Train smarts

The Polish rail network is generally in decent shape even if the rolling stock is by and large something you may have travelled on in Italy some years ago. Certainly better than Britain's railways; you'll find most trains run on time, are cheap, and don't crash. Travelling times are generally pretty slow even on express and Intercity trains with limited high-speed sections of track throughout the country. That is being remedied but in turn this is causing increased travelling times on many lines. Tickets are by western standards very cheap with a first -class ticket to Krakow from Warsaw for instance setting you back about 140zl (about €30).

The state-owned Polish rail network PKP run several types of train. Intercity (also known as Eurocity or just IC) trains are the fastest, newest and most expensive of the lot, with first and second class compartments holding up to six people. New rolling stock is appearing with open carriages and 220v AV sockets. Ekspress are supposed to be older and slower and pack more people into less space than the former, but this distinction is slowly disappearing as both tracks and rolling stock get older. Use either of the above for long-distance journeys. Both come with dining carriages, though be warned, anyone falling asleep will incur the full wrath of the steward. Smokers should not make the mistake of booking a seat in a smoking compartment - you will die within minutes. Cheapskates looking to cut costs should opt for the markedly cheaper Tanie Linie Kolejowe (TLK), Pospieszny (posp) or Osobowy (os.) trains; you will pay buttons for the privilege, but your journey is guaranteed to try your good humour.

With the exception of pociąg osobowy trains, ticket prices include a seperate seat reservation charge. More information on train times and prices check the very useful www.rozklad.pkp.pl which has an English option. There is the functionality to book tickets online once you have registered (https://bilet.intercity.pl/irez/index.jsp). This option allows you to book a ticket and seat in one without the hassle of queuing at the station.

If you find yourself faced with long queues in the train station then you'll be pleased to hear you can hop on the desired train and buy a ticket direct from the conductor. You'll pay a small surcharge for this (approx 9zl), and credit cards are now accepted. Travellers are expected to greet others in their compartment with a curt 'dzien dobry', and it is taken as given that a male passengers will help females or the elderly with any heavy baggage.

Travelling by train should hold no fear, though you may have the misfortune of sharing a compartment with a woman who has no qualms with silencing errant children with a thump to the head. Or even worse, sharing a compartment with perky army discharges. Upgrading to first class for a cursory fee is usually enough to avoid these pitfalls.

Finally most stations throughout the country are appalling lacking in signs denoting the station name and it's surprisingly easy to miss your stop. Communicating with your fellow passengers can save a lot of time and frustration.

Arrivals Przyjazdy
Departures Odjazdy
Platform Peron

By bus

Both International buses and local mini-buses arrive and depart from the brand new terminal on ul. Bosacka 18 (E-1). It's right behind the train station and can be accessed by the same tunnels that give you access to the platforms. Follow signs for Dworzec Autobusowy and you'll find yourself in a two-story building on the opposite side of the train station from the Andels Hotel and Galeria Krakowska. If you're heading to Zakopane then your best option will be to get a bus, as opposed to a train, and you'll find buses departing more or less hourly, with journey time taking around two hours. These are proper coaches and leave from the upper level with tickets available from the ticket office in the station. For Zakopane bus times you can check www.rda.krakow.pl which at present is only in Polish. Click on odjazdy and then type in the town you wish to travel to. Remember 'do' is 'to' and 'od' is 'from' in Polish. For buses to places like Wieliczka and Auschwitz you are likely to be travelling by mini-bus. These leave from the ground floor and generally independent small businesses. Tickets for these are avaiable directly from the driver.

Jordan D-2, ul. Pawia 8, tel. 012 422 60 91, www.jordan.pl. English-speaking tour company with buses available for hire which also acts as a vendor for other company's scheduled bus services. ▶ Open 08:00 - 18:00, Sat 09:00 - 14:00. Closed Sun.

Kraków Bus Station (Dworzec autobusowy) E-1, ul. Bosacka 18, tel. *720 80 50, www.rda.krakow.pl. ▶ Ticket Office Open 06:00-21:00.

Minibuses

Biznestransport ul. Trakt Lubelski 358 (Warsaw), tel. 0 505 31 16 99, www.biznestransport.pl. Save considerable sums, and even time, on train travel by hiring a minibus to travel inter-city. Full size luxury buses and limousines are also available and these guys can also stretch to courier services and even warehousing. ▶ Open 24hrs.

Krakow Shuttle ul. Dukatów 27b(Rakowice), tel. 012 633 01 25, www.krakowshuttle.com. Good value Kraków and Katowice airport transfers, as well as tours of hard to reach sights in and around the city (Wieliczka, Auschwitz). ▶ Open 08:30 - 17:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

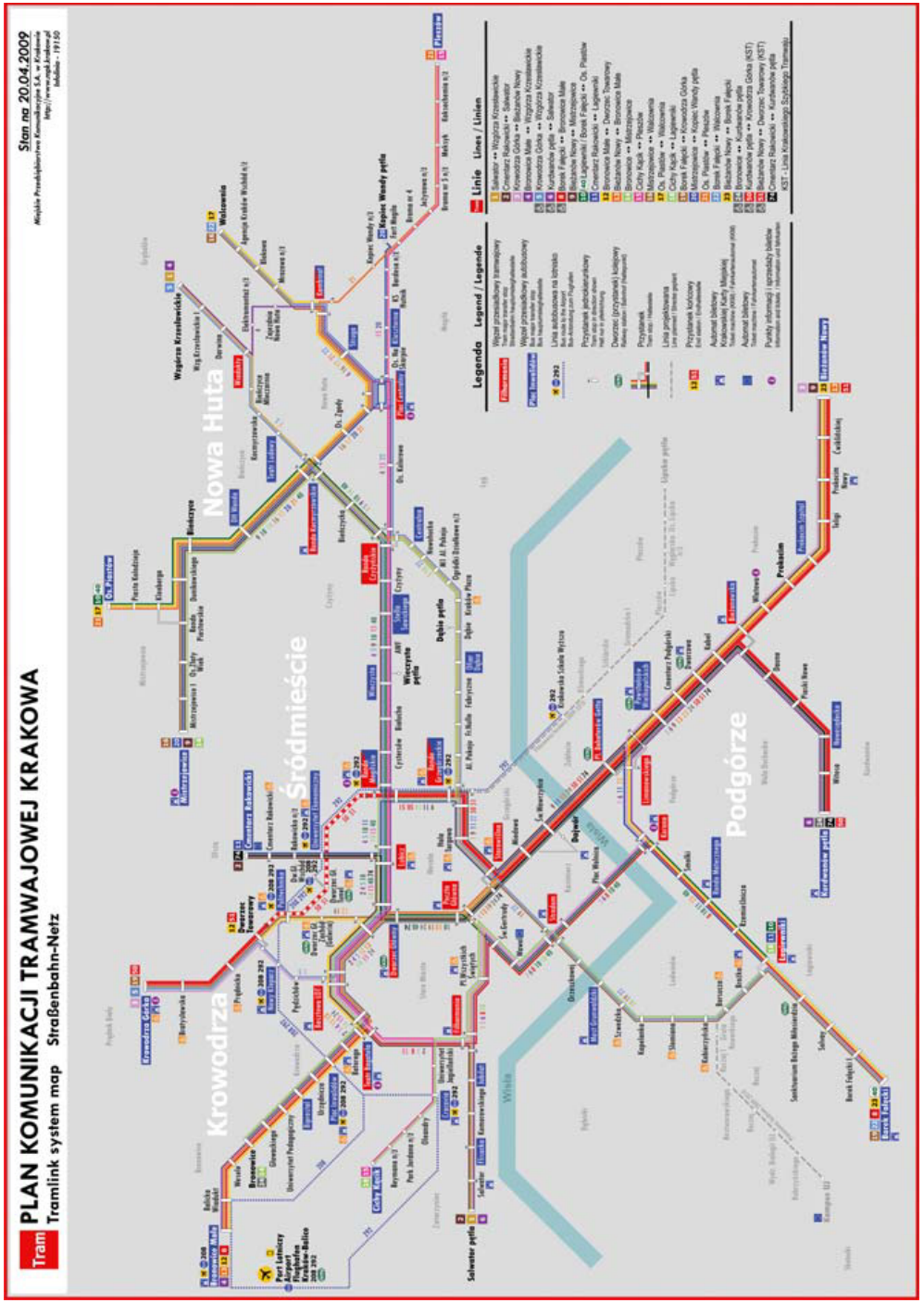
Taxis

Most taxis are reliable and use their metres without fiddling around, but beware of the cowboys waiting outside the train station and certain hotels. Make sure your cab has a large sign on the roof with phone number and company name, make sure the driver turns on the meter and you'll be fine. If you need a taxi from the station, walk up the stairs from the platforms to find reliable Radio Taxi 19191 on the rooftop parking lot. Expect to pay 7zł plus about 2.30zł per kilometre.

Barbakan Taxi tel. 012 196 61
Euro Taxi tel. 012 196 64
City Taxi tel. 012 196 21
Mega Taxi tel. 012 196 25
Radio Taxi tel. 012 191 91

Travel agents

Jordan C-1, ul. Długa 9, tel. 012 421 21 25, www.jordan.pl. ▶ Open 09:00 - 18:00, Sat 09:00 - 14:00. Closed Sun.

Marco der Pole C-5, ul. Kanonicza 15, tel. 012 430 21 31, www.marcoderpole.com.pl. ▶ Open 09:00 - 17:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

Orbis Travel C-3, Rynek Główny 41, tel. 012 619 24 59, www.orbis.krakow.pl. ▶ Open 09:00 - 18:00, Sat 09:00 - 14:00. Closed Sun.