



Kraków The Host City: Stories Episode 7: The Beginnings of the Hotel Industry in Kraków

2021-12-22

Today's hotels originated as inn houses, which developed at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. Inns, as they were referred to at that time, were located in the city centre and at market squares or the entrance gates to Kraków.

At the beginning of the 19th century, the most famous inn was "Pod Węgierskim Królem", which was located at Sławkowska and Św. Jana Streets and was later turned into the Saxon Hotel (from 1859, the hotel had its own ten-person omnibus, used for transporting hotel guests to and from the railway station). In the meantime, a large number of visitors were hosted by the inn "Pod Złotą Kotwicą" at Szpitalna Street, which was transformed into the Poller's Hotel – the famous artist Helena Modrzejewska rented her flat and coach house on a permanent basis at this hotel. The Commission for Good Order and National Education, established at the end of the 18th century, contributed to the creation of the Jagiellonian University: with its Botanical Garden and Astronomical Observatory, which have significantly enlivened the city. Another important impulse which contributed to making cultural and artistic life more attractive was the establishment of, among others: the National Museum, Historical Museum, Juliusz Słowacki Theatre or Kraków's Society of the Friends of Music, and Jordan Park at Błonia or the beginning of balneological spa activities in Swoszowice.

At that time exclusive hotels included the Grand Hotel at Sławkowska Street and the Royal Hotel at Św. Gertrudy Street, owned by Gustaw Sacher from a well-known family of Viennese restaurateurs. The 19th century also brought changes to Krakow's hotel industry. The following hotels also had a good reputation: the Dresden, Klein, London, Kraków, Pod Sobieskim or Polish.

As guest attendance increased, hotels began to modernize and compete with each other with technical innovations. The quality of service increased considerably, with the introduction of facilities such as electric lighting, service bells, bathrooms and toilets with hot and cold running water, reading rooms and rooms for receptions and meetings. For example, there was a traffic light system in the Polonia Hotel which allowed for communication between guests and the hotel personnel. In the hotel room, the guest had two buttons at his disposal, one to call the valets and the other a number button. There was a clock with lights on the corridor, showing which personnel was requested along with the room number. In addition, a panel with light shields was placed in the hotel manager's office, allowing him to check whether the guest was waiting too long for the room service.

It is said that in the 19th century, accommodation facilities in Kraków alone began their numbering from no. 1 on the first floor to no. 84 on the third floor.

Another luxurious and one of the oldest hotels was the Russian Hotel, now known as "Pod Różą" at Floriańska Street, which was managed by a woman; however, we will tell you more about this in the next episode of our series, as well as about a special International Hotel Telegraphic Code allowing reservations – the prototype of today's booking portals.

Author: Katarzyna Janik