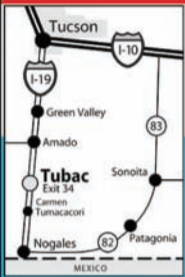


Juried Show
170 Artists

52nd Annual Tubac FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS

February 9 - 13, 2011
10 AM - 5 PM daily



Take I-19 to exit 34
info: 520-398-2704 www.tubacaz.com

Spend a relaxing day
or stay for an overnight getaway
at Southern Arizona's
only clothes-free resort.
Enjoy 30 beautiful,
secluded acres
just outside the city.



For a special first-time visit offer,
go to www.miravistasort.com

7501 N. Wade Road, Tucson
520-744-2355

4 Pools & Spas
Restaurant & Bar



Massage
Tennis



Save \$250pp*
When booked by 2/15/11

UNIWORLD
BOUTIQUE RIVER CRUISE COLLECTION®

9-Night Treasures of Prague the Rhine and Main Cruisetour

From \$3,149pp including:

- **7-Night Cruise; Cologne to Nuremberg**
Koblenz • Aschaffenburg • Miltenberg • Wurzburg • Hassfurt
Transfer to Prague
- **2-Night Land Tour in Prague**
Superior first class Art Deco Imperial Hotel (or similar) with Breakfast Daily
- Exclusive Epicurean Adventurer Program; Including Wine tasting and Franconian sausage-making culinary demo
- City tours of Bamberg, Nuremberg and Prague
- Aschaffenburg walking tour and Johannsburg Castle visit
- Koblenz walking tour and horticultural show at Ehrenbreitstein
- Captain's Welcome Gala and Farewell Dinner
- All transfers on arrival and departure days



JOIN US!

River Cruise Presentation with Uniworld's Robert Fitzgerald
Tues. Feb. 15th at 5:30 pm • Bon Voyage Travel • 1640 E. River Rd
Please RSVP by Feb 10th to your BVT Travel Consultant
or email: marketing@bvtravel.com

Celebrating 35 Years
Bon Voyage
TRAVEL

1640 E. River Rd. 441-2843 Sunrise & Kolb 441-2858 Rancho Vistoso 441-2859

Fares are non air, per person, dbl occupancy in standard accommodations, for select dates and itinerary and based on availability at time of booking. * Price is reflective of \$250 savings, and includes non-comm. fare of \$112. Gov't fees, transfers, and airfare (unless otherwise stated) add'l for all guests. Restrictions apply.

Great Escape

Wieliczka's Salt Mines: Salt Sparkles Underground

Story and Photography by Abigail King



The walls of the Chapel of St. Kinga are covered with religious panoramas.

The black letters pressed into a plate of gold ahead of me reads *Kopalnia Soli* (salt mine). The chill in the air condenses my breath. From somewhere close by, I hear the clanging of machinery and automated instructions spoken in English, German and Polish.

"Are you ready?" asks Christopher, a guide from the nearby village of Wieliczka, Poland. He's cloaked in a long charcoal jacket and is blowing on his hands to keep warm. For a giant-sized man, he uses a soft voice, "Because once we start, I will not be able to talk to you. And you will not be able to turn back."

It's an ominous message, but we are about to descend 100 meters beneath the surface of the earth. I suppose that over the years he, or one of the other compulsory guards, has suffered at the hands of over-enthusiastic tourists. Shivering in the open air, though, I for one am ready.

"Eight hundred steps," he says again, as a final warning. A uniformed official steps aside, and we begin the descent, down, down, down into *Kopalnia Soli*, Wieliczka's salt mines and a World Heritage Site to boot.

Work first began here back in the 13th century, and the mines have been functional ever since, through landslides, floods, the Nazi invasion and communist Russia. The real story, however, begins 20 million years ago, when the sea covered this region of Poland,

leaving behind a residue of buried treasure in the form of sodium chloride.

There's plenty of time to contemplate history and chemistry as you make the descent, because the creaking wooden staircase goes on and on, round and around, down and down. More than a million people visit the mines each year, and it's difficult to see how this contraption copes. We traipse through makeshift corridors, stooped in the bare light of a few electric bulbs. So far, Wieliczka is living up to the images most of us have of underground mines: dark, dirty and dangerous.

St. Anthony's Chapel changes all that. Carved by the miners into the leaden rock salt, this fairy-tale world of life-size statues glistens under the quiet, soft light. Like all good fairy tales, there's



The Chapel of St. Kinga is the grand finale of the Wieliczka salt mine tour.



Salt-crystal chandeliers hang in the Chapel of St. Kinga.

a princess involved. According to legend, when Princess Kinga of Hungary became betrothed to King Boleslaw the Bashful of Poland around 700 years ago, she threw her engagement ring into Hungary's salt mines. This, somehow, was supposed to guide her to the salt supplies in her adopted country, Poland. When drilling started in Wieliczka, miners found not only salt but the engagement ring itself.

Our next royal encounter is a little more sedate: a traditional bust of King Kazimierz the Great, Poland's most famous ruler, whose name still describes Kraków's revived Jewish Quarter. Next up is a sculpture of Nicolaus Copernicus, the first person to stare into the heavens and calculate that Earth was not actually the center of the universe after all.

Standing in his footsteps (Copernicus came here as a student in the 15th century), so deep beneath the earth, it seems hard to imagine anyone gazing at stars overhead.

Here, salt instead of stars glitters in the ceiling. Although raw rock salt looks

a mottled granite gray, when water seeps in, the crystals dissolve and then reform in brilliant formations.

"We call them spaghetti and cauliflower," says Christopher, catching my eye. "For obvious reasons."

I reach out and touch a "cauliflower," my fingertips meeting a coarse resilience disguised by its fragile and tangled appearance. Like Wieliczka itself: deceptively beautiful, incredibly tough.

In the museum section, plastic men with hooded faces labor alongside mechanical horses, axes and carts. These everyday workers, toiling out of sight of the world, constructed sculptures so impressive that the world still marvels at them centuries later. Statues of Goethe, local-born Pope John-Paul, even a merry dwarf who promises instant fertility if you kiss him on the nose.

Yet all of these works fade into the shadows once you reach the grand finale, the Chapel of St. Kinga.

Chandeliers fill this vast, 23,000-cubic-meter cavern, with each teardrop consisting of purified, clear salt. Religious panoramas cover the walls, and backlit rose salt, sourced from a neighboring mine, glows as the heart of Jesus and then even characterizes God.

The tour ends with a heart-choking ride to the surface in a caged rocket of a lift, but before I leave, I catch a glimpse of Wieliczka's forgotten heroes. Lamps in place, pickaxes slung over their shoulders, two miners smile at each other, forever frozen in salt.

DL

Abigail King is a freelance writer and photographer. Comments for publication should be addressed to letters@desertleaf.com.

A sculpture of Polish mathematician and astronomer Nicolas Copernicus, who was the first to propose that the Sun, not Earth, was the center of the universe, commemorates the time he spent in the area when he was a university student.



Contigo

cocina latina

Modern Latin Cuisine
Full Bar and Tapas
Happy Hour and
Late Night Specials
Specialty Cocktails



Open for Dinner Monday - Saturday 520-299-1730 www.eatatcontigo.com

Northwest Corner of River and Campbell

CLIQUE

1865 E. River Rd.

Johnny Was
Three Dots
Hanky Panky
Christopher Blue
Pandora Jewelry
Yellow Box Shoes
and more....

SAVE
20% OFF
Your Purchase

2-1-2011 Through 2-14-2011

10AM-5:30PM
(520) 232-9458



La Jolla

FREE

Silver Storywheels®
Bracelet

With a \$250.00
Storywheels purchase

La Jolla Diamonds
520.615.0203
Not to be combined with
any other offers.

FREE

Ring Inspection
& Cleaning

La Jolla Diamonds
520.615.0203
Not to be combined with
any other offers.

DIAMONDS & GEMS

"Where Diamond Lovers Send Their Friends"



Featuring
Storywheels®
Unique. Genuine. Original.

1825 E. River Rd, Suite 105 ▼ Tucson, AZ 85718 ▼ 520.615.0203 ▼ www.storywheels.net