

TRAVEL

GREAT ESCAPES

Great Escapes features various travel news items. Send news leads to Hugh Gallagher, assistant managing editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers Inc., 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150, or fax them to (313) 591-7279.

HOT SUMMER START

Making up for the lack of spring over the past three years, this year's unusually warm weather has brought a strong, early start to Michigan's tourism season.

Four new attractions should help give tourists even more to do in Michigan this summer: On May 22, Shivering Timbers roller coaster, the new centerpiece of Michigan's Adventure Amusement Park near Muskegon, takes its first passengers on a ride more than a mile long, screaming down hills up to 125 feet high at speeds of more than 65 m.p.h.

Slated to open June 1 in Battle Creek — in probably the only place in the world where one will find a family attraction devoted to cereal — is Kellogg's Cereal City USA. A combination museum, heritage center, and family entertainment complex, Cereal City offers visitors the opportunity to view a full-scale, simulated production line in which the cereal making process is exhibited beginning with the receipt of grain, storage, milling, cooking, blending and flavoring, to the rolling and baking of flakes and

packaging of the finished product. Visitors also get a chance to taste freshly baked Corn Flakes.

Also opening on May 22, is the new 830-seat Mackinac Center Stage Theatre at the new Mackinac Crossings entertainment complex in Mackinac City, with the dazzling live revue, "Stagestruck," which will be performed twice daily throughout the 1998 season.

For more information about these and other Michigan vacation and getaway destinations and attractions, travelers should call 888-78-GREAT. Travel counselors are available Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Travelers may also call 800-644-8644, 24 hours a day, for recorded information about festivals and events, fishing conditions, and information about Michigan golfing opportunities. Travel Michigan's web site at www.michigan.org, also offers a wealth of Michigan travel information.

OYSTER HUNT

Because of the early spring, wild oyster mushrooms and Dryad's Saddle polypores, two excellent edible mushrooms, will join the more famous white (yellow) morrels as targets of the guided hunt on May 29-31 during the Marcella and More outing at Springbrook Hills Resort, Walloon Lake in the northwest Lower Peninsula.

For details contact Springbrook Hills at (616)555-2227.

BOOK HAPPENINGS

Book Happenings features various happenings at suburban bookstores. Send news leads to Hugh Gallagher, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers Inc., 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150, or fax them to (313)591-7279, or e-mail him at hggallagher@ee.homescomm.net

BORDERS (BIRMINGHAM, SOUTHFIELD)

Lylo Crocodile visits 11 a.m. Saturday, May 30 at the store, 31150 Southfield Road, (248)644-1515.

BORDERS (BIRMINGHAM, WOODWARD)

William Kienzle discusses "The Greatest Evil," 7 p.m. Tuesday, May 26; James Windell signs "Children Who Say No When You Want Them to Say Yes," 7 p.m. Wednesday, May 27; contemporary lit group discusses "The Ice Storm," 7:30 p.m. Thursday, May 28; Even Keel performs, 8 p.m. Friday, May 29; Gar Green performs 11 a.m. Saturday, May 30 at the store 34300 Woodward Ave., Birmingham (248)203-0005.

BARNES & NOBLE (NORTHVILLE)

Mystery book club discusses John Maxim's "Heaven," 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, May 26; Susan Madden signs "Nobody Over Eats," 7:30 p.m. Thursday, May 28 at the store 17111 Haggerty Road at Six Mile, Northville.

BARNES & NOBLE (BLOOMFIELD HILLS)

Fiction group discusses Bally White's "Mama Makes Up Her Mind," 7 p.m. Wednesday, May 27; Cinema-Lit group discusses Peter McCabe's "The Butcher Boy," 7:30 p.m. Friday, May 29 at the store 6575 Telegraph Road, Bloomfield Hills (248)540-4209.

MURDER, MYSTERY & MAYHEM Mystery Mavens discuss Penny Warner's "Dead Body Language," 1 p.m. Tuesday, May 26 and 7 p.m. Thursday, May 28 at the store, 35167 Grand River, Farmington (248)471-7210.

BORDERS (FARMINGTON HILLS) L.E. Modesitt signs "The White Order," 7 p.m. Wednesday, May 27, at the store, 30995 Orchard Lake Road, Farmington Hills, (248)737-0004.

PAPER BACKS N' THINGS Romance writers Nora Roberts and Ruth Ryan Langen sign their books 7 p.m. Thursday, May 28 at the store, 8044 Wayne Road, Westland, (734)522-8018.

HALFWAY DOWN THE STAIRS Annual Make Way for the Ducklings Parade, 11 a.m. Saturday, May 30 at the store 114 E. Fourth St., Rochester, MI (248)652-6066.

BORDERS (ROCHESTER HILLS) Romance writers Nora Roberts, Ruth Ryan Langen, Marianne Wellman and Jill Gregory sign their books 1 p.m. Sunday, May 31, at the store 1122 S. Rochester Road, Rochester Hills (248)652-0558.

Krakow: Poland's rediscovered jewel

BY MELINDA CLYNES
SPECIAL WRITER

Less than 250 miles from central Europe's more popular gems — Prague, Vienna and Budapest — lies Krakow. Long labeled Poland's cultural capital, Krakow is now considered a precious jewel in its own right. With a castle and palaces, museums, ancient churches and the largest medieval square in Europe, you'll find that Krakow bestows a rich experience at a thirty-four-Euro price.

Better yet, Krakowians are cordial and witty, welcoming visitors with much pride and refreshingly little pretension.

Krakow natives will enchant you with stories about kings, saints, fanciful beasts and politics. Uncover why the dragon is considered a Polish family pet, who is Casimir the Great and what life was like only 10 years ago under martial law.

Krakow's fascinating history — from occupation by the Tartars in the 13th century, by the Swedes in the 17th century and by the Nazis in the 20th century; to Solidarity; and finally to the election of a pre-democracy president last fall (whoever) — should not be glossed over, because the history, although long and involved, will make your visit terribly intriguing.

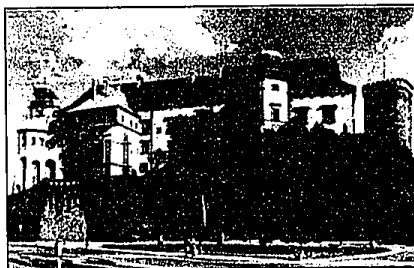
But even those not wanting to experience Krakow's history can enjoy its surface pleasures. Historical landmarks are ubiquitous, many found in and around Krakow's two most notable districts, Old Town and Wawel Hill.

Old Town

Sprawling 11 blocks long and seven blocks wide, pedestrian-only Old Town exudes European aura and bustle. It's a place to roam and explore, best without a agenda, touring countless museums and churches as you stumble upon them and partaking in obwarzanki, poppy seed pastry rings, when you're hankering for a snack.

Old Town structures, many built long before Columbus set foot in America, regard business people, hip students, shoppers and wandering visitors with the fondness of old friends, weaving a colorful pattern of modern happy times with ancient, not-so-jolly times. As more and more travelers reveal Poland's value as a destination, Krakow's irresistible Old Town area will continue to gain popularity.

Like most of Krakow, Old Town was relatively unscathed by World War II, but monuments fight a modern-day battle against acid rain and toxic gases of nearby Nowa Huta steelworkers and against pollution from coal. Reminiscent of Formula 409 television commercials, buildings being cleaned offer an unbelievable side by side of filth and grime next to brilliant stone.



Wawel: The royal castle on Wawel Hill is a landmark of Krakow.

But even with its black soot finish, Florian's Gate, a favorite entranceway to Old Town, conjures up images of the forboding, majestic wall that once encircled the city. The area beyond, now a ring-shaped park, was once a moat. Florian Street, sprinkled with cafes, shops and hotels, jostles visitors and residents alike toward Main Market Square.

Famed as the largest medieval square in Poland, and perhaps all of Europe, Krakow's town center is a hodge podge of merchants hocking souvenirs and flowers, vendors cooking sausages over five rings and imposing structures with beginnings dating back 600 to 1,000 years.

The Historical Museum of Krakow is located in the square's Krzyzstofow Palace. Here you'll find a slice of the old life, including clocks, paintings and costumes. Cloth Hall, with its arched gateways, stuffed in sellers of traditional handicraft — amber jewelry, woodcraft and embroidery — on the ground floor and houses the Gallery of Polish 19th Century Painting on the upper floor.

While art and history are omnipresent, you also cannot ignore organized religion when sightseeing in this corner of the world. Churches are part of the community life in Krakow and all of Poland — they are places of worship, historical monuments, concert halls, museums of art and, during the occupied times, were sanctuaries for those involved with liberation movements. The best-known place of worship in Old Town is St. Mary's Church.

From the outside St. Mary's two distinct towers epitomize the seemingly piecemeal, random construction of many of Krakow's structures. The shorter, Renaissance-domed tower houses the church's five bells and the taller spire and turret-dressed tower, once served as city lookout post.

Inside St. Mary's, the star attraction is the high altar of the church. Twelve years in the making (completed in 1489), the limewood carved altar was confiscated by the Nazis but reclaimed and returned to the church in 1957.

In and around Old Town are numerous other churches of note, historical buildings and museums of history and art. Exploring these monuments is as imperative as roaming all of the distinct cross streets of Old Town — not just Florian Street — and partaking in coffee at an artist's cafe. Be sure to sample a vodka or beer at one of the many intimate, dark underground taverns, sometime illuminated by mere candlelight.

Wawel Hill

An easy walk through the sound neck of Old Town down Grodzka Street will land you at Wawel Hill. Because Krakow is still considered the cultural capital of Poland, Wawel Royal Castle and Cathedral are the most visited sites in the country. So much of Poland's 1,000-year history is preserved atop Wawel Hill, it's no wonder school groups and touring couples alike saturate the monuments year round.

Countless Polish rulers resided in the Royal Castle, originally built in the early 11th century by King Boleslaw Chrobry. The dwelling was later transformed into an impenetrable Gothic castle by the famed King Kazimierz Wielki and finally to a spectacular Renaissance fortress completed in 1536 by King Zygmunt I Stary.

Inside the castle is the finest tapestries in central and eastern Europe. Most of the 136 fabric wall hangings were constructed in Brussels around 1650. Woven with wool and silk, and threaded with gold and silver, the land-

scapes feature a variety of animals representing good and evil — ostriches, dragons, bears and even the now extinct dodo bird can be found in the realistic canvas portrayals. The oldest tapestry, the "Legion of the Sworn Knight," is from 1460.

Adjacent to the Royal Castle lies the Wawel Cathedral. Picturesque in its irregularity, with various add-on chapels built out from the main structure, the cathedral played an important role in national history. Most of Poland's kings were crowned here and buried here in royal crypts alongside famous poets and painters and other national heroes.

The original cathedral was constructed in 1020 by Boleslaw Chrobry, Poland's first king, but rebuilt a century later. It turned to the ground in 1305 (only St. Leonard's Crypt survived), and the current structure was erected during a 40-year period in the mid-14th century.

Once you've taken in the pleasures of the castle and cathedral, depart Wawel Hill through the Dragon's Cave. Access the home of the fabled dragon through an entrance at the western end of the hill. After descending 135 stairs and walking through the dragon's digs, you'll encounter the bronze fire-breathing beast at the bottom of the hill on the banks of the Vistula River.

Within walking distance of Wawel Hill is the suburb of Kazimierz, Krakow's Jewish quarter. More than 70,000 Jews lived here until 1941, when most were sent to concentration camps. Today, only 160 Jews live in the area of Kazimierz, but the wealth of synagogues and Jewish cemeteries attest to a once vibrant Jewish culture and atmosphere.

Kazimierz, quickly becoming home to Krakow's young, bohemian crowd, is an interesting place to roam. Be sure to visit Remu's Synagogue and Cemetery, where more than 700 ornate Renaissance tombstones were uncovered after being buried by Jews for protection against the countless armies that invaded Krakow in the 18th century.

Wherever you venture in and around Krakow, you'll enjoy the people and the scenery — whether it's the hustle of the city and her grand structures, or the rolling countryside, filled with ancient wooden churches, snow-capped peaks and alpine streams and lakes. Be sure to take along a few key Polish phrases and an attitude for exploration, and you'll be ready to partake in Krakow and its environs. Have a good journey, or as they say in Poland, "Szczesliwej podrzozy!"

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