

September 27 to October 2, 2015

LEAVING COPENHAGEN

Sunday is another travel day: CPH to Krakow. We pack up then go back to Saturday's cafe (good croissant). I then write my postcards to my mother, godmother, and friend, we mail them at the hotel, and get a cab to the airport. After doing the subway last night, I think Mitch thinks it might be just a bit beyond our comfort level to do it with our luggage.

CPH TO KRAKOW

We are on Norwegian Airlines and they have a 20 kilo weight limit so we have to shift a few things before we are allowed to check our bag. You can have 20.9 kilos. I transfer all the paper out of my bag and a couple of Mitch's travel books to my carry on. Terminal 2 security is closed so we walk to Terminal 3 and queue for a very long security line. I don't know how long it actually took, but it seemed like it was pressing the tolerance of everyone. We find that there is no gate yet for our flight, and there are two possible ways we might have to go, so we get a bottle of sparkling water--still no gate, then get lunch. Finally we are given a gate, and they acknowledge that the flight is 1.5 hours late. When we get to the gate, another gate is announced, and we walk to the other end of that arm of the terminal. It now becomes apparent that we are traveling with a huge student group (high school or early college) and older people. Both are annoying. We do see a doppelgänger of Mitch's nephew Stephen in the group of students. The flight itself is uneventful after the two groups finally get themselves on board. Northern Poland is also flat, and the fields are very precise. We see some mountains as we near Krakow.

ARRIVING IN KRAKOW

As Mitch had thought, the subway from the airport to Krakow doesn't run from the airport until the next day when the new airport opens. We get a taxi. We have been in communication with our local contact who we are meeting to get some help with logistics and are scheduled to meet her at 6:30 pm. I had decided to send her a description of us, although I suspect Americans are easy to spot. We have intended to come to Krakow, which is in the part of Poland that Mitch's families are from, for several years. Everyone we've ever talked to about it says it was a favorite stop, so although we don't really know what to expect, we are looking forward to this part of our trip.

SETTLING INTO KRAKOW



The cab delivers us to Krakow; **Hotel Stary** is beautiful, located in the center of the medieval center. We are put in the new wing, which suits us. Built in two old buildings, the blending of new materials and eras current and past has been masterfully done. The marble in the bathroom is a little over the top for our taste, and while we do enjoy the size and luxury of it, we forget that this is likely the only lush bathroom we are likely to have.

We unpack then set out to met Gosia (pronounced Go-sha).

View from our room over the glass-roofed atrium; the marble in the bathroom; the bathtub, and the rug, which I love.



The physical descriptions of us I'd emailed Gosia turn out to be important when the place we had planned to meet is closed for renovation; she runs up to us as we head down the street toward the next cafe, where we sit and chat. We sort out what Mitch and I want to do and what we need help with, and get to know each other a bit.



The Wodka Bar. It was also mentioned in the NY Times.

Gosia then walks us around a bit (it is dusk going dark) then we stop into her favorite Wodka Bar. She is a bit taken aback that neither of the usual bartenders are there. She gets us each a shot of Quince Vodka, her favorite. She reflects on the era-change of there being a young bartender, as well as a younger clientele. She discovered Wodka Bar when she was a college student, and has been going there for 11 years. It has seen her through every term paper, boy friend, job change, etc. Quince vodka is delicious. We head back to the hotel where Gosia retrieves her bike and we go off to dinner nearby.



The ceiling of our room at the Hotel Stary.

As we were warned in Copenhagen, this is not the culinary big-leagues. We have a passable Italian meal—it is cheap though! Back in our hotel we check our daily walking mileage which is passable despite spending so much of the day in transit. I'm exhausted, but awake at 12:30 and am annoyed by the exterior lights which are lighting up our interior. I finally go back to sleep about 4 am. I enjoyed the ceiling.

MONDAY TOURISTS IN KRAKOW

We get a bit of a slow start because I am groggy from my lack of sleep, but I am motivated to get downstairs to get coffee. Breakfast is included in our room. I figure out the Nespresso machine, check out the breakfast offerings, and, after my first cup of coffee, get yogurt and fruit along with a small carrot cake muffin. My first muffin had tiny chocolate chips in it. I think chocolate in my breakfast pastry is an abomination, so I had to go back for something else. I have two more cups of coffee. Mitch enjoys meat and cheese (basically cold cuts) and pastries.

Having had time to think about it I tell Mitch what I have in mind for the day. He figures out how we will do it. We set off on foot to the Fashion Expo Gosia had mentioned. There is a nice ring park around the old part of Krakow: it is the moat filled in and planted with trees, grass, and with walking paths. There is more to Krakow as you leave the ring and we are soon walking through another park along the Vistula River. The Fashion Expo is not quite what I had expected, but I do get to see some local designer things, all interesting, mostly young and urban.

From there we walk across the river to **Shindler's Factory** which now has a museum. It shows what Krakow was like before 1939, and the changes it underwent during German/Nazi occupation, and how the life was squeezed out of the Jewish Ghetto, and really out of Krakow. It was a very dense exhibit and I'm fairly certain I only digested portions of it. The Factory is located next to the contemporary museum, but it is closed on Mondays. I have had plenty of input for today anyway.

We make our way back to the central city and eventually stop for a late lunch of pirogies and apple pancakes. Mitch says his mom used to make both of them, but not as often as anyone would have liked. I point out that they are not easy to make; it is one of the few times I can recall him speaking so glowingly of food prepared by his mother. We have a bit of down time before meeting Gosia at 4 pm for a more in-depth walk/tour of Krakow. I have made it a little difficult for her by telling her that I am not interested in churches!

I started, finally, to work more diligently on the running stitch sampler. I need to do a bit every day if I am to improve. Once I realized that I wasn't yet skilled enough to actually do multiple stitches at once, and needed to go up and down with the needle, it is not so difficult. I am realizing that everything I do is time consuming. I enjoyed it, but it took an hour to get through a 36" length of thread. Hopefully I will gain some speed.

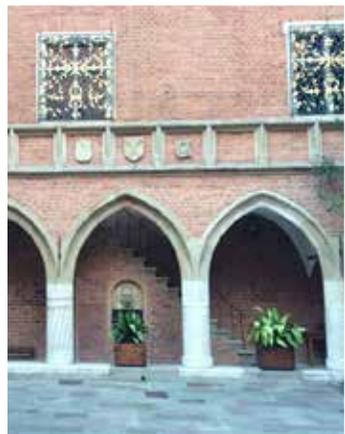


My sampler.

TOURING KRAKOW

We begin our tour by walking a few blocks to the **Jagiellonian University**. First we walk by the local theatre (performance hall) which is in a period of transition—modern vs. traditional. The University was founded in 1364 and it has been functioning, at various capacities, since then except when it was closed during the Nazi occupation. Approximately 140 professors were exterminated. There is an oak tree planted in front of the Administration building to commemorate those professors. We walk on to a church to see **an amazing stained glass** window of Genesis, done in Art Nouveau style. With the evening sun coming through it it is spectacular. Every other decorative style is represented in the sanctuary of this church. We just pass through as they are in the midst of services.

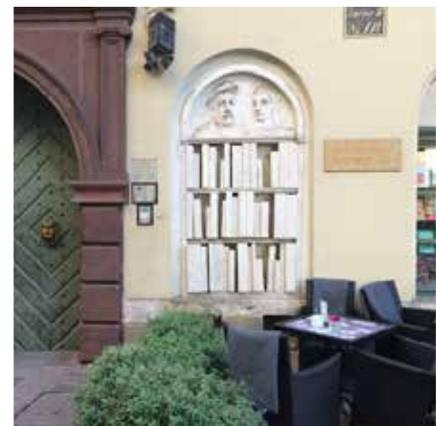
The former pope, Pope John Paul II, was a pivotal figure in Krakow and is much in evidence. His photo is everywhere and the building across from this church seems to be devoted to his mission. We go on to a concert hall around the corner that has similar stained glass, but lacks the fabulous sun-effect. We continue on past more university and church buildings. I ask Gosia to explain how the Roman Catholic Church was able to survive Communism with such a presence. I have been thinking about all the churches, and all the old buildings (I think of Communist architecture as being very concrete and ugly) still existing as we walked earlier. This opens up Gosia's passion for political science and history and broad-ranging conversations will go on for the rest of our tour. The answer is tied to the Polish connection to the church and the Communists fear of an uprising if it was completely quashed. The buildings were not destroyed because 1) they built a New City outside of Krakow, and they were basically



Two views of the original building of Jagiellonian University.

not interested in investing resources into Poland, only extracting them. We will have some further conversations about the Polish character and characteristics (stubbornness and fatalism, primarily).

We walk past **Wawel Hill (the Royal Hill)** and back to the River, walking past the dragon sculpture. Gosia tells us the story of the Krakow dragon, and other inhabitants of the Castle over the years. There is evidence of culture existing here from Before Christ. We are heading to Kasimierz, the former Jewish Ghetto, now a down-at-the-heels, but hip and happening neighborhood. The rents are cheap but the buildings often run down since there have been no/few true owners since 1940. Unlike Czechoslovakia, property wasn't nationalized when the Communists left, so ownership remains unclear. The Nazi's not only destroyed records, but also exterminated the owners, so it is often



A carving in the front of a building. Notice the door handle, door, and doorway too.



A flourish outside a building in Kazimierz.
Wire, not twigs!

shoes. She agrees that is a good idea!

We have another passable Italian dinner: wine and pizza, and more sparkling water before we return to the hotel to pack it in for the day.

TUESDAY IN KRAKOW



Wawel Hill. Palace Courtyard.

impossible to determine clear ownership. No bank loans, no owners to do repairs, no clear solution. This tour with Gosia was so valuable in helping us see not only the history but the social history.

The old Synagogue is closed for the day and we're about to pack it in (this will end up being a 14 mile walking day for us). We return to the street of beers to have one. Gosia has a honey beer, I have a Czech lager, and Mitch has fresh-squeezed lemonade. Talk turns to literature and language. Gosia's boyfriend is Norwegian--as are the colleagues who have connected us to her--so she is very good with English and, as I often find with students who speak it as a second language, appreciates the nuances many Americans don't notice. We make plans for dinner on Tuesday (which turns out to happen on Wednesday) and are hopeful that Yohn (John) will also be able to join us. I give her money for the tour, which she says is too much, but I say it is what we want her to have, and that she should buy a pair of



Building over building. It is a very cool solution and blending of old and new.

We set out to see some of the sights today. Before doing that we go in search of the needle work shop I have found online. For some reason, I feel that embroidery floss and sewing thread are what I should buy as my souvenir of Krakow. We go to one, which isn't open, then go on to the one I'd found. It is just opening and is filled with people with urgent needle work needs. They do not speak English, and I have to run out to get cash from Mitch, but I ask them to match my chiffon to sewing thread which they do, and we are both pleased to get through the transaction so easily. The tiny shop was packed with things--so many that I couldn't take it all in. Next we seek out a laundry that Mitch had looked up on line. It takes a few twists and turns to locate it, so we see a bit of Krakow we might not otherwise have walked through. We note the prices so Mitch can compare them to the hotel. We find (by that I mean Mitch found) the museum with the daVinci painting closed for renovation. There is a sign saying that it is being shown on Wawel Hill.

We head up the Royal Trail and buy entry tickets to the state rooms, private apartments and **the da Vinci**. We skipped the cathedral (no one else did, so it seemed a particular wise move). I loved the interiors of the palace which were restored to 17th century; spare-ish furnishings with lots of art and tapestries and wallpaper, but none of it gaudy. The Wawel Hill compound was really fabulous. You had a real sense of this being a neighborhood (for the 1%!). Lovely villas overlooking the City Center, River, or countryside. Clearly living up here was the best. On our way back to the City Center we checked some restaurants out,

settling on the Hotel Copernicus restaurant for lunch. This is a sister hotel to our hotel, done first. Lunch is lovely. We shared veal in broth (reminiscent of tortellini en brodo in Bologna) and spinach soup, followed by pasta with fresh tomato sauce and ricotta ravioli with oranges. Delicious. In between courses I ask to look at the dinner menu. We return to our hotel because I have scheduled a massage (sore muscles, bad sleeping again Monday night). Mitch goes off to book our tour to Auschwitz (the only way you can go). After my massage I grab a nap while Mitch explores the internet and does some work. I spend the balance of the afternoon reading and stitching. Mitch has a call with a client which he takes in the bathroom so I won't hear the details (he loves secret deals!)

We go back to one of the restaurants we had scoped out earlier. I had a feeling we needed to get a more authentic meal and it had several things that looked promising. The restaurant is a newish, and offers an excellent, more modern translation of traditional foods. An amuse of pate, cherry jam, and warm rolls kicks off an delicious meal. We have appetizers (which I have forgotten—I think it was the hazelnut vodka at the end of the meal that caused that!) which we do not share (which leads me to believe I had beets), then share duck (best ever!) and venison. Mitch is interested in the cheesecake (more cake than we do, but good) so we share that, followed by the aforementioned complimentary hazelnut vodka.

AUSCHWITZ/BERKINAU

We get up much earlier than we have been so we can have breakfast and go out to procure items for lunch. We are ready with reading material (Mitch), knitting (Jill), rolls, cheese, apples, and a nut packet I didn't eat last night (part of the hotel turn-down service) at 11 am to board the bus. We climb on the 16 passenger bus, choose the back row, and are immediately squeezed in by two other people so we are snug the entire trip. I knit. I eat my apple on arrival at the parking lot for fear I will not last if I don't have something more



Assembling for the Auschwitz tour.



Where people were transported from. Location made it an ideal place to carry out the Nazi program.

in my stomach. We are escorted to the Museum grounds where we are divided into language groups, given our headsets, and set off on the tour.

No matter what you have read, or how much you inure yourself, the cruelty and depravity is unbelievable. The horrors begin to compound themselves until it becomes unimaginable that this was devised and carried out by humans. The language of the tour is very careful. Auschwitz was fine; it looks like a military camp, and while all the evidence of the horrors are there, the normalacy of the setting makes it bearable. Then you go to Birkenau. The day was cold and gray, the terrain is flat, and the desolation much more impactful here. I think it is knowing that this was intentionally built to carry out the depraved scheme of the Nazis; it looks more like a chicken farm than a military camp. We do not use headsets or microphones here because the entire camp is considered a cemetery. You begin to realize that death and murder cover every inch. The memorial is fitting and we walk to the barracks. We stand inside one of the women's barracks as

our guide speaks of hoping this will not ever be allowed to happen again. We are standing on dirt floors, in near dark, looking at three-tiered sleeping platforms which each held seven women. As she finishes others start to look around but I have to bolt outside. We've both taken in all we can.



Birkenau.

We were horrified at people taking selfies and other callously "Vacation! I'm here!" photos. These places are horror fields, not Disneyland.

The trip back brings us to the Center at rush hour. At the second stop to drop people off Mitch and I look at each other, grab our stuff and jump off the bus, assuring the tour guide we know our way to our hotel. Fresh air and space are quite welcome. Not tour people, the day would have been a bit of a trial under any circumstances. We return to the hotel so Mitch can do his 6:30 phone call and I can change my clothes. We are running a bit late so we get a cab to the restaurant where we are meeting Gosia and John, along with Simon, John's youngest son. Fittingly, it is an Israeli restaurant. We have a couple of pints and a nice shared dinner. John and Gosia will be leaving for a long-holiday weekend, taking the new fast train. In a show of pure Polish character, Gosia is sure something will go wrong while John thinks a fast train trip will be perfect. Simon will be flying to Copenhagen to meet up with his mother to check out where his brother will be living while attending business school there. At the end of the meal we Uber back to our hotel with John and Simon who are returning to John's apartment nearby. Gosia is again on her bike.



A church and the Vistula River.

THURSDAY IN KRAKOW

Today is for hitting what is left to do. We take a more leisurely approach to getting going, but rush out when we find our room being cleaned when we come back from breakfast. Another walking day we head to **MOCAK (Museum of Contemporary Art of Krakow)**. I decide we need an espresso beverage is needed before we tour the exhibits. Mitch does "map work" on his phone while I do a little stitching.



MOCAK

The exhibit is awesome. Some general concept art then an exhibit on Auschwitz. It is thoughtful and some of the best conceptual and video work we've seen. We really enjoy it. We walk back to the plaza memorial to the Jewish Ghetto, walk by the pharmacy (the pharmacist was instrumental in passing messages, money, and helping Jews find places to hide outside the Ghetto). I've decided we need to eat the open faced sandwiches Gosia pointed out to us in the market in Kazimierz. On our way to lunch I slip



Red purse.



Cheers!

into a shop and find a felted handbag I think I should own. I go outside to get Mitch to consult on color-delighting the owner who thought I was just leaving. We choose red, complete our transaction, and do a bit more window shopping as we head to lunch. We share different sandwiches then walk around a bit more and return to the hotel to drop off my purchase.

Around the corner from the hotel is the Krakow Museum. They are showing an exhibit of European and Japanese prints from a private collection. We do a bit more walking to find someplace for dinner, finding the interesting options running out. Back at the hotel we repack our bags and enjoy some down time. Mitch has a phone call. We choose (after a lot of online looking) a place that has gotten

good reviews for both food and price. Before we go to dinner we head to the **Wodka Bar** to sample some Polish vodka. Tonight there is a young woman behind the bar. She laughs when I ask which are the Polish vodkas and she points to about two dozen. Seeing many we are familiar with, we try one that she indicates is quite good. I don't note the brand, but I think it was Orkisz. We have another good dinner and return to our hotel. We are ready except for what needs to go into our suitcases in the morning.