

KRAKÓW

*A city of great historical, academic
and intellectual significance*

Located in southeast Poland, between the Jura uplands and the Tatra Mountains on the banks of Vistula River, Kraków is one of the oldest and most beautiful cities in Eastern Europe, with many incredible, historical sites to visit. Besides the magnificent architecture, and abundance of artistic and cultural experiences, you will fall in love with its decadent culinary offerings, its fine selection of wine, and unique boutiques.

Archaeological excavations at Wawel Hill uncovered the region's rich history dating back to the Old Stone Age. The earliest written references to the city appear in Cordova merchant Abraham Ben Jacob's records from 965. In 1978, the medieval Old Town, the Renaissance Royal Wawel Castle, and the district of Kazimierz, with its ancient synagogues, were added to the original UNESCO World Heritage List and all are worthy sites to visit. A gentle stroll through this beguiling city with its myriad of palaces, churches, theatres and mansions will reveal some of the continent's finest examples of Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque architecture.

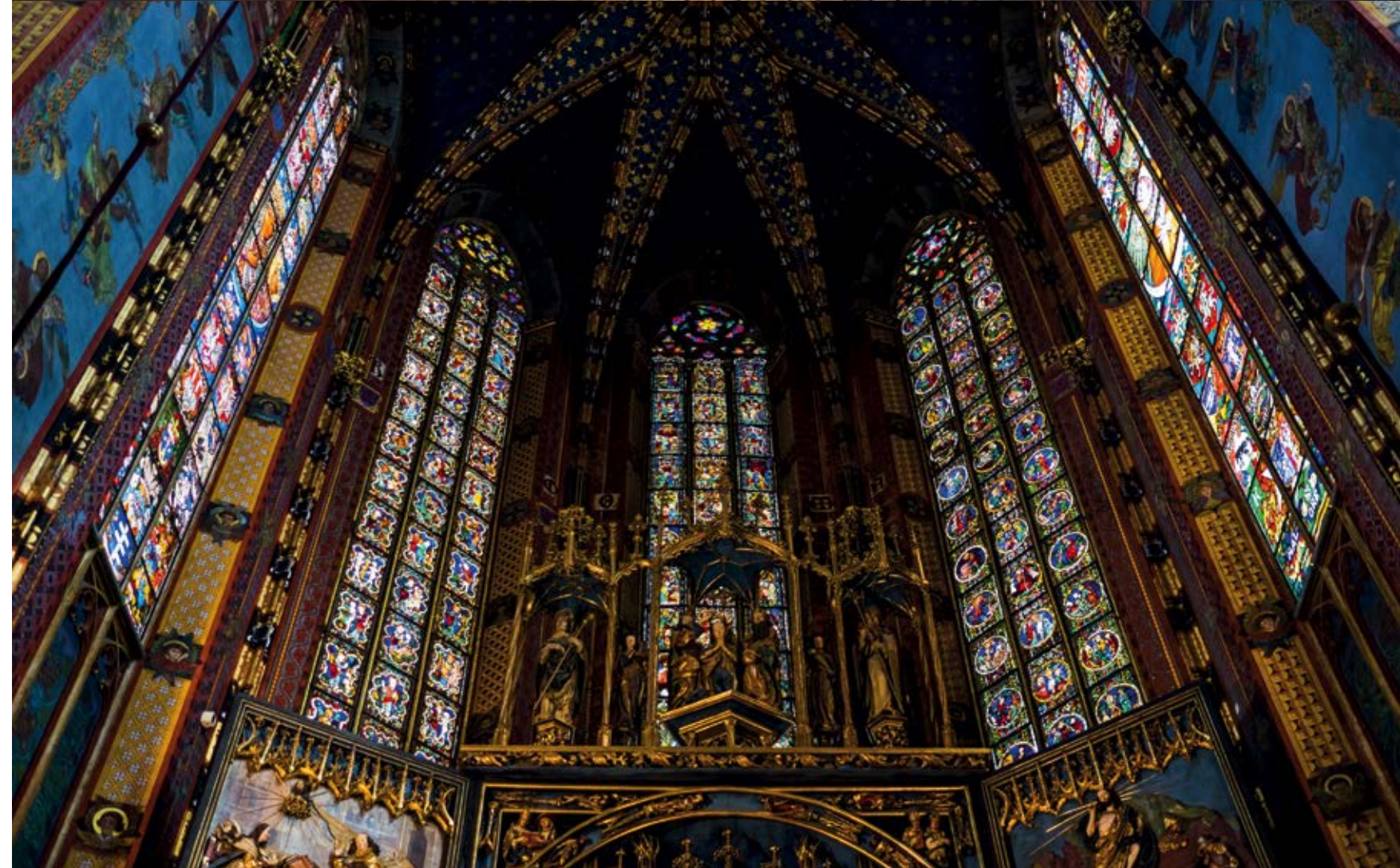
THE RYNEK GŁÓWNY

At the heart of Kraków lies the largest medieval market square in Europe, the Rynek Główny, which was established around 1257. There you'll find the Sukiennice or Cloth Hall, where travelling merchants would meet to discuss business, and to trade in imports from the east, including spices, silk, leather and wax, and Polish produced exports of textiles, lead and salt from the Wieliczka Salt Mine. Today, the Cloth Hall is a treasure trove of stalls selling everything from textiles, to gorgeous engraved wooden boxes and carefully carved and painted wooden chess sets and crystal glasses (which make for lovely gifts for friends and family) as well as a wonderful variety of amber trinkets and jewellery. Florianska Street is the most famous tourist street and its tenement houses play host to a variety of shops selling clothes, souvenirs, jewellery, leather goods, alcohol, as well as

many restaurants, cafes, bars and clubs. You must visit Restauracja Wierzynek for a superb meal at one of the oldest restaurants in Poland. The restaurant dates back to 1364 and hosted the wedding feast of King Casimir the Great's granddaughter. Situated in the Morsztynowska Tenement, in the very heart of Kraków's Old City, the Restaurant itself is located on the first and second floor of the refurbished building, and boasts eight rooms each of a different size and interior set. The Knight Room on the first floor derives its name and décor from the elements of knight's equipment: historic armour, shields, helmets, swords and sabres. This is the largest of all Wierzynek's chambers and its stained glass windows ensure privacy, therefore it enjoys popularity of businessmen and diplomats. Next to it, the Clock Room's walls are full of mysterious and antique pendulum clocks. Here the time has stopped literally and figuratively. Above them all reigns an original painting by Rafał Olbiński, with its modern interpretation of the famous feast at Wierzynek. Their menu pays tribute to the past, with authentic old Polish recipes infused with modern elements. Their produce is locally sourced and they do have a vegetarian menu. Café Wierzynek on the ground floor is filled with the aroma of freshly brewed coffee and decadent treats. Next door, you'll find the café's chocolatier, Slodki Wierzynek.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE KINGS

The reign of Casimir the Great (Casimir III 1310–1370), patron of the arts and sciences, had a lasting impact on the city. He founded two new cities, Kazimierz and Kleparz, which were closely connected with Krakow and encouraged the building of Gothic, Franciscan and Dominican churches, such as St. Mary's Church, the Corpus Christi Church and St. Catherine's Church, as well as the renovations of the cathedral and castle on Wawel Hill, the Cloth Hall, Town Hall and other public buildings. In 1364, Casimir III founded Krakow Academy, from which the Jagiellonian University grew. Now,





more than 200,000 students choose to study in Kraków every year, a testament to its beauty and its lively cultural life. There are twenty-three institutions of higher education within the city, with Jagiellonian University, founded in 1364 by Casimir III, offering students interested in literature, with the opportunity to join the Department of International Polish Studies.

Ladislaus Jagiello, Grand Duke of Lithuania, was crowned King of Poland in 1386 and started the greatest Polish dynasty, which ruled Poland for over 200 years. During his reign, the royal court proved worthy patrons of artistic and cultural life. This supportive atmosphere attracted remarkable humanists, scientists and artists who came to Poland – in particular to Kraków – from Italy, Germany and other countries. For centuries, the city has been a significant academic and intellectual centre. Today, the Jagiellonian Library houses the country's most important relics and masterpieces of the Polish language, and archives all Polish prints published in Poland and abroad.

A LITERARY HAVEN

The country's Academy of Fine Arts was established in 1818 and the Society of the Friends of Fine Arts was established in 1854. Kraków was honoured with the title of European Capital of Culture in 2000

by the European Commission, and besides being home to one of the continent's oldest universities, is also home to the country's first scriptoria, libraries and printing houses. There is a thriving book market here, with almost 80 bookshops and 30 antiquarian bookstores, as well as many publishers. In fact, on the Main Market Square, you'll find a bookshop, now known as Bookstore Matras, that has continuously operated in the same address, since it opened in 1610, making it the oldest bookstore in the world. You'll find the fascinating Massolit Books and Café, an independent English-language bookshop in the heart of the beautiful Old Town, and bookshops such as Lokator, Verbum (which specialises in antiquarian books), Mocak Bookstore, and Austeria are definitely worth a visit.

Krakow is a member of the International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN) for persecuted writers.

In spring and summer, local cafes, bars and bistros, all housed in architecturally historical buildings with unchanged exteriors, spill out onto the sidewalks around the Rynek Glowny. The city's literary and cultural scene is alive with many events and festivals which celebrate music, film, theatre, and poetry. The biggest literary festivals include the popular Miłosz Festival, championing poetry from across the world in the name of Poland's Czesław Miłosz, and the Conrad Festival, inspired by the creative internationalism of Joseph Conrad. Writers and scholars flock to Krakow annually to attend these festivals, and

the International Book Fair is now in its twentieth year. The city has produced numerous Polish Nobel Literary Prize winners including Henryk Sienkiewicz (1905), Władysław Stanisław Reymont (1924), Czesław Miłosz (1980) and Wisława Szymborska (1996). There are several hundred poets who call this wonderful city home, and most participate in the many poetry evenings and salons that take place on a regular basis. The city's numerous literary institutions host readings, salons and performances on Poetry Night, which started in 2011. Kraków's constant support of the literary arts saw it being designated with the permanent title of a UNESCO City of Literature.

FOR THE LOVE OF ART

In the late 19th Century, after years of decline under the partitions of Polish and Austrian occupation, the Sukiennice was renovated and turned into Poland's first national museum. The museum was housed on the upper floor, and was home to a nationally symbolic collection: 19th Century Polish Painting.

In 2006 the gallery's 1,300 paintings and sculptures were moved to the castle in Niepolomice when the Sukiennice underwent extensive renovations. The new gallery opened in 2010 blending the old with the new, recreating the original 19th-century look with carefully chosen colours and decorations, but in a decidedly modern setting,

with state-of-the art lighting and educational facilities. There is now a multimedia room for lectures and meetings where nine glass screens recreate a world 130 years in the past. Computer touch-screens show the history of the Sukiennice and its works of art.

The gallery is divided into a series of salons that take you on a tour of Polish art history. Among them are the Enlightenment Room, featuring both Polish and foreign classicists, the Michalowski Room, featuring Polish romanticism and the beginnings of nationalist art, and the Chelmonski Room, displaying Polish impressionism and the beginnings of symbolism. Some of the most famous historical paintings of local 19th-century artist Jan Matejko can be seen there. The renovations extended below the Rynek Główny, uncovering the foundations of early Kraków. It is now the largest underground museum in Europe, with 6,000 square metres displaying Krakow's history. Here, you can walk past medieval crossroads and fragments of early paved streets, as well as parts of the earliest Sukiennice walls. There are even remnants of wood structures that predate the founding of the city.

NEARBY UNESCO HERITAGE SITES

After an hour-and-a-half's drive from Kraków, you'll come to globally significant UNESCO Heritage Site; Auschwitz Birkenau: German



Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp (1940–1945). It is a sombre but important visit. The Auschwitz-Birkenau complex was the largest of the concentration camps created by the Nazi German regime, and was the one which combined extermination with forced labour. According to a UNESCO release, “The remains of the two camps of Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II-Birkenau, as well as its Protective Zone were placed on the World Heritage List as evidence of this inhumane, cruel and methodical effort to deny human dignity to groups considered inferior, leading to their systematic murder. The camps are a vivid testimony to the murderous nature of the anti-Semitic and racist Nazi policy that brought about the annihilation of more than 1.2 million people in the crematoria, 90 percent of whom were Jews.”

It is difficult to comprehend what happened here as you walk around the complex. Its fortified walls, barbed wire, railway sidings, platforms, barracks and gallows, gas chambers and crematoria – roughly 150 buildings and 300 ruins – are still in evidence today, as it was only partially destroyed by fleeing Nazis when the camp was liberated. The personal items on display in the collections bear witness to the lives of the victims that lost their lives here, before they arrived at the camps. Even though this is not an easy tour to be a part of, it is a very important site to visit when in Poland.

For a more light-hearted, but equally fascinating experience, visit The Wieliczka Salt Mine, located roughly 14 kilometres southeast

of Kraków. Wieliczka is famous for its ultra-deep salt mine which has been in continuous operation for 700 years. Below the surface is a maze of pits and chambers with incredible carvings done by hand from salt blocks. Included on UNESCO’s World Heritage List in 1978, the mine is known for the preservative qualities of its micro climate, and for its health-giving properties. An Underground Rehabilitation and Cure Centre was established in the Teodora Wessel Chamber, on level III (a depth of 135 meters) in 1997. The sanatorium treats chronic allergic diseases, such as asthma, during overnight stays.

The mine’s tunnels span some 300 kilometres over nine levels, the deepest of which is 327 metres underground. The public is able to view some 22 chambers connected by galleries, and it’s a definite must see destination during your stay in Kraków. You’ll be in awe of the chapels, altarpieces and figures that have been painstakingly, and beautifully carved over the centuries by the miners. Every single element in the ornamented Chapel of St Kinga (Kaplica św. Kingi,) from chandeliers to altarpieces, is created from salt. It took over 30 years (1895–1927) for one man and then his brother to complete this underground temple, and about 20,000 tonnes of rock salt had to be removed during the process. There are life-size statues of each of the Pope’s in this Chapel, as well as incredible wall frescos, one even featuring Leonardo Da Vinci’s Last Supper. It is a truly unique and worthwhile visit.

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WHERE TO STAY IN KRAKÓW

There are a number of five star hotels in Kraków. Hotel Copernicus on Kanonicza Street (Krakow’s oldest street that winds its way toward Wawel Royal Castle), is the only hotel in Poland affiliated to Relais & Châteaux. The hotel is housed in a building that was the residence of cathedral canons several centuries ago. Copernicus, famous astronomer and “father” of the heliocentric theory, stayed there whenever he visited Kraków as a Canon of the Archbishop of Warmia. Every attempt has been made to ensure the preservation of the historic building, and the works of art within it, while still providing a superlative accommodation experience for its guests. Copernicus Restaurant, the renaissance inspired restaurant, serves wonderful meals based on Polish royal cuisine. The Bonerowski Palace also comes highly recommended. It is an elegant palace located in the city centre, conveniently at the intersection of St. John Street and the Main Market Square. Besides its gorgeous interiors, of special note are the concerts featuring marvellous nocturnes, preludes and waltzes by Polish composer Chopin, which are performed almost every evening at 19:00 in the hotel’s Royal Hall by talented young artists. The unique property is one of the finest monuments of mixed architecture in old Krakow where archaeologists discovered important architectural treasures, like a Gothic-style medieval pillar and murals depicting rural scenes from the 17th Century. ■ Lindsay Grubb

