



# Guide to Krakow

## Guide Contents

---

- [Where To Stay](#)
  - [Where To Eat](#)
  - [What To See](#)
  - [How To Get There](#)
  - [Tourist Info](#)
  - [When To Go](#)
  - [Travel Information](#)
- 

**POLAND** Poland's former capital and oldest university town lies in a broad valley on the banks of the Vistula river, and is a treasure house of national culture and dazzlingly beautiful. Its ancient, elegant Old Town has been placed on the UNESCO list of World Historic Sites. It is ideal for a long weekend break, without the tourist hoards and high prices. Be dazzled by its art and architecture, from baroque to Art Nouveau, renaissance to Gothic, and by the sheer spectacle of the city.

## *Where To Stay*

---

- **HOTEL ELEKTOR**

**Ulika Szpitalna 28(00 48 12 423 2317)**

A smart option in a central location, which benefits from a good restaurant and wine bar. Rooms have been restored in the style of 19th-century private apartments. Price rating: 1/5

- **HOTEL FRANCUSKI**

**Ulika Pijarska 13**(00 48 12 422 5122)

Situated near St Florian's gate, this comfortable and atmospheric old building offers comfortable double rooms and has a restaurant serving French food. Price rating: 1/5

- **HOTEL POD ROZA**

**Ulika Florianska 14**(00 48 12 422 1244)

Translated as 'Under the Rose', Hotel Pod Roza was established in the early 19th-century and is one of the most elegant and charming hotels in the city. Price rating: 1/5

## *Where To Eat*

---

### ALEF

Ulika Szeroka 17 (00 48 12 421 3870). Serves high-quality Jewish food, along with regular concerts of *Klezmer* music.

### CHIMERA

Ulika Swiat Anny 3 (00 48 12 423 2178). This has fine borsch and rolled veal fillets which are popular with locals.

### JAMA MICHALIKA

Ulika Florianska 45. A fabulous Art Nouveau café serving delicious pastries.

### RESTAURACJA HAWELKA

Rynek Glowny 34 (00 48 12 422 0631). This serves outstanding East European food served in the elegant Sala Tetmajerowska.

### RESTAURACJA POD ANIOLAMI

Ulika Grodzka 35 (00 48 12 421 3999). Translated as 'under the angels', this is a stylish cellar restaurant serving excellent trout and duck. You can opt for the traditional stereotypes of East European cuisine or more subtle, modern dishes.

## THE WIERZYNEK

Rynek Główny 15 (00 48 12 422 9896). Traditional cuisine served in a historic setting.

## *What to See*

---

### AUSCHWITZ

Regular train and bus services connect Krakow with the industrial town of Oświęcim, 50km to the west. It was here in 1940 that the Nazis built their largest and most notorious extermination camp, Auschwitz-Birkenau, where an estimated four million people died during the Second World War. The museum, open from 8am to 3pm, takes a 'no holds barred' approach and the experience can be distressing, every gruesome detail of life in the camp is documented.

### KAZIMIERZ AND THE BAROQUE ISAAK SYNGAGOGUE

Walking south from the foot of Wawel Castle towards the Pilsudski bridge you enter the ancient Jewish settlement of Kazimierz. The Second World War years changed the area beyond recognition, within four years the Jewish community that had lived in the city for at least 600 years was virtually obliterated and today the district is a shadow of its former self. It comes as a surprise to discover that many of the quaint streets in which this tragedy took place have survived, and it is here that that Steven Spielberg decided to base the ghetto in *Schindler's List*.

There is only a small Jewish population left in Krakow, and a small congregation, mostly elderly, still attends the 16th-century Remu'h Synagogue on Ulica Szeroka in Kazimierz, but most other synagogues now function solely as museums. The most handsome is the Baroque Isaak Synagogue. There is not much to see inside: a few inscriptions in Hebrew; a couple of life-size photographs; cut-out images of men in prayer and a few videos. The first film shows a party of Hassidic Jews travelling to Palestine in the 1920s. The second is a documentary about the work of a Jewish medical agency immediately before World War II. The other films were made by the Gestapo for training purposes and some of the events occurred right outside the doors of the synagogue. The most shocking scenes of all record the clearing of the ghetto in Podgórze. Open from 9am to 7pm daily except Saturday.

### RYNEK GŁÓWNY

Krakow's marketplace is Rynek Główny, located at the centre of the city's historic old town. This is a magical space of clustered Gothic spires and classical façades. Shoppers crossing to the boutiques and galleries of surrounding streets - Florianska, Grodzka and Swietego Jan- vie with drinkers in pavement cafés, the odd tourist and a few tuneless buskers from the highlands further south, dressed in bright-clue jackets, breeches and boots. Elderly ladies, consuming cream pastries observe the spectacle from the coffee house in the Sukiennice, the enormous Renaissance Cloth Hall at the centre of the square.

### THE CZARTORYSKI MUSEUM

The Czartoryski is the oldest museum in Poland and began as the private collection of Princess Izabela Czartoryska (1746-18350), who amassed a large collection of Polish art and memorabilia. The most famous room contains a single masterpiece and an empty picture frame. The missing painting is Raphael's Portrait of a Young Man which disappeared during the Nazi occupation. But Leonardo da Vinci's sinuously alluring *Lady with an Ermine* remains, an ode to the chastity of Cecilia Gallerani, the Duke of Milan's favourite mistress. Elsewhere the museum, established by the Czartoryska family in 1876, has the feel of a private collection. Other highlights include Rembrandt's *Landscape with the Good Samaritan*. Cabinets of curiosities recall the taste of eccentric individuals, while gorgeous fake Oriental sashes proclaim the family's belief that they were descended from the legendary Sarmatian warriors of central Asia.

#### THE GALLERY OF THE SUKIENNICE

This is one of Krakow's best-known architectural monuments. Rectangular in shape, the Cloth Hall was the medieval city's main centre of trading, surrounded on all sides by a labyrinth of market stalls. Enjoy the morbid fantasies of 19th-century Krakovian painters in the gallery here: wild-eyed women on rearing horses with glam-rock hairstyles.

#### THE MARIACKI

This is Krakow's most spectacular historic church, and the immense high altar by Veit Stoss, a 15th-century German, can be viewed daily from 11.50am until evening mass. Carved from limewood, gilded and painted, the altarpiece is a visionary interpretation of the Virgin Mary's life. The Virgin herself rises, beneath a frothy Gothic canopy, to her coronation in heaven.

#### WAWEL CASTLE

Wawel is a Renaissance palace, complete with graceful courts and loggias, built by Italians for the 16th-century king Zygmunt the Old. Pope John Paul II once described it as 'a sanctuary of Poland's history which cannot be entered without awe and inner trembling'. Yet for all its Florentine veneer, Wawel remains a northern citadel, a magnificent array of jostling turrets and balconies rising above the Vistula river. Inside, its massive rooms boast Venetian battle scenes and grandiose fireplaces. The monarchs are buried close by, in the adjoining cathedral, a Gothic masterpiece in miniature studded with fabulous tombs of red Hungarian marble. The view from Wawel hill also takes in Krakow's harsher side, from the modern suburbs to the older, Jewish quarters of Kazimierz and Podgórze, the locations of the darkest episodes in the city's history. Open from 10am to 3pm daily except Monday.

#### WIELICZKA

Of all Krakow's memorials and monuments, the one to receive the most reverence is located in a small, unexceptional town a few miles south-east of the city. When Wieliczka was placed on UNESCO's World heritage list in 1978, it suddenly found itself ranked alongside the Pyramids and the Taj Mahal. Yet its famous salt mines, 1,000 ft underground, are unquestionably a phenomenon;

these rich mineral deposits, which paid for many of Krakow's grandest edifices, have been a tourist attraction for six centuries. For most Poles, the thousands of 'delvers' who laboured here have come to embody a kind of national spirit, the perennial triumph over adversity. Perhaps only in Poland can you find a mine adorned with vast chasmed chapels with translucent sculptures - delicate Madonnas and whole cycles of Biblical reliefs - illuminated by salt-crystal chandeliers hanging 40ft above. 12km to the southwest of Krakow, the salt mines of Wieliczka are best reached by bus from Krakow's main station. These are open daily and can be reached by the Lux-Bus from the main bus station or by taxi. Between June to September, English-language tours begin at 10am, 12.30pm and 3pm. Between July and August, they begin at 11.30am and 1.45pm.

## OTHER SIGHTS

Even the most energetic visitors could spend weeks trying to visit all of Krakow's monuments, from the exquisite 15th-century cloister of the Collegium Maius, part of the city's Jagiellonian University, to the surreal splendours of the Modern Art Gallery. Or the Archdiocesan Museum, where the medieval altarpieces on display are overshadowed by Pope John Paul II's typewriter, furniture and skis. Still more remarkable however, are the city's churches, from the Romanesque St Andrew's to the baroque St Peter and St Paul and the frankly decadent Franciscan church, redecorated around 1900. Its plain brick exterior hardly prepares you for the polychromatic riot inside, where fields of writhing painted poppies, lilies and sunflowers encircle vast Art Nouveau windows. This is the invention of Stanislaw Wyspianski, the Gaudí of the north.

## *How To Get There*

---

### AIRPORT

Balice airport is located 15km from the city centre. A taxi to the city is relatively cheap.

### AIRLINES FROM THE UK

LOT Polish Airlines (0845 601 0949; [www.lot.com](http://www.lot.com)) flies from London Gatwick to Krakow. British Airways (0870 850 9850; [www.ba.com](http://www.ba.com)) also flies from London Gatwick to Krakow.

## *Tourist Info*

---

Cultural Information Centre, Ul Swiat Jana 2. Open from 10am to 7pm. This has listings of cultural events in the city and provides information on how to get tickets.

## *When To Go*

---

Poland has a temperate climate which is more continental than Britain's, with colder winters and warmer summers. Early autumn is a good time to go; temperatures are relatively mild and this is also the cultural season, when concerts and festivals take place in the city. Spring is also a good time to visit, when the mild weather allows for sightseeing and outdoor activities.

