

A town of numerous attractions

This Classical building dates back to the 19th century, with extant sections of its original 12th-century and 14th-century construction. Particularly noteworthy is a Baroque chapel of the Morsztyn family (built in 1693) and a free-standing belfry founded in the late 17th century by King John II Sobieski.

Wieliczka is a town of parks, greenery and beautiful spots, one of them doubtless being Jana Pawła II Avenue, which leads from the Daniłowicz Well of the mine to the historical market square. The southern side of the square includes the Przychocki Palace, built in the late 18th century. The same period saw the construction of another exquisite palace complex owned by the Konopka family, now the seat of the Instytut Pamięci Narodowej. Walking along Jana Pawła II Avenue one can't miss a robust, Neo-Gothic red-brick building, the popular Sztygarówka (Foreman's House). It was built in 1898 in honour of Emperor Francis Joseph I on the 50th anniversary of his enthronement. Over more than a hundred years of its history, this representational building designed by Prof. Tadeusz Dołęga-Mostowski and modelled after the Collegium Novum of the Jagiellonian University, has been a seat of a number of institutions, among them the Mining School, the Salinary Museum, and the Wieliczka Community Centre. Currently, it is occupied by the County Government.

The architectural landscape of the town features a series of monuments of religious art, such as St. Sebastian's church, a small larchwood building founded in 1582 by Sebastian Lubomirski as a votive gift for being saved from a cholera epidemic. The interior of the church is decorated with unique stained-glass windows and polychrome by Włodzimierz Tetmajer. Like the wooden churches in Podstolice and Grabie, it forms part of the Trail of Wooden Architecture.

A building that clearly stands out in the town's skyline with its dignified silhouette is the Franciscan Monastery. St. Francis of Assisi's Church and the Franciscan Reformati Monastery (built in the first half of the 17th century) were the first brick constructions of the Franciscan Reformati in the Małopolska province. The church houses the sanctuaries of Our Gracious Lady Duchess of Wieliczka and Brother Alojzy Kosiba the Servant of God, who spent part of his life in the Monastery.

In 1811, on the site of a former medieval manor called 'Tur' (The Aurochs) that neighboured the Monastery, the Turówka (The Aurochs House) was built, initially having the functions of a salt works, and subsequently converted into military quarters, a salt warehouse, and a salt trading and forwarding centre. Today, the renovated building is home to a four-star hotel named Turówka.

As a town friendly to tourists and to locals, Wieliczka can take pride in its abundant cultural offerings, featuring events such as the Summer Music Festival, the Early Music Festival, the Strauss Concerts, or the underground New Year Concerts. Cyclic events include the SALTCUP International Ballroom Dance Tournament held annually, and the National Car Rally in honour of two great Polish drivers, Janusz Kulig and Marian Bublewicz. A big fest is traditionally held in mid July: the Day of Saint Kinga, patron saint of salt miners. The highlight of September 2008 in Wieliczka will no doubt be the

65th „Tour de Pologne”, an international cycling race, a bonus point of which will be located here.

Wieliczka boasts an active amateur art scene, including four choirs: the Lutania, Camerata, Ziarenko and the John Paul II Choir, as well as folk groups: the Mietniowiacy, the Raciborsko, and the brass bands of Podstolice, Byszyce and the Salt Mine. The musical talents of the residents of Wieliczka inspired the founding of the First Degree Musical School in 2006, which offers lessons in piano, violin, cello, guitar, accordion, percussion and brass instruments to children and youth.

Many educational and cultural attractions are largely connected with the mining traditions, legends and customs that are unique to the region of Wieliczka, such as the Easter-time visits of Siuda Baba (the Sooty Biddy) who goes from house to house on Easter Monday, blackening the hands and faces of local residents – a custom that harks back to the cult of the spring deity Leda, and to the keeping of the fire in the pagan temple by a woman who, not permitted to wash through the whole year, was blackened by the ashes. Old country dances and songs from the Wieliczka area (the apple-tree dance, the cock dance, the Harvest Festival or the Krakow wedding rites) are cultivated by numerous folk groups.

Wieliczka’s unique Salt Mine, its historical architecture and beautiful parks make the town an attractive tourist destination. Combining history and modern times, the extraordinary aura of this mining town is highlighted by traditions that reach back to the golden age of the great Kings of Poland, making it a place truly worth visiting.