Magiczny Kraków

Practical information about Kraków

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Kraków, a city with county rights located in southern Poland on the Vistula river, is the second largest city in Poland with regard to both population and surface area. It is the former capital of Poland, the Royal Capital City and the burial grounds for Polish kings as well as the capital of the Małopolska Region.

The city is located at the meeting point of several geographic regions: the Sandomierz Basin, the Western Beskidian Foothills and the Polish Jurassic Highland.

The history of Kraków as an organised urban centre begins around the 7th and 8th centuries CE. Even today we can admire the remains left behind by initial settlers in the form of two mounds: Krakus and Wanda. From the beginning, the power centre focused on Wawel Hill. Another crucial date in the history of the city was its acquisition of city rights under the Magdeburg Law on 5th June 1257. At that time, the current urban arrangement of the Old Town took shape and the Wawel Castle became the seat of the contemporary ruler of Poland. The location of Kraków at the intersection of trade routes from Rus’ to Germany and the Kingdom of Bohemia (today's Czech Republic) and from Pomerania to Hungary, Turkey and the Balkans, stimulated its fast economic growth.

The then-capital city of Poland was at the peak of its development in the 15th and 16th centuries. In those times, Kraków was – as it is now – a city of science and culture. It attracted the greatest artists, whose works we can still admire today: the altarpiece by Veit Stoss or the cloisters at the Wawel Castle designed by Bartolomeo Berrecci. The history of Kraków is inextricably linked to the history of the Polish nation.

After the golden age, the power of the Commonwealth began to decline. The Swedish Deluge, the economic downfall and partitions of Poland took their toll on the fate of the country and the city. However, inhabitants of Kraków never forgot the times of its greatness. Presumably for this reason, the city was constantly the real patriotic lair of the nation. This is from where the First Cadre Company led by Józef Piłsudski set out and where the disarmament of the invader’s army started on the day of restoration of Poland’s independence.

Today, Kraków is a modern and developing city and a melting pot where the tradition of indigenous residents is mixed with students’ avant-garde. However, thanks to a huge number of monuments finely preserved in the city’s layout, it has never lost its majestic character. Kraków is simply magical.

Krakow in figures:

- area: 327 sq. km
- population: above 765,000
- 4 administrative units: Śródmieście, Krowodrza, Podgórze, Nowa Huta – jointly divided into 18 districts
- highest point: Piłsudski Mound on Sowiniec – 383.6 m above sea level
- lowest point: Potok Kościelnicki estuary – 187 m above sea level

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- highest building: Cracovia Business Center – 105 m
- longest street: Igołomska – 9.5 km
- Jagiellonian University – the oldest Polish university is the second oldest one in this part of Europe, established on 12th May 1364