



Kraków has always been, in many respects, a charmed city. With a history that dates back to the 4th century settlement of Wawel Hill, Kraków has fortuitously avoided destruction since the pesky Mongols stopped bullying the area in the 13th century, growing into one of the most prominent cities in Central Europe. The most important city in Poland not to come out of World War II looking like a trampled Lego set, even the Soviets failed to leave their mark on the enchanted city centre during 45 years of supervision, forced to erect their gray communist Utopia in the outlying suburb of Nowa Huta. As a result, Kraków is today one of the most beautiful showpieces of Eastern Europe – a claim validated by its historic centre's inclusion on the first ever UNESCO World Heritage List in 1978, along with the nearby Wieliczka Salt Mine and only ten other places in the world. A city of majestic architectural monuments, cobbled thoroughfares, cultural treasures, timeless courtyards, priceless artworks and legendary beer cellars and gardens, Kraków's historic centre is the pride of Poland.



© Rodrigo Galíndez

What To See

Kraków's centre can be divided into two main sections – the **Old Town** and **Kazimierz** (the former Jewish Quarter), with **Wawel** towering between them. These three areas are requisite for anyone visiting the city – even if just for a day – and have been given their own separate treatment with accompanying cultural listings within this guide. Though one could spend their life wandering in and out of the cobbled streets, courtyards, cafes, clubs and museums of the Old Town and Kazimierz (we've attempted to make a life out of it), if you get the opportunity, don't hesitate to take a trip across the river into **Podgórze**. Just beyond Kazimierz, Podgórze is the city's most naturally beautiful and mysterious district; the Jewish heritage trail also naturally leads here where the worst horror of Kraków's Nazi occupation played out and Schindler made a name for himself.


Within these pages you'll also find a section devoted to **Nowa Huta**, one of only two planned socialist realist cities ever built. Designed to be the antithesis of everything Kraków's Old Town represents, both culturally and aesthetically, the massive steelworks and other commie comforts of Nowa Huta are only a tram ride away. Those staying in the area for a week or more should strongly consider daytrips to **Wieliczka**, **Ojców National Park**, **Auschwitz-Birkenau** and **Tarnów**, information about all of which you'll find here by reading on. However long your stay, the meticulously updated information in this guide will help you make the most of it. Enjoy exploring Kraków and Małopolska.



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Tourist Information

City Tourist Information D-2, ul. Szpitalna 25, tel. 012 432 01 10, www.biurofestiwalowe.pl. The official city tourist office. Also on ul. Św. Jana 2 (10:00-18:00). ▶ Open 09:00 - 19:00.

Cracow City Tours D-1, Pl. Matejki 2, tel. 012 421 13 33, www.cracowcitytours.com. Also at ul. Floriańska 44 (D-2, 012 421 13 27, Open 07:30-24:00). ▶ Open 07:30 - 20:00. 

Jordan Tourist Information and Accommodation Centre D-2, ul. Pawia 8, tel. 012 422 60 91, www.it.jordan.pl. ▶ Open 08:00 - 18:00, Sat 09:00 - 14:00. Closed Sun.

Krakow Tourist Information Point C-3, ul. Floriańska 6, tel. 012 378 94 48, www.seekrakow.com. ▶ Open 08:00 - 20:00.

Małopolska Tourist Information C-3, Rynek Główny 1/3 (Sukiennice), tel. 012 421 77 06, www.mcit.pl. The official regional tourist office. ▶ Open 09:00 - 21:00.

Tourist Information Office Marco der Pole C-3, Pl. Mariacki 3, tel. 012 431 16 78, www.krakow-travel.com. ▶ Open 09:00 - 19:00, Sun 09:00 - 18:00.



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Any exploration of Kraków's Old Town should start with the **'Royal Route'** – the historical coronation path of Polish kings when Kraków served as the royal capital from the 14th century to the very end of the 16th century. Most of the Old Town's prime sights (more information on which can be found in these pages with help from the index) lay along this route from the Floriańska Gate to Wawel Castle. For many of less noble lineage, however, the route begins at Kraków's train station, a walk from which to the main market square is among the most regal and awe-inspiring introductions to any city in Europe. Following the human traffic from the station through the ul. Basztowa underpass will plant you in the green space that encircles the Old Town known as the **Planty (D-2)**. Ideal for a fair weather stroll, the Planty was once a series of medieval fortifications surrounded by a moat. After Poland's Third Partition in the late 18th century, the order came down from Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph I to dismantle these neglected structures, however thanks to local effort the northern parts of the wall were spared, including the magnificent Barbikan and Floriańska Gate. Walking the two blocks towards the Barbikan, take note of the **Śłowacki Theatre (D-2)** to the left on ul. Szpitalna. A marvelous Baroque masterpiece from 1893, while it's a bit difficult to infiltrate during the day, buying an affordable ticket to the theatre is highly recommended. On ahead, the circular fortress of the **Barbikan (D-2)** was added to the city's defences in the late 15th century while, directly across from it, the **Floriańska Gate** that officially began the Royal Route dates back to 1307. Pass through it and you're on one of Kraków's main commercial streets. Behind the Golden Arches, kebab and souvenir signs don't fail to notice the architectural detail of the facades. On this street you'll find the **Jan Matejko House and Museum**, as well as the underappreciated **Pharmacy Museum (C-2)**.



© Piotrus

Arriving upon Kraków's main market square or **'Rynek' (C-3)**, you are now standing in the heart of Poland with your finger on its pulse. Historically, culturally and spiritually the Rynek and Wawel may be the two most important sights in the country (sorry Warsaw). The largest medieval market square in Central Europe, Kraków's Rynek is 200 metres square and functions as the city's social gravitation point. Lined with cafes and restaurants, filled with people, pigeons, street performers, musicians and horse-drawn carriages, this is a place of festivals, concerts, parades and other events. At its centre lies the impressive **Cloth Hall** or **'Sukiennice'** – a neo-Gothic structure which has evolved and grown over the years, serving as a market for merchants since the Middle Ages. Directly before you as you're leaving Floriańska is **Mariacki Cathedral** – one of the most dazzling cathedrals in the country famed for its incredible altarpiece and stained glass. It's from atop the taller of the two cathedral towers that a bugler plays an abbreviated tune every hour on the hour – don't miss it. On the other side of the square you'll find the **Town Hall Tower**, with a viewing platform at the top and a theatre and bar in the former basement prison.



© special B

Leaving the Rynek follow the kings down ul. Grodzka to pl. Wszystkich Świętych (C-4). To the right is **St. Francis' Basilica (B/C-4)** with an Art Nouveau interior by Stanisław Wyspiański that should not be missed, while directly before you are three more incredible stained glass windows by Kraków's favourite son in a specially-made modern building. Ulica Grodzka leads you past **Peter & Paul's Cathedral (C-4)** with its striking sculptures of the 12 disciples posed before it. Cut across the small square to your right and you'll find yourself on one of Kraków's most handsome streets, ul. Kanoniczna. The late Pope John Paul II's former residence is at numbers 19-21, which now house the **Archdiocesan Museum (C-5)**. Kanoniczna lets out directly at the foot of **Wawel Castle (B/C-5)**, the city's defining landmark. A source of great pride, patriotic and spiritual strength, Wawel is worth spending half a day exploring, as well as the Wisła riverbanks below.

Other Old Town highlights you'll be the poorer to have missed include the famous **Czartoryski Museum (D-2)**, which can claim one of only five Da Vinci's on display in the world within its collection, and the fabulous 20th century art collection on the top floor of the **National Museum (H-3)**. The Old Town is also home to the second oldest university in Central Europe. Jagielloń University's **Collegium Maius (B-3)** is the school's oldest building and was the studying place of Copernicus. Take an hour out to see the incredible library and lecture hall, as well as the oldest surviving globe in the world to depict the Americas. Anyone looking to do some bizarre bargain hunting should head to one of Kraków's catch-all marketplaces, with **Stary Kleparz (C/D-1)** and **Hala Targowa (E-4)** – especially during its Sunday morning flea market – being bonafide cultural experiences in their own right (see Shopping for more). Finally, if you're looking for a leisure activity on a lovely day, the ascent to the top of **Kopiec Kościuszko (F-3)** is well-rewarded with fantastic views of the entire Old Town.

Guided tours

AB City Tours H-3, ul. Kościuszki 49, tel. 0 601 44 07 87, www.abcitytour.pl. Their large fleet of electronic golf-carts zips tired-footed tourists around all the sites in town, while informational audio recordings explain Kraków's history in English, Polish, Spanish, German, French, Italian, Norwegian and Hungarian. ► Open 08:00 - 16:00. **TC**

Agnieszka Sababady, tel. 0 600 21 24 98, www.krakowguide.pl. The history, culture and legends of Kraków and the area with an English- and German-speaking licenced guide and interpreter. Personal recommendations available. ► Prices negotiable.

Cracow City Tours D-1, Pl. Matejki 2, tel. 012 421 13 33, www.cracowcitytours.com. The best value trip to Auschwitz on offer. Also at ul. Floriańska 44 (D-2, 012 421 13 27, Open 07:30-24:00). ► Open 07:30 - 20:00. **TC**

Cracow Tours C-3, Rynek Główny 41, tel. 012 619 24 47, www.orbis.krakow.pl. Variety of tour packages including city centre tours, Auschwitz, the salt mines and Zakopane. ► Open 09:00 - 18:00, Sat 09:00 - 14:00. Closed Sun. **TC**

Crazy Guides K-1, ul. Lublańska 22/9, tel. 0 500 09 12 00, www.crazyguides.com. Communist themed tours of the Nowa Huta district and Steel Works. Experience Stalin's gift to Kraków - one of the world's only centrally planned cities - in a genuine Eastern Bloc Trabant 601 automobile.

Cruising Kraków Bike Tours C-2, ul. Basztowa 17, tel. 0 514 55 60 17, www.cruisingkrakow.com. Bike tours around Kraków led by experienced native English-speaking guides. No reservations required: tours depart from the Mickiewicz monument on the Rynek. Cost 69zł. ► Open 09:00 - 19:00.

Horse-drawn carriage C-3. Catch a quick glimpse of Kraków from a horse-drawn carriage. Carriages are hired from the Rynek and cost approximately 110zł/hr, 60zł/30min. Routes are individually determined.

Marco der Pole C-4, ul. Kanonicza 15, tel. 012 430 21 31, office@marcorderpole.pl, www.krakow-travel.com. A well-seasoned outfit with an info office at Plac Mariacki 3, Marco der Pole organises daily walking tours, regional daytrips and even religious pilgrimages. ► Open 09:00 - 17:00.

The Tourist Guide Association (Stowarzyszenie Przewodników Turystycznych - Kraków) C-3, ul. Sienna 5, tel. 0 602 44 28 06, www.guide-crakow.pl. These well-connected linguists can help you find and book tours of Kraków in English, Czech, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Dutch, Swedish, German, Polish, Russian, Slovak and Serbo-Croatian.

Visit Cracow tel. 0 605 652 522, www.visit-crakow.com. Licenced English- and German-speaking guide offering walking tours and sightseeing by car/coach of the Old Town, Kazimierz, Oskar Schindler tours and Jewish root searching. Prices negotiable. ► By appointment only.

guided tours



- ✓ Auschwitz-Birkenau
- ✓ Salt Mine
- ✓ Old Town Walk
- ✓ Jewish Quarter Walk
- ✓ Oskar Schindler Sites
- ✓ Tour Bus
- ✓ Zakopane and the Tatra Mountains
- ✓ Ojcow National Park
- ✓ Czestochowa and the Black Madonna
- ✓ John Paul II Route
- ✓ Tyniec Abby Tours
- ✓ Cracow Panoramic Bus

Booking:

- Cracow City Tours Office - 2 Matejko Square
- Małopolska PKS Office 30 Floriańska Str.

or call

012 421 13 33

www.cracowcitytours.com

Churches

Holy Trinity Church (Kościół Św. Trójcy) C-4, ul. Stolarska 12. Built in 1250 by Dominican friars from Bologna, the church lost many of its treasures when it was gutted by fire back in 1850. Rebuilt in 1872 this huge structure is now an important evangelical centre. The image of Our Lady of the Rosary, found inside the Rosary chapel, is said to have healing powers.

Reformed Franciscans' B-2, ul. Reformacka 4, tel. 012 422 29 66, www.ofm.krakow.pl. This church was built between 1666 and 1672 and reflects the modest furnishings and architectures of this strict order. A specific microclimate in the church's vaults naturally mummifies the bodies in the crypt. If you'd like to see the mummified bodies, hair and all, you must ask for permission. Across the street are outdoor Stations of the Cross. ► Open during mass only.

SS Peter & Paul's Church (Kościół Św. Piotra i Św. Pawła) C-4, ul. Grodzka 52a, tel. 012 422 65 73, www.apostolowie.pl. Kraków's premier Jesuit Church was built in the early 1600s. The twelve disciples standing on the gates outside are its most striking feature, although the interior has been extensively renovated and the airy, austere grandeur of this late Renaissance building is now evident. ► Open 07:00 - 19:00, Sun 13:30 - 18:00.

St. Adalbert's (Kościół Św. Wojciecha) C-3, Rynek Główny, tel. 012 422 83 52. Kraków's oldest church sits not unlike a lost orphan at the southeast corner of the Cloth Hall, a mad mix of pre-Roman, Roman, Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque architecture, all crammed together in a higgledy-piggledy jumble of religious styles. The earliest parts of the building date from at least the 11th century, pre-dating the

Rynek and explaining its seemingly random position within it. St. Adalbert had his own cult following at the time, which explains how it managed to survive. A look inside is well worth it, not least because the floor sits some two metres below the surface of the main square. ► Open 09:00 - 18:00, Sun 14:00 - 18:00. **TC**

St. Anne's (Kościół Św. Anny) B-3, ul. Św. Anny 11, tel. 012 422 53 18. A leading example of Baroque ecclesiastical architecture in Poland inspired by Italian architect Baldassare Fontana and assisted by painters Carlo and Innocente Monti and Karl Dankwart. Airy dome frescoes and soft angels everywhere offer a sense of light and redemption in comparison to the dark Gothic style. ► Open 09:00-12:00, 16:00-19:00.

St. Bernard's (Kościół Św. Bernardyna) C-5, ul. Bernardyńska 2, tel. 012 422 16 50, www.bernardyni.com.pl. With most eyes and cameras pointing towards Wawel it's easy to miss St Bernard's, a church and monastery founded St John of Capistrano, a nasty zealot with a particular penchant for encouraging anti-Jewish pogroms. Constructed in the mid-to-late 15th century St Bernard's was meant as a refuge for those wishing to atone for their sins and live in accordance to the teachings of St Francis of Assisi. Fearing it would be commandeered as a strategic base by the invading Swedish troops the Poles burnt the church to the ground in 1655, later rebuilding it in its current baroque style. ► Open 06:00 - 19:00. No visiting during mass please.

St. Francis' Basilica (Bazylika Św. Franciszka) C-4, Pl. Wszystkich Świętych 5, tel. 012 422 53 76. Burnt down numerous times, this 13th century basilica was the first brick building in town and is now adorned with amazing Art Nouveau windows and decorations. Krakowian Stanisław Wyspiański made the eight stained-glass windows around

1895, including the controversial God the Father in the Act of Creation. He covered the walls with colourful hippie-type patterns and motifs inspired by nature, including huge dandelions. ► Open 06:00 - 20:00. No visiting during mass please.

St. Mary's Basilica (Bazylika Mariacka) C-3, Pl. Mariacki 5, tel. 012 422 05 21, www.mariacki.com. Tartar invasions of the 13th century left the original church in a heap of ruins and construction began on St. Mary's using the existing foundations. It doesn't matter how many times you see it, the altarpiece, stained glass windows of the nave, and the blue, starred ceiling will take your breath away. The magnificent altarpiece was for 12 painstaking years the principal work of the 15th century German artist Veit Stoss (aka Wit Stwos), and depicts the Virgin Mary's Quietude among the apostles. Surrounding the altar are polychrome paintings by Matejko, Mehoffer and Wyspiański. Several local legends are attached to St. Mary's. The architect of the smaller tower murdered his brother (the architect of the taller), apparently jealous that his structure was shorter and less elaborate. Racked with guilt he then committed suicide by throwing himself off the roof of the cathedral. Nowadays the taller tower is home to one of Kraków's most enduring traditions. The bugle call played on the turn of every hour apparently takes its origins from an event in 1241. Having spotted invading Tartar forces on the horizon, a lone fireman started playing his trumpet to alert the habitants of Kraków. He was shot with an arrow in his neck, abruptly cutting off the tune mid-melody, but the town was roused from its sleep and defended itself. In honour of this event, seven local firemen now have task of tooting the tune every hour. The first written mention of the tradition dates back to 1392, though a local magazine recently claimed the whole custom was invented by an American in 1929. ► Open 11:30 - 18:00, Sun 14:00 - 18:00. Admission 6/3zł.

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TRAVELERS ARE REQUESTED:

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Monuments

Adam Mickiewicz C-3, Rynek Główny. One of the most important statues in Poland, the large likeness of the romantic poet and national hero Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855) was originally unveiled in 1898 to celebrate the centenary of the great man's birth, and, like so many other symbols of national pride was destroyed by the occupying Germans during WWII. The statue that stands in the Rynek today is a 1955 copy of Teodor Rygiel's original, and is a popular and easily recognisable meeting place. Lithuanian-born Mickiewicz (who's most famous work, Pan Tadeusz begins with the words 'Lithuania, my country!' and who is known and loved by the Lithuanians as Adomas Mickevičius) never visited Kraków until 35 years after his death. His body lies at rest in the Cathedral crypts just down the road at Wawel.

Dżok B-6, Bulwar Czerwieński. Dżok (Jock) was by all accounts a happy and no doubt philosophical little Polish dog who was left tragically orphaned when his owner had a heart attack in his car in 1990 on the city's busy Grunwald Roundabout (Rondo Grunwaldzkie). Left behind when his master was taken away in an ambulance, Dżok waited patiently for his friend to return for a year before finally going to live with a lady who used to come and feed him. After the lady died in 1998 poor Dżok was taken to a local dog hostel from where he escaped on his second day of captivity and was swiftly run over by a train. In 2001 a sculpture of Dżok was unveiled at Bulwar Czerwieński close to where his original master passed away. The work of local sculptor Bronisław Chromy (1925-), a collection box in the back is for helping fellow orphaned animals.

Elvis Presley G-4, Al. Elvira Presleya. One of Kraków's least known, hardest to find and most bizarre monuments, this tribute to the King is a pilgrimage worth making. Though located on an 'avenue' named in his honour, it's little more than a footpath into the beguiling woods of Zakrzówek and the picturesque quarry that lies beyond. A large standing stone with Elvis' face set in it and half-submerged in silicon, this seemingly wacky act of randomness is an in-all-seriousness tribute from the Kraków Elvis fan club. Recently the King's hair was spray-painted blue and he can usually be found in the company of artificial flowers. The perfect occasion for an outing, you'll find Elvis by departing Al. Gen. Zielińskiego for ul. Zielna, somewhere near where it meets ul. Pietrusińskiego (G-4) on the map in the back of this guide; where the road ends you'll find the King.

Grunwald Monument (Pomnik Grunwaldu) D-1, Pl. Matejki. The Battle of Grunwald, fought between the joint armies of Poland and Lithuania against the Teutonic Knights on July 15, 1410, is considered to be one of the greatest battles ever to take place in medieval Europe. A defining moment in Polish history, the battle was immortalised in Kraków with the unveiling of this weighty monument in front of an estimated 160,000 people on the 500th anniversary of the event in 1910. Antoni Wiwulski's (1877-1919) original masterpiece was, not surprisingly, destroyed by the occupying Nazis during WWII and the copy that now stands in its place dates from 1976, having been faithfully reproduced using sketches and models of the original. At the top on his horse is the Lithuanian king of Poland Władysław Jagiełło, his sword pointing downwards in his right hand. At the front is his cousin the Lithuanian prince Vytautas (Vitold), who is flanked on either side by victorious soldiers from the joint army. The dead man at the front is Ulrich von Jungingen, the Teutonic Order's Grand Master, who lost his life during the battle.

Museums

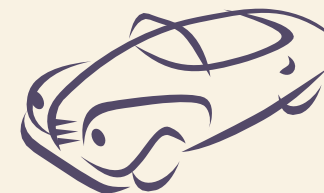
Aquarium - Natural History Museum D-5, ul. Św. Sebastiana 9, tel. 012 429 10 49, www.aquariumkrakow.com. The man who brought us Kraków's first hostel (Nathan, believe his name was) has now brought us the city's first aquarium. After a series of horrific bureaucratic holdups, this fish is back in the water along with the dozens of lizards, monkeys, turtles, tropical frogs and venomous snakes that also inhabit the 2000 square metre space. Occupying the lower two levels of the Natural History Museum, the aquarium was designed specifically for children with touch-screen info stations, touch tanks and educational programs. The next big step for the aquarium is the anticipated unveiling of a 90,000 litre shark tank as the space continues to expand despite bureaucratic and financial obstacles. Go fish. ▶ Open 09:00 - 20:00, Sat, Sun 09:00 - 21:00. Admission for children ages 4 to 16 - 12zł, adults 18zł. Children under 4 free.

Archdiocesan Museum of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła (Muzeum Archidiecezjalne Kardynała Karola Wojtyły) C-5, ul. Kanonicza 19-21, tel. 012 421 89 63, www.muzeumkra.diecezja.pl. John Paul II lived here - twice. Once as Karol Wojtyła, the young priest with a penchant for skiing (his Head skis are on show) and later as a bishop, in grander, adjacent rooms. The Archdiocesan doubles as a small but well-presented showcase of beautiful sacral art, some dating back to the 13th century. Among the items on display, you will find presents to His Holiness from heads-of-state. All very nice, but the exhibition will only hold the attention of true papal enthusiasts, and visitors can expect to be tailed by over-zealous curators. Personal guided tours available or for groups up to 30 people in English, German, Italian and Polish. ▶ Open 10:00 - 16:00, Sat, Sun 10:00 - 15:00. Closed Mon. Admission 5/3zł, family ticket 12zł. Guided tours 60zł. **TC**

Archeology Museum (Muzeum Archeologiczne) B-4, ul. Poselska 3, tel. 012 422 71 00, www.ma.krakow.pl. Fresh from a recent boost of cash, Kraków's one-time lacklustre Archaeology Museum has been transformed into something actually worth going to have a look at. As well as some fine examples of life from Małopolska during the Stone Age and a brilliant room dedicated to local clothing from 70,000 BC to the 14th century, the museum houses a permanent collection of artefacts from ancient Egypt including some beautiful shrouds, a number of intricately decorated sarcophagi and some mummified cats. The latter exhibition is best enjoyed with the aid of an audio guide, available when you buy your ticket. ▶ Open 09:00 - 14:00, Thu 14:00-18:00, Fri, Sun 10:00 - 14:00. Closed Sat. From July 1 open 09:00 - 14:00, Tue, Thu 14:00 - 18:00, Sun 10:00 - 14:00. Closed Sat. Admission 7/5zł, Sun free for permanent exhibitions. **TC**

Burgher House (Hippolit Museum) (Dom Mieszczański (Kamienica Hipolitów)) C-3, Pl. Mariacki 3, tel. 012 422 42 19, www.mhk.pl. The Hippolit's were a merchant family who lived in this fine building around the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th centuries, although the building dates back considerably further than that. The inside has been transformed into a series of recreations of typical Polish bourgeois houses from the 17th to the early 20th century, and is interesting for the insights it gives into how the other half lived as well as being a showcase for some truly remarkable furniture. Highly recommended. ▶ Open 10:00 - 17:30. Closed Mon, Tue. Last entrance 30 minutes before closing. Admission 6/4zł, Wed free. **TC**

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Celestat E-2, ul. Lubicz 16, tel. 012 429 37 91, www.mhk.pl. About as odd as it gets, the History of the Fowler Brotherhood celebrates what is essentially a male-only cult of hunters who wear strange hats, worship a silver chicken and have their very own king. In existence since 1565, the history of the Brotherhood is laid out courtesy of a series of oil paintings, guns, teapots, photographs and, inside the Sharpshooters' Hall, a glass case containing the mystical chicken that appears to be the focus of all the fuss. Top marks for wackiness, it's unlikely you'll leave any more enlightened as you were when you went in. Precisely what rain was invented for. ▶ Open 09:30 - 17:00. Closed Mon, Sun. Admission 6/4zł, Wed free. **TC**

Collegium Maius (Jagiellonian University Museum) B-3, ul. Jagiellońska 15, tel. 012 422 05 49, www.uj.edu.pl/muzeum. Jagiellonian University is the third oldest university in Europe, founded by King Kazimierz the Great in 1364. Its picturesque courtyard ranks as one of the most beautiful of the city. An amiable English-speaking guide will take you on a 45-minute tour of the Treasury, Assembly Hall, Library and Common Room. Along the way, you will see the oldest surviving globe to depict the Americas. It was in 1492 that astronomer Nicolas Copernicus began his studies at the Jagiellonian, developing his own theories about which way the world spins. You need to call or visit in advance to book a place on the English-language tour, which takes place Monday through Friday at 13:00. ▶ Open 10:00 - 15:00, Tue, Thu 10:00 - 18:00, Sat 10:00 - 14:00. Closed Sun. Last entrance 40 minutes before closing. Admission 7-16/5-12zł.

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Tourist Information Office

Daily City Walks in English and German!
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– in front of our Office
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Czartoryski Museum (Muzeum Książąt Czartoryskich) C-2, ul. Św. Jana 19, tel. 012 422 55 66, www.muzeum.krakow.pl. Its principle claim to fame is the possession of Leonardo da Vinci's Lady with an Ermine, one of only three extant Da Vinci oil paintings and a sentimental favourite for Poles, reproduced and hung in many a living room. The museum also houses an impressive collection of Etruscan, Greek, Roman and Egyptian relics, such as falcon sarcophagi. Museum enthusiasts could spend many happy hours here; only the paucity of English explanations might frustrate. ▶ Open 10:00 - 18:00, Sun 10:00 - 16:00. Closed Mon. Last entrance 30 minutes before closing. Admission 12/6zł, Sun free for permanent exhibitions. **TC**

Friends of the Fine Arts Society Gallery (Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Sztuk Pięknych) B-2, pl. Szczepański 4, tel. 012 422 66 16, www.palac-sztuki.krakow.pl. This gorgeous Art Nouveau building's exterior depicts the highs and lows of the creative process. The interior is a setting for a regularly changing selection of contemporary Polish art. ▶ Open 08:15 - 18:00, Sat, Sun 10:00 - 18:00. Last entrance 15 minutes before closing. Admission 7/4zł.

Geology Museum (Muzeum Geologiczne) C-4, ul. Senacka 1-3, tel. 012 422 19 10, www.ing.pan.pl. One tiny room given over to the provision of information about the rocks and geological structures in the Kraków region. Featuring a few glass cases full of rocks and crystals with Polish explanations, it's not exactly going to blow you away, but it's a nicest enough brief interlude all the same, and they've also thoughtfully provided a brochure in English to help demystify what is a specialist subject to say the least. ▶ Open 10:00 - 15:00, Sat 10:00 - 14:00. Closed Mon, Tue, Wed, Sun. Admission 4/3zł. Groups by prior arrangement.

History Museum (Muzeum Historyczne) C-3, Rynek Główny 35, tel. 012 619 23 00, www.mhk.pl. Established in 1899, Kraków's superb History Museum charts the trade, culture, politics and daily life of the city from 1257 until the end of the Second Republic in 1939. Unfortunately it's time for the 17th-century Pod Krzysztoforami (Under St. Christopher) building it's housed in to get a bit of a facelift. As such, the permanent exhibition is now closed, however there are some temporary exhibits running during the renovation. The current one is 'Helena Modrzejewska (1840-1909): Z miłości do sztuki.' Translating to 'From Love to Art' and meaning, we would prefer to presume, that she creates her art out of love, her love for art...anyway, find out by going. ▶ Last entrance 30 minutes before closing. Admission 8/6zł, family ticket 16zł, group ticket 4zł per person. **TC**

History of Photography Museum (Muzeum Historii Fotografii im. Walerego Rzewuskiego) H-1, ul. Józefitów 16, tel. 012 634 59 32, www.mhf.krakow.pl. Allegedly Poland's only museum dedicated exclusively to photography, this recently renovated museum is a real gem for fans of the art form and features some interesting exhibits. Laid out in several cupboard-size rooms that also play host to a series of changing photographic exhibitions, find some wonderful early stereoscopic photographs commemorating the 1871 Siege of Paris, an old darkroom, heaps of ancient cameras and a nice collection of historical images of Kraków. ▶ Open 11:00 - 18:00, Sat, Sun 10:00 - 15:30. Closed Mon, Tue, Mon, Tue admission for groups of minimum 5 people only. Reservations must be made 7 days in advance. Last entrance 30 minutes before closing. Admission 5/3zł, Sun free. Groups of 5-25 people 2zł per person. **TC**

Home Army Museum (Muzeum Armii Krajowej) J-1, ul. Wita Stwosza 12, tel. 012 430 33 63, www.muzeum-ak.krakow.pl. Documents Poland's military resistance towards foreign invaders over the last century, with a particular focus on WWII. Uniforms, weapons, photographs and maps are all presented, and there is a section devoted to Poland's most famous resistance heroes. A fascinating collection, though sadly lacking in coherent English translations. ▶ Open 11:00 - 17:00. Closed Mon, Sat, Sun. Sat, Sun Open by prior arrangement. Admission 5zł. Groups over 10 people 3zł per person. **TC**

Józef Mehoffer House (Dom Józefa Mehoffera) A-2, ul. Krupnicza 26, tel. 012 421 11 43, www.muzeum.krakow.pl. Mehoffer was one of the turn of the 19th century's artistic elite, a skilled stained-glass artist collaborating with Wyspiański on the interiors of numerous Kraków churches and important buildings. This, his house, was where the artists of the Młoda Polska (Young Poland) movement often met and is a delight to visit, filled with elegant furnishings, Art Deco to impressionist-era art and many sketches, designs and finished stained glass pieces that attest to his important artistic legacy. ▶ Open 10:00 - 18:00, Sun 10:00 - 16:00. Closed Mon. Last entrance 30 minutes before closing. Admission 6/3zł, Sun free for permanent exhibitions. **TC**

Manggha B-6, ul. Konopnickiej 26, tel. 012 267 27 03, www.manggha.krakow.pl. The Museum of Japanese Art & Technology houses the National Museum's Japanese artefacts, consisting mostly of the fabulous 6,500-item collection of local legend Feliks Jasieński (1861-1929). Exhibits include battlesuits adorned with face masks (with suspiciously Polish-looking moustaches), antiques, delicate porcelain, incredibly beautiful waterpaints and comic-like woodcut prints. In the centre there's a collection of sometimes hilariously translated Japanese comics (which must be read right to left). The building was commenced by film director Andrzej Wajda who saw the Jasieński collection exhibited during WWII. Upon winning the Kyoto city prize in 1987, he donated the US\$340,000 grant to the construction of the museum. The café terrace has a great view over to Wawel Castle. ▶ Open 10:00 - 18:00. Closed Mon. Last entrance 30 minutes before closing. Admission 15/10zł, family ticket 25zł, group ticket 60zł, Tue free. Guided tours 100zł.

Pharmacy Museum (Muzeum Farmacji) C-2, ul. Floriańska 25, tel. 012 421 92 79, www.muzeumfarmacji.pl. Located inside a wonderful 15th-century building, Kraków's brilliant Pharmacy Museum is laid out on several floors and includes all manner of exhibits from full-scale reproductions of ancient apothecary shops to some beastly snakes in jars and, on the top floor, a really good display of traditional herbal medicines. Also of interest is the small exhibit dedicated to the extraordinary and brave Pole, Tadeusz Pankiewicz. ▶ Open 10:00 - 14:30, Tue 12:00 - 18:30. Closed Mon. Last entrance 45 minutes before closing. Admission 7/4zł.

Polish Aviation Museum (Muzeum Lotnictwa Polskiego) al. Jana Pawła II 39 (Prądnik Czerwony), tel. 012 642 87 00, www.muzeumlottnictwa.pl. Near a training area for would-be tractor drivers (make sure you look both ways before leaving), this museum boasts pre-war and modern Polish aeroplanes and helicopters. ▶ Open 09:00 - 17:00, Mon 09:00 - 15:30, Sat, Sun 10:00 - 16:00. Admission 7/5zł, Mon free. **TC**

Silesian House (Dom Śląski) H-1, ul. Pomorska 2, tel. 012 633 14 14, www.mhk.pl. Officially called the 'Museum of the Struggle and Martyrdom of the Polish Nation', this building served as the Gestapo headquarters during WWII. Today it is one of the most interesting and sadly neglected museums in the city - we challenge you to meet anyone who has actually been here. That doesn't mean you shouldn't pay a visit. Split into two sections visitors can see the terrifying cellars which were converted into detention cells during the war and haven't been touched since. The cells are covered in drawings and inscriptions by the thousands of Poles that were held and tortured here and information cards translate much of the graffiti into English. Upstairs the interrogation rooms have been turned into an exhibit that chronicles Kraków's history between the years 1939-56. To see these free exhibits enter the courtyard at Pomorska 2 and find the inconspicuous buzzer on an outside wall to your right. After ringing it you may have to wait up to ten minutes, beginning one of the most bizarre and chilling museum visiting experiences you'll ever have. ▶ Open 10:00 - 17:30. Closed Mon, Sun. Last entrance 30 minutes before closing. Admission free. Guided tours 80zł. **TC**

The Bishop Erazm Ciołek Palace (Pałac Biskupa Erazma Ciołka) C-5, ul. Kanonicka 17, tel. 012 429 15 58, www.muzeum.krakow.pl. After a recent restoration, this early 14th century palace now holds two permanent exhibitions of the National Museum: Art of Old Poland from the 12th to 18th Centuries and Orthodox Art of the Old Polish Republic. As you could have guessed, both exhibits consist entirely of sacral art from before the idea of 'art' was applied to non-religious subject matter (how many centuries did that take?). Most of it came directly out of Kraków's own churches or others in the region, and most of it is admittedly superb, if that's your thing; if it's not, it's a bit of a snooze-fest. The highlight is without doubt the strange 16th century 'Christ Riding a Donkey' - a near life-size wooden sculpture of everyone's favourite model doing just that with vacant eyes and the mule atop a wagon. Really beautiful. ▶ Open 10:00 - 18:00, Sun 10:00 - 16:00. Closed Mon. Last entrance 30 minutes before closing. Admission 12-20/6-10zł, Sun free for permanent exhibitions.

The National Museum in Kraków (Muzeum Narodowe w Krakowie) H-3, Al. 3 Maja 1, tel. 012 295 55 00, www.muzeum.krakow.pl. Far from being the shoeless peasants many cynical historians would have us believe, previous generations of Poles have in actual fact excelled in the arts. The superb National Museum of Art in Kraków showcases many such examples of their work. As well as a number of world-class temporary shows, the museum also houses fine collections of Polish fine and applied arts, and gives its entire top floor over to the permanent 20th-century Polish Art exhibition, a truly awesome collection that any gallery would be more than proud of owning. The museum also houses a good bookshop and a small café. ▶ Open 10:00 - 18:00, Sun 10:00 - 16:00. Closed Mon. Last entrance 30 minutes before closing. Admission 10/5zł, Sun free for permanent exhibitions. **TC**

Wyspiański Museum (Muzeum Wyspiańskiego) B-2, ul. Szczepańska 11, tel. 012 422 70 21, www.muzeum.krakow.pl. Dedicated to the beautiful works of Stanisław Wyspiański (1869-1907), Kraków's foremost Art Nouveau artist and one of the city's most celebrated sons. Of particular interest are the sketches and paintings of his children, the designs for the stained glass windows of the St. Francis Basilica and the model of Wawel Hill transformed into a Polish Acropolis. ▶ Open 10:00 - 18:00, Sun 10:00 - 16:00. Closed Mon, Tue. Last entrance 30 minutes before closing. Admission 8/4zł, Sun free for permanent exhibitions. **TC**

Rynek Główny

Kraków's main market square (Rynek) serves as the city's gravitational centre, and is the natural start and finish point for any tour of the city. Originally designed in 1257 - the year Kraków was awarded its charter - the gridlike layout of the Old Town and its central square has changed little in the years that have followed. Measuring 200 metres square, the Rynek ranks as one of the largest medieval squares in Europe, and is surrounded by elegant townhouses, all with their own unique names, histories and curiosities. Through the centuries it was in Kraków's Rynek that homages to the king were sworn and public executions held. Most famously it was here that Tadeusz Kościuszko roused the locals to revolt against foreign rule in 1794. The Rynek has always been the natural stage for public celebrations, with everything from Dragon parades to Christmas crib competitions taking place. Not all the events have had been happy affairs however, and back in the 17th century King Jan Sobieski III was privy to a firework display which ended in bloodshed when some of the explosives were accidentally fired into the crowd. Some mistake. More recently the market square was subjected to a Nazi rally under German occupation which was attended by Der Führer himself and celebrated the square's name change from Rynek Główny to 'Adolf Hitler Platz.' Fortunately the moniker didn't last long and today the Rynek occupies itself by hosting the yearly Christmas and Easter markets, as well as numerous festivals and outdoor concerts.

Taking centre stage in the Rynek is the **Cloth Hall** (Sukiennice). Built in the 14th century this huge hall was effectively the first shopping mall in the world. To this day it is still crammed with hawkers and stalls selling amber, lace, woodwork and assorted tourist tat. Destroyed by fire in the 16th century it was rebuilt in 1555 using the renaissance signature of Italian architect Giovanni il Mosca. Alterations have continued ever since, including the addition of neo-Gothic arcades in the 19th century. Currently excavations are being carried out below the Cloth Hall to explore and eventually open a museum about its medieval merchant heritage.

Directly next to the Sukiennice stands Poland's most eminent scribe: **Adam Mickiewicz**. Ironically, the bard never visited the city until after his death when his remains were transferred to the Wawel Cathedral crypt, but this hasn't stopped the statue from becoming one of Kraków's best loved monuments. Across from Mickiewicz looms the magnificent **St. Mary's Basilica**, its crowning glory being Veit Stoss' altarpiece. The area surrounding the Basilica was formerly a cemetery, and the bodies of hundreds of Krakovians still lie beneath the cobbles. Ghoulish tourists will also appreciate the set of metal neck restraints displayed on the side door of St Mary's, formerly used to punish philandering women.

On the Square's other side is the 70 metre **Town Hall Tower**, the only element of the 14th century Town Hall remaining after many fires, renovations and uncaring demolitions. It's cellars once housed a prison and visitors can ascend to the top floor through Gothic vaulted rooms containing a model of the Old Town Hall and 1960s photographs of Kraków for a less than sensational view from the upper windows. Admission 6/4zł.

The glorious ensemble that is Wawel, perched on top of the hill of the same name immediately south of the Old Town, is by far the most important collection of buildings in Poland. A symbol of national pride, hope, self-rule and not least of all fierce patriotism, Wawel offers a uniquely Polish version of Buckingham Palace and Westminster Abbey rolled into one. A gorgeous assortment of predominantly Romanesque, Renaissance and Gothic architecture dating from around the 14th century onwards, visiting Kraków and not seeing Wawel is like playing tennis without a ball.

Even for those who know or care little about the country's past, Poland's ancient seat of royalty contains a vast wealth of treasures inside its heavily fortified walls that can't fail to inspire. Made up of the Castle and the Cathedral, of which the former contains most, but by no means all of the exhibitions, Wawel's must-see highlights include the Cathedral's mind-boggling interior, a tantalising glimpse of Poland's very own Crown Jewels inside the Crown Treasury & Armoury and, on a fine day, a leisurely stroll around its courtyards and gardens. A full tour of Wawel, which is hard work but comes with its own rewards, can take an entire day.

Cathedral (Katedra) B-5, Wawel 3, tel. 012 429 33 27, www.wawel.krakow.pl. The scene of the crowning of almost every Polish king and queen throughout history, the current Wawel Cathedral is the third to be built on the site. The first cathedral was built of wood, probably around 1020, but certainly after the founding of the Bishopric of Kraków in 1000AD. Destroyed by fire it was replaced by a second cathedral that subsequently burnt down again. The current building was consecrated in 1364 and built on the orders of Poland's first king to be crowned at Wawel, Władysław the Short (aka. Władysław the Elbow-high, 1306-1333), who was crowned among the charred rubble of its predecessor in 1319. Considered the most important single building in Poland, Wawel's extraordinary Cathedral contains much that is original, although many glorious additions have been made over the centuries. Arguably not as stunning as that of its cousin St. Mary's in the Rynek, the interior of Wawel Cathedral more than makes up for its visual shortcomings thanks to the sheer amount of history packed inside. At its centre is the imposing tomb of the former Bishop of Kraków, St. Stanisław (1030-1079), a suitably grand monument dedicated to the controversial cleric after whom the Cathedral is dedicated. Boasting 18 chapels, all of them about as ostentatious as you're ever likely to see, of particular interest is the 15th-century Chapel of the Holy Cross, found to the right as you enter and featuring some wonderful Russian murals as well as Veit Stoss' 1492 marble sarcophagus to Kazimierz IV. The Royal Crypts offer a cold and atmospheric downstairs diversion. This is the final resting place of many great Poles, including ten of the county's former kings and their wives as well as other civic and military heroes such as the poet Adam



Mickiewicz and Poland's military strongman Józef Piłsudski. At the top of a gruelling wooden series of staircases is the vast, 11 tonne St. Zygmunt Bell. Cast in 1520, the bell can supposedly be heard 50km away. ▶ Open 09:00 - 17:00, Sun 12:30 - 17:00. Cathedral Museum Closed Sun. Last entrance 30 minutes before closing. Admission free. Entrance to The Royal Tombs, the Zygmunt Bell and Cathedral Museum 10/5zł.

Cathedral Museum (Muzeum Katedralne) B-5, Wawel 2, tel. 012 429 33 27, www.wawel.krakow.pl. Opened in 1978 by Karol Wojtyła just before he became Pope John Paul II, the fabulous Cathedral Museum features a wealth of religious and secular items dating from the 13th century onwards, all related to the ups and downs of the Cathedral next door. Among its most valuable possessions is the sword deliberately snapped into three pieces at the funeral of the Calvinist king, Zygmunt August (1548-1572) the last of the Jagiellonian dynasty, as well as all manner of coronation robes and royal insignia too boot. ▶ Open 09:00 - 17:00. Closed Sun. Last entrance 30 minutes before closing. Admission to The Royal Tombs, the Zygmunt Bell and Cathedral Museum 10/5zł.

Crown Treasury & Armoury (Skarbiec Koronny i Zbrojownia) B-5, Wawel Hill, tel. 012 422 51 55, www.wawel.krakow.pl. Containing among many splendid treats Poland's very own equivalent of the Crown Jewels, the Crown Treasury & Armoury provides a delightful excursion into the world of the sumptuous, extravagant and the just plain violent. To the left, the Crown Treasury features several glass cases of golden and jewelled goblets, platters, coins and other wonders, of which the Szczerbiec, the country's original coronation sword, is the ultimate highlight. To the right the Armoury contains a frightening array of spiky pikes, wonderment of weapons including some exceedingly swanky crossbows, and in the cellar a collection of cannons and replicas of the banners captured at the Battle of Grunwald. ▶ Open 09:30 - 17:00, Mon 09:30 - 13:00, Sat, Sun 11:00 - 18:00. Last entrance one hour before closing. Admission 17/10zł, Mon free.

Tickets & Tourist Information

Tickets & Tourist Information B-5, Wawel Hill, tel. 012 422 16 97, www.wawel.krakow.pl. Located in the far southwestern part of the Wawel complex, this should be your first stop when touring Wawel. As well as selling tickets, the Tourist Service Office gives away useful and free Wawel maps. There's also a small post office, gift shop and a decent café inside the same building. ▶ Open 09:00 - 17:00, Sat, Sun 09:00 - 18:00.

Eat in Wawel

Na Wawelu B-5, Wzgórze Wawelskie 9, tel. 012 421 19 15, www.nawawelu.pl. Kraków's ultimate tourist trap, or just a much under-rated café and restaurant in the best location on earth? You decide as you see fit, but much will depend on the service, which varies from very good to completely disinterested. The food is definitely overpriced for what is standard international fare, but you can have a reasonable coffee, beer or juice here, and let's face it, for a location like this you will hardly be expecting any bargains. ▶ Open 12:00 - 17:00. (21-45zł). ☺ ☹ ☹ ☹ ☹ ☹

Dragon's Den (Smocza Jama) B-5, Western, low end of Wawel Hill, www.wawel.krakow.pl. The spectacular limestone formation that is Wawel Hill is believed to have been formed about 25 million years ago. Not the solid piece of rock it appears to be, the inside is full of eerie caves and crawlspaces. This particular cave was home to a dragon, Smok Wawelski, or the Wawel Dragon, a particularly nasty creature who liked nothing more than to spend his leisure time feasting on sheep and having his way with the local young ladies. Sent to dispatch the beast was none other than King Krak, the legendary founder of the city. The story goes that by exploiting the dragon's penchant for farm animals Krak fooled Smok into eating a dummy sheep stuffed with tar and sulphur, causing the poor thing to explode. Smok Wawelski's cave later became a famous tavern and brothel during medieval times and is now a tourist trap luring families into its dripping confines. Outside the exit is the bronze likeness of Smok, popular for its fire-breathing abilities which you can witness by texting "SMOK" to 7168 on your mobile (even dragons have phones these days), however his talents seem freeze up when the temperature outside dips below 0 degrees centigrade. ▶ Open 10:00 - 17:00. From July open 10:00 - 18:00. Admission 3zł. Tickets dispensed by machine near the entrance; be sure to have change.

Royal Castle (Zamek Królewski) B-5, Wawel Hill, tel. 012 422 51 55 ext. 219, www.wawel.krakow.pl. Wawel's prominence as a centre of political power predates the building of the first Cathedral on the site in 1000AD. Evidence shows that Wawel Hill was being used as a fortified castle before Poland's first ruler, Mieszko I (circa 965-992) chose Wawel as one of his official residences. The first Polish king crowned in Wawel Cathedral was the teenage Władysław the Short (1306-1333) on January 20, 1319, beginning a tradition that would see a further 35 royal rulers crowned there up until the 17th century. All of these rulers used the Castle as a residence, and all of them added their own architectural details to the building. The moving of the capital to Warsaw in 1596 and Poland's subsequent decline saw the Castle fall into a state of disrepair. The occupying Austrians used it as a military hospital and even went so far as to demolish several buildings including a number of churches on the site. The 20th century saw the Castle change hands on a number of occasions, with the huge ongoing renovation works that continue to this day being halted for a number of reasons, most famously when the Castle was used as the headquarters of the Nazi Governor General, Hans Frank during the German occupation of the city during WWII. Today's Castle complex is a beguiling muddle of styles including Medieval, Romanesque, Renaissance and Baroque. The inner courtyard with its delightful colonnades is a true architectural masterpiece, and the treasures it contains within do much to contribute to Kraków's rightful status as a truly world-class city. ▶ Open 09:30 - 17:00, Mon 09:30 - 13:00, Sat, Sun 11:00 - 18:00. Last entrance one hour before closing. Admission 8-24/5-18zł, Mon free.

State Rooms & Royal Private Apartments (Reprezentacyjne Komnaty & Prywatne Apartamenty Królewskie) B-5, Wawel Hill, tel. 012 422 51 55, www.wawel.krakow.pl. Two collections in one, of which the latter is only accessible on a specially conducted guided tour, these are the rooms in which the royals once lived and did their entertaining. The spectacular State Rooms seemingly go on forever, and are full of luscious oil paintings, intricate 16th-century Flemish tapestries, some truly extraordinary wallpaper and the breathtaking Bird Room. Highlights include the eerie Royal Audience Hall, complete with 30 wooden representations of former Kraków residents' heads on the coffered ceiling and the Hall of Deputies, still with an original throne that really brings the majesty of Poland's past to life. The Royal Private Apartments are, as one would expect, stunning. Packed with delightful Gothic and Renaissance details, rooms include the wonderful Guest Bedroom, complete with original Renaissance larch wood ceiling and the 15th-century tapestry, Story of the Knight with the Swan, Wawel's oldest surviving example of the art form, and the charmingly named Hen's Foot, two small rooms inside the 14th-century Belvedere Tower. What these rooms were originally used for is anyone's guess, but the view from the windows is well worth the visit. ▶ Open 09:30 - 17:00, Sat, Sun 11:00 - 18:00. Closed Mon. Last entrance one hour before closing. Admission to State Rooms 17/10zł, Royal Private Apartments 24/18zł (guide included).



Wyspiański's Wawel

It's already a century since Stanisław Wyspiański passed away, yet his presence remains almost everywhere you look in the city. As well as his tireless efforts for the city and Poland in general as a painter, playwright, poet and more besides, Stanisław Wyspiański also found time to apply his talents to the field of architecture. Fascinated with Wawel since childhood, Wyspiański took advantage of the occupying Austrian army's plans to move their barracks out of Wawel to completely redesign the complex. His so-called Wawel-Akropolis, designed over the winter of 1904-1905 with the help of the Polish architect Władysław Ekielski (1855-1927), sought to radically alter Wawel with the addition of scores of new buildings, towers, chapels and even an amphitheatre, the finished effect somehow managing to recreate a vision of a once mighty Poland. Wyspiański's failing health and subsequent death two years later meant that his greatest project unfortunately never left the drawing board. Using the original designs, a fabulous model of Wawel-Akropolis was made in the early 1980s and is on permanent display in the Wawel Room inside the city's superb Wyspiański Museum.



See

Plac Nowy

Plac Nowy D-6. While Kraków's main square, Rynek Główny, makes all the postcards and photographs, it is Plac Nowy in Kazimierz that has emerged as the spiritual centre of Kraków sub-culture. Lacking the splendour of the Old Town, Plac Nowy is, if anything, something of an eyesore - a collection of unkempt buildings surrounding a concrete square filled with chipped green market stalls and rat-like pigeons flapping about. If you want something completely different from the Old Town, however, here it is.

Plac Nowy started assuming its shape in 1808 having been incorporated into the Jewish quarter in the late 17th century, and its Jewish connections are highlighted by an oft-encountered local insistence on referring to it as Plac Żydowski (Jewish Square). For over 200 years it has served as a market place with its central landmark, the round market building, being added in 1900. The rotunda was leased to the Jewish community in 1927 serving as a ritual slaughterhouse for poultry right up until Nazi occupation. Following the war it resumed its role as the centre of the market around it, a function it still carries today.

Apparently it's the only place in Kraków where you can purchase horsemeat, though savages with unrefined taste will instead be found lining up outside the dozen or so hole-in-the-wall fast food hatches that operate from the rotunda. Most legendary of these is Endzior, a rite-of-passage for any first time visitors to Kazimierz. Placing their order through the slit-like window you'll find everyone from police blokes ignoring emergency calls on their walkie-talkies, to stick-thin party girls getting their week's worth of calories; Kazimierz without Endzior is like Rome without a coliseum.

The gourmet feasting doesn't stop there: each May the square hosts the annual Soup Festival, a culinary stand-off between local restaurants. Awards are given in several categories and anyone is invited to cut up a crucible and bring it to the square. Granted, it's not a patch on Kraków's annual Sausage Dog Parade, but (unlike with the sausages) you get fed, right?

Surrounding the Okraglak (rotunda) are some 310 trading stalls (with 33 more in the smaller square around the corner), and you'll find something going on daily from 5:30am till early afternoon. Fresh produce, sweets and random rubbish are constant guarantees but weekly highlights include Sunday's clothing market, Tuesday morning's small critter expo and Friday's bewildering pigeon fair, the latter two of which are photo essays waiting to happen. Visit the square Tuesday morning to find the answer to the riddle, 'How many rabbits fit in a suitcase?'

As trade dries up for the day the area takes on a new guise: Kraków's premier pub crawl circuit. Find the academics with beads, dreadlocks and secondhand books in places like Singer, Alchemia and Les Coloures, while the similarly dark and arty Mleczarnia down the road (ul. Meiselsa) can boast a superb toilet that doubles as a time portal to the 1920s. For all its symbolic charm it comes as a relief that drinking in Plac Nowy is no longer the one-dimensional experience it once was; there's only so many misanthropic actors you can deal with. Adding an edge of urban gang to the night are pre-club places like Le Scandale and Zbiżenia, and recently Taawa became the first club to open on Plac Nowy, luring a bit of bling to the already unpredictable fizz that is a day spent in this part of town. Don't miss it.



Kazimierz is the district that housed Kraków's Jews for over 500 years. In the last decade it has been rediscovered, and its hollowed-out Jewish culture gradually reintroduced. Famous for its associations with Schindler and Spielberg, there's more to the historic Jewish quarter than cemeteries and synagogues. Lying between shops selling buttons and spanners, you'll find the heart of Kraków's artsy character. Peeling façades and wooden shutters hide dozens of smoky cafes, each one effecting an air of pre-war timelessness. Alternative, edgy and packed with oddities this is an essential point of interest to any visitor.

The history of Kazimierz can be traced back to 1335 when it was officially founded as an island town by King Kazimierz the Great. Unlike Kraków, which was largely populated by Germans, Kazimierz was dominated by Poles. It was not until 1495 when Jews were expelled from Kraków that they started to arrive to Kazimierz in force. Awarded its Magdeburg Rights, which allowed markets to be held in what is now Pl. Wolnica, Kazimierz prospered and it is recorded as being one of the most influential Polish towns during the middle ages. By the 17th century Jewish life was flourishing and numerous synagogues had been constructed. Alas, Kazimierz was about to run out of luck. In 1651 the area was hit by the plague, then four years later ransacked and ruined by the Swedish invaders. Famine, floods and anti-Jewish riots followed in quick succession, and it wasn't long till a mass migration to Warsaw began, leaving the once vibrant Kazimierz a broken shell.

In 1796 Kraków came under Austrian control, and four years later Kazimierz was incorporated into Kraków. It was to signal the area's rebirth. The governing Austrians ordered Kraków's Jews to resettle in Kazimierz, and the area was slowly redeveloped; timber houses were banned, streets were cobbled and walls that once ringed Kazimierz demolished. Kazimierz was finally going places; in 1857 the first gas lamps lit up the streets, a tram depot added in 1888 and in 1905 a power station. By 1910 the Jewish population stood at 32,000, a figure that was to nearly double during the inter-war years, and a rich cultural life arose around them. But this was to change with the outbreak of WWII, and the Nazis' monstrous ideas of racial superiority. Approximately three to five thousand of Kraków's Jews survived the horror of the Holocaust, a large proportion of them saved by Oskar Schindler. Although 5,000 Jews were registered as living in Kraków in 1950 any hopes of rekindling the past soon vanished. The anti-Zionist policies of the post-war communist authorities sparked waves of emigration to Israel, and by the 1970s signs of Jewish life had all but disappeared. The fall of communism in 1989 sparked new hope. Kazimierz by this time had become a bandit suburb, the sort of place

you'd only visit with military backup. But investment began trickling in and the area's decline was reversed; 1988 saw the first Jewish Festival take place, and five years later the Judaica Foundation was opened. That was also the year Spielberg arrived to film Schindler's List, a film that would put Kazimierz on the world map and irrevocably change its fortunes. Today a visit to Kazimierz ranks just as high on itineraries as a trip to Wawel, illustrating the historical importance and public regard the area has.

To get a feel for the area start your tour of Kazimierz at the top of **Szeroka**, coming from **ulica Miodowa** (E-6). Here you'll find the restaurant Dawno Temu Na Kazimierzu (Long Ago in Kazimierz). Disguised to look like a row of shop fronts the doorways come adorned with traders' names splashed on them: Holzer, Weinberg, Nowak. It's not hard to feel the ghosts of the past as you walk down the Austrian cobbles. Next door swat up on your literature by visiting Jarden, the area's first Jewish bookstore, or take a look at Szeroka 6 (now Klezmer Hois hotel and restaurant). The building formerly housed the Great Mikvah, a ritual bathhouse that gained notoriety in 1567 when the wooden floor collapsed and ten women drowned. Modern day Szeroka has a raft of restaurants to pick from, though you can't do much better than visiting Rubinstein at number 12. It's named so for a reason. 'Queen of Cosmetics' Helena Rubinstein was born next door at number 14.

Take time out to explore the synagogues and bars before veering to the right and onto **ulica Józefa**. The street actually takes its name not after Joseph of Bible fame, but the Habsburg Emperor Joseph II who stayed on this street while touring his nearly conquered territories. Find the **High Synagogue** at number 38, so called because the prayer room was located on the first floor. Looted during WWII the synagogue housed the Historic Monuments Preservation Studio in the post-war years, only returning to its intended function in the 1990s. It's also on Józefa you'll find what many regard to be Kraków's most picturesque courtyard. Accessed via an archway, the cobbled courtyard at number 12 (D-6) is instantly recognizable from Spielberg's 'Schindler's List.'

While on your Kazimierz safari do put aside time to visit the **Isaac Synagogue** (ul. Kupa 18, E-6), whose restored interiors now house a permanent exhibition titled 'In memory of Polish Jews'. In 1939 a member of the synagogue committee was executed inside these halls after refusing to set fire to it. The synagogue is also the source of an enchanting legend. It relates to the founder, Isaac, a devout but impoverished Jew who once had a dream telling him if he went to Prague he would discover great treasures buried by a bridge. Following his instincts he set off to Prague, only to find the bridge he had dreamt of surrounded by a garrison of soldiers. Having spotted him loitering, one of the soldiers challenged Isaac as to his intentions. Isaac came clean, only for the soldier to scoff words to the effect of 'You're an idiot! I've been having dreams all my life about a Kraków Jew called Isaac who has treasure hidden under his stove. But I'm not stupid enough to go to Kraków, especially seeing that every second Jew is called Isaac'. You can guess the rest. The moment Isaac returned home he pulled the stove down and discovered a wealth of riches, making him the richest man in Kazimierz.

But Kazimierz is not exclusively Jewish. Take for example the stunning **Corpus Christi Church** on ul. Bożego Ciała (D-6/7). Completed in 1405 the 70 metre tower dominates the horizon, and work through the ages has seen a slew of intricate details added to both the exteriors and interiors. Try and track down the tiny church prison in which sinners

The Zbruch idol

If you're admiring Wawel Castle, you might notice the strange, battered sculpture in front of it at Plac Bernardyński (C-5). That's a replica of the 'Zbruch Idol,' a rare and coveted archaeological treasure from the 9th century. Why so rare? This is one of the most important Slavic artefacts in the world - the only sculpture in existence believed to depict a Slavic god. For that reason, you'll find replicas of the Zbruch Idol in many museums, including the Moscow and Kiev Historical Museums, however, Kraków has the distinction of housing the original idol in its fine Archaeological Museum on ulica Poselska (B/C-4). Commonly associated with the god of war, Svantevit, the deity didn't do a very good job defending himself when crusaders tossed him into the Zbruch river during the Christianisation of the East Slav tribes in today's Ukraine. Discovered during a drought near the village of Liczkowce in 1848, the narrow, four-sided limestone pillar 2.7 metres in height, has three tiers of badly-weathered bas-reliefs etched on it. The bottom tier shows a kneeling, bearded figure supporting the upper tiers with his hands. The smaller middle tier shows a figure with arms extended, while the large top section has a head on each side, united under a Slavic nobleman's hat. Each figure possesses a different object: a ring, a drinking horn and tiny child, a sword and horse, and an eroded solar symbol. While interpretations differ, many believe these tiers represent the three levels of the world, with the largest being that of the gods. Other theoreticians have speculated it is four separate Slavic gods, not one, while some would claim the fact that it is made out of stone, not wood, makes it altogether non-Slavic.

who had broken the sixth commandment would be held and subjected to public ridicule. Also of note is a 15th century painting, the Madonna Terribilis Daemonibus. Used in exorcisms for the last five centuries the canvas is reputed to have warded off a hundred thousand demons. Sticking to the ecclesiastical theme pop by the church of **St. Michael the Archangel and St. Stanislaus the Bishop Martyr** (C-7). It's right by the altar that Stanislaus, the Bishop of Szczepanów was murdered and then quartered at the whim of King Bolesław the Bold. Stanislaus was later beatified, becoming the patron saint of Poland, and it became a tradition for Polish Kings to make the pilgrimage from Wawel to this church in a bid to compensate for the sins of Bolesław. A stone allegedly splattered with the blood of the saint can be viewed close by. Ghouls will also be delighted to learn of the crypt, one of the most high profile in Kraków. It's here you'll find the bodies of local heroes Czesław Miłosz and Stanisław Wyspiański.



Galleries

Centre for Jewish Culture (Centrum Kultury Żydowskiej) D-6, ul. Meiselsa 17, tel. 012 430 64 52, www.judaica.pl. Changing exhibitions of contemporary Jewish art. ▶ Open 10:00 - 18:00, Sat, Sun 10:00 - 14:00. Admission free.

Olympia Galeria D-6, ul. Józefa 18, tel. 0 603 22 30 08, www.olympiagaleria.pl. Brimming with interesting contemporary art. ▶ Open 11:00 - 17:00, Sat 11:00 - 14:00. Closed Mon, Sun.

Churches


Corpus Christi Church (Kościół Bożego Ciała) D/E-6/7, ul. Bożego Ciała 26. This massive brick beauty from the 14th century takes up two entire blocks in Kazimierz, making it one of the city's largest holy sites. A three-nave in the Gothic style, the pulpit features a golden boat (with oars and a mast even) being held aloft by two mermaids. And though there are few things we like more than mermaids, the crowning glory has to be the towering golden altarpiece. According to legend, a robber who had stolen a precious relic from another church repented on this spot, abandoning the reliquary. The priests in pursuit saw a strange light emanating from the ground and discovering their sacred prize, founded a church here in recognition of the miracle.


Skalka (Kościół Paulinów, Pauline Church) C-7, West end of ul. Skaleczna, tel. 012 421 72 44, www.skalka.paulini.pl. Commonly referred to as Skalka, this gorgeous riverside sanctuary is one of the most important religious sites in Kraków, with a fair share of history. In 1079, King Bolesław the Bold accused the bishop of Kraków,

Stanisław Szczepański, of treason. According to legend, the bishop was beheaded with the sword seen next to the altar and then his body was chopped into pieces on a tree stump. After the murder, the royal family fell under a curse. To appease the spirit of the wronged bishop, the family built the Pauline Church and made regular pilgrimages there to atone for the murder. Szczepański was canonised in 1253. The Skalka crypt is packed tight with important Poles including composer Karol Szymanowski, writer Czesław Miłosz and painters Stanisław Wyspiański and Jacek Malczewski. ▶ Open 06:30 - 20:00. No visiting during mass please.


St. Catherine's (Kościół Św. Katarzyny) D-7, ul. Augustiańska 7, tel. 012 430 62 42, www.parafia.augustianie.pl. Respected as one of the most beautiful Gothic churches in Kraków. Most of its furnishings were lost in the 19th century though the Baroque high altar from 1634 survives. The cloister built in the time of Kazimierz the Great and decorated with Gothic murals and 17th century paintings is worth seeing, as is the south porch decorated with stonework and tracery. ▶ Open 10:00 - 16:00, Sat 10:00 - 14:00, Sun 13:30 - 17:00.

Museums & Synagogues

City Engineering Museum (Muzeum Inżynierii Miejskiej) E-7, ul. Św. Wawrzyńca 15, tel. 012 421 12 42, www.mimk.com.pl. Evidence that Polish museums are finally catching up with the modern world, this charming museum inside an old tram depot features three separate exhibitions. The first two deal with the history of public transport in Kraków and the development of the Polish automotive industry in the form of a large collection of truly wonderful vehicles, and the third is what's called the Fun & Science exhibition. Aimed primarily at young people, the latter is a bizarre assortment of hands-on displays giving visitors the opportunity to interact and learn about such things as electricity and hydrostatics. Of particular note is a small cucumber in a jar with lots of wires sticking out of it attached to a voltmeter. ▶ Open 09:00 - 16:00, Tue, Thu 09:00 - 18:00, Sat, Sun 10:00 - 16:00. Closed Mon. Admission 6,50/4,50zł. 

Ethnographical Museum (Muzeum Etnograficzne) D-7, Pl. Wolnica 1, tel. 012 430 55 63, www.mek.krakow.pl. Founded in 1911 by the teacher and folklore enthusiast Seweryn Udziela (1857-1937) and located inside Kazimierz's former Town Hall, this cultural highlight usually gets overlooked by tourists - wrongfully so. There's not enough space here to wax lyrical about the delights inside, including beautiful recreations of 19th-century peasant houses, folk costumes, some extraordinary examples of the so-called Nativity Cribs, the breathtaking top floor collection of folk art and a rather peculiar wooden bicycle. With many of the exhibits explained in good English, all we need say is it does a highly commendable job of promoting and explaining Polish folk culture, and can't come recommended enough. A separate gallery for changing exhibits can be found nearby at ul. Krakowska 46. ▶ Open 11:00 - 19:00, Thu 11:00 - 21:00, Sun 11:00 - 15:00. Closed Mon. Admission 8/4zł, Sun free for permanent exhibitions. 

Galicia Jewish Museum (Żydowskie Muzeum Galicja) E-6, ul. Dajwór 18, tel. 012 421 68 42, www.galicjajewishmuseum.org. The brainchild of award-winning photo-journalist Chris Schwarz, the Galicia Jewish Museum is comprised of some 135 photographs aimed at keeping alive the memory of Jewish life in the south of Poland in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Schwarz' images of forgotten cemeteries, derelict synagogues and death camps prove haunting and sober viewing, and deserve to be an essential

part of any Kazimierz tour. Though his exhibition serves as the focal point, the converted warehouse also houses a café, information point and a bookstore selling a range of titles of Jewish interest. ▶ Open 10:00 - 18:00. Open until 22:00 the last Friday of every month. Admission 12/6zł. 

Isaac's Synagogue (Synagoga Izaaka) E-6, ul. Kupa 18, tel. 012 430 22 22, www.chabadkrakow.pl. Isaac's Synagogue, built in the early Judaic-Baroque style, was opened in 1644, and was a gift to the city from a wealthy Jew, Izaak Jakubowicz. It is perhaps the most strikingly beautiful of the Kazimierz synagogues, all arabesques and squiggles yet retaining a sober linearity, especially within. Renovation is not yet complete, but much survives and there is much to admire, not least the fragments of original wall scriptures. Rabbi Eliezer Gurany runs the place with a smile and is usually on hand to provide information to allcomers. ▶ Open 09:00 - 19:00, Fri 09:00 - 15:00. Closed Sat. Admission 5/3zł.

New Cemetery E-6, ul. Miodowa 55. This cemetery was established in 1800 and was the burial ground for many of Kraków's distinguished Jews in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Its story takes on a darker aspect with the decimation of the Jewish population between 1939 and 1945. Many of the tombstones are actually no more than memorials to entire families that were killed in the Holocaust. They now lie surrounded by weeds. The rejuvenation of Kazimierz has not yet penetrated the New Cemetery's walls, but there are newly-lit candles burning over the headstones. ▶ Open 09:00-18:00, Closed Sat.

Old Synagogue (Stara Synagoga) E-6, ul. Szeroka 24, tel. 012 422 09 62, www.mhk.pl. Built on the cusp of the 15th and 16th centuries, the Old Synagogue serves as the oldest surviving example of Jewish religious architecture in Poland and is home to a fine series of exhibits that showcase the history and traditions of Polish Judaism. It is no longer a working synagogue. The English explanations assume no great depth of knowledge on the reader's part and are therefore a perfect primer on the subject. In the midst of all the glass cases stands the bimah enclosed in an elaborate, wrought iron balustrade. Upstairs, a rather shoddy room displays the irrevocable tragedy of this district. Posters and signs advertise the restoration of the old German town of Krakau and the segregation of city trams, followed by deportation instructions and posters with names of executed civilians. The bookshop sells a fine selection of works related to Jewish Krakow, in a number of languages. ▶ Open 09:00 - 17:00, Mon 10:00 - 14:00. Last entrance 30 minutes before closing. Admission 7/5zł, Mon free. 

Remuh Synagogue & Cemetery (Synagoga Remuh z Cmentarzem) E-6, ul. Szeroka 40, tel. 012 429 57 35. The smallest but most active synagogue in Kazimierz, dating from 1553. If you enter quietly, you may even be afforded a glimpse of a service. You can stroll through the cemetery which was in use until 1800. This holy burial ground was spared by the vandalism of the Nazis because many of the gravestones had been buried to avoid desecration during the 19th century occupation of Kraków by Austrian forces. Most famous is the tomb of the 16th century Rabbi Moses Isserles, better known as the Remuh. Beside that lies the oldest tomb in the cemetery commemorating his wife, Golda Auerbuch. ▶ Open 09:00 - 18:00. Closed Sat. Admission 5/2zł.

Temple Synagogue (Synagoga Tempel) D-6, ul. Miodowa 24, tel. 012 429 57 35. Gorgeous synagogue with a beautifully renovated interior. The gold-trimmed woodwork within plays host to many concerts. ▶ Open 10:00 - 18:00. Closed Sat. Admission 5/2zł.

Schindler's Factory

Schindler's Factory (Fabryka Schindlera) K-4, ul. Lipowa 4, tel. 012 257 10 17. One thing that has bothered us since Steven Spielberg threw the international spotlight on Kraków's World War II history with his acclaimed film Schindler's List (filmed almost entirely in Kraków) 16 years ago was the city's failure to confront its own past by acknowledging historic sites associated with the Holocaust, most of which lie anonymously in Podgórze. Now, however, Schindler's historic enamel factory has finally been opened to the public. Only problem is there's currently not much to see there. A small exhibit on Oskar Schindler himself is now open, but the main exhibition will not be ready until autumn at the earliest. Still, evidence that this historic site is nearing completion in its transformation into an educational space and world-class museum is great news not only for tourists, but for Podgórze - a district largely forgotten on the other side of the river - and the healing process of the city itself. After years of derisions, revisions and administrative muck-ups the site was rightfully taken over by The Historical Museum, who are currently overseeing the fruition of their design to make it Kraków's first museum to properly address the full scope of the city's sad World War II history. Like Warsaw's acclaimed Rising Museum, Schindler's Factory will house an interactive, multimedia exhibition dramatising episodes from the German occupation such as the roundup of Jagiellonian University professors, life in the Kraków Ghetto, forced labour in the nearby Płaszów camp and deportations, as well as recreations of Oskar Schindler's office and other exhibits of the factory as it was then. A vast amount of photographs, documents and household objects from the occupation era will be on display illustrating the everyday struggles of that time for both Jews and Poles. A truly monumental site, the museum will only cover a few buildings in the front of the factory while plans to open a controversial contemporary art museum under separate ownership in the buildings at the rear appears to be moving forward. ▶ Open 10:00 - 17:00. Closed Mon. Admission 5/4zł.

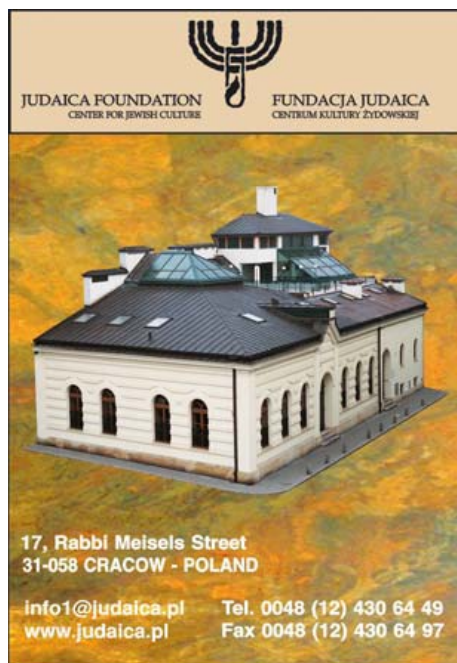
Useful contacts

Jarden E-6, ul. Szeroka 2, tel. 012 429 13 74, www.jarden.pl. Jewish bookshop that also arranges guided Schindler's List tours and trips to Auschwitz-Birkenau. ▶ Open 09:00 - 18:00, Sat, Sun 10:00 - 18:00.

Jewish Community (Żydowska Gmina Wyznaniowa) D-7, ul. Skawińska 2, tel. 012 429 57 35, www.krakow.jewish.org.pl. It has around 160 members and organises events and gatherings for the Jewish community in Kraków. ▶ Open 09:00 - 14:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

Judaica Foundation D-6, ul. Meiselsa 17, tel. 012 430 64 49, www.judaica.pl. A civic and cultural centre hosting lectures and exhibits reflecting Jewish life past and present. ▶ Open 10:00 - 18:00, Sat, Sun 10:00 - 14:00.

Tourist Information D-6, ul. Józefa 7, tel. 012 422 04 71, www.biurofestiwalowe.pl. Information on what to see and what's going on in Kazimierz. ▶ Open 09:00 - 17:00.



When Spielberg came to Kraków to produce his award-winning film 'Schindler's List,' the result was a fast and far-reaching revitalisation of Kazimierz, Kraków's former Jewish district. Ironically, however, it didn't reach across the river to Podgórze, despite the fact most of the film's historic events took place here as did much of the filming. As Kazimierz became super-saturated with tourists and bars, predictions that Podgórze was where the new hipster heart of Kraków would start beating were plentiful, but have thus far failed to develop beyond a few rogue cafes. The area's inability to shake its subtle but pervading pall of heartache is in no doubt due to its failure to confront its past. A district rich in natural beauty, unusual attractions and tragic historical sites which seem to have gone all but forgotten, getting off the beaten path in Kraków is as easy as crossing the river, and all the more rewarding.


The first signs of settlement in Podgórze date from over ten thousand years ago, though the Swedish invasion in the 17th century saw much of Podgórze levelled. Awarded the rights of a free city in 1784 by the Austrian Emperor Joseph II the town was eventually incorporated as Kraków's fourth district in 1810, and the following decades saw its aggressive development; quarries and brickworks were constructed, and a string of military forts added, of which Fort Benedict is the only still standing. An indication of Podgórze's age is Krakus Mound, excavations of which have dated it to the Iron Age. The trespasses of WWII in recent history are what people most associate with the district. On March 21, 1941, the entire Jewish population residing in Kazimierz were marched across the Powstańców Śląskich bridge and crammed into what was to become known as the Podgórze Ghetto. Traces of the Ghetto still exist, including a stretch of the wall on ul. Lwowska (K-4). Liquidated on March 14, 1943, most of the Jewish residents faced death either in the gas chambers of Birkenau, or in the nearby work quarries in Płaszów and Liban; now abandoned, both sites can be visited the curious and intrepid. The Pharmacy Under the Eagle (J-4, Pl. Bohaterów Getta 18) pays testament to the victims of the Holocaust, though plans to turn Schindler's Factory (K-4, Lipowa 4) into a museum have continue to stall, slowing the area's ability to heal and emerge as an endorsed destination on the tourist map.

Podgórze Churches

St. Benedict's K-5, Lasota Hill. Take any of the dark, daunting trails off ul. Rękawka into the wooded limestone cliffs of Krzemionki to discover one of Kraków's oldest, smallest and most mysterious churches in the clearing next to the St. Benedict Fort. The date of the present structure has been hard to determine, but the curious site certainly dates back to the 11th century and a leading theory attributes it to the Benedictine monks of Tyniec. Saved from destruction and dereliction by a local priest the tiny, cramped interior - consisting of only a small nave and chancel with a painting of St. Benedict over the pulpit - has been restored, but can only be accessed once a year ironically during the pagan Rękawka festival held the first Tuesday after Easter.

St. Joseph's J-5, ul. Zamojskiego 2, www.jozef.diecezja.pl. Presiding over the heart of historic Podgórze on the south side of the district's main square, this unmissable neo-gothic juggernaut was built between 1905-09 on the design of Jan Sas-Zubrzycki. Dominated by an 80 metre clock tower, elaborate masonry dressing, gargoyles and sculptures of saints, St. Joseph's slender, yet imposing brick facade ranks among the most beautiful in Kraków and is gorgeously illuminated at night. The interior is no less beautiful and visitors should also note the abandoned 1832 belfry that stands on a rocky outcropping behind the church - all that remains of the original temple, dismantled due to design flaws. ▶ No visiting during mass please.

Podgórze Museums

Pharmacy Under the Eagle (Apteka Pod Orłem) J-4, pl. Bohaterów Getta 18, tel. 012 656 56 25, www.mhk.pl. When the Podgórze district became the new Jewish ghetto under the Nazi occupation, the owner of this pharmacy, Tadeusz Pankiewicz, decided to stay on in Podgórze and do all he could for the 15,000 Jews living at this last stop on the genocide route. The only Poles allowed to live and work in the Jewish ghetto, Pankiewicz and his staff risked their lives in many clandestine operations and he was later recognised as one of the 'Righteous Among the Nations.' Today, his pharmacy has been converted to a small museum, which heartrendingly portrays life in the ghetto. ▶ Open 09:30 - 17:00, Mon 10:00 - 14:00. Last entrance 30 minutes before closing. Admission 5/4zł, Mon free. 

Podgórze Places of Interest

Bednarski Park J-5, entrances from ul. Parkowa and ul. Zamojskiego. Opened with great fanfare at the end of the 19th century, the park's founder Wojciech Bednarski was reportedly carried around like a winning quarterback while newspapers from as far away as St. Petersburg applauded the park's establishment. Though the park itself doesn't offer much more than a partially paved path to walk on, this is one of the most beautiful, captivating natural spaces in Kraków with limestone cliffs, over one hundred different species of tree and the remains of an 18th century fortification. Covering eight and half hectares, Bednarski Park is lush and wild with trails winding everywhere, in turns shadowy and chimerical, or open with fine overviews of the city from its various ridges.

Fort Benedict K-5, Lasota Hill. The only surviving fortress of three that were built in Podgórze in the mid-19th century to protect the Vistula river and the road to Lwów, Fort Benedict is one of only a few citadels of the 'Maximillion Tower' type left anywhere. An impressive two-storey brick artillery tower in the shape of a sixteen-sided polygon with a round interior yard, the fort has a total surface area of 1500 square metres. Atop the Krzemionki cliffs on Lasota Hill, it takes its name from nearby St. Benedict's church. The fortress quickly lost its usefulness in the 1890s and has since been used as Austrian military barracks and was even converted into apartments in the 1950s, though today it lies in general dereliction, filled with abandoned furniture and building materials. Numerous plans have been put forth for converting it into a cultural space, but it remains impenetrable to tourists at the moment, adding to the scenery and mystique of one of Kraków's most surprising and strange corners.

Krakus Mound (Kopiec Krakusa) K-5, Lasota Hill. The oldest structure in Kraków, Krakus Mound is one of two prehistoric monumental mounds in the city and is also its highest point, providing incredible panoramic views from its worn summit. Sixteen metres high, sixty metres wide at the base and eight metres wide at the top, Kopiec Krakusa stands in scruffy contrast to the manicured modern mounds elsewhere in the city, with a muddy path winding around to a bald peak. The site of pagan ritual for centuries, the mound retains an ancient, evocative atmosphere amplified by the surroundings of the cliffs of Krzemionki, the green rolling fields of Płaszów, the grim Liban quarry and the Podgórze cemetery. With incredible views of the city, Krakus Mound lies at the centre of one of Kraków's least explored and most captivating areas and should be visited by anyone looking to take a rewarding detour from the beaten path. It can be approached most easily from the major intersection of al. Powstańców Wielopolskich and ul. Wielicka via ul. Robotnicza to the steps of al. Pod Kopcem (K-5), or by following ul. Dembowskiego (J-5) to the pedestrian bridge over al. Powstańców Wielopolskich to the base of the mound.

The result of great human effort and innovative engineering, Krakus Mound has long been a source of legend and mystery. Connected with the popular story of Kraków's mythical founder, King Krak or Krakus, the mound is said to have been constructed in honour of his death when noblemen and peasants filled their sleeves with sand and dirt, bringing it to this site in order to create an artificial mountain that would rule over the rest of the landscape. In the interwar period, extensive archaeological studies were undertaken to try to date the mound and verify if there was truth to the legend that Krak was buried beneath it. Though much about the ingenuity of the mound's prehistoric engineers was revealed, no trace of a grave was found, however excavations were not completely comprehensive. A bronze belt was unearthed in the lower part of the mound and dated to the 8th century, and there is general agreement today that the mound was created by a Slavonic colony sometime between the latter half of the 7th century and the early 10th century, though other hypotheses credit the structure to the Celts. Originally there were four smaller mounds around the base of Krak's mound, however these were levelled in the mid-19th century during the construction of the city's first fortress which surrounded the area with a wall embankment and a moat (later levelled in 1954). The location of the Krakus Mound and the Wanda Mound in Mogiła - the city's other, lesser prehistoric earthwork - hardly seems accidental. In addition to being an ideal vantage point over the surrounding valleys, when standing on the Krakus Mound at dawn on June 20th or 21st the sun can be seen rising directly behind Wanda's Mound; conversely, standing on Wanda's Mound at dusk, the sun sets in a straight line behind Krak's Mound. The legend of Krak's mound inspired the modern creation of burial mounds for Kościuszko and Piłsudski in Las Wolski and today they remain one of Poland's greatest archaeological mysteries.

New Podgórze Cemetery (Cmentarz Podgórski) K-5, ul. Wapienna 2, tel. 012 656 17 25. Behind Kopiec Krakusa on the Krakus foothills, the New Cemetery is a large, picturesque memorial park filled with monumental sculpture. Opened in 1900, the cemetery originally had a strict Catholic character with a separate designated area for Protestants and a distinct section for suicides (marked 'VIII-a'). Today it continues to grow and is ideal for a visit on All Souls' Day (Nov. 1, 2) due to its basin-shape creating an amphitheatre of coloured candlelight. ▶ Open 07:00 - 20:00.

Old Podgórze Cemetery (Stary Cmentarz Podgórski) K-5, Corner of ul. Limanowskiego and ul. Powstańców Wielopolskich. Podgórze's primary necropolis for over a hundred years, the Old Podgórze Cemetery is/was the resting place of the formerly independent city's most distinguished citizens. Established in the late 18th century, the cemetery's grand arched gateway is set back from a busy intersection on a hill behind the iconic sculpture of 'God the Father.' Unfortunately, with the exception of a few, many of the most notable graves have been lost during the boneyard's turbulent history. Crossing the stone entry, the first grave on the right is the resting place of Edward Dembowski - leader of the 1846 Kraków Uprising, laid to rest here in a collective grave with 28 insurgents shot by the Austrian Army; nearby is the Bednarski family vault, where Wojciech - founder of Podgo's most beautiful park reposes. Closed upon reaching capacity in 1900, the Germans levelled a third of the cemetery during WWII while building a railway. Even more grievous was the site's reduction to a fraction of its original size during the construction of al. Powstańców Wielopolskich in the 1970s, when almost all the graves were destroyed or strewn haphazardly about. Like much of the district today, the cemetery's charm lies in the nostalgic character of its general neglect. A small relic of vanishing beauty, the cemetery is open everyday from dawn to dusk.

Liban Quarry



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Liban Quarry J/K-5, ul. Za Torem. One of the creepiest, most forgotten places in Kraków, the Liban quarry should first and foremost be a place of remembrance for the victims of the Nazi labour camp that operated here during Kraków's WWII occupation. That said, the sight lays in overgrown abandon today, slowly becoming a nature sanctuary for waterfowl, birds of prey, pheasants and other various creatures (we've even seen an unattended horse grazing here) as the city seems to have forgotten it completely. Incredible limestone cliffs, ponds and dense vegetation lend Liban breath-taking qualities just as much as the rusting refinery equipment, fenceposts, gravestones and tangles of barbed wire that can still be found amongst the brush here.

The limestone company 'Liban and Ehrenpreis' run by two well-known Jewish industrialists from Podgórze established a quarry here in 1873. By the end of the 19th century a complex of buildings was established within the quarry and a railway line laid as the families enjoyed an excellent reputation locally and abroad. However, during Nazi occupation, Liban was set-up as a cruel penal camp where 800 young Poles were kept prisoner from 1942 to 1944 performing forced labour. A small, discreet, overgrown and easily overlooked memorial for 21 inmates executed during the liquidation of the camp lies beside the cliffside at the Za Torem end of the site.

In 1993 Steven Spielberg used Liban as the set of all the scenes from Schindler's List that take place in the Płaszów concentration camp. Not wanting to use the nearby site of the camp itself out of respect, it must have taken little imagination on his part to settle upon Liban. During filming 34 barracks and watchtowers were set-up around the quarry, and though most of the set was subsequently removed, some traces remain confusingly mixed with the genuine historical leftovers from the war, making it unclear just how uncomfortable you should feel as you walk amongst the many gallows-like fenceposts strung with barbed wire and rusty machinery. Certainly, the most disturbing site is the central pathway paved with Jewish headstones, which we can put you at ease by assuring you is not genuine. An incredibly evocative, yet peaceful and beautiful site, Liban allows you to explore Kraków's World War II history on your own terms, interpreting it as you like without the hand-holding of history books or tourist bureaus. Enter the quarry at your own risk by following a trail from Krak's Mound toward Podgórze cemetery along the rim and into the quarry, or try your luck from ul. Za Torem; though there is nothing unlawful about being in the quarry, city employees of the Housing Office buildings at the quarry's entrance have been known to aggravatedly deny entry or ask people to leave.

The bastard child of a devastated post WWII Poland, the huge Socialist Realist suburb of Nowa Huta is the direct antithesis of everything cuddly Kraków is. Gargoyles and tourists? Not here. The Orwellian settlement of Nowa Huta was one of only two entirely pre-planned socialist realist cities ever built (the other being Magnitogorsk in Russia's Ural Mountains), and one of the finest examples of deliberate social engineering in the world.

Funded by the Soviet Union, Nowa Huta swallowed up a huge swathe of agricultural land, and the ancient village of Kościelniki in an attempt to create an in-er-face proletarian opponent to intellectual, fairytale Kraków. The decision to build NH was rubber stamped on May 17, 1947 and over the next few years construction of a model city for 100,000 people sprung up at breakneck speed. Built to impress Nowa Huta featured wide, tree-lined avenues, parks, lakes and the officially sanctioned architectural style of the time - Socialist Realist. Nowa Huta's architects strove to construct the ideal city, with inspiration coming from the neighbourhood blocks built in 1920s New York. Careful planning was key, and the suburb was designed with 'efficient mutual control' in mind - Wide streets would prevent the spread of fire, the profusion of trees would soak up a nuclear blast, while the layout was such that the city could easily be turned into a fortress town if it came under attack.

It was a massive task, with volunteer workers flocking from across Poland to take part in this bold project. Feats of personal sacrifice were rife and encouraged with one man, Piotr Ożański, credited with laying 33,000 bricks in one single day. For the workers life was tough; many were still sleeping in tents when the first winter arrived, and crime was rampant. Legends abounded of bodies being buried in foundations, and night was positively dangerous in this country still reeling from the chaos of world war. Finally, on June 23, 1949, work on the first block of flats began - today a plaque found on ul. Mierzwia 14 commemorates this.

Somewhat sadly perhaps, the Utopian dream that was Nowa Huta was never fully realized. A fearsome town hall in the style of the renaissance halls found across Poland was never built, and the pompous decorations planned for the central buildings were never added. However what was completed is very much worth the trip. Taking centre stage is the Central Square, once named in Stalin's honour. Dating from 1949 it's a masterpiece of Soviet social planning, and the brainchild of architect Tadeusz Ptaszycy. In an ultimate twist of irony, this Soviet landmark was officially renamed Ronald Reagan Square in 2004, though speak to any local and you'll still find in referred to as Pl. Centralny.

But while this 'square' serves as the focal point for visitors, it's the steelworks that Nowa Huta is known for. Poland was in the process of rebuilding itself from near complete destruction in WWII, and steel was vital to this progress. Work began in April, 1950, and by 1954 the first blast furnace was in operation. Employing some 40,000 people in its heyday the steelworks - named for a time after Lenin - were capable of producing seven million tonnes of steel annually, and at one time boasted the largest blast furnace in Europe. Such was its reputation that Fidel Castro chose to visit the Steelworks rather than Kraków's Rynek on one state visit to Poland. Found on the end of al. Solidarności the entrance to what is known as the Sendzimir Steelworks has been given the full socialist makeover, with two concrete monstrosities built to echo the fine old buildings of Poland. You'll hear the natives referring to this architectural masterstroke as the Doge, after the grand palace in Venice which they are supposed to resemble.

Memories of Lenin

As an avid cyclist it is distinctly possible Lenin visited what is now Nowa Huta during his two year sojourn in Kraków. He made a high-profile comeback in 1954 when the steelworks were named after him, and a year later a statue of him was unveiled in Strzelecki Park. The figure was moved to the Lenin Museum soon after, and thereafter mysteriously disappeared. In 1970 the decision was taken to construct a new one on Al. Róż, with Marian Konieczny winning the commission. Strangely the artist, the man behind the Nike statue in Warsaw, was at the time living in Lenin's former flat. Weird. Perhaps inspired by this freaky turn of fate Konieczny took three years to create a cracker of a statue, with the seven tonne Lenin seen striding purposefully forward with raincoat open and furrowed brow. The people of Nowa Huta however were left unimpressed, and the statue soon became the focus of creative vandals. In 1979 a bomb was planted at his feet, though the only casualty proved to be a local man who died of shock after woken by the blast. During the Martial Law era more attempts to destroy him were thwarted, and he doggedly survived an effort to pull him down, as well as an arson attack. Finally, on December 10, 1989, Lenin was picked up by a giant crane, boxed up and left to rot in a disused fort. But his story doesn't end there. Years later a Swedish philanthropist bought him for 100,000 Swedish crowns, and had him shipped out to a museum outside of Stockholm. Today Nowa Huta's pet Lenin has been given a more youthful look by Swedish artists, and is now seen touting a pierced ear and a ciggie.

Nowa Huta may have been designed to be a socialist showcase city, but the reality was far different. It became a hotbed of anticommunist activity, with early displays of dissent traced back to the twenty year struggle for permission to build the Arka Pana church. Not surprisingly many of these protestors could be found during the day on the factory floor, and the steelworks were to play a huge part in the Solidarity strikes of the early 1980s. Identified as an anti-establishment stronghold, the steelworks were placed under military control during the period of Martial law, and today a remembrance room inside the factory honours those workers who put their lives on the line.

Similar to certain parts of Warsaw as well as many urban areas in the former Soviet Union Nowa Huta offers a surreal look inside the false dawn that was communism. Nowhere is this flawed grandeur more apparent than in the Teatr Ludowy (os. Teatrálne 34), its interiors filled with absurd chandeliers. Built in 1955 the exterior was apparently inspired by ancient Egypt, though anyone who visits is likely to disagree. Equally fear-some is the Kino Świt, its facade supported by twelve pillars.

Yet while Socialist Realism is the defining style, it's not the only one. By the 1960s, and with the supply of bricks from the flattened Wrocław drying up, it was the turn of the high-rises to come to the fore. The horizon was transformed within a decade, with easy to build faceless towers mushrooming up in the suburbs. However, while Nowa Huta is the product of the last half century, it is still possible to find places of older value. First off there's Mogiła (see below), and nearby is a WWI cemetery containing the bodies of 71 soldiers felled in battle. Artist Jan Matejko frequently escaped Kraków to this region, and his manor house on ul. Wańkowicza 25 is today a museum, its rooms perfectly preserved from the times he would take solace from the flap and flutter of urban Kraków.

Tourist information

Tourist Information Centre os. Słoneczne 16, tel. 012 643 03 03, www.biurofestivalowe.pl. The nerve centre of Nowa Huta's new persona, there's not a lot available in English here yet, but one or two of the people working in the building speak English well. This is currently the only place to pick up a (free) map of Nowa Huta, which also doubles as a walking tour of the district's most interesting sights. ▶ Open 10:00 - 14:00. Closed Mon, Sun.

Main sights

Arka Pana Church (Kościół Arka Pana) ul. Obronców Krzyża 1, tel. 012 644 54 34, www.arkapana.pl. Built between 1967 and 1977, Nowa Huta's first house of worship was designed by Wojciech Pietrzyk and was pieced together brick by brick by volunteer workers with no assistance from the communist authorities. The complete opposite of what Nowa Huta was meant to stand for, Arka Pana is a remarkable building, and a true symbol of the Polish belief in Catholicism. With no outside help it was down to the locals mix cement with spades, and find the two million stones needed for the church's facade. The first corner stone was laid in 1969 by Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, who would later assume fame as Pope John Paul II. But the discovery of a WWII ammunition dump delayed work, and the precarious removal of some 5,000 mines and shells had to be completed before work was resumed. Finally, on May 15, 1977, the church was finally consecrated. Built to resemble Noah's Ark, with a 70 metre mast-shaped crucifix rising from the middle, the church houses a mind-boggling array of treasures, including a stone from the tomb of St Peter in the Vatican, a tabernacle containing a fragment of rutilite brought back from the moon by the crew of Apollo 11 and a controversial statue of Christ that shows him not on a cross, but about to fly to the heavens. No surprises that it's the work of Bronisław Chyży, the same lunatic behind the Wawel Dragon statue and Dżok the Dog. And if you thought it couldn't get weirder then you hadn't gambled on the statue dedicated to Our Lady the Armoured - get this, the half metre sculpture is made from ten kilograms of shrapnel removed from Polish soldiers wounded at the Battle of Monte Cassino. The church became a focal point during the anti-communist protests of the early 1980s, not least for the shelter it afforded the locals from the militia. Protesting during the period of Martial Law was dangerous business, and that's proved by the monument dedicated to Bogdan Włosik more or less opposite the church. Włosik was shot in the chest by security services, and later died of his injuries. His death outraged the people, and his funeral was attended by 20,000 mourners. The monument commemorating the site of his death was erected in 1992 and is a tribute to all those who died during this period. ▶ Lower level Open 06:00 - 17:00. Upper level Open during mass and on request. No visiting during mass please.

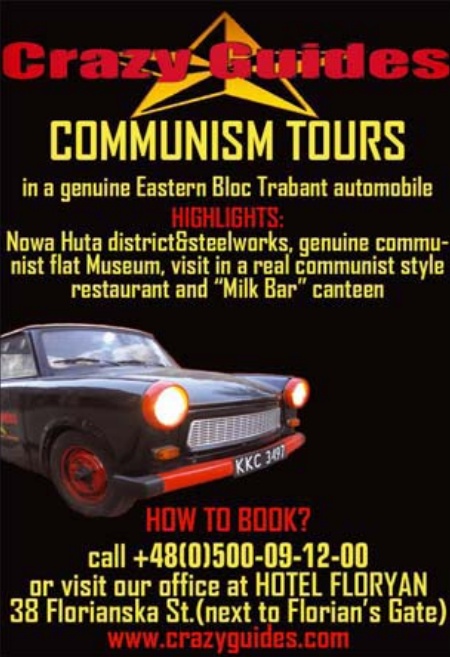
Museum of the Armed Act (Muzeum Czynu Zbrojnego) os. Góralski 23, tel. 012 644 35 17. An astonishing museum that doesn't translate into English very well, find inside a series of dusty rooms several touching exhibits dedicated to those who fought and died for their nation and who were born in the Nowa Huta area. In Polish only, most things on display might not mean much to those lacking a healthy interest in the detritus and paraphernalia of war, but it's well worth popping in if only for a look at the intriguing and grotesque models of life under the Nazis during WWII. ▶ Open 10:00 - 15:00. Closed Sat, Sun. Admission free.

Norwid Cultural Centre (Ośrodek Kultury im. C. K. Norwida) os. Góralski 5, tel. 012 644 27 65, www.okn.edu.pl. Of the kind once found lurking behind every fold in the Iron Curtain, this focal point for Nowa Huta's creative community would be of little interest to the outsider if it wasn't for the superb collection of original paintings and sculptures on display up the stairs, all of them the work of the now infamous Kraków Group. ▶ Open 09:00 - 21:00, Sun 16:00 - 21:00.

Nowa Huta Museum os. Słoneczne 16, tel. 012 425 97 75, www.mhk.pl. Inside the Tourist Information Centre this small museum features a series of changing exhibitions relating to the life and culture of Nowa Huta, and is well worth dropping by to see what's on. ▶ Open 09:00 - 17:00. Closed Mon. Last ticket sold 30 minutes before closing. Admission 5/3zł. Wed free.

Mogiła

Incorporated inside Nowa Huta's borders in 1973, the small village of Mogiła is everything you think Nowa Huta isn't. A sleepy collection of wooden houses and not much else, Mogiła does however claim two superb architectural gems. The vast and splendid St. Wenceslas' Church dates from 1266, and was founded by bishop John Prandota. The huge interior features many fine examples of Renaissance painting and is generally considered to be one of the most important religious buildings in the Małopolska region. Across the street is the diminutive St. Bartholomew's Church, a 15th-century wooden treasure, Kraków's only wooden church and remarkable for little else except for its rare cross shape. To get to Mogiła, take tram N°15 or 20 east from Pl. Centralny, get off at the Kłasztorna stop and walk south a couple of hundred metres down ul. Kłasztorna. You can't miss them.



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For centuries, salt was mined near Kraków and brought wealth to the region. Two mines can be visited, of which the one in Wieliczka is the most spectacular. About 20 million years ago, this area was covered by a shallow, salty sea. Unfortunately for Kraków the beaches have gone, but left behind were some huge salt deposits that ended up 10-200m underground due to tectonic movements. Ever since the Stone Age, locals have been boiling brine to extract salt from the easily reachable layers; from the 13th century people started to dig for rock-salt. The mines gradually developed from small shafts used by local farmers and operating only in wintertime, to complexes of tunnels with horse-powered winches until finally into the modern mines that were eventually closed in the 1990s. Both the Bochnia and Wieliczka mines can be visited on tours that last about two hours, with witty guides who give insight into ancient and modern salt mining techniques and the artworks, chapels, lakes, sports facilities and sanatoriums you now find underground. The temperature in both mines is a constant 15°C. If you want to impress the guide, memorise the wonderful words *Szczęście Boże* (stench-tsh boh-zhe); this essential, unpronounceable bit of salt miners' lingo means as much as 'may God protect you.'

Bochnia Mine (Kopalnia Soli Bochnia) ul. Solna 2, Bochnia, tel. 014 615 36 36, www.kopalniasoli.pl. This salt mine was the oldest production company in Poland - it recently closed after more than 750 years of operation. The tour takes in the largest chambers, that hold a sports centre, cafeteria, disco and sanatorium before heading off to the chapel and some twisty old shafts. While less spectacular than Wieliczka, Bochnia is a less commercial and hurried experience.

Get there by train from Kraków (1-3 trains per hour, 30-60 minutes) and walk 10 minutes uphill from the station to the Rynek (main square) from where you see the shaft lifts. ▶ Admission 30/22zł. Tours at 09:30, 11:30, 15:30, Sat, Sun hourly between 10:15 & 16:15. Phone ahead for an English-speaking guide 100zł.

Wieliczka Mine

ul. Danilowicza 10, Wieliczka, tel. 012 278 73 02, www.kopalnia.pl. A listed UNESCO monument since 1978, the Wieliczka mine is thought to have been created by the forces of nature around 15 million years ago. The mine features nine floors, ranging from 64 metres to 327 metres in depth, with one shaft dating from medieval times. The tour takes in a series of chambers full of carvings and statues, the late 17th century St. Anthony's chapel and the huge 22,000 cubic metre Chapel of St. Kinga, which is completely decorated with salt. The bas-relief wall carvings, made by talented miners, depict scenes from the New Testament and display amazing dimension and realism. After passing a salt lake that holds more than 300g of salt per litre, and a hall big enough to fly a hot-air balloon in, the tour ends at the underground restaurant and souvenir shop. A rattling high-speed mining lift brings you back up to the surface. Travel the 15km to Wieliczka by frequent train (4zł) or by minibus (every 20 minutes from the train station, 2,50zł). ▶ Open 07:30 - 19:30. Admission 64/49 zł.



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foto: Dorota Budner

For centuries the town of Oświęcim was a quiet backwater community, largely bypassed by world events. That changed with WWII when, under its German name of Auschwitz, it became the site of the largest death camp in the Third Reich. Between 1.1 million and 1.5 million people, mainly Jews, were exterminated here, etching the name of Auschwitz into the history books.

Getting there

Oświęcim is 75km west of Kraków and is served by frequent **buses** (1.5hrs, 10zł) which leave from the station at ul. Bosańska (E-1) and two early **trains** (1.5hrs, 11zł) daily. Some buses drop you off at Auschwitz Museum, others will leave you at Oświęcim train station from where local buses №2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 17 and 23 (tickets at the kiosk, 2.20zł) go to the museum. The two camps are **3km apart**. Buses leave for Auschwitz II - Birkenau every hour from the car park of Auschwitz I during the high tourist season (roughly April 15th to November 1st). More definitively, take a taxi between the two for 15zł. Waiting minibus taxis run by Malarek Tour can take you **back to Kraków** - a group of eight would pay 25-35zł/person.

Auschwitz I (Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz - Birkenau) ul. Więźniów Oświęcimia 20, Oświęcim, tel. 033 844 80 00, www.auschwitz.org.pl. Words do no justice to the horror of Auschwitz. Pass through the main gate of the concentration camp Auschwitz I - with the immortal inscription 'Arbeit Macht Frei' ('Work makes you free') - and you become a witness to one of the most horrific crimes ever perpetrated. But not before you pass several hot dog huts - including one with a sensitive Coca Cola poster declaring in Polish: 'want to live!' Surely it's only a matter of time till one vile human opens a theme pub called 'Bar Mitzvah.' Prisoners passing through Auschwitz had no such luxuries, as the gruesome film shown in the reception area illustrates. The English language version is held at 10:00, 11:00 and 13:00 and is a suitably sober prelude to what lies ahead.

After this disturbing introduction make sure to pick up the official guidebook (priced 4zł), whose map of the camp is crucial so as not to miss out on the key sites. The prescribed route runs past the gateway and kitchens, where the camp orchestra once played as prisoners marched to work, before starting in earnest inside Block 4. It's here you'll find a good overview of the creation and reality behind the world's most notorious concentration camp. Exhibits include original architect's sketches for gas chambers, tins of Zyklon B used for extermination and mugshots of inmates.

It's the final rooms that make for the most disturbing viewing, however. On liberating the camp Red Army forces found over seven tonnes of human hair destined for German factories. Now on display in a room shielded from natural light the endless piles of hair do much to demonstrate the scale and depravity of the Nazi death machine.

Transported to Auschwitz in cattle trucks newly arrived prisoners were stripped of their personal property, some of which you'll find on display in Block 5. Huge glass display units are home to mountains of artificial limbs, glasses, suitcases and shaving brushes, though the most touching sight is without doubt the collection of children's shoes. Block 6 examines the daily life of prisoners with collections of photographs, artists' drawings and tools used for hard labour while the next set of barracks recreates the living conditions endured by prisoners: bare rooms with sackcloth spread out on the floor, and rows of communal latrines, one decorated with a poignant mural depicting two playful kittens.

A brief history

1940

April

In spite of the marshy terrain a Nazi commission decides to open a concentration camp in Oświęcim, primarily because of the excellent transport links it enjoys.

May 20

Using existing Polish army barracks as a foundation the construction of Auschwitz I is completed.

June 14

728 Polish political prisoners from Tarnów become the first inmates of Auschwitz I. They are soon followed by 12,000 Soviet POWs.

1941

September 3

First experiments with Zyklon B poison gas are conducted on 600 Soviet POWs

1942

Auschwitz II - Birkenau and Auschwitz III - Monowitz are established.

1944

October 7

Jewish crematoria workers in Birkenau stage an armed uprising, blowing up Crematorium IV. Hundreds escape but all are soon captured and put to death.

1945

January

Liquidation of Birkenau with documents burnt and gas chambers, crematoria and barracks destroyed. All prisoners who can walk, approximately 58,000, are sent on arduous 'death marches'. Around 15,000 die during this 'evacuation'. On January 27 the Red Army liberates Oświęcim, where around 7,000 prisoners too weak to move have been abandoned to their fate. In the months after the war the Auschwitz barracks are used as an NKVD prison.

Post-war

The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum is established. In 1979 UNESCO includes Auschwitz I and II on its list of World Heritage sites. In the same year it is visited by Pope John Paul II. His successor, German Pope Benedict XVI visits in 2006.

June 28, 2007

UNESCO World Heritage Committee approves Poland's request to change the name Auschwitz Concentration Camp to Auschwitz Birkenau. German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp (1940-1945). The request is a reaction to the tendency of the site being referred to as a Polish death camp.

Your visit takes a stomach churning turn at Block 11, otherwise known as 'The Death Block'. Outside, the Wall of Death - against which thousands of prisoners were shot by the SS - has been turned into a memorial festooned with flowers, while inside the horrors of this Nazi death factory have been faithfully preserved: whipping posts, manacles and gallows included. It was at the Wall of Death that Pope Benedict XVI prayed during his ground-breaking visit in 2007. The cellars are terrifying. It's here the Nazi's conducted their first experiments with poison gas in 1941 on Soviet prisoners. Other cells include the death place of Father Maximilian Kolbe, a Polish priest sentenced to death by starvation after offering his life to save another inmate, and tiny 'standing cells' measuring 90 x 90 cm where up to four prisoners were held for indefinite amounts of time.