

2011 - POLAND

21 April 2011

Great weather and lots of attractions to see in Krakow - one of Europe's most attractive cities.

Krakow The Beautiful

LANGUAGE

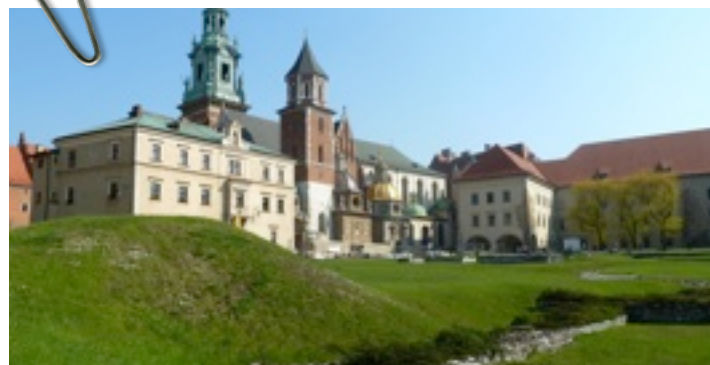
"This tea does not taste right Sig" Heather confessed. I sipped some and soon realised that my Polish language skills left a lot to be desired. I got the "herbata" or tea bags, right. I even got the "mleko" or milk, right. But I failed dismally on the "zsiadle mleko" or sour milk!! It certainly did not taste nice in Heather's tea - a curdling mess. I immediately went out and got some proper milk for my poor wife who was still washing her mouth out.

OUR APARTMENT

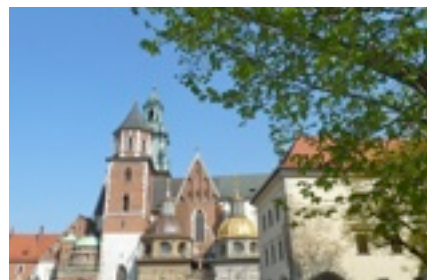
Our apartment, Dom Polonii, is right in the centre of the largest market square in Europe. No need to stress out how to get home and only \$80 a night. Amazing!!

JAYWALKING

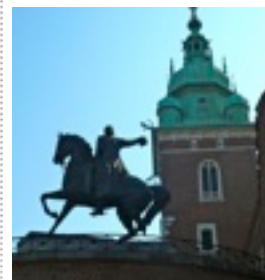
We were warned not to jaywalk. Crowds stand obediently at a crossing waiting for the lights to change. This has extra effect if you are aware of how little Poles respect the rules of the road in a vehicle where it often feels like the survival of the fittest. Local city police will quite freely give you a 50zł fine for crossing the road or 150zł for crossing when the light is red - and there are no exemptions for being a foreign visitor. In fact non residency means you have to pay in cash on-the-spot!! (the cops will even accept foreign currency). Charming.



Wawel Cathedral



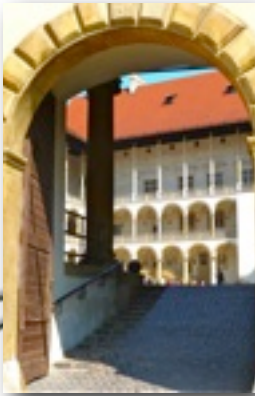
Buildings within Wawel Cathedral walls



Sigismund the Brave?



If you are interested in cathedrals, crypts, castles, museums, and the history of when Poland was powerful then Krakow is for you.



Wawel Cathedral



Lovely springtime light

PAIN IN THE NECK

Every hour on the hour a bugler can be heard playing from atop St Mary's church. We stood to listen the first time. It was awe inspiring. Until, that is, he stopped dead in mid tune. Evidently legend has it that a sentry trumpet player sounded the alarm of an enemy approaching in 1265 but was shot in the throat. Hence he stopped mid song and the tradition has continued ever since. Every hour on the bloody hour!!!! All night too.

THE CRUSH OF PEOPLE

In peak time our bike ride was quite an experience. We had to compete with people, horse drawn carriages, trams, pigeons, other bikes, delivery vans, cars and open topped sightseeing mini buses. It takes quite a deal of concentration to find a hole in the traffic and quickly fill it with your bike.

ATTRACTIONS

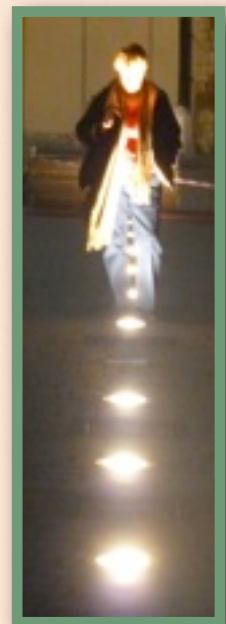
There is certainly plenty to see in a day. In the early morning, after a hearty breakfast, we rode around the perimeter of the market centre and ended up at Wawel Castle. The hill that the castle stands on was used as a fortification even before Poland's first ruler - Wladyslaw the Short :-). Over 35 rulers were crowned in Wawel up until the 17th century. But Krakow started to

decline from 1596 when the capital of Poland was moved to Warsaw. The castle grounds are immense. The grounds house many buildings including a cathedral and a large cloister. We visited both at no cost. This was a surprise. Wawel Cathedral's bell towers tolled slowly for a day, and the city literally closed down for a week, when the recent Pope died. Karol Wojtyla (or Pope John Paul 11) was born here. He was the first non Italian born pontiff in over 400 years. How's that for local trivia! The Poles take their catholic history VERY seriously.

We had a pleasant ride beside the Vistula River to the Schindler Factory (a la the award winning movie "Schindler's List"). This place was certainly worth the 15zł each to enter. We could have spent all day here. The museum documents what happened to the Jewish population in Krakow & how Schindler helped them survive and escape. The multimedia show throughout the museum is very clever and it makes you feel like you were really there living in the ghetto. So much to learn and we all hope that the world will not forget what happened here.



The weather is certainly warming up. The nights are still quite cool but once the sun comes out the warming rays make for a change in attitude - everything seems more vibrant



Heather - lighting up my night



St Mary's Cathedral



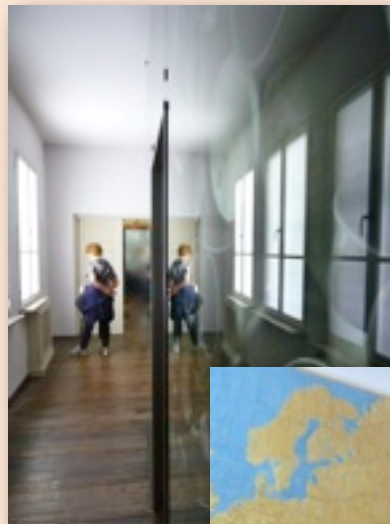
View from the Underground Museum



VISTULA RIVER

The Vistula is Poland's longest river. It runs through Warsaw. The quantity of bike and walking tracks was a pleasant surprise. Compared with England, we saw lots of bikes here. We also watched as people stripped off to worship the sun. The temperature was 23 by midday but the air was crisp. Mind you after riding for 10 kms we began to perspire. Luckily our apartment was always within easy reach so we could put on T shirts.

In the afternoon we visited the Underground Museum. This museum is the result of 5 years of excavating land under the huge market centre. What was uncovered was extraordinary. Cross sections of the diggings and many ancient artifacts discovered here, were on



display. The interactive multimedia shows were, like the Schindler Factory, excellent and made our experience all the more realistic. Krakow certainly had a glorious past. It is poised to have a glorious future too. We could have spent more time here but Heather wanted to move on. We visited the "Cloth Hall", an arcade where many traditional art and craft products were for sale.

We finished off our stay in Krakow by eating dinner at a boardwalk restaurant. As we watched the passing parade we rang Slavek to confirm our train's arrival in Warsaw the next day, and shared our view of the city centre via Skype.

Our stay in Krakow has come to an end.