



## **20 years of business tourism development in Krakow**

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**20 years of changes, challenges and development - of the city, the local MICE industry and the congress infrastructure. The year 2004 saw the creation of the Krakow Convention Bureau, one of the first such facilities in Poland. With Poland's access to the European Union, and the first hotel chains making their mark in Krakow, the city understood the potential that tourism offered Krakow and decided to pursue it.**

### **Krakow Convention Bureau**

Krakow Convention Bureau has been a part of the municipal framework of Krakow since 2004, with a primary goal of promoting the city as a business destination, and a solid brand that continues to garner interest in Poland and abroad.

The Krakow Convention Bureau acts as a partner, bringing together the business community, the scientific community and the city's authorities, and is often the first point of contact for event organisers, especially from abroad. Most large association congresses held in the city rely on the cooperation and support of the Convention Bureau.

Due to the specific nature of Krakow and its position as a scientific centre, the Krakow Congress Ambassador Club is especially important. It operates within the Krakow Network group, run in cooperation with the UMK Krakow Convention Bureau. So far, the Polish Congress Ambassador title has been awarded to more than 320 people, 64 of whom are connected with Krakow.

### **A steady rise in the number of events in Krakow until the outbreak of the pandemic**

Since 2014, the annual "Meetings Industry in Krakow" has been providing detailed information on the meetings industry, showing a steady increase in the number of reported events until 2019. For comparison, in 2014 there were 3,976 events, while three years later there were 6,013. Although the pandemic interrupted this trend, the latest report shows that 4,368 business meetings were held in 2023, which is an increase of 66.15% compared to the previous year, and more than double the number of 2021, leading to an optimistic conclusion that the upward trend in the organisation of congresses and conferences has reemerged. It should not be forgotten that in 2014 Krakow was the first Polish city to estimate the economic impact of the meetings industry on the city's economy, confirming its consequences to the city budget. The 2017 report shows that the share of GDP generated by the meetings and events industry in the GDP of Krakow was 3.38%.

Elżbieta Kantor, Director of the Tourism Department, commented that *'The higher number of events is a natural reaction to the various unique aspects of Krakow. Its centuries-old history and heritage, rich tourist offer and modern hotel facilities and congress infrastructure are an ideal setting and base for congress and conference organisers. The scientific community is an important driving force attracting international congresses to Krakow. The city houses 23 higher education institutions and dynamically developing businesses.'*

### **Professional infrastructure**

More events bring higher investments in infrastructure, and the hindsight of 20 years shows



how vast the changes have been. With 83 hotels in 2004, Krakow can now boast an impressive 198, including 21 5\* venues, many of which are used by event organisers and business guests. Two of them have a strong focus on conference clients – DoubleTree by Hilton Krakow Hotel & Convention Center and Metropol by Golden Tulip, both with 16 conference rooms that can accommodate as many as two thousand guests.

In 2014, three major conference venues opened in the capital of the Malopolska region – TAURON Arena Krakow (Poland's largest indoor arena that can accommodate more than 22,000 people), Expo Krakow International Trade Fair and Congress Center (able to host congresses for 5,000 participants), and the ICE Krakow Congress Center (which hosts a variety of events - in terms of form, theme and scale).

During its ten years on the market, it has housed business and cultural meetings that shaped ICE Krakow, making it one of the leaders on the European congress and cultural scene. Since October 2014, ICE Krakow has held over 1,400 events for nearly 1.7 million participants, including such shows as the 61<sup>st</sup> ICCA World Congress, ECAI (European Conference on Artificial Intelligence), International Organization of World Heritage Cities Congress (OWHC), 48<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Surgery, and the Open Eyes Economy Summit.

May 2024 marks 10 years since the first event at TAURON Arena Krakow - Pixar in Concert. Since then, the Arena has held over 2,400 events and welcomed more than 6 million people! TAURON Arena Krakow has hosted such legends as: Paul McCartney, Elton John, Sting, Björk, Robbie Williams, Metallica, Aerosmith, Depeche Mode, Deep Purple, Iron Maiden, Linkin Park, Justin Bieber and Harry Styles. Altogether, it hosted more than 430 artists, 380 sporting events, and over 100 congresses and conferences, such as the Musketeers Congress, Lyconet Elite Seminar, Jobicon Job Fair, MeetUp, and HackYeah Hackathon.

EXPO Krakow, the largest trade fair and exhibition facility with 15,000 square metres of floor space in the Malopolska region, opened in 2004. The first event organised at EXPO Krakow was ConExPest, followed by Moto Show Krakow. Currently, every year, EXPO welcomes more than 100,000 visitors from all over the world. The main events, i.e. the International Book Fair in Krakow®, the International Dental Fair KRAKDENT®, the International Trade Fair of Hotel and Catering Equipment HORECA®, the BookGame Festival and Board Game Fair, and the TUNING SHOW EXPO event for car enthusiasts, have become an intrinsic part of the events calendar in Krakow.

The Fabryczna Conference Center CKF\_13 opened in 2021, and is a multifunctional facility located in the historic section of the Fabryczna City complex, on the premises of the former Polmos vodka factory. The Fabryczna City complex also houses the four-star Mercure hotel, an arcade with restaurants, and the Vodka Factory Museum.

The number of air connections is steadily increasing to meet the needs of visitors coming to the capital of the Malopolska region, with Krakow Airport currently offering more than 160 regular connections. Passenger traffic at the Krakow Airport is gradually increasing, with nearly 9.5 million passengers in 2023 – the best result in the airport's 60-year history.

## **The city supports events**



Krakow's consistent policy and recognition of how important it is to grow the meetings industry for the economy of the city have a huge role in branding it as a Host City – a city of organisers. The “Sustainable Tourism Policy for Krakow in the Years 2021-2028” defines business tourism as one of the strategic key areas.

Congresses and conferences are among the products with most value in terms of competitiveness and attractiveness.

*‘Krakow concentrates on attracting international congresses and conferences. The end goal is to promote the City of Krakow as a city of congresses, which has been pursued by the Krakow Convention Bureau for 20 years. We focus on more than just attracting events, supporting organisers at every stage of the process, as we believe that the city's positive image is the best publicity,’* concluded Małgorzata Przygórska-Skowron, Head of the Krakow Convention Bureau.

Congresses and conferences are economically beneficially for event organisers, but also hoteliers, restaurateurs, transportation companies, museums, and tourist guides. The meetings industry creates jobs, and the city receives taxes paid by companies representing the industry. Promotion and publicity should also not be discounted, with event organisation entailing articles in international trade press, information on congress websites, and social media posts of organisers and participants.

Large international events are accompanied by campaigns addressed to the local community, including CSR activities. These could be free examinations for residents at medical events, charity runs, or free event entrance for students. These activities show that international events are not just closed meetings of specialists, but they enter the fabric of the city and resonate with residents. Krakow promotes the perception of congresses as “heritage”, believing that they are not just episodes in the life of the city, but have the potential to positively impact the local community. The organisation of congresses is a strategic growing market, and its potential lies in knowledge transfer.

Organisers are supported in different ways – from study visits, providing professional promotional materials, engaging the city authorities into the process of attracting participants to the meeting, to finally promoting the event. The city is sometimes also the organiser or partner for certain points on the meeting agenda. Krakow offers organisers of conferences, congresses, cultural and sporting events special rates for public transportation, with a 2014 Resolution of the City Council of Krakow introducing a so-called “conference ticket”, providing discounts depending on the size of the group and the duration of the event, ranging from 10% to 30% of the price. The city is considering further support for event organisers.

Grant funds, which are actively obtained, support the development of business tourism and the activities of the Convention Bureau itself. The ICE Krakow Congress Center was built with EU funds, while a Swiss grant helped to organise impact studies. In the years 2022-2023, Krakow and the Malopolska region shared the spirit of the “Wide Open for Meetings” campaign, implemented as part of the “Malopolska – a destination” project, financed from European Funds under the Regional Operational Programme of the Malopolska Region for 2014-2020.

The budget of the entire project was PLN 24 million, of which PLN 8 million was allocated for the



**Magiczny  
Kraków**

campaign in Poland, and PLN 16 million for the international campaign, including PLN 4 million for MICE promotion. The promotion was complementary and multi-channel, with focus placed on the Internet, relying on the latest products and online marketing tools. The campaign included preparation of ads and banners highlighting the richness of the tourist offer of the Malopolska region and Krakow, with promotional adverts appearing in reputable weeklies such as The Economist. The total reach of just one component of the project – the social media campaign – is estimated at nearly 30 million people. On Facebook alone, the total reach across all markets is estimated at over 10 million!

Krakow is a member of international associations, such as the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), which currently brings together 900 entities, companies and organisations active in business tourism worldwide, and the City Destinations Alliance (CityDNA), an organisation that helps its members to share information and experience related to city tourism.

## **Challenges**

Trends in the tourism and meetings industry over the past few years have clearly indicated that travelers are paying more and more attention to environmental and sustainability issues. Hotels and congress centres around the world are taking steps to reduce CO2 emissions and waste, and obtain independent certification.

Krakow, as one of the most popular tourist destinations in Poland, is also joining this trend by promoting the organisation of sustainable events. It was the first Polish city to join the GDS-Index in 2022, which is a benchmarking initiative that compares cities based on their sustainability performance, with classification based on seventy criteria. Being a part of such global initiatives is a driver for local initiatives, joint actions between the tourism industry and the city, and, as a result, long-term changes in the ESG field. In 2024, as the Convention Bureau, we created the Sustainable Tourism Business Strategy for Krakow, as well as the Declaration on Diversity and Equality in the Congress Industry. Becoming a member of the initiative is a catalyst for further projects and joint activities between the tourism industry and the city, and consequently an opportunity for long-term quality improvements in Krakow tourism.