

26 **Experience Time Travel**  
Through Kraków

Having heard much raves from friends who have returned from Kraków, it's been on my list to experience personally, and explore the popular destination visited by 10 million tourists and business delegates annually. Once the Polish capital, today it is a dynamic and vibrant city that is both academically and culturally rich. Being approximately 1500km from Paris and 1500km from Moscow, it is literally in the middle of Europe. It takes two and a half hours to fly from London to Kraków Airport –which offers regular cost-effective direct flights to major airports across Eastern and Western Europe.

**Ken T. reports**

**INSPIRING HISTORICAL BACKDROP**

Kraków is located on the Vistula River in the Malopolska region of Poland, which contains half the number of sites in Poland that are on the UNESCO World Heritage List (14 out of 27)! Two of the twelve indexed in the original 1978 list are in Kraków, and one of them is Kraków's magnificent, historical capital of Poland – Wawel castle, the Old Town, and the Kazimierz district. The European Capital of Culture by the EU for the year 2000 also does well on another esteemed list – in the 2017 Michelin Guide, where 24 out of the 52 Polish restaurants are located in Kraków.

As I explore around the Old Town, I felt like a passenger wandering through time one cobblestone step at a time, that my humbling time frame was merely a fragment of the existence of my surroundings. The all-time heart of the city, Kraków's main market square **Rynek Główny** is the largest among Europe's medieval cities, with the best-preserved cloth market in Europe (*Sukiennice, 16th-century renaissance Cloth Hall*) in the middle of the square.

Here you'll hear the only musical signal in the world that has sounded regularly for six centuries, the bugle call that

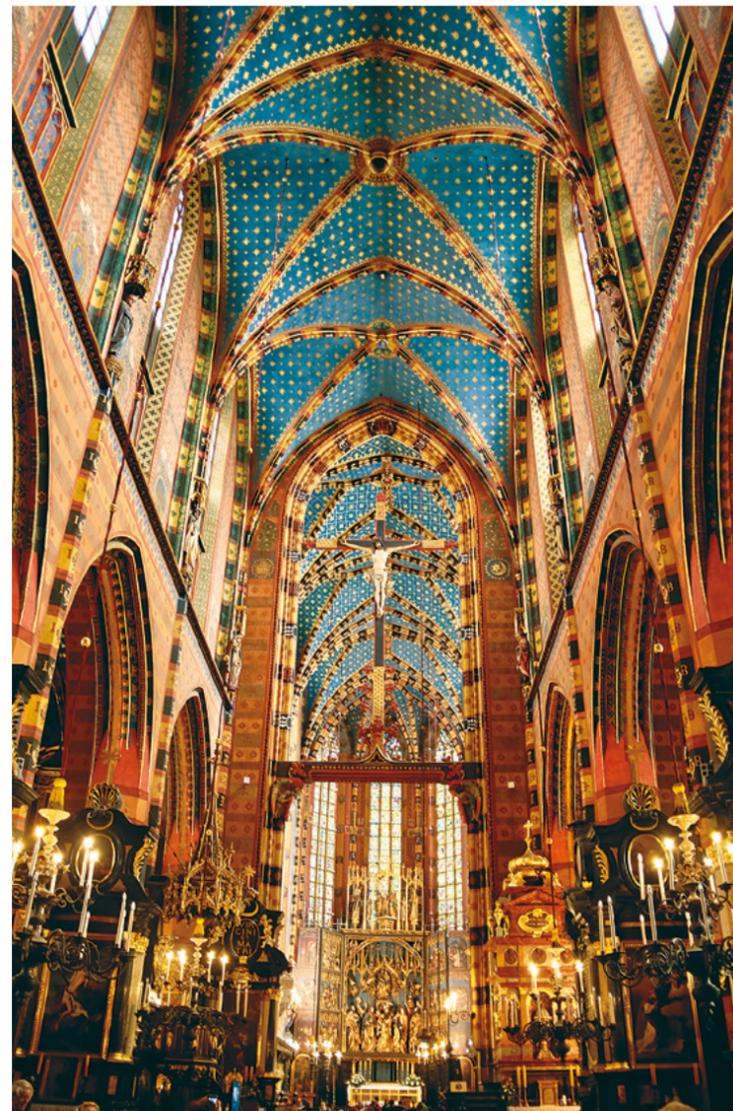
plays every hour comes from the top (*of the taller tower*) of the most distinctive building in the square – the spectacular 14th-century gothic **St. Mary's Basilica**.

Kraków is known for its universities, scientific facilities and research institutions. Nicolaus Copernicus studied medicine here in one of the oldest universities of international renown – the **Jagiellonian University** founded in 1364. The **Wawel Royal Castle** casts a stately and aristocratic atmosphere from atop the steep limestone hill. It features an astonishing mix of architecture styles with structures dating back to the late 10th century.

**HOME AWAY FROM HOME**

Kraków offers 9000 hotel rooms across a broad range of accommodation types, and there is a wealth of friendly and professional hotels clustered near the centre. Five-star establishments like **Radisson Blu, Holiday Inn** and **Grand Sheraton** (*which offers a view of the Vistula River and Wawel Castle*) will never go wrong with their advantageous location and impeccable standards.

Across the Vistula River, the **Hilton Garden Inn** is a short 150m walk to the ICE Congress Center, and I was particularly



The interior and exterior of St. Mary's Basilica ▲



▲ Wawel Royal Castle by the Vistula River

▼ ICE Krakow: International Conferencing and Entertainment



▼ Wieliczka Salt Mine



impressed by their excellent and impressively photo-worthy catering services. For a perfect base that is within a convenient distance to Kraków Arena Hall and Expo Kraków Fair Trade Center, look no further than the **DoubleTree by Hilton**. The hotel and convention center comprises of 232 guest rooms and 16 meeting rooms offering space for up to 2,000 delegates.

**INCREDIBLE VENUES**

In 2014, the city received its flagship congress facility that is funded from municipal budget. The **ICE Kraków Congress Center** is a beautifully designed multi-purpose building which resembles a melting slab of ice – inspired by its acronym which stands for International Conferencing and Entertainment. The main Auditorium Hall can seat 2,000 people, while two smaller halls (*Theater and Chamber Hall*) add another 900 to the total capacity. It also contains a Conference Hall Complex of 11 rooms, 32 multifunctional rooms, and 2,650 square meters of light-filled glass-walled foyer spread across three floors, facing the historic Wawel Hill. Opened in 2014 too is the **EXPO Kraków**, the largest multi-purpose facility in the south of Poland which provides 13,000 square meters of exhibition space.

The most memorable MICE offering is a true sight to be behold (*which also made it into UNESCO's first World Heritage List*). The **Wieliczka Salt Mine** is one of the world's oldest operating salt mines, continuously operating since the Middle Ages (*13th century*), though commercial mining ceased in 1996. The areas excavated for salt were converted into storehouses, workshops, beautiful chambers and chapels, with impressive ornamental statues and decorations carved into the rock salt by the miners. The biggest underground conference hall can accommodate up to 600 people. This authentically unconventional location (*visited by a million visitors from all over the world every year*) has consistently been a distinctive backdrop for various events and business meetings.