

Learning to Sew.....in Poland, in Polish

On the 10th of August 2025, I flew to Krakow, Poland to complete a sewing course as enabled by the Henry Morris Memorial Trust. I had been planning this trip for about a year and saved up money for transport, accommodation and subsistence whilst I was there through a babysitting job. I was thrilled to receive money from the Henry Morris Memorial Trust to be able to complete a course whilst I was there. This was important to me to test my Polish language skills as I had never used Polish as a language of instruction before – that I was able to do this and independently navigate Polish systems has really boosted my confidence. Additionally, I feel as though it put me in touch with my roots as all my great-grandparents were small business owners and artisans in and around Krakow, supporting another small business and learning a craft in Krakow made me feel very connected to them. Finally, I was excited to be able to start building my own connections and network in Krakow - as after this experience moving there in the future now seems more possible and enticing than ever before.

My parents dropped me off at Stansted airport where I caught a flight to Krakow airport in Poland. From the airport, I took the train to Krakow central station, from where it was a short walk to my accommodation. I stayed at the PKP Krakow youth hostel as it was the most affordable place that allowed 16 year olds to stay alone – additionally I was excited by the prospect of meeting similar young travellers in the same situation. Previously to going to Poland, I had researched courses before I left for Poland and found 2 potential options for sewing courses. As neither needed to be prebooked long in advance, upon arrival I went to both places and after talking to the staff and what each course was like, as well as getting a feel for the place I decided to complete my course at Slow Fashion Cafe, Krakow.

I was struck by the creativity and welcoming nature of the Slow Fashion Cafe. It was located roughly a half hour walk away from my hostel and offered an ongoing programme throughout the week where people of all ages and levels came to work on their projects in various slots with instructors walking around and helping everybody.

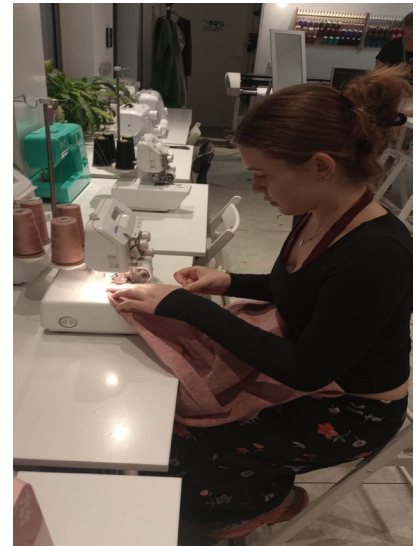


The Workshop

I was attracted by the flexibility of this course as I was also keen to pack other tourist attractions into my schedule, some of which were only available for certain times. I booked a programme which was 6 slots, which were each 2.5 hours long for the few

days I was there, you could do up to 3 slots a day. The cost of the course was 620 pln (£124) which was mostly covered by the Henry Morris scholarship fund.

On the first day of the course, I practiced basic stitching techniques and patterns. Prior to the course I had some self taught amateur sewing practice, however I was keen to learn 'properly' with adequate technique, hence I chose a sewing course. Over the course I sewed some elasticated wide leg trousers, a matching camisole and a kimono. I also learnt how to use a sewing machine correctly, an overlocker and specialist steaming iron, as well as many practical sewing skills.



Practising different stitches



Cutting the pattern



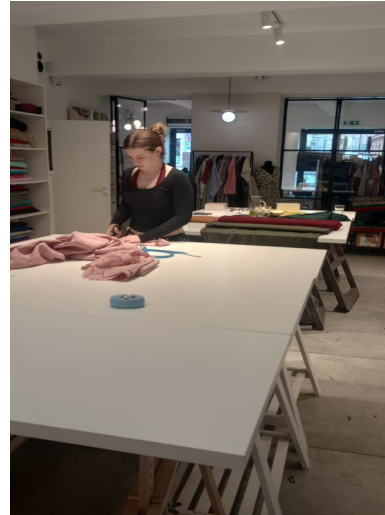
Pinning and defining darts

Whilst I was enamored by the sewing, at the beginning of the course I was nervous about navigating the language alone. Some Polish has always been spoken in my home and I studied for the Polish GCSE last year, however this was mostly from a textbook and independently communicating to somebody who only spoke Polish was new to me. Thankfully, at the start of the course all the instructors were very pleasant and I instantly felt at ease, this calmness helped me talk to and understand the general sewing instructions and conversation fluently. However, I struggled to understand any technical language as I had never been exposed to those words before and am not a native speaker. All the instructors were very understanding and receptive to my questions – the technical language was also not a major barrier as it was a beginners course so all the steps were explained in detail and therefore I was able to infer a lot from context.

Some of my sessions were with an American girl a similar age to me called Michelle, who was starting her gap year in Poland. We started chatting in the sessions and even managed to go around Wawel castle – one major tourist sight – together as we had booked for similar times. This kind of network building and fun experiences were exactly what I hoped to gain through this scholarship.



Trying on my kimono



Altering after measuring

At the end of my time alone in Poland my family flew out to join me for our family holiday and we went to visit some more distant family in a Polish village – upon telling them about my sewing course they informed us that sewing was actually in my blood as my great aunt was the village seamstress.

Overall, I am very grateful to have had such a transformative experience and would like to thank the Henry Morris Memorial Trust for making it possible. Reflecting on my experience I feel excited by the future – specifically at the prospect of living in Poland, seeing Krakow independently as a young adult has made love the city and really be able to picture myself living there. I have also developed a new confidence in my language abilities, yet another barrier removed.



Me, leaving Poland in the trousers I made; and vowing to return to learn more!