

# KATOWICE

## Short Break

Wes Gibbons 2017



**Katowice** is a coal mining city in Silesia, southern Poland, 1660 kilometres northeast of Barcelona. There are currently (summer 2017) low cost direct flights from England, Scotland, Ireland, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Greece. Katowice is not a tourist hot spot but is interesting, and with the aid of European money has recently bloomed from a depressed industrial blot to a cleaner and livelier place with music, museums, parks and a city centre with good restaurants/bars. It makes for a short break or as part of a longer stay in Poland visiting nearby Kraków, which is 140 minutes away by train or 75 minutes by car. For those who can take the horror of WWII local history, the Nazi extermination camp of Auschwitz lies 40km southeast of the city and day visits can be arranged.

← *New Silesian Museum housed in Katowice coal mine*

**Arrival.** Katowice airport lies 34 km north of the city. The local KTM bus runs every 40-60 minutes from in front of Terminal C, takes 50 minutes, and costs 46 polish złoty (zł) return. There are also minibus and taxi options. If you arrive on a late flight we recommend staying at the cheerful Noclegi Airport Park Hotel: they will come and pick you up it seems at any time of night and drop you back in the morning. The

airport is pleasant and modern, with three small terminals all within easy walking distance of each other, and there are plenty of ATM machines. We used a new ING machine in Terminal B which worked fine. You will arrive in Terminal C: the other two terminals are for departures (and, note for your return, have very little inside once you have passed security). Pick up a free copy of Katowice in your pocket guidebook and ask for a map of Katowice at the tourist office. The bus drops you at the underground bus stop beneath the central railway station. From here a flight of stairs leads up to ground level, a Starbucks coffee bar, and access to the city through a shopping mall.

**Where to stay:** There are plenty of options, but from personal experience we can recommend the Hotel Althus which has rooms on high floors with great views (especially the superior corner rooms), excellent breakfast, and is 10-15 minutes walking from everywhere you need to be. If there is a concert on during your stay, you can enjoy the new auditorium for the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra (a 10 minute walk away from the hotel).





*The urban view from the Althus Hotel with the old coal mine in the background.*

**Where to eat:** The bar-restaurant scene centres around the streets of Staromiejska and Mariacka just north of the railway tracks. For a traditional Polish meal you can't go far wrong with **Tatiana** in Staromiejska: try their Zurek (sour rye soup) which is a kind of Polish cocido containing egg, sausage and potato. For something cheaper, more laid back and not traditional consider **Bar a Boo** downstairs at the end of Mariacka (south side of road) near the church. They serve salad, pasta and wood-fired pizza. Even cheaper and more bohemian is the excellent **Złoty Osioł** (Golden Donkey) restaurant on the corner between Mariacka Tylna and Mielleckiego streets (a few minutes walk from the Absurdalna bar: see below), with vegetarian main courses (line up at the kitchen to order: they will then bring the meal to you) accompanied by all-you-can-eat help yourself salad.

**Where to drink:** if you like craft beer there are several options, such as Browariat (head south from Mariacka along Francuska, under the railway and it is on your right: they have a roof terrace), Absurdalna (south of Staromiejska on Dworcowa 3) for intimate, unusual decor, or the more modern Kontynuacja (Staromiejska 8) which has an outdoor street terrace.

**What to mine:** coal. Katowice is one of many mines in the Upper Silesian Coal Basin, with the town mine opening in 1822. Until its closure in 1999 the mine produced more than 120 million tonnes of coal. These Upper Silesian coals are Carboniferous, more specifically (for the enthusiast) Namurian to Westphalian in age, which makes them between 310 and 325 million years old.

**What to visit:** Given the coal mining heritage of Katowice we recommend two places in particular. These are the new **Silesian Museum** just northeast of the town centre, and the remarkably well preserved former mining village of **Nikiszowiec**, a short bus ride away to the southeast.

The new **Silesian Museum** opened in 2015 on the site of the former coal mine just northeast of the town centre. It is still under construction and redevelopment but there is already plenty to see, including much Polish art. Many of the exhibits are below ground in what was once the mine. For me the best part was wandering around outside and inside the old, dilapidated and semi-museumised mine buildings and taking the lift to the top of the winding tower. It is free on Tuesdays and closed on Mondays.



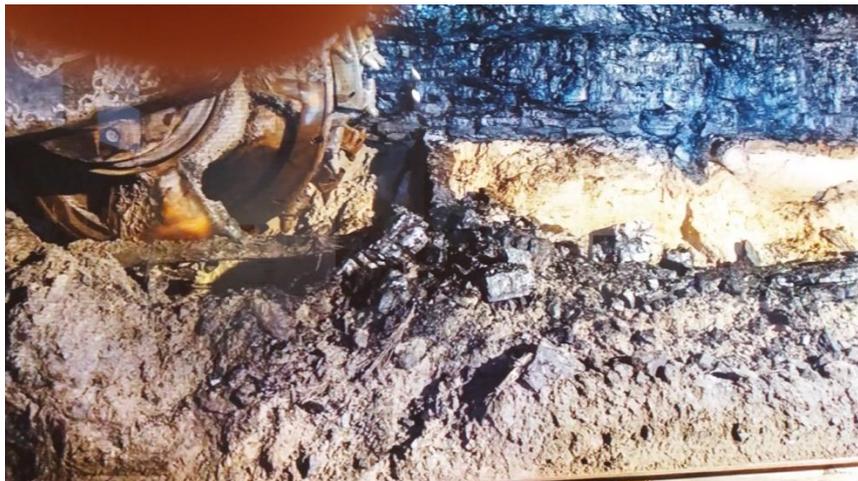


**Nikiszowiec** can be reached by several buses. For example, leaving from the bus stop on Al. Korfantego in front of the Katowice Hotel you can take the No. 920 bus which goes directly into the centre of the redbrick village and drops you off right by St Anne’s Church, or the No. 30 bus which after 11 stops drops you off in the street of Szopienicka immediately west of the village. Buy the 1-zone ticket either from the machine at the bus stop or from the grumpy lady at the kiosk. Visit the church then the tourist office where there is an industrial ethnography museum (small fee: free on Tuesdays, closed Mondays) that is definitely worth a visit. Nikiszowiec is a real piece of perfectly preserved 20th century mining history: it may not sound interesting but it is. Crown your visit by lunch and/or a drink at the excellent Café Byfj, on the corner of Krawczyka 120 metres west of the church across plac Wyzwolenia and opposite hair salon Teresa (below).



The originally German-owned Giesche (today Wieczprek) coal mine is one of the largest in the area, opening in 1826 and producing over 260 million tonnes of coal. It operated close to zinc mills and together these industries provided employment for the purpose-built nearby settlements of Nikiszowiec and the “garden city” of Giszowiec 2km to the southwest.





The photo above shows machinery cutting through a shiny bituminous coal seam resting on pale rock (called “ganister”) that was formerly the sandy soil beneath the dense vegetation that became buried and compressed to form the coal (photo from the exhibition in the industrial ethnography museum in Nikiszowiec).

Other places to consider visiting in Katowice include the Silesian Park, Kósciuszko Park (with the church of St. Michael the Archangel), the Jewish Cemetery, Katowice Historical Museum, the Spodek arena and Silesian Insurgents Monument, and the huge cathedral of Christ the King.

