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AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 GIRLS ► #57

Krakow, Poland

THIS EASTERN EUROPEAN GEM IS
ALL IT'S KRACKED UP TO BE

IF WHAT COMES to mind when you think of Poland is pierogi and a dreary post-communist landscape dotted with old ladies in babushkas, you'll be tickled pink by Krakow. As the royal capital of Poland for 500 years, this delightful city is a sea of Gothic, Renaissance, and Art Nouveau architecture. More importantly, Krakow was one of the few towns in the region not decimated by Germany's World War II invasion, so its gorgeous buildings are intact. Cobblestone streets, unique boutiques, hip bars, and a growing art scene make Krakow more fun than a barrel of *małpa* (monkeys).

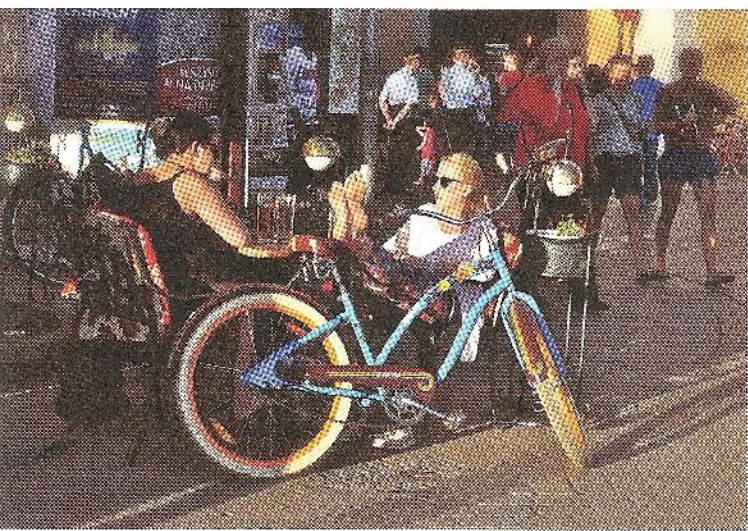
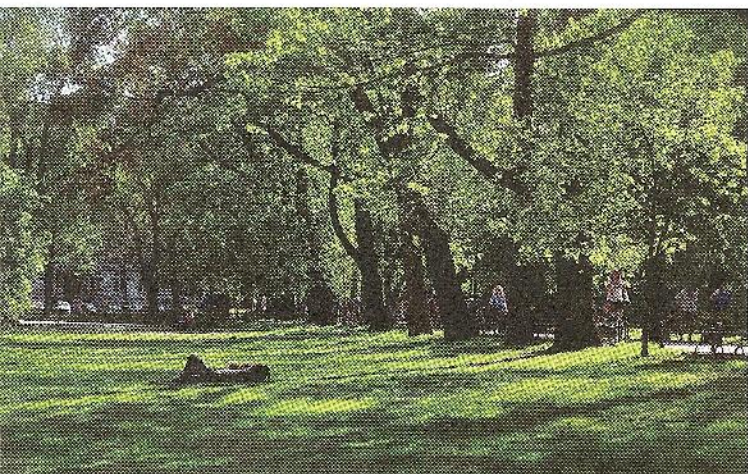
The best way to explore Krakow is to start in the city center, aka Old Town or Stare Miasto. For breakfast, fill up with a traditional Polish breakfast of meat, cheese, and bread at **Cafe Magia** (Plac Mariacki 3). Polish it off with one of their famous flavored hot chocolates.

Once your belly is full, make your way to the Cloth Hall, otherwise known as **Sukiennice** (Rynek Główny 1/3). A stellar example of Renaissance architecture, it used to serve as a trading hub for silk, leather, and other exotic goodies. Today, it's home to souvenir stalls and a superb collection of 19th-century Polish art; head to the rooftop cafe

for a bird's-eye view of the town square. *Wawel Castle and the riverfront*

Should you still want to flex your spending muscles, skedaddle over to **Lulu Living** (Tomasz 17), a chic-yet-quirky store and cafe. Home goods from emerging Polish designers sit alongside finds from China, France, Morocco, and Sweden. If you're peckish, visit a traditional Polish milk bar, like the nearby **Pod Temida** (Grodzka 43). Those spots, which sprouted up to feed workers at the end of the 19th century, serve a variety of milk-based goodies, as well as traditional cuisine such as fried pork chops, pierogi, pancakes, and cabbage.

Stroll past **St. Mary's Basilica** (Plac Mariacki 5), the architectural inspiration for many a Catholic cathedral in the U.S., and head for **Ciuciu** (Gołębia 3), the smallest candy factory in the world. (Or so the owner says.) What really makes ➡



this little shop special is watching your personalized candy being created in front of your eyes. Once your inner child has been set free, take a walk over to **Tuban** (Szczepańska 7), where you can shop till you drop for all the latest in soap-bubble-making equipment.

For dinner, chow down on traditional Polish food just around the corner at **Babcia Malina** (Sławkowska 17). This restaurant resembles a wooden house, with traditional trinkets on the walls and piano music wafting through the air. Post-meal, head back to Old Town for a cocktail in the cobblestone courtyard at **Cafe Kratka** (Bracka 3-5)—it's a perfect spot for some serious people-watching. Or get swanky at **Baroque** (św. Jana 16); with more than 100 different vodka flavors, this bar's bound to offer something that suits your fancy. Feeling more casual? Sip beers with a laidback crowd while listening to classic rock at **Piwnica Pod Ogródkiem** (Jagiellonska 6), housed a few blocks away in a 16th-century cellar.

The next morning start your day with berry cake and coffee at the artsy **Cafe Gołębia** (Gołębia 3). Here, wannabe authors can drop a poem in the blue box outside and be rewarded with a free treat, if the staff deems the work worthy. Now put on your walking shoes and head to Kazimierz, the old Jewish district. Make a pit stop on the way at the famed **Galeria Plakatu** (Stolarska 8-10), an übercool store filled with some of the best of Polish poster art of the last 50 years. With its reproductions and original pieces, this shop is a sure place to find the perfect souvenir.

No visit to Krakow would be complete without a visit to **Wawel Castle** (Wawel 5), a great source of pride among the Polish people. Built in the 11th century, this castle has been home to three Polish dynasties as well as the place of coronation for all Polish royalty. Take a guided tour, then make your way to **Momo** (Józefa Dietla 49), for lunch. This vegan café offers a wide range of international food, including Tibetan dumplings and South Indian pancakes. When you're done eating, get your fix of creative goods at **Idea Fix** (Józefa 20). Dedicated to promoting Polish creativity, this store is packed with eco-conscious housewares, apparel, art, and cosmetics.

For dinner, take a five-minute walk around the corner and grab some grub at the oh-so-trendy sushi restaurant **Genji** (Dietla 55). Or you could try **Pimiento Argentino Grill** (Józefa 26), an upscale steakhouse straight out of South America. Just want a snack? Wait in line with the masses for the Polish version of pizza, *zapiekanka* (a baguette sliced in half topped with cheese, mushrooms, and ketchup), at **Endzior** (Plac Nowy 4).

Cap off the night with a rousing political discussion at **Kawiarnia Naukowa** (Jakuba 29-31), a famed activist watering hole just two blocks away. This pro-feminist lefty bar welcomes all kinds, though you're more likely to fit in if you've got a tattoo or piercing. For a traditional experience in the Jewish district, check out **Alchemia** (Estery 5), a candlelit jazz bar popular with artsy types, travelers, and fashionistas. If you thought Poland was a drab backwater, one visit to Krakow will make you change your tune—like taking a hit of crack, you'll want to come back for more Krakow. —RACHEL KHONA

From top: Enjoying a sunny day outside; a cafe in Old Town; having fun next to Sukiennice