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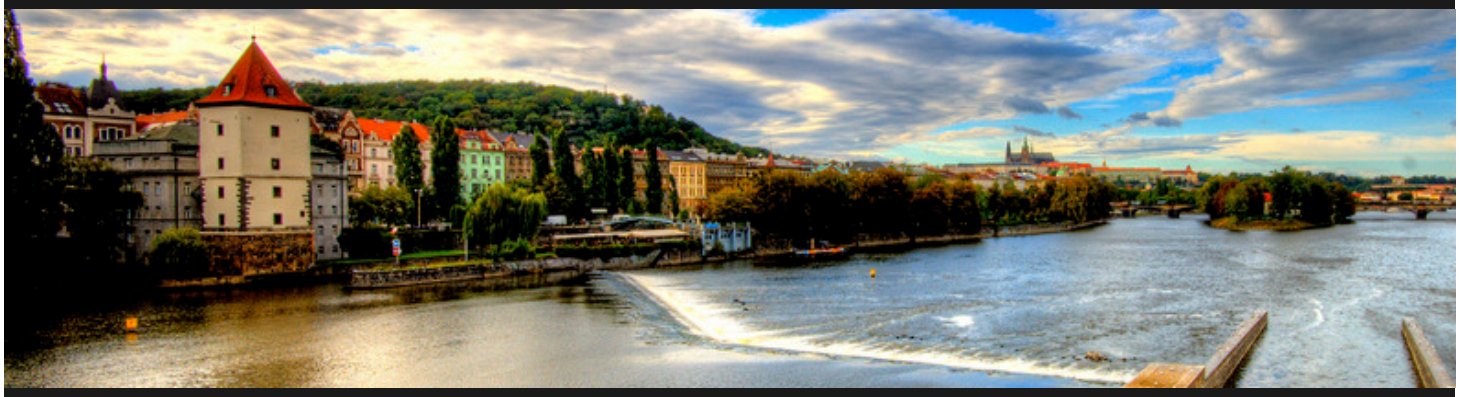

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Prague's Best-Kept Secrets

Prague, 1 Day

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Guide Description

AUTHOR NOTE: While it may seem that the guidebook industry has exposed everything Prague has to offer, this fairytale city still has many surprises up its sleeve. On your visit, try to balance tourist-ridden hotspots with out-of-the-way places patronized by locals. Spend a day outside at the impressive Prague Zoo, get a glimpse into Prague's immigrant culture at SAPA, and have some quality cocktails or a tasty meal without paying tourist mark-ups. There's even a fantastic option for vegetarians, a group that's not well represented in the Czech Republic.

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Itinerary Overview

things to do
restaurants
hotels
nightlife

Day 1 - Prague

Prague Zoo
Prague's most underrated attraction

Asia Trade Center SAPA
Large Vietnamese Market

Hapu
A friendly space serving incredible cocktails

Lehká Hlava
Secret Garden

Passepartout
Handsome yet unpretentious French food

Mozaika
A true mosaic

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Day 1 - Prague

QUICK NOTE

contact:
tel: 420 296 112 111 / 420 296 112 230
fax: 420 233 556 704
http://www.zoopraha.cz

location:
U Trojskeho zamku 3/120
Prague Bohemia 17100

1 Prague Zoo

DESCRIPTION: Founded in 1931, the Prague Zoo is now one of the best in Europe, housing 5000 animals of 650 species. Among the pavilions, the Indonesian Jungle transports you into a fresh tangle of greenery and the Monkey Island allows visitors to get up close and personal with primates. Although there were problems in 2002, when a major flood killed many of the animals and destroyed zoo enclosures, the zoo has since recovered and is, again, a thriving zoological garden. But animals aren't all this zoo has to offer, it lies in a lush river valley and boasts spectacular views from atop a rocky cliff. Few city zoos offer such impressive surroundings. © NileGuide

contact:
tel: +420 244 092 416
http://www.sapa.biz

location:
Libušská 319/126
Prague Bohemia 142 00

Asia Trade Center SAPA

Sapa Vietnam

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:
To get to SAPA, take the metro to Zelivskeho or Depo Hostivar, then take the 208 bus to the "Tiskarska" stop, which is only about 50 meters from the main entrance. Because SAPA sells wholesale goods, visitors are sometimes asked to show a trade license (Zivnostensky List) upon entering. This is usually only an issue if you come by car, as anyone buying wholesale would need to transport goods to their place of business. Owing to this, the main gate by the bus stop sometimes has barriers. However, if you walk up the road alongside the SAPA market complex, near a field, you can enter through a barrier-free gate without any problem. Don't let this information deter you from going to Sapa: it is practically unheard-of for visitors to actually be turned away.

DESCRIPTION: Many people don't realize that the Czech Republic has a substantial Vietnamese population. Many Vietnamese immigrants speak fluent Czech and run clothing shops or grocery stores within the city. The main retail center for Prague's Vietnamese community lies in the south of Prague. Called SAPA, after a northern Vietnamese tribe, this area offers a glimpse into an entirely different face of Prague. As you enter the area, a welcoming message is inscribed in both Czech and Vietnamese. Here, you can haggle for handmade items and very cheap clothes. Additionally, you can find a wide range of traditional Vietnamese ingredients such as lemongrass and fish sauce. While in "Little Hanoi," notice the pagoda-like temple and enjoy the Vietnamese pop music blaring from some massive speakers. Most of all, though, don't miss the

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chance to enjoy some cheap and delicious Vietnamese culinary specialties like pho, meat and noodles swimming in a light broth. © NileGuide

contact:
tel: 420 222 720 158

location:
Orlická 8
Prague 130 00

hours:
Mon-Sat 18-2

2 Hapu

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:
The menu doesn't list the "Mojito" as one of its drinks but they're more than willing to make you a fantastic version of this classic Cuban cocktail using authentic Havana Club rum. If you like mint and lime, Hapu's Mojito is definitely worth a taste. Other favorites include the Margarita and Gin Gimlet.

DESCRIPTION: Prague cocktail bars are frequently overpriced, aloof, and inexact. Hapu, though, is none of these things. Hidden in a corner of Vinohrady, this small, artsy bar offers some of the tastiest cocktails in Prague at well below central prices. The interior is small, decorated with mismatched couches and local artwork. This creates a mood that is simultaneously lively and relaxed. The friendly service and delightful cocktails make it the type of place you want to return to time and time again. As it is quite small, you may have to share a table with strangers but the clientele consists largely of ex-pats and English-speaking Czechs, meaning it's a great place to meet locals you can actually talk to. When it comes to cocktails in Prague, there is nowhere more welcoming and satisfying than Hapu. © NileGuide

contact:
tel: +420 222 220 665
http://www.lehkahlava.cz

location:
Boršov 2
Prague 110 00

hours:
Mon-Fri 11:30am-11:30pm,
Sat-Sun noon-11:30pm

3 Lehká Hlava

Lehka Hlava

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:
On weekdays, between 11:30 and 15:00, Lehká Hlava serves a special lunch menu for 108 Kč.

DESCRIPTION: Keep a clear head, a full belly and a healthy outlook on life with a meal at Lehká Hlava (which means clear head). This vegetarian restaurant has quickly become popular amongst herbivores and carnivores alike, thanks to the variety of menu options, fresh ingredients and creative cooking. The menu ranges from pastas to quesadillas to curry; especially notable is the burrito and the pasta with smoked tofu. Reservations recommended. © NileGuide

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contact:
tel: 420 222 513 340
www.passepartout.cz

location:
Americká 20
Prague 130 00

4 Passepartout

Passepartout

DESCRIPTION: A small, candlelit restaurant in the French style, Passepartout is set oustide of the center, meaning you won't be paying tourist prices. The design is simultaneously clean and intimate, with a rich brown leather bar. French-accented servers with fluent English are attentive but careful not to interrupt a private moment. The menu is big enough to offer something for everyone but small enough to provide fresh, succulent dishes in which the passion is apparent. Before dessert, take some time to linger over a fine cheese platter and a bottle of wine. Then, for a sweet finale, the Pistachio Soufflé is a house specialty and a luscious one at that. © NileGuide

contact:
tel: +420 224 253 011
http://www.restaurantmozaika.cz

location:
Nitranská 13
Prague 130 00

hours:
Mon-Fri 11:30am-12am; Sat 12pm-12am; Sun 4pm-12am

5 Mozaika

Photo courtesy of Mozaika

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:
Mozaika's chefs frequently offer new specials; be sure to check the card for temporary tasty items.

DESCRIPTION: Normal 0 false false false EN-US X-NONE X-NONE /* Style Definitions */ table.MsoNormalTable {mso-style-name:"Table Normal"; mso-tstyle-rowband-size:0; mso-tstyle-colband-size:0; mso-style-noshow:yes; mso-style-priority:99; mso-style-qformat:yes; mso-style-parent:""; mso-padding-alt:0cm 5.4pt 0cm 5.4pt; mso-para-margin-top:0cm; mso-para-margin-right:0cm; mso-para-margin-bottom:10.0pt; mso-para-margin-left:0cm; line-height:115%; mso-pagination:widow-orphan; font-size:11.0pt; font-family:"Calibri","sans-serif"; mso-ascii-font-family:Calibri; mso-ascii-theme-font:minor-latin; mso-fareast-font-family:"Times New Roman"; mso-fareast-theme-font:minor-fareast; mso-hansi-font-family:Calibri; mso-hansi-theme-font:minor-latin;} Contemporary cooking in an upscale atmosphere makes Mozaika a great choice for a relaxed yet refined meal. You'll have a choice from American (burger); Italian (fusilli with spicy sausage) or French (duck breast) just to name a few of the unique creations on offer. Competent staff and a fashionable interior add to the enjoyment. Reservations recommended. © NileGuide

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Prague Snapshot

Local Info

The Czech Republic lies at the heart of Central Europe and at its center is the beautiful and historic city of Prague. With a population of some 1.3 million residents, the city lies on either side of the Vltava River in the middle of Bohemia that is one of the three historic Czech territories; the others being Moravia and Silesia. The city has seven"chapter divisions" or districts.

North and Western Suburbs

This area is mainly residential and parkland, which encompasses Stromovka, the city's largest park. Originally a hunting ground, Stromovka is now filled with many top attractions including the Vystaviste Exhibition Grounds, the Prumyslovy Palace, the Planetarium, and the Lapidarium.

A walk to the west of the park brings visitors to the Royal Summer Palace(Letohrádek královny Anny), a neo-Gothic building where the National Museum stores some of its treasures.

To the south of Stromovka lies Letna Park. A walk farther south brings one to a plateau overlooking the main city and river. Here, you will see the large Metronome that replaced the monument to Stalin—the largest in the world, which was destroyed on the orders of Krushchev in 1962. Other places of interest are the National Technical Museum and the National Gallery Collection of Modern& Contemporary Art. Walks through the residential areas will expose you to many styles of architecture here.

Hradcany

Situated on the hill overlooking Prague, Hradcany is made up of Prague Castle, St Vitus Cathedral and the Strahov Monastery —all places that are steeped in history. The Army Museum, the Royal Gardens and the Toy Museum are also nearby.

St Vitus' Cathedral was commissioned by Charles IV(1316-1378) and its foundation was laid in 1344. However, work on it went on for nearly 600 years before being finalized in 1929, which means that the architecture is from many different periods and in different styles. Attractions inside include the crown jewels, the crypt and the South Tower. The Strahov Monastery was founded in 1140 by the Premonstratensian Order, although its present day baroque appearance dates from the late-17th and 18th centuries.

Mala Strana

Covering the area just below Hradcany and bordering the river, Mala Strana is just across Charles Bridge from the main city. Now home to many foreign embassies occupying a number of buildings built by the Catholic nobility, the area is full of palaces, gardens and baroque churches including the Church of St. Nicholas(Sv. Mikulas). Open daily, this is an example of Prague baroque architecture; it was built between 1702 and 1753 by Christoph Dientzenhofer and later also worked on by his son. Frequent concerts and recitals(both at lunchtime and in the evenings) are held here featuring the works of Mozart.

Josefov

Prague's Jewish Quarter can be reached by a short walk from Wenceslas Square or by taking the metro to Staromestska, Line A.

Dating back to at least the 13th century, this area is rich in history. Places to visit include the Jewish Cemetery, its five synagogues, the Jewish State Museum and the Jewish Ceremonial Hall with its Hebrew clock dating from the 15th century. The narrow cobbled streets lend a unique atmosphere to the area, especially at night. The Kafka Museum is located on the border of Josefov and Stare Mesto.

Stare Mesto

Prague's Old Town is centered around Old Town Square, the Jan Hus Monument and the Old Town Clock Tower featuring its astronomical clock dating back to the 15th century. The Old Town Hall is open daily. It is only a short walk away from Wenceslas Square.

There are several churches of note here including the Church of Our Lady Before Tyn as well as courtyards and numerous cafés, bars and restaurants catering to every taste.

Nove Mesto

This is Prague's main commercial and business district. It is based around Wenceslas Square at the top of which is the National Museum and the two main commercial streets—Na Prikope and Narodni. Running from these streets are many smaller streets and courtyards. Hotels, bars and restaurants abound in this area.

Walking along Legerova or Ke Karlovu(where you will find the Dvorak Museum) will bring you to the Police Museum from where you can take a walk along the top of the Botic Valley towards the river.

Vysehrad and the Eastern Suburbs

Centered upon the ancient rocky fortress of Vysehrad(the Republic's most-revered landmark) and containing the Vysehrad Cemetery, a Romanesque rotunda and the Gothic church of St. Peter and Paul, this area stretches to the working-class suburb of Zizkov. It is home to the TV Tower(from which you can enjoy panoramic views of Prague) and the ancient Zizkov Hill, atop which stands a statue of Jan Zizka(a 15th century army general) and the mausoleum in which the remains of the three Communist presidents of the Republic and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier can be found. The suburb of Vinohrady contains Prague's most modern church, the Church of the Most Sacred Heart of Our Lord(Kostel Nejsvětějšího srdce Páně), which was built in 1928.
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History

The Czech Republic is a Central European country(consisting of the historical regions of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia), which has been inhabited since some of the earliest days of human settlement in Europe.

It was in the 5th century AD that the forefathers of its present inhabitants settled in the region and around the year 868 AD that Prince Borivoj of the Premyslid family became ruler- his dynasty laying the foundation of the Czech state. In around 870 AD, Prague Castle was built atop a hill overlooking the Vltava river.

Perhaps the most famous early ruler was the Catholic Duke Wenceslas I(903-935 AD), who became the Patron Saint of Bohemia but who is more well known today as the subject of a Christmas carol.

With the death of Wenceslas III in 1306, the Premyslid dynasty was succeeded in 1310 by the House of Luxemburg and in

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1346, Charles IV became the Czech King. Being Holy Roman Emperor, Charles made Prague his capital, building many great buildings including St. Vitus Cathedral and Hradcany Castle(Prague Castle), as well as establishing Charles University(Univerzita Karlova v Praze)—the first University in Central Europe. After Charles' death, came the Hussite Wars which meant 15 years of religious conflict.

In 1526, the Hapsburg dynasty succeeded to the throne but this only resulted in further conflicts including the Thirty Years War(1618-1648) that resulted in the death of an estimated third of the country's population, and a decline in the usage and spread of the Czech language.

However, in the period 1784-1848, there was, despite the efforts of the Hapsburgs, a revival of the Czech nation; the language was standardised, the Industrial Revolution arrived, and many great Czech leaders like Frantisek Palacky emerged.

After the Great War in Europe in 1918, the Allies were persuaded to declare a new state of Czechoslovakia comprising Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia and Slovakia. However, under the Munich Agreement in 1938, the British and other European powers agreed to the annexation of Czech territories by the Germans under Adolf Hitler. After the Nazi domination during the Second World War(1939-1945), the Czechs then found themselves under Communist control as Soviet troops swept into the country in May 1945.

Elections were held in 1946 with the communists winning 38% of the vote, and in 1948 they seized power under Klement Gottwald with the support of the Soviet Union, virtually eliminating all opposition. All land and industry was nationalized with the aim of making Czechoslovakia a supplier of heavy industrial equipment and arms to the Eastern Bloc.

Unhappy with the depressed state of the country, a new Communist party was formed under the leadership of Alexander Dubcek who tried to establish socialism with a human face in what is now known as the Prague Spring. In August 1968 however, the Soviet Union and its allies invaded the country resulting in an even more depressed state which lasted for a further 21 years- economic reforms were reversed and over a half million Party members were expelled.

After the momentous events of late 1989 within the Soviet Bloc, police violence against a legal student demonstration in Prague in November that year(themasakr, as it became known) heralded the fall of Communism in Czechoslovakia. On the 28th of December, Mr Dubcek became Chairman of the Federal Assembly, and the next day, Vaclav Havel, a leading Czech writer and playwright, became President. A coalition government was formed in June 1990 and, after three years of debate and argument with the main Slovak parties, Parliament gave the required 3/5 majority to terminate the Federation. On January 1, 1993, the Czech and Slovak Republics went their separate ways.
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Hotel Insights

Since the Velvet Revolution in late 1989 and the opening up of its borders, the Czech Republic- and Prague in particular- has seen an enormous explosion in tourism resulting in major building and renovation programs to accommodate the influx of leisure and business visitors.

With its luxurious 5-star hotels, one-room apartments in private houses, country houses and converted castles, budget accommodation andbotels, Prague can now begin to rank itself as one of the best cities for people to visit with accommodation available to suit a wide variety of tastes and budgets. With the great increase in the number of rooms available, there is now accommodation to be had at any time of the year- even at the last minute(although, as always, it is advisable to book in advance).

North and Western Suburbs

The North and Western suburbs of Prague are the place to go if you want to be able to explore the bustling, main part of the city by day but return to a quiet neighborhood at night. Not to worry however, despite being a little ways off the beaten tourist track, these areas are accessible by public transportation to the center. One option for those looking for a fancy, quiet and relaxing accommodation can try Crowne Plaza Prague, where you will find all the comforts of home. The Hotel Wienna is another comfortable, quiet option offering horseback riding and tennis, that won't be quite so hard on your wallet. Another affordable, no frills option is the Hotel Pyramida, just a short distance from Castle Hill. For a more down home, rustic feeling, Pension Villa Maria will make you feel right at home. They also organize free airport and train station pick-ups along with day trips out of the city.

Hradcany

One of the oldest districts of Prague, Hradcany is home to Prague Castle and with its cobblestone streets is steeped in history, charm and things to do. To get the real historical feel of the area, the Hotel U Krale Karla is a great choice. Located in a former Benedictine structure, this building has been around since before the 17th century. The Grand Hotel Evropa is another landmark hotel, situated in a beautiful building with surprisingly affordable prices, but no shortage of charm. For a more unusual type of lodging, try the Albatros Botel, a hotel on a boat with comfortable, clean rooms, you can't get a better river view anywhere. For a more luxurious experience, the InterContinental Praha can provide you with mountains of relaxation in their swimming pool, solarium and sauna, not to mention any of the numerous services they provide to their guests. Even more exclusive is the boutique Hotel Savoy, where the stars stay in Prague. Fear not budget travelers, not all accommodations in this district are pricy landmarks, for the budget backpacker, the Old Prague Hostel is a great place to stay, with a great location and extremely affordable prices.

Mala Strana

Mala Strana is also known as the “Lesser Side” and is another of Prague's oldest districts, situated across the Charles Bridge below Prague Castle, it is home to many foreign embassies. Incredibly close to all the action of Prague's center, but mostly removed from the hoards of tourists, Mala Strana is a great area to stay in. Common in Mala Strana are Pensions like Pension Dientzenhofer, a small, comfortable guest house located in a 16th century building, named for being the birthplace of Kilian Ignaz Dientzenhofer, a well known Czech architect of the time. Hotel Hoffmeister is on a slightly larger scale than the small pensions, and fits in perfectly with the grand buildings of the district. It also boasts a good restaurant with great wines. Hotel Pod Vezi is a great place to experience “magical Prague”, quiet, cozy and quaint on the inside, but with tons of activity as soon

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as you step out the front door. Hotel U Tří Pštrosů is another hotel with a history. It was originally the first coffee house in all of Bohemia, and nowadays is an elegant, fanciful accommodation.

Josefov

The old Jewish Ghetto, Josefov is another district ripe with history and culture, along with wonderfully medieval narrow, winding cobblestone streets. Josefov and the surrounding areas is a good, interesting central location. Hotel Maximilian is a quiet hotel close to Josefov, as well as easily accessible to the rest of the city's major sights. Special features of the Maximilian include a Thai Massage studio and a floating pool. Casa Marcello is another nearby option, tucked behind a convent and featuring a Mediterranean feel, it is another quiet, relaxing option. Hotel Josef is another hotel with modern amenities in ancient surroundings, including a courtyard where you can enjoy your breakfast from the restaurant.

Vysehrad and the Eastern Suburbs

Located a little farther from the center, Vysehrad, the Eastern Suburbs and the surrounding areas, such as Zizkov and Vinohrady are a good option for those wishing to be slightly more removed from the big, crowded city atmosphere. Hotel U Tri Korunek, located in the Zizkov area is very popular with tour groups, and is situated in an area with an abundance of nightlife, so you won't be bored a little ways from the city center. Dorint Don Giovanni is an easy ten minutes by metro from the center, and features luxurious artwork and fountains as well as well equipped business facilities. Standard Hotel Prague, is very tourist oriented, arranging tours and providing information on the city and local culture, and also features wonderful gardens which are a particularly nice place to spend time in the summer. Pension Brezina, in the Vinohrady area is just a short trip from major attractions and features three different types of newly redone rooms. Another Vinohrady pension is Pension Holiday Home, quiet and comfortable within walking distance from the central sights of Prague.

Prague also has a number of recognized camping sites and although these tend to be situated outside the city, they have the advantage of being extremely cheap and are usually clean and well looked after. The location of these sites is no real disadvantage as public transport is always available and it is cheap and fast to get anywhere in Prague.

Corresponding with the increase in the number of rooms available, a number of accommodation agencies have been established: some are located at the airport and the main railway station, Hlavni Nadrazi. The largest travel bureau in the Czech Republic is Cedok(formerly the state travel agency). It offers accommodation at all prices and last-minute bookings can be made at their offices. At the airport, Cedok can be found at the arrival hall, and their main office in Prague is at Na Prikope at the bottom right of Wenceslas Square.
©

Restaurants Insights

The growing number of visitors to Prague and the widespread availability of accommodation since 1989 has led to an increase in the number of restaurants, together with a great improvement in hygiene standards. The influx of people of other nationalities coming to live in Prague has had an impact on the nature of the cuisine, which has become much more cosmopolitan.

While restaurants up to the early 1990's were predominantly Czech- both in terms of food and decor- new restaurants have been refurbished and the standard of service has improved. There are restaurants in the city centre that only a limited number of Czechs can afford to visit, so the cuisine tends to be mainly either French or international, catering predominantly to European or American tourists and business people. There are however, innumerable restaurants catering to those on a more modest budget, and these tend to attract the Czech business and professional classes. These offer both Czech and international food of the highest quality.

North and Western Suburbs

These farther out suburb areas of the city still offer everything you would expect to find in more crowded areas, but with a neighborhood feel. For Italian food that will please the whole family, try the incredibly popular Pizzeria Grosseto, considered by many to be the best in the whole city. For a more local flavor, traditional Czech eateries abound in this area, as in the rest of the city. U Kavalira is a friendly Czech restaurant, specializing in chicken and pork dishes, with a great atmosphere. Kavarna Kabinet is an artsy, friendly neighborhood cafe and bar, with a good value. For something a little more upscale that digs a little deeper into your wallet, Le Bistrot de Marlene is a quaint little traditional French restaurant near the river that may be a nice break from traditional Czech fare.

Hradcany

This neighborhood, slightly removed from Old Town and touristy centers boasts a number of high quality, and high cost restaurants. Restaurant ADA is popular with Parliament members and stars, and features French and international cuisine. Likewise, Restaurant Hradcany has been voted one of the best restaurants in Prague, basing its changing local and international menu on fresh, seasonal ingredients. Also nearby Hradcany are a number of cheaper, more casual options such as Cantina, for those craving something a little spicier and more exotic than the Czech food you may have had enough of. Also nearby is JJ Murphy's, another departure from traditional fare, but with some of the best burgers in Prague.

Mala Strana

This elegant part of town definitely boasts its fair share equally elegant eateries such as David Restaurant, specializing in game dishes. U Patrona has been named one of the most romantic in the city, with a five course menu you won't soon forget. Also quite common here, as in other parts of the city as well, are hotel restaurants being quite noteworthy, like U Tri Pstrosu, a historical restaurant in a hotel boasting traditional Czech dishes such as Goulash with Dumplings. Another popular restaurant located inside a hotel is Essensia inside the **Mandarin Oriental**, which provides its guests with fresh, refined Asian and international food. Restaurace Pálffy Palác serves up French cuisine inside a baroque palace, complete with rooftop terrace for warmer months. Hergetova Cihelna provides stunning views to go along with their elegant international menu.

Vysehrad and the Eastern Suburbs

These suburban areas of town have no shortage of variety when it comes to the food offerings. For traditional Czech meals,

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U Sadlu II, specializing in all kinds of game as well as other traditional Czech specialties. For something a little more on the lighter side, venture over to Knihomola for a good selection of sandwiches and salads, along with the live entertainment Wednesdays through Sundays. For great Italian food, Crazy Daisy serves up homemade pastas along with their full bar. The cuisine doesn't stop with Europe, however, as there are more exotic options available as well. Yang Zi Jiang in the Zizkov area dishes out typical Chinese fare, along with some more adventurous selections. Also in Zizkov is Mailsi, an excellent Pakistani eatery specializing in lamb dishes.

The Czech Republic has been producing some of the best beers in the world for centuries- in fact it has the highest rate of beer consumption(per capita) in the world. It was in Plzen that the first bottom-fermented beer was introduced in 1842, (hencepils) and production still continues there with Pilsner Urquell- the most famous brand- (For brewery tours, check out Pilsner Urquell and Gambrinus lager). The other main production centre is Ceske Budejovice in South Bohemia where Budvar is produced. Until recently, most pubs brewed their own beers but now the larger breweries have taken over- Western companies such as Bass have moved into the Czech Republic in a big way.

Wines from South Moravia and Melnik are the best of many produced in the Republic, but are still generally considered inferior to the best of the French and German wines. Spirits are readily available, but should you have stomach problems, tryBecherovka, a herbal spirit from the Karlovy Vary area.
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Nightlife Insights

Entertainment in Prague is extremely varied and still comparatively cheap compared to other European capitals. From nightclubs and discos to rock concerts, classical and traditional Czech music venues, dance halls, theatres and cinemas galore- whatever the visitor requires, there is plenty of it in Prague.

Theater

The Czech Republic has a massive cultural heritage and this is reflected in the number of halls, theaters and other venues used for concerts, recitals, opera, ballet, plays and other events. Prague's main theater is the National Theatre, built in the late 19th century. Opera and ballet are performed here as well.

For centuries the Czechs have been renowned for their ingenuity and originality, which again is reflected in the number of specialized theater groups and theatrical displays which are around. Perhaps the most famous of these are the Black Light Theatre, the National Marionette Theatre and the Image Theatre as well as the magic lantern shows at the Nova Scena(an extension to the National). It must be said that some of these productions are blatantly aimed at the tourist market but nevertheless they provide an insight into the traditions of Czech mime and puppet theater.

There are several theaters(some with productions in English) that put on plays by the most famous of playwrights from Shakespeare to Vaclav Havel – the former Czech President. Even if a play is in Czech, several theaters now have translation facilities available- but it is wise to check prior to booking.

Music

At the Stavovske Divaldo(Theatre of the Estates) and the Statni Opera Praha(State Opera House) you can catch Opera and ballet performances. There are regular classical concerts and recitals held in a variety of venues from the National Museum and Smetana Hall(Smetanova Síň) of the Municipal House, to the Dvorak Hall of the Rudolfinum and the halls of the Liechtenstein Palace.

Churches also play a prominent role in bringing music to the people with frequent recitals at lunchtime and in the evenings. The Prague Spring Music Festival commences around May 12(the anniversary of Smetana's death) each year and lasts for some three weeks, attracting top artists from all over the world.

The Czechs have a reputation for a love of jazz, and there are several excellent jazz clubs in the area. The most famous but perhaps not the best is the Reduta on Narodni where Presidents Havel and Clinton once performed. It is advisable to book ahead, particularly if a popular musician is playing. During the summer months, a number of jazz bands can be found strolling the city's streets and squares, particularly around Charles Bridge and Old Town Square.

Cinema

The Czech film industry is thriving, with many Western films now being shot in the Czech Republic(Mission Impossible was shot in Prague). There is also a huge number of cinemas(kino) at which all types of film are shown. Most western films are shown in Czech with English subtitles. Films are advertised with large posters displayed on any available wall and outside the cinema itself will be a detailed listing of all films being shown in Prague cinemas.

Nightlife

Prague has a vibrant nightlife with many clubs and dance halls both in its center and in the suburbs. It has now become a regular spot on the pop/rock concert circuit, with most major artists having performed in Prague at one time or another. The area around Wenceslas Square is the hub of club entertainment including places like the extremely popular Lucerna on Vodickova.

Casinos

Over the last few years there has been an increase in the number of casinos in Prague, although the visitor must be wary that some casinos can also mean arcades containing one-armed bandits, especially in the center of Prague. For a casino in the true sense of the word, where one can play roulette and card games, there are listings in most newspapers and other guides. Several hotels have casinos including the Hilton Atrium, the Ambassador and the Jalta.

The press provides regular and up-to-date listings of all concerts and theater productions: thePrague Post(the main English language newspaper in Prague), has an excellent section each week devoted to entertainment listings. In addition, there are a number of weekly guides which also provide information. There are several specialized ticket agencies where you can obtain tickets for all shows and at most 3-star hotels and upwards, tickets can be bought from reception.
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Things to Do Insights

Prague is known as the"City of Spires" thanks to the hundreds of spires reaching towards the sky from the various onion-domed towers, churches and synagogues. To best view those spires and gain a sense of the history and magic of Prague, one need but wander the winding, cobbled streets of the historic city center and experience the magic firsthand.

Prague Castle(Hradcany) One of the most noticeable landmarks in the city is, of course, Prague Castle. In the center of the Castle is St. Vitus Cathedral, founded in 1060. Right in the castle complex itself, you can settle in for fine dining at Na Baště restaurant in the Na Baste garden, or at Vikárka, with views of the cathedral and the Deer Moat. Just next to Na Baste is Cafe Poet while near Vikarka is Cafe Formanka. Various other places to sit down, relax and recharge with some food and drink in the castle proper include Black Tower Cafe, Bistro Rudolf II and Cafe Gallery. The wide variety extends to the menus, offerings and of course the prices as well.

Petrin Hill& Mala Strana About 300 meters from the castle, the former orchard and gardens of the Royal Castle are now a large park and freely accessible area. At the lower end of the funicular, you can grab a quick bite to eat at La Bastille or the Cantina Mexican restaurant. If it's later in the evening, head toward Malostranske Namesti for some jazz and blues at U Maleho Glena. Rub shoulders with locals, tourists and expats alike at the Shadow Cafe, or take in a show at Divadlo Na Pradle or Svandovo Divadlo. A little ways down Ujezd you will find Pizzeria La Fame, perhaps one of the finest low-cost Italian restaurants in town. For those less cost-conscious, head to Kampa Island for some traditional Czech Cuisine at Cafe Restaurant Dvorak or a fine dining experience at the Rybarsky Klub(Fishermen's Club) restaurant.

Old Town Square(Staromestske Namesti) A visit to Prague isn't complete until you've crossed the famous Charles Bridge from Malostranske Namesti. On the other side is Old Town Square, home of the Astronomical Clock and the Gothic style Tyn Cathedral, as well as the Jan Hus statue. On the way to the square, stop in at Café Indigo for some great bramboracky(potato pancakes) and a cup of coffee. Across the street from the café you can take in the beautiful Baroque library hall of the Klementinum, which now serves as part of the national, university, and technical libraries. The Prague City Library is just across from the Klementinum and is worth a visit as well. Casa Andina, perhaps the only Peruvian restaurant in all of Prague, is a few blocks north of Old Town Square. Rock'n' roll fans should head to Dlouha trida where the popular Roxy Music Club can be found.

Wenceslas Square(Vaclavske Namesti) A meandering walk through the narrow, cobbled streets in a southerly direction from Old Town Square will take you to Wenceslas Square, perhaps the true center of Prague. Pop in for a film at Kino Svetozor or Kino Lucerna, or just a snack at Hospoda v Lucerne. If you are looking for more lively nightlife, then check out the hip and popular nightclub Duplex, right in the middle of the square, or the Lucerna Music Bar& Club. Just off the square is The Lions British sports pub and around the corner; at the lower end, one can take in a cup of coffee and some light fare at Café Café. Be sure to see the statue of good King Wenceslas himself and head across the street to check out the magnificent National Museum.

Prague TV Tower Just up the hill(follow Vinohradska from the National Museum) you'll wander a little out of the center, but for the highest view of Prague one needs the 216-meter-tall Zizkov television tower(look east from the center). The tower contains a café, Luxusni Restaurace —a luxury restaurant 63 meters above the ground and an observation deck 100 meters high, making it the highest observation area in the city. Stop in at U Sadu, mere meters from the tower, for traditional Czech cuisine, beer and atmosphere. For a more modern feel try Restaurant Quido. Nightlife in the area includes the rock club at Palác Akropolis, Sedm Vlku Music Club and Restaurant, and Bond's Cocktail Bar. On your return to the center proper, wander through Riegrovy Sady Park where the open air beer garden is normally awash in expats who live in the area and also happens to be one of the best places to watch the sun set.

Guided Tours

Walking Tours Guiding Prague(+42 222 518 259/http://www.guidingprague.com/) Prague Walker(+42 603 181 300/ http://www.praguewalker.com/) Private Walks(+42 773 103 102/http://www.private-walks.com/)

Bike Tours Praha Bike(+42 732 388 880/http://www.prahabike.cz/) City Bike Prague(+42 776 180 284/http://www.citybike-prague.com/) Top Bicycle(+42 519 513 745/http://www.topbicycle.com/)

River Cruise Tours Cruise Prague(+42 774 278473/http://www.cruise-prague.cz) Prague Holiday(+42 226 201 910/http://www.prague holiday.cz/) Mary's Travel and Tourist Services(+42 222 254 007/http://www.marys.cz)

Bus Tours Prague Sightseeing Tours(+42 222 314 661/http://www.pstours.cz/) Ekoexpres(+42 737 077 077/http://www.ekoexpres.cz/) Grey Line Prague(+42 224 826 262/http://www.citytours.cz)

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Travel Tips

Getting There

Air

The Ruzyne Airport(+420 02 2011 3314/ http://www.csl.cz/en/)lies just northwest of downtown. The one terminal is equipped with two restaurant areas that feature both sit down and self serve options, and a wealth of retail outlets. Numerous banks and ATMs are available for currency exchange. It is serviced by:

Air Canada(+1 800 776 3000/ http://www.aircanada.ca/) Air France(+1 800 871 1366/ http://www.airfrance.com/) British Airways(+1 800 247 9297/ http://www.british-airways.com/) Condor(+1 800 524 6975/ http://www7.condor.com/) Continental(+1 800 525 0280/ http://www.continental.com/) Delta(+1 800 221 1212/ http://www.delta.com/) Easy Jet(+871 244 2366/ http://www.easyjet.com/) FlyBe(+0871 700 0535/ http://www.flybe.com/) Germanwings(+44 870 252 12 50/ http://www1.germanwings.com/) Iberia(+1 800 772 4642/ http://www.iberia.com/) Lufthansa(+1 800 645 3880/ http://www.lufthansa.com/) Smart Wings(+420 255 700 827/ http://www.smartwings.net/) United(+1 800 241 6522/ http://www.ual.com/)

From the Airport

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Shuttle& Bus: A minibus shuttle service operated by CEDAZ(+420 220 114 286/ http://www.cedaz.cz/public-shuttle-bus-from-airport-to-prague-centre.php/) operates daily from 5:30a-9:30p. Shuttles exit every 30 minutes and cost around CZK90 for a one-way fare into downtown.

Bus 119 transports passengers to the Dejvicka Station for CZK9. From there passengers can hop on to the metro's green line, or Line A, to the city center. In all this takes about 45 minutes.

Taxi: Taxis, operated by a transportation company called FIX(+420 2 2011 3892), charge a fixed rate ranging from CZK120-CZK870.

Rental Car Companies: Alamo(+1 800 327 9633/ http://www.alamo.com/) Avis(+1 800 831 2847/ http://www.avis.com/) Budget(+1 800 527 0700/ http://www.budget.com/) Europacar(+49 069 697 970/ http://www.europcar.com/) Hertz(+1 800 654 3131/ https://www.hertz.com/)

Train

More than 20 of Europe's major cities connect with Prague via rail. The Ceske Drahy, or the CD(+420 02 2422 4200/ http://www.cd.cz/static/eng/), handles all domestic train service. The"rychlick," or express train, services all of the Czech Republic's major urban areas. The"osobnyvlak" is much slower and seemingly stops in every town. The Hlavni Nadrazi, Prague's main train station, is directly connected to the metro. Walking around the bus terminal after dark, especially in the surrounding park, is not advised.

Bus

Eurolines(+420 224 814 450/ http://www.eurolines.com/) is the most popular European bus line that services Prague from all points of the compass. CSAD(+420 475 684 973/ http://www.csad.cz/) serves as the Czech Republic's regional bus company. Most buses dock at the Florenc Central Bus Station(+420 02 2421 1060) just east of the historic Jewish Quarter.

Car

Prague is accessible from every direction, but unlike most other major European cities, there are few major highways. The E50 travels west from Pizen into Prague before continuing southeast to Brno. The E65 snakes into Prague from the northeast, beginning south of Liberec.

Getting Around

Public Transport

Prague offers a wonderfully efficient public transportation infrastructure. Dopravni Podnik(+420 296 191 111/ http://www.dpp.cz/index.php?q=en/) carries almost 3 million passengers a day on some 2,000 trains, trams and buses. Fares for all systems are based on a zone basis and all start at CZK12.

The trams, featuring 25 lines, zigzag the entire downtown area, servicing stops every 10-20 minutes. Lines 22 and 23 are the most popular and are locally known as"tourist trams" or the"pickpocket express."

The metro, or subway system, also covers the downtown area but with less stops than the trams. There are three lines: Green(A), Yellow(B), and Red(C). The green line is the most popular with tourists for it services all of the main attractions- Old Town, Prague Castle, Wenceslas Square- in the city center. Subways run every 2-6 minutes between 5a-midnight.

Prague's downtown streets are too narrow to accommodate buses. They only serve the outlying suburbs, making them almost inconsequential for tourists.

Taxi

Taxis are not recommended. Allegedly most are operated by organized crime and have an ugly reputation for overcharging. If you dare to chance a ride try ProfiTaxi(+420 02 6131 4151) for it is one of the few companies that provides English-speaking drivers.

Car

Driving is not encouraged. Most of downtown's historic districts ban cars and parking is but a mere rumor. If you do insist on driving, make sure you are legally parked since local authorities are quick to tow.

Bike& On Foot

Prague provides no incentives for bike riding. Bike paths don't exist and drivers view riders as moving targets. If you do ride, be sure to lock your bike as thefts are very common.

Walking is the best mode of transportation for exploring Prague's historic districts. And as an added incentive, Prague's signature Charles Bridge is only open to pedestrians. ©

Fun Facts

1. Interesting fact: Skoda, a local car manufacturer, is one of only four automobile trademarks that can claim a more than 100-year-old history. The company was founded by Mr. Emil Skoda. Skoda means"pity" in Czech.

2. Weird fact: The Old Kladbury Horse is considered a Living Work of Art and listed on UNESCO's World Heritage List. It's the only horse bred for ceremonial purposes at royal courts.

3. Random fact: Czech pucks do not leave black smudges. The exact formula of the Gufex pucks, manufactured in a Moravian village, is a secret.

4. Useless fact: The Czech Republic has the largest network of signposted footpaths in the world. As of 2002, more than 38,000 kilometers of paths have been signposted.

5. Fun fact: The first sugar cubes were made in the Czech town of Dacice in 1841.

6. Educational fact: The word"robot" is Czech. It first appeared in a drama written by Czech playwright and journalist Karel Capek called R. U. R.(Rossum's Universal Robots). It was actually his artist brother Josef though who came up with the word.

7. Historical fact: Prague Castle, begun in the 9th century, is listed in the Guinness Book of World Records as the largest castle in the world.

8. Medical fact: Czech doctor Jan Jansky was the first to divide blood into four types in 1907.

9. Outer Space fact: Neil Armstrong played Czech composer Antonin Dvorak's New World Symphony on the moon.

10. Religious fact: The Infant Jesus of Prague is one of the oldest and most revered images of Jesus. Credited with miracles and healing, people from all over the world have sent it dresses, which are on display at Church of Our Lady Victorious.

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11. Natural fact: Pravcicka Brana is the highest natural arch in Europe. Located in northern Bohemia along the German border, it is 21 meters high with a span of 26.5 meters.

12. Sobering fact: In 1951, Dr. Jaroslav Skala created the first"sobering-up station" for those who'd enjoyed the pub a bit too much. It was to act as an introduction to his treatment facility for alcoholics. His treatment was based on routine, community order, work, sports and singing anti-alcohol songs.
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