Kraków first Polish city recognised by Green Destinations

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Kraków has joined the ranks of global destinations recognised as leaders in sustainable tourism. The city has been awarded the Bronze Award in the Green Destinations certification programme, granted by the international Green Destinations Foundation. The programme's standards are recognised by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), the world's leading authority setting directions for sustainable tourism development. This is the first distinction of its kind awarded to a Polish city and one of the first in the Central and Eastern European region. The list of destinations that have received this prestigious recognition is available here: Green Destinations | Our Destination Collection.

Kraków achieved an impressive score of 8.3 out of 10. The award confirms the city's long-term commitment to responsible tourism management, protection of cultural heritage, improvement of residents' quality of life, and the development of tourism in a sustainable manner aligned with the needs of the local community. Auditors particularly praised Kraków's strategic approach to tourism management and the implementation of the city's guiding document, the "Kraków Sustainable Tourism Policy 2021-2028", adopted by the Kraków City Council in 2021.

What is Green Destinations?

Green Destinations is an international assessment and certification programme for tourism destinations based on globally recognised sustainability standards. The standard covers six key areas:

- Destination management
- Nature and landscape protection
- Environment and climate
- Culture and heritage
- Social well-being
- Business engagement and communication

The programme enables an independent evaluation of actions undertaken by cities and regions while identifying opportunities for further improvement in tourism policies. Destinations receiving recognition become part of an international network for exchanging experiences and best practices in sustainable tourism.

International Recognition of Kraków's Efforts

The distinction was awarded following a months-long assessment process during which the Tourism Department submitted documentation covering more than 100 criteria and indicators related to sustainable tourism development. These included environmental, social, economic and cultural aspects, as well as destination management practices and long-term tourism planning.

The recognition granted by the Green Destinations Foundation confirms Kraków's strong performance in areas critical to sustainable tourism, including responsible governance, protection of cultural and

natural heritage, waste management and climate action. It also acknowledges the city's efforts to maintain Kraków's attractiveness as a tourism destination in the long term.

Importantly, the Green Destinations system evaluates not only visible outcomes but also the strategies, policies and governance mechanisms that integrate sustainability principles. As a result, the award validates not only achieved results but also the quality of the processes underpinning tourism development in Kraków.

Kraków's Strongest Areas

The audit demonstrated that Kraków performs very well across most assessment categories. The highest-rated areas were:

- Business and communication: 9.2/10
- Destination management: 8.9/10
- Culture and heritage: 8.3/10
- Nature and landscape: 8.1/10

Kraków received its highest score for stakeholder engagement and communication. Auditors highlighted the transparency of the city's actions, accessibility of information, stakeholder involvement, and well-developed cooperation structures between the municipality, residents, social organisations and the tourism industry.

The city's tourism management system also received high praise, including the work of specialised tourism policy units within the Kraków City Office, as well as initiatives supporting public dialogue and nighttime economy management.

Benefits for Kraków

Receiving the Green Destinations distinction brings a number of benefits:

- Increased international recognition of Kraków as a responsible and modern destination
- Enhanced credibility of the city's sustainable tourism initiatives
- Confirmation of efforts to improve the quality of tourism in Kraków
- Opportunities to promote the city through the Green Destinations network and at international industry events
- Automatic eligibility for competitions showcasing sustainable tourism best practices
- Increased appeal to travellers seeking environmentally and socially responsible destinations
- Access to knowledge exchange with some of the world's most advanced sustainable destinations

The audit emphasises that Green Destinations recognition provides an independent international endorsement of the quality of actions undertaken by the city and its local partners.

Areas for Further Development

The certification process is not solely about recognising achievements. It also serves as a roadmap for continuous improvement. Auditors recommended:

- Strengthening Tourism Impact Monitoring
- Kraków should conduct more frequent research on residents' perceptions of tourism and monitor the social and economic impacts of visitor activity. Since the last resident survey on tourism's impact was conducted several years ago, auditors highlighted the need for more regular assessments.
- Expanding Climate Action
- Recommendations include:
- Setting measurable targets for reducing emissions associated with visitor travel
- Monitoring progress in reducing energy consumption
- Increasing the use of renewable energy sources
- Communicating climate-related initiatives more effectively to visitors
- Greater Visitor Engagement
- The audit also identified a need for programmes that encourage visitors to actively contribute to local community and environmental initiatives, as well as improved access to information on sustainable tourism through visitor-facing channels.

Enhanced Protection of Natural Resources

Recommendations include further monitoring of tourism's impact on natural areas, reducing light pollution, and strengthening the documentation of actions related to nature conservation and animal welfare.

Confirmation of the Right Direction

In their final assessment, auditors concluded that Kraków has developed strong foundations for sustainable tourism governance, including a comprehensive monitoring system, active mechanisms for cooperation with residents, and transparent public policies in this area. They particularly highlighted the involvement of social organisations and residents, as well as the city's openness to dialogue on tourism development.

This recognition is not only a success for Kraków but also an important signal to other cities and the tourism industry in Poland. It demonstrates that tourism growth can go hand in hand with care for residents, the natural environment and cultural heritage, while aligning with the highest international standards of responsible destination management.

Importantly, this achievement does not mark the end of the journey. Rather, it represents another step towards attaining a higher level of certification. The auditors' recommendations provide clear directions for future actions that will enable Kraków to further strengthen the balance between tourism development and the well-being of residents, cultural heritage and the natural environment.