

The 2008 International Conference of Physics Students

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Held in Krakow, Poland, this year's International Conference of Physics Students (ICPS) had over 400 attendees from across the globe. Although participants were mainly European, students came from as far as Brazil, Taiwan, and Sudan to partake in the event, which kicked off with a lecture on superconductivity by an esteemed university faculty member. Student lectures dominated daytime activities, and covered almost every topic of physics, from gravitational waves to noctilucent clouds. The twenty-minute lectures were different than the typical conference talk; as they were given by students, they were set at levels understandable by those with basic physics backgrounds. A poster session with comparable material was also scheduled, enabling one-on-one interaction between students.



*National party participants,
Polish folk dancers*

In addition to the purely academic activities, the conference provided an introduction to a variety of different cultures. The hosts led a city tour of Krakow, which was followed by a Polish evening, where students could sample a variety of Polish food and drink. The following day, a national party was held, where each country was responsible for providing native food and drinks, and a national song/dance if so desired. The three-person American contingent supplied participants with s'mores, funnel cake, fajitas, and chips and salsa. On either side of the American table were Finns and Egyptians; the former provided reindeer for consumption (labeled with a picture of Rudolph), while the latter put on a stunning belly dancing display.



Castle on Wawel Hill

The city of Krakow was far from dull. A day's journey into the city provided views of the numerous Catholic churches, reminders of the city's native Pope John Paul II, as well as a castle, Polish folk dancers, and Hotel Copernicus. The city was alive throughout the entire night; even at 4 a.m. kebab stalls had twenty-minute waits, and McDonald's teemed with customers. A mall near the train station made one feel as if they were back in the United States, while several minutes away were stalls selling Polish crafts. Krakow, at an intersection between east and west, provides the best of both worlds.

During one day of the conference, students took planned excursions to other sites, including a salt mine and nearby mountain. Almost half of all students traveled to Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest concentration camp and extermination camp of the Nazi era. Stark reminders of reality, mementos of those interned were displayed, from human hair to named suitcases to artificial limbs. The tour led students from barracks in the sullen brick buildings of Auschwitz to unheated stables, used as barracks, where thousands froze in Birkenau.

ICPS 2008 facilitated not only the discussion of physics amongst students from across the globe, but enabled a heightened degree of cultural understanding to be achieved by all of those in attendance. ICPS 2009, to be held in Split, Croatia, and ICPS 2010, to be held in Gratz, Austria, will hopefully continue the legacy that recent conferences began, and provide eye-opening experiences for all participants.