defeated in the end by a wandering tailor who showed the monster a mirror. The Basilisk was petrified by its own appearance, and hid away; from then on, he was no longer a threat to residents. Today on the façade of the building there is a sign of the Basilisk, which is the symbol of the renowned Warsaw restaurant of the same name.</p>
	Golden Duck	<p>A long, long time ago a princess who had been turned into a golden duck lived in the cellars of Ostrogski Castle. People said that anyone who found her would be rich beyond their wildest dreams. One year, on Kupala's Night, a young cobbler went down into the cellars – he was lucky and he met the golden duck, who promised him riches. However, she said there was only one condition: she gave him a bag full of golden coins and said he had to spend them all within one day and not share his riches with anyone. It was almost the end of the day, and the boy broke the condition: he gave the last coin to a poor soldier. In a blink of an eye, he lost everything he had purchased with the gold coins. And that's when he understood that money does not make you happy: true happiness comes from work and good health. From that time onwards, he lived the good life of a master cobbler and nobody ever heard about the Golden Duck again.</p>
	Stone Bear	<p>According to a romantic legend the stone bear lying in front of the Shrine of Our Lady of Grace the Patron of Warsaw (Jesuit Monastery) is in fact enchanted, shy prince who's waiting for the one woman whose love can bring him back to manhood.</p>