

KRAKOW – MUCH MORE THAN HISTORY

Krakow is famous for its rich history, world class monuments, Wawel Dragon, and pretzels. But it isn't worth limiting a visit to Krakow to just the legendary bugle call and sightseeing at the Wawel Royal Castle. Besides its historic heritage, Krakow also means festivals of international renown, innovative museums in which modernity links with tradition, and dozens of places connected with John Paul II.

Krakow is a city of a thousand-year-long tradition that used to play an important role as the capital of Poland and the seat of kings. Today Krakow is the capital of the Malopolska Region and a significant metropolis. It is the most recognisable Polish city in the world and one of the most popular tourist destinations in Europe – it is visited by more than 8 mln tourists annually. Everybody can find something here for themselves – not only history enthusiasts but also pilgrims, music, dance and art lovers.

From the Middle Ages to the present

It is impossible to enumerate all the things that make Krakow a masterpiece of its kind, but undoubtedly one of them is the Old Town area, which is an exquisite treasury of art works. It can boast a unique accumulation of historical sites: over 100 sacral buildings and several dozen historic residences and palaces. Krakow has 1,150 sites on the historical monument register, which represents nearly all architectural epochs and styles, starting from the Middle Ages to the present. The Market Square – the central point of the city – is also unique. With its impressive 200 x 200 m dimensions, it is the largest city square of medieval Europe that has been preserved in unchanged shape since 1257. In 1978, Krakow's Market Square, together with the surrounding streets with their distinctive chess-board pattern, was entered on the UNESCO World Heritage List. In 2005 it took first place in a ranking of the Best Market Squares of the World, the first global ranking of the Project for Public Space. Today the Market Square is home to a total of about 400 clubs, cafés, pubs and restaurants.

Face to face with history

Four metres beneath the surface of the Market Square the exhibition “In the footsteps of the European identity of Krakow” was created to present the re-discovered remains of the original medieval settlement, from the times of two famous Polish Kings – Boleslaw the Chaste and Kazimierz the Great – with about 700 everyday medieval items. Occupying a space of about 4,000 m², the exhibition was prepared on the basis of historical items that had

been discovered during the archaeological works conducted in the area between 2005 and 2010. Thanks to the employment of multimedia techniques, seeing the exhibition in the underground of the Market Square is a trip into a vibrant, medieval Krakow where visitors can stand face to face with history. The presentation technologies employed, including water screens and multimedia installations enabling extensive interaction with visitors, make the exhibition one of the most high-tech in Poland and Europe.

Thirteenth-century trade centre

Krakow is also the only town in Europe where a thirteenth-century trade centre still continues to operate. The Cloth Hall, one of the most recognisable historical buildings in Poland, is located in the middle of Krakow's Market Square in the very heart of the city. Its history dates back to the 13th century, when it was built during the reign of Duke Boleslaw the Chaste. In the Middle Ages it served as a kind of shopping centre, where merchants sold various goods, starting from food and everyday items, to luxurious goods like expensive fabrics, gold and jewellery. Even today the Cloth Hall is the most popular shopping gallery in Krakow. What is more, on the first floor visitors can explore the Gallery of 19th Century Polish Art, the largest permanent exhibition of 19th century Polish paintings and sculptures in Poland.

Four quarters of the globe

Only in Krakow is there a bugle call that has been played by a trumpeter to the four corners of the globe every hour, on the hour, for over six hundred years. A trumpeter plays it from The Bugle Tower (81 metres high) – the highest tower of St. Mary's Church, which is the most famous Gothic church in Krakow. St. Mary's Church houses also one of the largest Gothic wooden altarpieces in Europe. Created by Veit Stoss, the piece stands 13 metres high and 11 metres wide. Close to St. Mary's Church, a historic path often used by Polish monarch in the past, known as The Royal Route, connects the city's main entrance – St. Florian's Gate – with Wawel Royal Castle, which was the seat of Polish Kings until the end of the 16th century. In this time, 37 coronation ceremonies were held in Wawel Cathedral. It is also the resting place of rulers, as well as national heroes and the most brilliant Polish poets and writers.

Krakow can also boast of the oldest university in Poland and one of the most prestigious and oldest universities in Europe – Jagiellonian University. It was established in

1364 by the king, Casimir the Great. It is the “alma mater” of such outstanding Poles as Nicolaus Copernicus, Jan Kochanowski (a Polish Renaissance poet) and Pope John Paul II. Another interesting district of Krakow is Kazimierz, where Christianity has coexisted with Jewish culture for centuries. It is an area teeming with Judaic monuments of global importance. Nowadays it is also known as the beating heart of Krakow’s cultural and night life.

European Capital of Culture

Krakow is not only a city of history, but is also a place rich in cultural events. In the year 2000, Krakow received the title of European Capital of Culture. Every year the city hosts over 500 cultural events gathering 2 million audience. In Krakow there are also about 60 museums, more than 30 theatres, 70 galleries and countless other cultural institutions. Unique cultural events, including new productions and festivals, that have been on the Polish cultural map for years. It includes such famous, international events as the Misteria Paschalia, Sacrum Profanum, Krakow Film Music Festival, EtnoKrakow, NETIA Off Camera, the Divine Comedy Theatre Festival, the Czeslaw Milosz Literary Festival and Unsound Festival. Other well-known Cracovian festivals include the Jewish Culture Festival, International Street Theatre Festival, and the Krakow Nights series, which itself features the Night of Museums, Theatre Night, the Cracovia Sacra Night, Jazz Night, Poetry Night. Each month from May to September, for one night, the city’s squares are turned into theatrical or musical stages for Krakow’s theatres, its monasteries’ treasuries and gardens. These are places usually closed to the public, but on these occasions, they are open and free for everybody ’till the late night hours.

History and modernity

The best proof of the fact that linking history with modernity is possible are the three new, hugely popular exhibitions opened in Krakow since 2010: the “In the footsteps of the European identity of Krakow” tourist route underneath the Market Square; the restored Oskar Schindler’s Emalia Factory, and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Krakow (MOC AK). Oskar Schindler’s Emalia Factory hosts a permanent exhibition, “Krakow Under Nazi Occupation 1939-1945”, which includes 45 exhibition spaces arranged in a special manner so that visitors can virtually touch history and feel the atmosphere of Krakow under occupation. The exhibition is additionally enriched with state-of-the-art multimedia that lends itself to the uniqueness of this place: it offers a combination of historical messages with modern

technologies. The goal of this unique exhibition is to present visitors with the history of Krakow during war time and the difficult plight of the Polish and Jewish inhabitants of the city.

But Krakow is not only home to historical sites that commemorate old times. The fact that it is also fashionable and modern is evidenced by the launch of the Museum of Contemporary Art. In Poland it is the first institution of this type to be established from scratch. The building was erected on part of the premises of the old Oskar Schindler Emalia Factory in the post-industrial Zablocie district, which has undergone rapid regeneration in recent years. The design was created by Claudio Nardi, an Italian architect and interior designer, who draws upon the neo-Modernist trend. MOC AK gathers an international collection of art presenting the output of the last twenty years, and referencing everything from the latest artistic phenomena to the traditions of conceptual art. The institution's programme also covers educational measures, research and publishing projects.

City of the Pope

In Krakow you can find places connected with times throughout Pope John Paul's II life. Some of them bore witness to Karol Wojtyla as a Polish philology student, worker or actor. There are also those places he visited as a seminarian, where he celebrated his first masses, and those with which he was strongly connected as a lecturer or Metropolitan Archbishop of Krakow.

Finally, Krakow is a city full of places which the Polish Pope loved and to which he returned as head of the Catholic church every time he visited his homeland. It is a city with the most famous window in the world – the “papal window” (above the entrance to the Bishop's Palace), where the Pope used to greet young people and pilgrims congregating at number 3 Franciszkanska Street during his pilgrimages to Poland. Besides this, it is also the city with a 48-hectare meadow in its centre (the Błonia Field) where hundreds of thousands of people congregated to participate in masses celebrated by Pope John Paul II during his pilgrimages to his home country. Krakow is also one of the most popular pilgrim's destinations, because of The Divine Mercy Sanctuary in Krakow-Lagiewniki that was consecrated in 2002 by Pope John Paul II and in which the Pope solemnly entrusted the world to the Divine Mercy. Now the Sanctuary is a world centre of veneration of the Image of the Divine Mercy.

Krakow and amber

In the Middle Ages, Krakow was at the intersection of important trade routes leading West to Wroclaw and Nuremberg, East to Kiev, North to Gdansk and South to Hungary. The city was visited by merchants travelling from the south of Europe to find amber, the extraordinary treasure of the Baltic Sea. Nowadays, amber is available in nearly every jewellery shop in Krakow – the most beautiful pieces can be found in The Cloth Hall. What's more, in the year 2010 Krakow joined the "Amber Passport" programme, the aim of which is to introduce good market practices connected with the sale of amber jewellery and provide guarantees of the quality of amber products through certificates.