The 3rd Kraków Data Lab Conference Behind Us

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On March 20, the Kraków Data Lab conference, dedicated to the role of data in tourism, took place at the Manggha Museum of Japanese Art and Technology. The event was organized by the Kraków Tourism Alliance in cooperation with partners of the SCT HUB project – Codesign the Future of Sustainable Cultural Tourism: the Kraków Festival Office, the Polish Heritage Foundation, Jagiellonian University, the Kraków City Development Agency, and the City of Kraków Municipality.

The meeting brought together representatives of the tourism sector, culture, business, and data analytics experts. The main theme of the conference was: “Without data, you’re just another person with an opinion.”

The first part of the event consisted of a lecture block titled “Kraków Market Forecast 2026.” The presentations featured a series of analyses based on various data sources, highlighting key trends, visitor behavior, and changing market conditions.

The opening keynote was delivered by Jarosław Grabczak, Head of Commercial Product at eSky Group, who discussed the impact of online travel agencies on product decisions and customer behavior. He emphasized that data is essentially a question rather than an answer, as only proper interpretation allows its true value to be extracted. He also pointed out decision paralysis among consumers faced with too many choices and stressed that first visual impressions play a crucial role in the purchasing process. Citing data, he noted that over 70% of people making reservations belong to Generation Z, while 91% of those searching use AI-based tools—although only a small proportion actually trust them. He concluded by emphasizing that Kraków should communicate a strong value-for-money proposition while investing in low-volume but high-value source markets. He also highlighted the city’s ability to respond quickly to global crises through effective use of available data.

Next, Bartłomiej Węglarz from the IT Services Center of the City of Kraków described how data is used by the City Hall. He emphasized that while the city generates vast amounts of information, the key lies in properly integrating it to manage tourism responsibly. He demonstrated what data-driven management looks like in practice—an approach that forms the foundation of municipal decision-making. He also stressed the importance of ongoing dialogue about data, supported by events such as Data Lab, and encouraged the use of the City of Kraków’s Open Data portal, underlining the importance of transparency and accessibility for all stakeholders in the local tourism ecosystem.

Ryandeep Bains, Account Director at STR, then discussed global hotel market trends. He noted that over the past fifty years, the number of travelers worldwide has increased sevenfold, with Europe remaining the strongest hotel market, offering seven out of every ten hotel rooms globally. Since the pandemic, the number of hotel rooms in Europe has increased by 340,000. Looking ahead to 2026, he identified Germany, the United States, the Middle East, and China as key markets driving tourism demand. Poland ranked second in Europe in terms of the number of new hotels. He also pointed out that according to 2025 data, Kraków’s Main Market Square was the most visited location in Central and Eastern Europe, surpassing Vilnius, Warsaw’s Old Town, and Budapest.

Christophe Ramaciotti from Amadeus presented how air and hotel data help explain Kraków's connections with the world and identify the main source markets for visitors. The data highlighted the fastest-growing outbound markets, such as Romania, Bulgaria, and Israel, as well as cities where Kraków most frequently appears in travel searches—London, Tel Aviv, and Manchester. He also identified the markets generating the longest stays and emphasized the importance of seasonality analysis and efforts to smooth seasonal fluctuations at the city level.

Wojciech Liszka from Seerio presented a detailed analysis of Kraków's business meetings market in comparison with the rest of Europe. In 2025, the most important sectors were IT, tourism, and consulting, with a significant portion of meetings driven by new business. He emphasized the need to move from assumptions to decisions based on concrete data. He also noted that although demand for conference space is not low, inquiries typically arise only a few months before events.

The next speaker, Tomasz Czerski, Director of Software & Big Data at Orange, demonstrated how mobile network data can be used to analyze tourist flows in real time. He highlighted the impressive figure of 11.6 million overnight tourists in Kraków in 2025 and showed how such data can debunk common myths—for example, the belief that all visitors head first to Wawel Castle. He presented analyses related to seasonality, holidays, and weekends, as well as the impact of major events such as concerts at TAURON Arena, which generate additional traffic in the city center and encourage some visitors to extend their stay.

Grzegorz Suszka from Visa followed, discussing payment card transaction data used to build a profile of tourists visiting Kraków. Tourist spending is most often concentrated in retail, gastronomy, and grocery shopping, with notable peaks in December and during the summer holiday season. According to Visa data for 2025, the main source markets were Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States, Germany, Spain, France, and Norway. An interesting insight was the age structure of visitors, dominated by the 22–29 age group. The presentation also covered an analysis of the Airbnb market and its potential contribution to the city's accommodation structure.

The conference concluded with a panel discussion featuring representatives of the city authorities, the hotel industry, tourism sector, and cultural institutions. The panel was moderated by Rafał Abramczyk from Klips hotel data intelligence. The central question posed by the organizers was: "What conclusions for Kraków's business sector and DMO can be drawn from the presented data?" Panel participants included: Natalia Kulec-Greń, Director of the Tourism Department at the City of Kraków; Grzegorz Soszyński from Kraków Tourism Alliance; Agnieszka Dąbrowska from PI Apartments & Hotels; Jacek Stasikowski from Accor Group; Radosław Altheim from Q Hotels; and Carolina Pietyra from the Kraków Festival Office.

During the discussion, representatives of local government emphasized that tourism development should focus primarily on quality and on ensuring a sustainable impact of tourism on residents' daily lives. The panel debated whether it is better to invest in stable and predictable markets or to respond