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Cracow cafe society

YOUR EYES take a couple of minutes to adjust to the gloomy interior of Kawiarnia Jama Michalika, a remarkable cafe in the heart of Cracow. As you wait for the rather taciturn waitress to seat you, the art-deco interior of this Polish gem reveals itself as something of a riot of colour.

This is not the original interior. The cafe, which opened in 1895, was made over in 1908. At that time the cafe was at the centre of Polish culture, visited by leading lights of the Young Poland movement.

They gathered to gossip over a cup of coffee or a glass of absinthe, the more artistically inclined of them sketching the caricatures that still decorate the walls.

This creative elite also established a celebrated literary cabaret, *Zielony Balonik*, or *Little Green Balloon*, here in 1905.

Today the flamboyance of the belle époque might have passed, and intellectuals might be a bit thin on the ground, but the cafe is still a refuge for locals attracted by its bohemian legacy and for tourists keen to discover the real Cracow.

A further endorsement to

A further enticement is the menu, more afternoon tea than evening meal, although more substantial fare is available if required.

Fabulous cakes are perfectly complemented by Jama Michalika's signature coffee, roasted in-house, and our children had to fight us for their share of the delicious home-made ice cream on offer.

It's an ideal place for families, as the unique interior is protected in part by a no-smoking policy, something rarely encountered in Poland.

Visit with plenty of time on your hands: you'll need it both to fully appreciate the place and to allow for service that could at best be called laid-back.

ELEANOR FITZSIMONS

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