



Kraków The Host City: Stories - Episode 13: Orbis Kraków

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The development of foreign tourism in Poland was handled by many organisations, including social and political ones. Examples of organisers included The Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society, the Union of Socialist Youth, the Polish Students' Association, the Polish Olympic Committee, the Holiday and Tourism Office of the Polish Teachers' Union, the 'Turysta' Tourist and Leisure Cooperative and the 'Gromada' National Tourist and Leisure Cooperative.

However, the most important organiser of this movement was the 'Orbis' Polish Travel Agency, which was established in 1920 in Lviv. The founders of the Agency were the bankers Ernest Adam, Maksymilian Liptay and Józef Radoszewski, MPs Dr Władysław Kesłowicz, Count Aleksander Skarbek, and lawyer Ozjasz Wasser. Their goal was to create a travel agency with an international standard of service and, at the same time, an institution that would enable citizens to travel abroad.

The travel agency's development was intense and rapid; in the first five years of its operation, its owners established 28 branches. In 1928, 'Orbis' was granted the status of a national travel agency, and in 1933, following the purchase of its shares by the state-owned bank, PKO, the company moved its seat to Warsaw and established the 'Orbis' trademark. In 1939, the company employed 500 people and had 136 branches in Poland and 19 abroad, and had four hotels offering 360 rooms. Interestingly, 5 million people used the company's services in the early 1930s. In Kraków, the branch office was located at 41 Market Square, in a tenement house designed by the architect Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz and commissioned by the Vienna-based 'Phoenix' Insurance Company in the early 1930s.

The 'Orbis' offer was extensive – it focused on the sale of domestic and international travel (rail, air, bus, ship and ferry tickets), foreign tours and the arranging of individual tourist trips. While looking through the magazine 'Podróże i Turystyka' ['Travel and Tourism'] from the early 1960s, one can learn about what 'Orbis' was able to offer at that time. Thus, for tourists coming to Poland in group tours, 'Orbis' offered nineteen itineraries around the country. By 1963, the number had risen to 36 tour programmes. The itineraries were designed to make it possible to get to know the most interesting regions of our country within a relatively short period. An interesting example is the 12-day tour 'Around Poland'. The proposed route led as follows: Warsaw - Puławy - Kazimierz Dolny - Lublin - Sandomierz - Rzeszów - Łańcut - Kraków - Zakopane - Oświęcim - Częstochowa - Opole - Wrocław - Kalisz - Poznań - Gniezno - Kruszwica - Toruń - Włocławek - Żelazowa Wola - Warsaw. Slightly shorter 9-day tours also started and ended from the capital city. Each covered one of Poland's regions, e.g., Southern Poland, whose route led through the Podhale region and the Tatra Mountains, or South-Western Poland, where tourists could visit Greater Poland and Silesia. Moreover, programmes tailored to the specific interests of participants – 'Folklore of Poland', 'Flora and Fauna of Southern Poland', and 'Architecture of Poland' were on offer. The trip for folk art lovers led from Warsaw via Kadzidło, Opoczno, Kielce, Łysa Góra, Kraków, Zakopane, Szczawnica, Żywiec, Koniaków, Istebna and Katowice to Łowicz.

In 1971, 'Orbis' obtained government approval for the construction of hotels according to Western standards and by Western contractors through tenders based on a foreign currency loan. As a result, the hotels were put into operation in the following years: Forum and Victoria in Warsaw and Kasprowy in Zakopane. Six Novotels were also erected at that time. In 1979, 1.5



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million guests were served in Poland, and the number of customers using travel agency services reached 12.2 million.

The situation in the Kraków hotel market was characterised by investment stagnation until the mid-1960s. Hotels with a pre-war tradition were in operation; the only new facilities were the sports complex with Hotel Korona that opened in 1957 and 'Dom Turysty' ('Tourist House') six years later. It was not until 22 June 1965 that a hotel facility was opened, which was then a model in terms of function, standard and form in the country. One can read about the details of this Polish investment in the next episode, to which we now invite you.