

Day 1 - Old Town Tour

Start your tour early; begin on the corner of Szczepanska and Swawkowska on the corner of the Town Square. Begin walking down Szczepanska through Plac (square) Szczepanski, currently just a parking lot, but nearly 1,000 years ago this area was one of the oldest Jewish settlements in the city. The proximity of Catholics and Jews in this area created problems between the groups, later making a move eminent. To the southwest on this square you'll see Poland's oldest theater, with some great stone carvings on the façade.

Cross the parking lot to your right, sneaking down the small street on the opposite corner of the theater. This street will lead you past a couple walled churches on some of the Old Town's forgotten streets. Keep turning left until you reach the planty, a narrow park which takes you right to Plac Grunwalda across the street across from the park.

It is here that the Grunwald memorial stands to dedicate the Polish victory over the Teutonic knights. To your left stands the railroad headquarters and the art institute. The railroad building is the only building in the city that is entirely in the Viennese style, although the city was under Austro-Hapsburg rule for nearly 150 years. To your right stands the less than impressive national bank.



As you cross back across Basztowa street you will come upon the rounded fortification called a Barbican (seen in the picture on the left), a medieval fortification that once stood on an island in the no longer present moat. This is the world's best preserved barbican.

Just past the barbican is Florianska Brama (gate). This was the city's main gate and the entrance to the Old Town and the Royal Route, the path kings took to and from Warsaw for coronation and burial.

After passing under the gate, turn left on Pijarska and walk one block to another theater, which doubles as the city's opera house, built in the late 1800's. Hiding behind the theater is a small church and a true feel of the city in the more local part of Old Town. But, return to Florianska Street to see the tourist trap this city is quickly becoming.

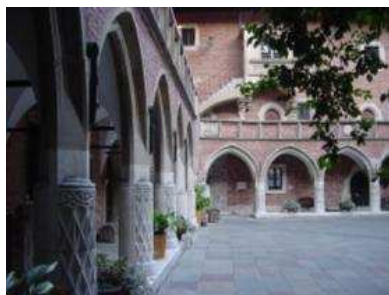
Opposite Florianska Gate at the other end of the road you will see Mariacki Church (right). Pass by the church to the left, away from the square until you find a small path directly behind the church. This area, known as Plac Mariacki, is distinguished by its white stone paving to signify where the church's cemetery once stood. The area is peaceful and the cemetery has since been moved due to a Austro-Hapsburg law forbidding burials within the city limits.



Upon entry of the church (only one of four churches worth visiting - this one is gothic or medieval), you'll notice the bright colors and vibrant feel of the church. The altar piece is the best preserved medieval altar piece in the world (many others were altered or added to during the later architectural periods).

As you leave the church hopefully you'll hear the "hajnal" or bugle call every hour on the hour. The bugler is very friendly and if you can find him in the tower after he plays he's sure to wave to you. He plays the same tune four times, once in each direction and ends the tune abruptly. This was first played as a warning call from St. Andrew's church (which you will soon see). With the 1200's Tartar invasion a bugler played the tune, but was struck by an arrow in the throat before finishing the warning call. This is the first of many myths that drape the city of Krakow.

As you're looking up towards the two towers of the church you'll witness a common feature of gothic architecture, one tower is slightly taller than the other. This was done to be used as a look-out for invaders or in the present day for fires. Krakow, however loves their myths and so this too has one. During the time of the church's building, each tower was being built by a brother, whom competed against each other to try to make a taller tower. As one brother clearly out-built his brother, the losing brother exacted his revenge by killing his brother with a knife. Out of guilt this brother finished his lost brother's tower to exceed the height and workmanship of his own tower. If it's open, its worth a visit to the church's taller tower for the incredible views of the city.



The main market square (Rynek – meaning market) is great to just wander around while enjoying the architecture and atmosphere, but for now, pass by to the square's opposite corner and head northwest on Swianty Anny Street. One block from the square, you will find a large, ancient stone building, called Collegium Maius (left), housed in a building over 700 years old and perhaps once an entire city consisting of the city's Jewish population. The entrance to the courtyard is on Jagiellonska Street and is free - well worth a short stop.

Upon leaving Collegium Maius turn right, until you reach the planty again. Here you will find Colligium Novum in the neo-gothic style, which has an extremely impressive interior room called the Aula, which is typically off limits to visitors. On the off chance it is open; you will see paintings of the university's greatest alumni including Copernicus and Pope John Paul II.

Head back to the rynek and go into the Sukinnice or cloth hall, which is still a market, selling great carved chess sets for anywhere between \$30 and \$65. There is also a great bakery here, which serves "Choco Duets" which are incredible chocolate filled pastries. As you leave the center door of the cloth hall facing towards the church, you will see a knife hanging from a string directly above you, this knife is supposedly the knife used for the brother's killing.

Directly in front of you is a statue of Adam Mickiewicz, Poland's greatest poet. The statue was destroyed during the war, but many of the original pieces were returned by Poles in the post-war years to reconstruct him. To the right is St. Wojtich's church, one of only two buildings to withstand the Tartar invasion in the 1200's. It is at the same angle as Mariacki church, the original grid pattern of the city.

Again, avoiding the tourist crowds, sneak down Bracka to Francziskanski Church. To the right on Francziskanska you'll see the yellow Archbishop's Palace, and former home of Karol Wojtyla, or Pope John Paul II. Immediately after his death this entire courtyard was filled with flowers and candles for weeks. In the interior courtyard stands a statue of the late pope.

The nearby brick church, Francziskanska Church, with an uneventful medieval exterior, has an incredible interior and is worth a stop. The building caught fire in the 1800's so the interior was re-designed at the turn of the century displaying the city's finest example of Art Nouveau (church two of four). The interior decorations were done by two of Poland's most famous artists, Jan Matejko and Stanislaw Wyspianski. The stained glass window in the back, "Let There Be Light" (right) was done by Wyspianski and is quite impressive, especially on a sunny day.



Leaving the church go right on Francziskanska, past the Old Town main vein, Grodzka Street to Dominikanski Church. After passing this large church on your left, turn right onto Poselska, a quiet street that tourists are unaware even exists. There is a nice church buried in the corner and the buildings here show a different side of Poland. Continuing down the street, you will again reach Grodzka, this time follow it to the left until you reach Kanoniczna Street (which is reached by a short trip down Senacka on your right, another street tourists forget about (can you tell there's a theme here)).

This is one of the city's oldest streets, but renovated numerous times over the centuries. The architecture ranges from medieval and renaissance to baroque and art nouveau, etc. Once you reach the small square, you'll see St Peter's and Paul's church in the Baroque style on your left just beside St. Andrew's church in the Romanesque style (below left).



St. Andrew's is the only other building in the city to withstand the 13th century Tartar raid (this is the building on which the mythical bugler was killed). Outside the church of St. Peter's and Paul's are statues of the 12 apostles. To the left opposite St. Peter's and Paul's is the university's old law building (now housing the art history department), the medieval arcaded courtyard is worth a look and you can easily sneak in to peak.

You will finish your tour of the old town with a walk down the rest of Kanoniczna (to the left towards the castle) to see another former house of Karol Wojtyla (Pope John Paul II). At the end of the street you will come upon the royal castle, Wawel, at which point turn left away from the castle to see the old armory and the Royal hotel. The armory has since been donated to the university (the actual weapons now housed in Wawel) and the Royal hotel is where the communist military officers used to spend time. The inside defines "inner circle," which consisted of high ranking soviet officers. Wawel will be visited tomorrow, so try your best to resist the urge to visit now.

Continue on Stradom Street, past the Royal Hotel. Take a left on Miodowa Street, which is just after the main road. When the road forks, stay on Miodowa until you pass under the railroad tracks. Just to your left, you will find the new Jewish Cemetery, which begins your tour of Kazimierz.

Kazimierz

The tour of Kazimierz will start in the new Jewish cemetery (make sure you bring something to cover your heads!). This cemetery is not well kept, and there are a lot of snails, so keep your eyes open (right). If a tomb stone breaks the pieces are made into the walls of the cemetery.



Kazimierz is known as the old Jewish quarter and was an independent city founded in the late 1300's. It was at the time an island, but the river has since been filled in and the city is now a part of Krakow. Go back the way you came - down Miodowa Street, until you reach Szeroka Street hidden on your left.

Once you reach the main street in Kazimierz, Szeroka (Wide Street), you will get an entirely different feel from that of the old town. To the right is the Remuh Synagogue, named after the greatest rabbi since Moses of Biblical times. The Synagogue is not extraordinary, but the cemetery is again incredible and the walls, are made of tomb stones. These tomb stones, along with the ones in the New Jewish cemetery were once used by the Nazis as a road into Plaszow concentration camp (as seen in Schindler's List).

At the end of Szeroka Street is the Old Synagogue, and the focal point of the old Jewish city. After passing by the synagogue turn right on Jozefa Street to find an elementary school and the Tall Synagogue. Besides this synagogue is Jakuba Street, perhaps the street with the most unique feel in the city. This was yet another filming sight of Schindler's List and the right wall is the border of the cemetery you just visited.

Turn left on Warszawera Street until you reach the new square. This area is less than spectacular, however many people very quickly fall in love with it. The buildings are still in ruin and the old stalls forming the morning markets seem dreary.



Just a block from the square is another filming location (right) from Schindler's List and defines the unique character of Kazimierz. To get here, head down Meiselsa Street and look for a narrow passageway on your left. This will conclude the Jewish side of Kazimierz; but you will finish the day with a walk to the Baroque St. Paulite's on the Rock, also in Kazimierz. To reach the church, go away from the new square on Meiselsa, which changes it's name to Paulinska. At the end of this road, you'll find the church.



St. Paulite's church has a great courtyard and fountain. Under the building is the Crypt of the Worthy, where some of Poland's greatest heroes are buried (most are buried in Wawel and their greatest one in the Vatican). The crypt is not worth a visit because the people will mean nothing, but the baroque interior of the church is spectacular and again represents another variety of architecture. Although baroque is the worst architectural style... perhaps ever, this interior is not as blatantly obnoxious in hideous detail (left) so the church makes the list as one of the only four churches worth the journey into.

This brings the day to a conclusion; you will be near the river and old town to just wander and relax.

Day 2 - Wawel Royal Castle

Get to Wawel Royal Castle (right) early in the morning in order to get free tickets (there are only so many distributed each Monday and they sell out quickly, tickets must be purchased on all other days). This will be a museum day, but it's more a palace, than a museum. There are a few exhibits: the Royal Apartments, the State Rooms, the Armory, the Oriental Art exhibit, and the Lost Wawel.



The Lost Wawel is nothing more than an archeological dig museum with a Romanesque rotunda (from about 1,000). If there's free time or particular interest, it shouldn't take more than a half hour.

The Armory is full of swords and other deadly weapons (also about a half hour). Here is the coronation sword and other presents from different popes to past Polish kings. Personally this is my favorite exhibit, but others quickly tire of swords room after room.

The State Rooms and Royal Apartments are also highlights of the castle. Wawel has the world's largest collection of tapestries, which are split between these two exhibits and many more in storage. Oriental Art consists of everything from Turkey to the Far East and mostly consisting of plundered goods from various wars and battles.

Lunch at the kielbasa, chicken, bigos stand at the bottom of the hill between exhibits... excellent and inexpensive!



If you have down time between exhibits, you must visit the cathedral, which is free and perhaps more impressive any the paid exhibits. If you're interested it's worth a visit up to the bell tower and down to the crypts. The bell tower is home to Zygmunt bell, Poland's largest and only rung on special occasions, such as to announce the Pope's death. The bell is simply a bell, but the views of old town are phenomenal (left); it takes about 5 minutes of climbing between narrow wood beams to get to the top. The crypts are the final resting place of nearly every Polish king and national hero, such as Koszuszko (the tallest peak in Australia was named after him). This crypt itself is also impressive, having been originally a part of an

earlier church built in about 1,000.

The entry level of the church is phenomenal and during the reign of nearly every polish king a new chapel was added. Immediately to your right after entering is the Holy Cross Chapel (right). The church has hand carved stalls and is almost a living museum. Throughout the church you'll find different bishops' and kings' sarcophaguses. Among the most famous are those of King Jadwiga (she was king because there was a law that a queen couldn't rule the country, so they crowned her king), who donated her entire fortune to the university. Also here is Kazimierz the Great, who ruled over Poland at its height of power. He founded the city of Kazimierz and expanded much of Krakow making it a well-known city throughout Europe at the time (late 1300's).



The most impressive chapel in the church however is the Zygmunt chapel, which is considered the greatest Renaissance work outside of Italy (below, inside and outside).



Again, this itinerary shouldn't fill the entire day, so take some time to relax and wander around the city or sit on the banks of the river people watching.

Day 3 - Free Day

Option 1: Auschwitz

Auschwitz is about an hour bus ride from Krakow, but it's a long day trip. The Auschwitz camp is an old Polish army barracks, which the Nazis turned into a concentration camp. It was here that many of the

prisoners lived (typically working outside the camp walls) and where the first gas chamber was built along with the first experiments of gas on inmates. Most prisoners here were Polish political prisoners, of which a total of 75,000 Poles died in the camp's history.



Birkenau, part of the Auschwitz-Birkenau complex (right) was added to the original camp, after the decision of complete annihilation of the Jews was made. This camp is much larger than that of Auschwitz and is the home to the other four gas chambers. It was here that the Jews and other races were brought for immediate death, in the end killing about one million Jews. Much of the death and horror associated with Auschwitz stems from the actions in the Birkenau part of the camp. Some of the original barracks are still standing, but most have collapsed and the gas chambers were bombed by the Nazis before leaving. The size is enormous and this is where most people feel the death of the camp.

Option 2: Nowa Huta



Nowa Huta was the Soviet Union's response to the cultural center of Krakow. Krakow was extremely rebellious during the early years of communism, so the Soviet Union built the world's largest steel factory just outside Krakow to bring in the working class and in theory more support to the communist system. This backfired and these new workers became just as anti-communist as the rest of the city. This was the "ideal Soviet socialist city" according to Stalin and is little more than communist block apartment buildings. The streets form a star shape and it combines historic Polish architecture with socialist realism. The streets are nearly identical, but in 1978 Karol Wojtyla, or Pope John Paul II opened the area's first church; built in the shape of an ark (left). This was considered the pope's first victory over the communists and it sticks out like a sore thumb in the middle of socialist block apartment buildings.

Option 3: Podgorze

Podgorze was originally an Austrian city in the Austro-Hapsburg Empire and the architecture here stands out from that of the old town across the river. The highlights of this region are Krak's mound, providing great views of Krakow from across the river (although it's a long walk up hill) and the old Jewish ghetto. There are only two remaining pieces of the ghetto walls standing and you can visit Schindler's factory on some days, although the guard makes the final decision. In addition, there is a great Austrian church dominating the central area.

Option 4: Czytorski Museum

This museum has numerous weapons from the armory and is home to one of the three Da Vinci's in the same series as the Mona Lisa - Lady With an Ermine. There is also a famous Rembrandt nearby. The rest of the museum is also good, but nothing which is extraordinarily spectacular.

Option 5: Art Nouveau Krakow

There are a number of oddly decorated buildings just north and west of old town which represent the turn of the century architecture. They are impressive, although not worth more than about a half hour of your time. One features a singing frog and another has a spider web near the top.

Option 6: Relax

The planty makes a nice walk (about 45 minutes) as does sitting by the river with the local Poles, attempting to get a tan. Also west of the city is a forest with a zoo, riddled with bikers and runners on the paths.

Option 7: Wroclaw

Wroclaw is about a three hour train ride from Krakow and is also a long day trip. The city was originally Polish, but then was taken by the Germans for a couple hundred years. After the Second World War, it was returned to Poland. The city has a strange combination of Polish and German. The city is laid out like a Polish city, it has two islands with about 8 churches on them and the city has a main market square and another smaller square. The architecture is a combination of German (right) and Polish and it feels much more German than Dresden, Berlin, or Frankfurt and more Polish than many Polish cities.



Option 8: Warsaw

Contrary to popular belief, a day trip to Warsaw is possible, but it requires a start at about 6:00 or earlier. The express train gets to Warsaw in two hours, but the city is impossible to see in a single day. The old town has been re-built, but is nice; the new town looks very similar and is also mostly re-built. The park on the south side of the city is great, but little more than just a park. The downtown is the business district and is very modern. This area is also home to the Palace of Culture, a present from the Soviet Union, and looks nearly identical to one of the seven sisters in Moscow. The main street in Warsaw has many palaces including the president's palace. All in all, the city is a combination of Krakow and a western city and has been completely re-built since World War II. It's not as western as Munich, or as business as Frankfurt, or as historic and attractive as Krakow, but it has a strange combination of all these aspects.