

2.2.1. The Wieliczka Salt Mine ⁴

The historic Salt Mine in Wieliczka is one of the most attractive and the world's most famous tourist sites. Year 2008 was the 30th anniversary of entering the Wieliczka Salt Mine on the UNESCO List of World Cultural and Natural Heritage.

Already since neolithic times in Wieliczka region, salt, as precious as gold, was acquired from brine springs through heating the brine and vaporisation of water. In the middle of the 13th century the excavation of rock salt began.

Since its beginning the Wielicka salina constituted an important source of royal revenue — in the 14th century it generated 30% of all the state's income. The salt mine maintained the royal court and paid for the upkeep of the castles guarding the trade routes and also for the activity of the Krakow Academy. The profits drawn from the salt trade allowed for development of the Wawel Castle. In the 16th century the mine became one of the largest business enterprises in Europe at that time.

In the 16th century the Wieliczka Salt Mine used to be shown to the privileged visitors of the Wawel royal court. Towards the end of the 15th century tourist activity began in the mine. Few, privileged visitors (members of the upper classes, possessing each time an explicit approval of the king) were let down on thick ropes, then with torches they visited cavities carved in the salt rock. The conditions of visiting the mine improved only after building wooden staircase in one of shafts in 1744. The Austrian rule in the mine meant a further step in the development of tourism. The Austrians correctly estimated the values of the mine, advertising it as one of the prime visiting sites of the Austrian Monarchy. At the end of the 18th century a few dozen of people visited the mine monthly and at the beginning of the 19th century this number increased to one hundred of people weekly. In the course of years new routes and chambers were adapted to visiting; balls, shows, boat rides on salt lakes and even fireworks were organized in the middle of excursions. In the latter part of the 19th century, horse-cars transported tourists. In the 19th century many kings, writers, artists and scientists visited the mine. It became famous all over the world.

Early in the 20th century another tourist attraction was added, namely, the Chapel of the Saint Kinga. The visiting rules were defined as well as days and hours of opening and prices of tickets. Between the two world wars the number of tourists considerably increased. Next, in the period of Nazi occupation, the only visitors were the German VIPs.

After the end of the Second World War, there was a rapid increase of the number of tourists visiting underground routes — in 1945 there were already more than 10 thousand people and this number continued to grow, reaching about 200 thousand in 1955. A large number of visitors to the mine caused the necessity of indispensable renovation of passages and facilities and also preparation of new tourist routes and chambers. In the years 1959-1964 all renovation works were carried out, independent ventilation system for the underground excavation was made and electric wiring was installed. The following years brought a systematical improvement of catering for tourism, which in the mid-1970s caused an increase of number of tourists to 750 thousand annually.

In 1978 the Wieliczka Salt Mine was inscribed in the UNESCO First List of World Cultural and Natural Heritage (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation), together with 11 other sites from around the world (of which, i.a. Krakow Market Square).

In 1994 the mine was acknowledged as the National History Monument by the President of the Republic of Poland.

At present, the mine consists of approximately 3000 chambers and nearly 300 kilometres of subterranean corridors lying on 9 levels, of which a 3.5-kilometres section is accessible to tourists. At the mine there is an underground sanatorium, the Krakow Saltworks Museum, a restaurant, a post office and

⁴ *Elaborated on the basis of: Information from Marketing Division of the "Wieliczka" Salt Mine Tourist Route Ltd.; Janusz Podlecki, Wieliczka. The historic salt mine (3rd edition, revised and changed). Publ. „Karpaty” – Andrzej Łączyński, Kraków 2007; the UNESCO First List of World Cultural and Natural Heritage of 9 September 1978; website <http://www.kopalnia.pl/>*

souvenir shops; various types of social events are organized such as concerts, film screenings, sport performances. The Wieliczka Salt Mine is visited annually by approximately million tourists from Poland and rest of the world.

TABLE IX. VISITORS TO THE “WIELICZKA” SALT MINE

Specification	2000	2005	2007	2008
	<i>in thousand</i>			
TOTAL	758.2	1028.7	1159.6	1097.5
<i>Domestic</i>	533.6	452.6	483.9	470.2
<i>Foreign</i>	224.6	576.1	675.7	627.3
<i>of which from:</i>				
<i>Great Britain</i>	15.0	39.0	85.0	87.0
<i>Germany</i>	30.0	53.7	44.1	43.4
<i>France</i>	18.3	41.2	40.4	38.0
<i>Korea</i>	5.8	27.2	33.7	34.9
<i>Italy</i>	13.4	42.2	43.7	34.6
<i>USA</i>	38.2	53.4	45.9	32.5
<i>Norway</i>	10.9	22.6	29.4	29.2
<i>Russia</i>	2.4	25.3	34.7	27.9
<i>Spain</i>	4.1	20.3	25.3	26.2
<i>Hungary</i>	6.6	22.5	21.2	24.9

Note. 10 countries are specified, from which the number of visitors in 2008 was the biggest.