

## The annual Jewish Culture Festival in Kraków – a positive example of present-day Polish-Jewish relations



*Sounding of the Shofar, a ram's-horn trumpet used by ancient Jews in religious ceremonies and as a battle signal, now sounded at Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Source: Jewish Festival Poland website.*

The annual Jewish Culture Festival in Poland's Kraków is one of the positive aspects of present-day Polish-Jewish relations. The festival is always well-attended and greatly enjoyed by Poles, Polish Jews, European fans, and countless members of the Jewish diaspora around the world.

The 32nd Jewish Culture Festival was held this year, 2023, and focused on the 75th anniversary of the founding of the state of Israel.

Initiated by Polish-Jewish activists Janusz Makuch and Krzysztof Gierat in 1988 as a local event, the festival has grown to become one of the most important events in the city and one of the best-known cultural events in Poland. It is also one of the biggest festivals of Jewish culture in the world.

Held in Kazimierz, the city's historical Jewish quarter named after King Kazimierz the Great and a vibrant district full of art galleries, restaurants, and cafes, the festival is a celebration of Jewish art, music, and literature. The main goal of the festival is to educate people about Jewish culture, history, and Judaism, as well as familiarize them with modern Jewish culture originating mainly in the United States and Israel.

Held every year during June and July, the festival features almost 300 events during its 9-to-10-day period of operation. Up to 30,000 participants from various countries sample Jewish cuisine and take part in workshops, lectures, exhibitions, plays, guided tours, and performances of various styles of Jewish music. These include cantoral, hasidic, classical, Jewish folk, and klezmer, which is very popular in Kraków nowadays.

Over 150 artists, instructors, and lecturers from both the Ashkenazi and Sephardic cultures are typically engaged in sharing their enriching experiences and knowledge with the festival's many enthusiastic attendees.

The two most important concerts are the inaugural concert on the first Sunday, and the final concert on the last Saturday of the festival. The inaugural concert usually takes place in one of seven synagogues of Kazimierz and features cantoral music. The final concert is always held outdoors and is the culminating point of the festival. Referred to as "Shalom on Szeroka Street," the final concert offers almost seven hours of live Jewish music in front of Poland's oldest synagogue and is performed by musicians from around the world.

The number of festival attendees grows from year to year and television coverage brings the festival to viewers across Poland, Europe, and around the world. For Poland, the Jewish Culture Festival serves as a symbolic bridge where Poles and Jews can meet to strengthen the process of mutual understanding and respect through the celebration of Jewish culture and life.

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*Author: Gene Sokolowski*

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