

Kraków Old Town is the historic central district of Kraków, Poland. It is one of the most famous old districts in Poland today and was the center of Poland's political life from 1038 until King Sigismund III Vasa relocated his court to Warsaw in 1596. The entire medieval old town is among the first sites chosen for the UNESCO's World Heritage List, inscribed as Cracow's Historic Centre.

Medieval Kraków was surrounded by a 1.9 mile (3 km) defensive wall complete with 46 towers and seven main entrances leading through them. The district features the central Main Square, the largest medieval town square of any European city. At the center of the plaza, surrounded by row houses and noble residences, stands the Renaissance cloth hall Sukiennice (currently housing gift shops, restaurants and merchant stalls) with the National Gallery of Art upstairs. It is flanked by the Town Hall Tower. The whole district is bisected by the Royal Road, the coronation route traversed by the Kings of Poland. The Route begins at St. Florian's Church; passes the Barbican of Kraków and enters Stare Miasto through the Florian Gate. It leads down Floriańska Street through the Main Square, and up Grodzka to Wawel, the former seat of Polish royalty overlooking the Vistula river.

The Gothic **Wawel Castle** in Cracow in Poland was built at the behest of Casimir III the Great and consists of a number of structures situated around the central courtyard. In the 14th century it was rebuilt by Jogaila and Jadwiga of Poland. Their reign saw the addition of the tower called the Hen's Foot (*Kurza Stopka*) and the *Danish* Tower. The Jadwiga and Jogaila Chamber, in which the sword Szczerbiec, was used in coronation ceremonies, is exhibited today and is another remnant of this period. Other structures were developed on the hill during that time as well, in order to serve as quarters for the numerous clergy, royal clerks and craftsmen. Defensive walls and towers were erected in the same period. People have lived on Wawel Hill at the site of the Castle as early as fifty thousand years ago, in the Paleolithic Age. When more people began to settle down on the Wawel Hill and when trade became more efficient, the rulers of Poland took up their residence at the Hill as well. During the early 16th century King Sigismund I the Old (*Zygmunt I* in Polish) and his wife, brought in the best native and foreign artists including Italian architects, sculptors, and German decorators, to refurbish the castle into a splendid Renaissance palace. In the fire of 1595, the northeast part of the castle burned down. In 1609 King Sigismund moved the capital to Warsaw, and tough times for Wawel began. Both the castle and other buildings were neglected despite the concerns of local governors. The Swedish invasions of 1655 – 1657 and 1702 contributed to the further deterioration of the castle.

The Hill was occupied by the Prussian Army in 1794. Royal Insignia were stolen and never retrieved (apart from the Szczerbiec). After the Third Partition of Poland (1795) Wawel, as an important defensive point, was modernised by Austrians with defensive walls. The interior of the castle was changed and some of the buildings pulled down. After World War I, the authorities of the newly independent Polish Second Republic decided that Wawel Castle was to become a representative building of the Polish state and would be used by the Governor and later by the President himself. In 1921 the Polish Parliament passed a resolution which gave Wawel official status as the residence of the President of Poland. Following the ravages of World War II, by the decree of the State National Council, Wawel Castle became a national museum.

The Wawel Dragon

Beneath Wawel Hill is a gigantic cave. Legend has it that in the early days a fierce terrifying dragon lived in the Wawel Cave. It was so horrendous that he demanded that the local villagers would offer him treasure, as well as choice young maidens for his dining pleasure. The Dragon was so powerful that no one could defeat him, and any knights or warriors who would dare defy him were instantly roasted by his fiery breath. Then, one day, a young man stepped forward. He wasn't a knight or a brave warrior, but rather a slightly built young peasant lad, a tailor by trade. His name was Krak. He noted that the Dragon had a tremendous appetite. So he developed a plan. Krak took sheep skins and stitched them and filled them with pitch and tar. The Dragon took one look at the sheep and gobbled it. The monster exploded and wise young Krak was hailed as the people's savior. Krak and his descendents were the first rulers of Krak-ow. To this day, a gigantic bone can be seen suspended outside the Coronation Cathedral on Wawel Hill, and the people of Cracow point to as the last remains of the evil Dragon.



The Trumpeter of Cracow

One of the most beautiful and impressive is the Legend of the Trumpeter of Cracow. In the center of Krakow is a huge market square and, on one corner of the square stands Saint Mary's Church. In the taller of the St. Mary's two towers lives the Trumpeter. A trumpeter has stood guard in St. Mary's Tower for over 800 years, where every hour on the hour, a trumpet fanfare has been blown in honor of the Virgin Mary. Once, many years ago, Poland was attacked by the barbarian Tartar. The Tartars swept across the plain toward the city, and the only person who saw them advancing was the Trumpeter in his tall tower. To warn the townspeople, the Trumpeter began blowing his fanfare over and over, but, in the end he was shot through the neck by a Tartar bowman. He died as the arrow pieced his neck, on what the Poles call "the broken note." To this day,

every hour on the hour, a Trumpeter repeats the fan fare from St. Mary's church tower, but he breaks it off on the note where the original Trumpeter died, the "broken note" or the "hejnal" (hey-now). The noon-time *hejnał* is heard across Poland and abroad broadcast live by the Polish national Radio Station.

The Lajkonik

To commemorate the Tartar attack, each year the "Lajkonik" makes an appearance in the city. It is a character based on the old Tartar warriors and is colorful and fierce looking. He does not shoot arrows at the townsmen anymore, but instead this Tartar touches today's townspeople with his red baton, and – if he touches you – you'll receive an entire year's good luck!



St. Mary's Basilica is a Brick Gothic church re-built in the 14th century (originally built in the early 13th century), adjacent to the Main Market Square in Kraków, Poland. Standing 80 m (262 ft) tall, it is particularly famous for its wooden altarpiece carved by Veit Stoss (*Wit Stwosz*). The church is familiar to English-speaking readers from the 1929 book *The Trumpeter of Krakow* by Eric P. Kelly.

The **Wawel Cathedral**, also known as the **Cathedral Basilica of Sts. Stanisław and Vaclav**, is a church located on Wawel Hill in Kraków—Poland's national sanctuary. It has a 1,000-year history and was the traditional coronation site of Polish monarchs. Pope John Paul II offered his first Mass as a priest in the Crypt of the Cathedral on 2 November 1946. The main altar, was founded in 1650 by Bishop Piotr Gembicki and created by Giovanni Battista Gisleni. The altar painting of *Crucified Christ* by Marcin Blechowski is from the 17th century. Over the main altar stands a tall canopy of black marble supported by four pillars, designed by Giovanni Battista Trevano and Matteo Castelli. Underneath the canopy is placed a silver coffin of St. Stanisław after the previous one (donated in 1512 by King Sigismund the Old) was stolen by the Swedes in 1655.

The Wawel Cathedral has been the main burial site for Polish monarchs since the 14th century. As such, it has been significantly extended and altered over time as individual rulers have added multiple burial chapels.

Sigismund's Chapel is one of the most notable pieces of architecture in Kraków and perhaps "the purest example of Renaissance architecture outside Italy." Financed by King Sigismund I the Old, it was built in 1517-33 by Bartolommeo Berrecci, a Florentine Renaissance architect, who spent most of his career in Poland. A square-based chapel with a golden dome houses the tombs of its founder as well as of his children, King Sigismund II Augustus and Anna Jagiellonka.

The historic Salt Mine in Wieliczka is the only mining site in the world functioning continuously since the Middle Ages. Its original excavations are located on nine levels and extend for the total of about 300 kilometres: reaching the depth of 327 metres they illustrate all the stages of mining technology development over time.

The quotation comes from the justification for entering the Wieliczka Salt Mine on UNESCO's First World List of Cultural and Natural Heritage, on September 8, 1978 together with 11 other sites from around the world. Since times immemorial salt was the economic foundation of the state, it was used as a legal tender, replacing metal coins. Initially, salt was acquired from brine springs through heating the brine and the vaporisation of water. During the digging of the brine wells, a salt deposit was discovered, and its excavation with primitive tools began. The contemporary Polish monarchs quickly realised what value the white ore had and introduced a monopoly on the mining and even the distribution of salt. The traces of the first plant in which salt was manufactured from brine date back to the Middle Neolithic period (3,500 BC) and were discovered in the area where the town of Wieliczka was later created. Historical records demonstrate that Wieliczka was the largest salt-making centre in the Małopolska as early as in 10th-11th century, and it was known as Magnum Sal, or Great Salt.



At the end of the 13th century, the "Krakow Mines" company was formed, which included the Wieliczka and Bochnia salt mines along with local salt-boiling manufactures. The company functioned in this form for nearly 500 years, until the first partition of Poland (1772), and was the largest salt-production company in the Polish Commonwealth and one of the largest in Europe.

The salt mines of Krakow experienced their golden age between 16th and mid-17th century. In the period, the company employed about 2,000 miners, and production exceeded 30,000 tonnes. Under Austrian management (1772-1918) production was greatly increased, which resulted in the spatial development of the Wieliczka Salt Mine, mechanising the mining operation (steam and electric machines), employing professional engineering staff and the creation of the first tourist route for the public.

In 1913, a modern salt-boiling plant was installed in Wieliczka, which created a number of workplaces and prospects for the increase of production. However, extensive exploitation and neglecting current safeguarding work adversely affected the stability of the rock mass and the condition of the Mine. After the

Second World War, it was even planned to flood the Mine. In 1964, the mining of rock salt in Wieliczka was discontinued, and on June 30, 1996, the salt bed ceased to be exploited completely. At present, the picturesque mine excavations serve tourism, museum and health purposes.

The Miniature Park „The World of Dream” was officially opened on May 2007. Only in the Miniature Park we can go on a trip around the world – in just one day. We need several minutes to cross borders. The whole world covers an area of 45.000 m². There is a lot of a cleverly designed alleys leading up to another states and its monuments. In the Miniature Park are over 50 models of the most famous architectural wonders from all over the world, such as: the Acropolis Temple, the Colosseum, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, St Peter's Basilica, the Statue of Liberty, the Great Wall of China, the Eiffel Tower, the Triumphal Arc, the Big Ben, the Sphinx and the White House.

All the miniatures have been built at a scale of 1:25. This allows us to compare the height of individual structures. The Roman St Peter's Square is an exception - it has been built at a scale of 1:15 as the only model in Europe and the Venice complex – built at a scale of 1:10. The Venice complex has been built for a year on visitors eyes. It combines real and fantasy elements. The Venice complex is surrounded from three sides by a watercourse with a gondolas.

Auschwitz German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp (1940-1945)' was a network of Nazi German concentration and extermination camps built and operated in Polish areas annexed by Nazi Germany during the Second World War. It was the largest of the German concentration camps, consisting of Auschwitz I (the *Stammlager* or base camp); Auschwitz II-Birkenau (the *Vernichtungslager* or extermination camp); Auschwitz III-Monowitz, also known as Buna-Monowitz (a labor camp); and 45 satellite camps.

Auschwitz II-Birkenau was designated by Heinrich Himmler, who was the Reichsführer and Germany's Minister of the Interior, as the place of the "final solution of the Jewish question in Europe". From spring 1942 until the fall of 1944, transport trains delivered Jews to the camp's gas chambers from all over Nazi-occupied Europe. The camp's first commandant, Rudolf Höss, testified after the war at the Nuremberg Trials that up to three million people had died there a figure since revised to 1.1 million, around 90 percent of them Jews. Others deported to Auschwitz included 150,000 Poles, 23,000 Roma and Sinti, 15,000 Soviet prisoners of war, and tens of thousands of people of diverse nationalities.^[6] Those not killed in the gas chambers died of starvation, forced labor, lack of disease control, individual executions, and medical experiments.

On January 27, 1945, Auschwitz was liberated by Soviet troops, a day commemorated around the world as International Holocaust Remembrance Day. In 1947, Poland founded a museum on the site of Auschwitz I and II, which by 1994 had seen 22 million visitors—700,000 annually—pass through the iron gates crowned with the infamous motto, *Arbeit macht frei* ("work makes you free").

Selection process and genocide

By July 1942, the SS were conducting the infamous "selections," in which incoming Jews were divided into those deemed able to work, who were sent to the right and admitted into the camp, and those who were sent to the left and immediately gassed. Prisoners were transported from all over German-occupied Europe by rail, arriving in daily convoys. The group selected to die, about three-quarters of the total, included almost all children, women with children, all the elderly, and all those who appeared on brief and superficial inspection by an SS doctor not to be completely fit. Auschwitz II-Birkenau claimed more victims than any other German extermination camp, despite coming into use after all the others.

SS officers told the victims they were to take a shower and undergo delousing. The victims would undress in an outer chamber and walk into the gas chamber, which was disguised as a shower facility, complete with dummy shower heads. After the doors were shut, SS men would dump in the cyanide pellets via holes in the roof or windows on the side. In Auschwitz II-Birkenau, more than 20,000 people could be gassed and cremated each day. Despite the thick concrete walls of the gas chambers, screaming and moaning from within could be heard outside for 15 to 20 minutes. The belongings of the arrivals were seized by the SS and sorted in an area of the camp called "Canada,". Many of the SS at the camp enriched themselves by pilfering the confiscated property.

HOLLY CROS MOUNTAINS

Łysiec Mountain, commonly referred to as "Święty Krzyż" (Holy Cross) mountain was especially liked by witches ages ago. The folk legend has it that during their Sabbaths witches practiced witchcraft and organized hellish parties and dances. However, it is the remains of a stone heathen ring surrounding the top of the mountain and dating back to around 9th century.

Nowadays "Święty Krzyż" is famous in Poland and abroad for the Benedictine monastery and its Relics of the Holy Cross Tree. The monastery, now hosted by the Missionary Oblates, can boast of its 1000 years' history. Visitors and pilgrims can see a Classicist church dating back to the 18th century and the chapel of the

Oleśnicki Family containing Holy Cross Relics and a sepulchral crypt in its vaults. It is worth visiting the Mission Museum of the Missionary Oblates of the Virgin Mary as well as seeing the exhibition of the Świętokrzyski National Park. Tired visitors may try the monastery cuisine and drop in an old pharmacy, now a café, not only to have a cup of coffee or tea, but also buy traditional herbal medicines.

Krzemionki, also **Krzemionki Opatowskie** - Neolithic and early Bronze Age complex of mines of the Upper Jurassic (Oxfordian) banded flints, located in the eastern Poland near Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski. It is the biggest complex of the prehistoric flint mines in Europe.

The mining area is 4,5 km long and 25-180 m wide and covered 78.5 ha. There are above 4000 mine shafts with 2 - 9 m depth. Some of the shafts are connected by short adits. Adits are 55 - 120 cm height and their complete length is about 4.5 km. The rare Neolithic pictures occur on the walls of some adits.

The flints were exploited between 4th millennium – middle of the 2nd millennium BC (3000-1600 B.C. ^[4]) in the complex of the underground mines by people of the Funnel Beaker, Globular Amphora and Mierzanowice Cultures. Banded flints from Krzemionki were used mainly for the manufacture of numerous axes and chisels. Abundant quantities of these tools were traded as far away as 660 km from the Krzemionki. Main period of exploitation was 2500-2000 B.C. The flint mining in Krzemionki began to decline at least since 1800-1600 B.C.

In next centuries the mining area was only sporadically visited. The mines were discovered in 1922 by geologist Jan Samsonowicz. Archeological investigations started in 1923. In 1967 the Krzemionki mines were stated as archeological reserve and in 1995 as natural reserve. The underground tourist route is 465 m long and has 11.5 m at the deepest point.

BAŁTÓW

Since seventies of 20th century dinosaur tracks have been found in the Jurassic rocks exposed in the Holy Cross Mountains. During Late Jurassic (about 155 million years ago) the north eastern margin of the Holy Cross Mountains was flooded by a warm, tropical sea. The geologists interpreted the environment of the present-day Bałtów region as shallow water sea, rich in corals, brachiopods, gastropods, echinoids and ammonites. Supposedly, in the near distance was a land where dinosaurs dominated.

Limestones exposed in Bałtów originated in the environmental conditions of the Jurassic time. These rocks, therefore, contain fossil remnants of animals of the Jurassic age. Numerous and well preserved pieces of plants were also found,

which is a unique example within the Upper Jurassic rocks of Europe. Gerard Gierliński, an enthusiastic 'dinosaur pathfinder', began his research in this area expecting, that in the Bałtów surroundings some authentic dinosaurs tracks can be found. Soon after, the popular newspapers and also scientific periodics informed about first findings of tracks of the Late Jurassic dinosaurs – Allosaurus, Stegosaurus, Camptosaurus. These discoveries inspired strongly the local community and became a chance for its tourist oriented development. Initially, giant, natural scaled models of the dinosaurs were planned to be located in places, where scientists discovered their authentic tracks. Finally, the local enthusiasts started to plan the park, first in Poland of such a type, the main attraction of which were the dinosaur models, both of these found in the Holy Cross region, and also their cousins from all over the world. Thanks to creativity, work and energy of many people, in April 2004 the construction of the Bałtów Jurassic Park was initiated. The Park was organized on a completely wild area of the Kamienna oxbow lake stands and was ready after a very short time. It was opened on 7th August 2004.

The region of Kielce, the northern part of Little Poland, is situated between the rivers Vistula and Pilica. **Świętokrzyskie Mountains** are a number of latitudinally stretching ranges. The most important are: Łysogóry – the central range with the highest hills: Łysica (612 m asl.) and Łysa Góra (595 m asl)

Kielce, the biggest town in the northern Little Poland, is the capital of the Świętokrzyskie Province. Its characteristic feature is the substantial difference of ground levels – from 260 to 400 m asl. Within the boundaries of Kielce, there is a greater variety of geological formations than in any other European city. A picturesque location of the City at the foot of the Europe's oldest mountains - the Holy Cross Mountains - is a true asset of the City. A hilly landscape of the city is dominated by large woods, nature and landscape reserves and attractive water reservoirs. The Świętokrzyskie Region boasts clean air and is called the lungs of Poland; 66% of its area is under protection because of special natural values. A great asset of Kielce is numerous picturesque recreational areas and 5 natural reserves spreading within city limits. A good condition of the natural environment and rich mineral water resources (3rd largest in Poland) contributed to development of spa and rehabilitation facilities. Region is treasured in fossils of prehistoric animals. Footsteps and part of skeleton of the earliest Tetrapod from Devon (the first animal which went to the land from the sea) are the most famous discovery which was showed this year in the most

important magazines all around the world. This event is placed around 10 km from Kielce.

- **The Palace of Cracow Bishops (National Museum), Kielce, Poland**

Description: The Palace of Cracow Bishops, constructed on Bishop Jakub Zadzika's initiative in the years 1637 - 1641 is a brilliant and valuable example of Polish residences from the Waza epoch. Although there were certain redecorations made in 19th C., the palace maintained its original shape, elevation decorations and its original interior decor. Since 1971 it has been a branch of the National Museum. In its rooms on the ground floor it houses a gallery of Polish painting, presenting among others valuable paintings of our best painters from the period of the 17th to the 20th century: J. Malczewski, S. Wyspianski, J. Kossak, A. Gierymski, S. Witkiewicz. The gallery ranked sixth in the country. On the representative first floor you can admire valuable 17th and 18th-century paintings, furniture, tapestry and other arts, creating the atmosphere characteristic of a contemporary Magnate house. In the rooms there are unique, richly polychromed beam-framed floors, frescos, marble fireplaces and portals. The most beautiful are especially plafonds made at Thomas Dolabelli workshop presenting the fire of Moscow in 1612, the reception of the Swedish legates in 1635 and the trial of the Arians in 1638. In the palace you can also see a marvellous gallery of decorative art., the military objects exhibition, the Marshal Józef Piłsudski Sanctuary and temporary exhibitions.

- **Cathedral of the Assumption of Virgin Mary**

In 1171 the Bishop Gedeon founded a collegiate church under the invocation of the Assumption located on Wzgórze Zamkowe. It was a Romanesque-style temple. It was rebuilt and extended several times throughout ages to finally resemble an early Baroque three-aisle basilica. In the interiors of the Cathedral it is worth seeing the Gothic triptych, referred to as "the triptych of Łagiewniki", depicting a crowning ceremony of the Mother of God and the baroque main altar designed by Fontana. There you can also find a painting depicting the Gracious Mother of God of Kielce with her Child. Tourist may also see the cathedral treasury and descent into the underground crypt of the bishops of

- **The Museum of Toys and Play in Kielce**

The Museum of Toys and Play was established in 1979. In June 2006 it received a new seat and its name. The most precious part of its collection constitutes historical toys and, among them, dolls dating back to the turn of the 19th and

20th centuries and 20 th century lead soldiers, a German miniature sewing machine, an overhead projector, doll rooms, doll furniture sets as well as foreign and Polish building blocks. The oldest exhibit of the museum is a German wax doll dating back to the end of the 18th century. The Museum also houses such interesting permanent exhibitions as A Merry Company, Tea-time, An Exhibition of Teddy Bears, In the Grandmother's Attic, An Electric Railway Toy, In the World of Automobiles, An Exhibition of Lego Building Blocks,

Kadzielnia

A strict reserve of inanimate nature, area 0.6 ha, established in 1962. Situated in the centre of Kielce.

Paradise Cave is a typical travertine cave originated in calcium carbonate. Although small - it differs among polish caves thanks to rich and well-maintained travertine formations. It belongs the very few caves that are illuminated by an optical fibre and opened for tourists under guide's protection. The length of the tourist route is **180 metres**. The tourists enter an artificial underground passage which plays the role of a lock protecting the cave's microclimate. After 21 m they come to a special **Entrance Cavern**. In the upper part of the cavern, there was a narrow cleft through which the discoverers squeezed to the cave. The next one, **Cavern of Rubble**, is the largest chamber of. Here the tourist can see huge boulders which fell off the roof and were later covered with dripstone. A beautiful travertine column called **Harp** deserves special attention. In **Column Chamber** glamorous travertine columns rise up to meet stalactites suspended from the roof, numerous fossils corals cling to the walls as well as small lakes, sinter bowls and rice-fields are scattered here and there. The great rarity are loose formations "Cave Pearls". The bridge over one of the lakes takes the visitors to a **Chamber of Stalactites** where there are hundreds of stalactites at various formation stages. Their number reaches 200 per square metre. Paradise Cave was first discovered in 1963/64. It is under protection as a natural reserve

Royal Castle in Chęciny

Chęciny is a town located relatively close to Kielce on the route Warszawa – Kraków. The town underwent development owing to its deposits of precious metals such as lead, silver or copper. The picturesque panorama dominated by a Gothic castle soaring over the town and erected around 1300 on a high mountain referred to as Zamkowa Mountain. There you can meet the ghost of the Queen Bona or watch one of a large number of knight tournaments held in the castle. The historic town also has a lot of other monuments of architecture.

It is worth visiting, among others, an early Baroque cloister of the Benedictine Sisters, a church and monastery of the Franciscans founded by the king Casimir the Great in 1368, a parish church erected in the first half of the 14th century as well as a Renaissance-style former inn building referred to as Niemczówka. It is worth noting that Chęciny used to be a town inhabited by numerous people of Jewish origin, which was reflected in a late-Renaissance synagogue erected in the first half of the 17th century and a Jewish cemetery.

Legends

A very popular legend about the origin of Kielce is connected with Mieszko, the son of Boleslaus the Brave. Over 900 years ago the place where the capital of the region is now located was covered by vast forests, abounding in game and attracting hunters. Prince Mieszko was one of them. Chasing an animal, he left his company, reached an unknown clearing, and, fatigued, fell asleep in the grass. He dreamt that he was attacked by brigands who wanted to pour poison into his mouth. He was losing his strength when he saw Saint Adalbert in his dream. The saint raised his crozier and drew on the ground a winding line which turned into a stream. The prince woke up and saw a spring nearby. The water was as clear and tasty as it was in his dream. Mieszko recovered his strength and quickly found his companions. When he was leaving the clearing, he noticed the huge white tusks of an unknown animal, perhaps a boar. The prince announced he would build a town with a church in that place. Soon St Adalbert's church was erected in the clearing, the stream whose water returned strength to Mieszko was called Silnica ('Strong Water'), while the name of the settlement was Kielce, to commemorate the mysterious tusks ('kieł' in Polish).

Other legends claim that the town owes its name to the founder, belonging to the noble family of Kielcz. Some derive the name Kielce from the Celts, who stayed in this area during their wandering around Europe. There is also a hypothesis that in Old Polish the word reflected the jobs of people who used to live here and who were busy making mud huts, or, according to another theory, making iron tips for arrows and spears. Some even connect Kielce with the production of tar, which in our ancestors' dialect was called 'pkiel', while 'pkielce' simply meant a settlement of tar makers.

It seems that it is impossible to give a certain origin to the name of Kielce. You can believe the old legends or not, but it is good to know them.

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