Magiczny Kraków

Pierogi, steak tartare and żurek – a handful of classics

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Krakow has a lot to offer for famished tourists – both those hungry in a literal sense and those hungry for culinary escapades. You can find restaurants and eateries for every budget and with a wide selection of cuisines including casual Polish and international bar food, ethnic eateries, along with ambitious establishments

Given that, the title of the European Capital of Gastronomic Culture 2019 comes as no surprise. However, what are the must-eats when you are in Krakow for only a couple of days with – inevitably – only one stomach?

It is no easy task to create such a list since a lot depends on individual preferenes (of both the person looking for the recommendation and the person giving it), but you have to start somewhere. Let us then look at some of the most traditional, classic Polish dishes and then look for places where they taste exactly the way they should.

Pierogi are an all-time classic of Polish cuisine and its everlasting pride. We have a *pierogi* festival in Krakow and restaurants that specialise exclusively in *pierogi* – a good idea when trying different fillings would be to visit Przypiecek Krakowski (Sławkowska 32) or Przystanek Pierogarnia (Bonerowska 14 and several other locations in town). However, those looking for the traditional Krakow experience should drop by the U Stasi diner (Mikołajska 16) which has acquired something of a cult status over the years. The intellectual and artistic elite lunch here on *pierogi* and home-cooked meals and the density of professors per square meter is higher than in Collegium Novum. If you are looking for perfection in the art of *pierogi* making, you will find it in the modest Kalejdoskop (Lubisz 1, in the underground passage) – the dough is wafer-thin and the filling subtly yet expertly seasoned.

Steak tartare is not an exclusively Polish speciality, although in other countries restaurateurs do not have enough confidence in the consumer to let them mix the meat and condiments themselves and it is always served pre-seasoned. But it is worth doing it old-style and mix the meat yourself in Pod Baranem (Św. Gertrudy 21) – a bourgeois restaurant that is as typical for Krakow as it gets. Perfectionists can head to Ed Red (Sławkowska 3) renowned for its excellent beef while those of a more adventurous bent should visit Karakter (Brzozowa 17) where you can sample steak tartare made of horsemeat or ostrich with the chef's selection of original condiments.

Kotlet schabowy – a breaded pork chop – needs no introduction. It remains the flagship Polish dish and a no-brainer for those who like meat. You can find the most traditional and tastiest version of the pork chop – on the bone – in the classically Polish restaurant Pod Katarynką (Brzozowa 15) and the cosy Gąska (Limanowskiego 1) which specialises in goose. In a more informal setting, over a beer and some sports, you can try delicious *schabowy* fried in lard, as it should be, in Piwiarnia (Karmelicka 43A).

Żurek (sour rye soup) is a great comfort food when you are, cold and tired and feeling the pangs of hunger. It is difficult to explain the idea to foreigners (fermented rye does not sound particularly

appealing), but try it once and you will be sucked in to loving żurek, just as the soup itself get sucked into the edible bread bowl it is often served in. You can sample *żurek* served in bread in the popular Kogel Mogel restaurant (Sienna 12). Other varieties include *żurek* served with mushrooms and smoked meat, like the one in Kiełbasa i Sznurek (Pijarska 5) or with fresh horseradish like in Jarema (Plac Matejki 5), a restaurant that specialises in cuisine from *Kresy* – a region in the East of Poland. If you feel like contemplating the several decade-long tradition of an old school eatery like Cechowa (Jagiellońska 11), you can do so over a bowl of their tasty *żurek* – it is also good value for money.

Certainly the above list is far from exhaustive. – No herring! – some may exclaim. – And how about *golonka*?! – others will ask. Rest assured – you will find both excellent herring and *golonka* in Krakow. And *bigos*, potato pancakes, etc., as well as many other classics – simply take a closer look at the menus of the restaurants mentioned above.