

Travel Club trip to Krakow, October 2016

On Saturday October 15th 23 members of the Travel Group braved Ryanair's chaotic boarding queues for the two hour flight to Krakow.

Our hotel (the Wyspianski) was very centrally located just five minutes' from the old town, and was of a high standard, even though it was only designated as 3 star.

On Sunday (our first full day) our itinerary had to be changed as a marathon was taking place in the city. We therefore went to the Oskar Schindler Museum, located in one of the former factory buildings and managed under Nazi direction during the occupation. A walk around the old Jewish quarter followed. Our guide, Gregory pointed out where scenes in *Schindler's List* had been filmed.

That afternoon we visited the Wieliczka salt mines, a UNESCO World heritage site. Nine centuries of Mining resulted in 200 kilometres of passages and 2,040 caverns. Thankfully we had pre-booked our descent by lift, as the route starts at 64 metres and ends at 135 metres below ground level. Here the world's biggest museum of salt mining is located. The highlight of the tour is the underground cathedral, where the wall decorations, altar, religious statues and even the chandeliers are made of salt.



On Monday we had the option of a trip to Auschwitz, the most notorious of the Nazi concentration camps, which has now become a symbol of the Holocaust. This was an emotionally challenging experience, allowing us both to be educated and to pay our respects at the world's largest cemetery without graves.

On Tuesday we visited the 630-year old Jagiello University buildings, rebuilt in the 15th century as a splendid Gothic edifice. Its alumni included Copernicus, Pope John Paul II and our guide Gregory, who could speak seven languages! Following this we went to Wawel Castle, home of three dynasties of Poland's monarchs. The collection of Flemish tapestries there is matchless. A bonus was to be able to view the painting by Leonardo da Vinci "Lady with an Ermine," which is on loan to the Castle.

Our group split up on the two free evenings, some going to the oldest restaurant in Krakow to hear a classical pianist, others to the old Jewish quarter to hear a trio play traditional Jewish music. The whole party enjoyed a final night's meal at Starka Restaurant, which offers traditional Polish fare.

Tailored Travel Ltd, who organised our trip and our guide Gregory both ensured that it went without a hitch and was both educational and enjoyable. We had a wonderful group of travellers, which included members from Rodings and Harlow U3As and they all made easier my first venture as a group leader. Also thank you to my husband, Chris, for sorting out the huge piles of Zlotys at the end of the meal on the final night!

Jean Beugeard