

Eurolink Czech Romance

Capturing the Romance of Czech Republic

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Dear Travellers

Well the romance has begun! The architecture, the music, the art, and most of all the people captivated us on our 18 day tour. Once part of the wealthy Austro Hungarian Empire this country is dotted in sumptuous and dilapidated castles and chateaus. Medieval stone villages perched strategically on hilltops with the extra defence of the river twining below makes this a very scenic destination.

Most people go to Prague and this city is staggeringly beautiful with bridges looping across the Vlatva and spires and towers vying for attention from every architectural era. Prague's every face is photogenic with exquisite detail wherever you care to look. From its 14th Century heyday cathedrals churches castles all have survived the Nazi and Communist occupations of recent times. It is said that Prague was simply too beautiful to destroy! Easy to walk it is a relatively small area and what captivated the most was the access to music whether it be a jazz band playing on Charles Bridge or a chamber concert in a 400 year old Church. It is so inspiring to see so many young people walking around with music cases and young people attending the theatres, operas,

ballets and marionette shows which are on every night. Wandering through the narrow lanes you happen upon art installations, quirky sculptures, and quiet little restaurants where the beer is cheaper than the coke. Goulash and dumplings are the order of the day with a large Budvar or Pilsen which both originated in Czech Republic.

Beyond Prague it gets better and better with quiet country roads and picturesque villages set in fields of poppies and a few fields of solar panels as well. Near the border of Poland the 100 metre high sandstone towers at Adrspach just loom out of nowhere. For a day and half you could wander through this rock world set in the pine and beech forest and marvel at rock towers carved by nature into whatever shapes your imagination can conjure.

A lunch stop in Olomouc sitting in the same house as Gustav Klimt brought history alive and an hour here not long enough to admire the largest baroque sculpture in Europe a plague column (built in most towns of prominence in the 16th and 17th century to ward off the plague)

Then it was southbound to Moravia's capital of Brno which is famous for its

caves. Indeed we were underground for 2 hours and 1 hour of that on a boat. Again the forest of fir and beech was pristine. The fireworks festival was on so the stage in the town center was alive with orchestral music and folk dancing all wearing traditional decorative costumes. The wine tasting tent held some appeal as Moravia is the wine producing region of Czech Republic. Music held us spellbound everywhere and not least of all in the Catholic Church on Sunday morning the very church where Mendel the Augustinian Monk the father of genetics worshipped and lived (I think we slept in his cell) We climbed the tower of Brno and there was the brass band all ready to play to the town traditionally done at 11am. Next stop was Telc famous for its renaissance architecture on all sides of the town square. Surrounded by a water Chateau parkland and lakes full of carp the views from the tower were stunning. The outdoor stage in the town square was set for the local children's concert and we were treated to instrumental music, singing folk dancing and gymnastics. Some travel south of Prague to Cesky Krumlov for the day so this town had the buzz of tourism but its chocolate box beauty couldn't be faulted and many took the opportunity to canoe down the river through the center of this characterful medieval town. Plzen our next stop involved a tour of the brewery of course! Also a visit to the largest Jewish Synagogue in Europe (Very few Czech Jews survived the holocaust) Then it was off for a beer bath Not only does one drink it! It is very healthy to soak in a bath of hot beer froth and all and of course have a cold pint while you are in there.

To keep on track health wise it was off to the Spa towns Marianske Lazne and Karlovy Vary where one buys a fancy cup and stops at various fountains to take the waters (Similar to Bath in UK) Grandeur and old world charm describe these towns where the rich and famous have been coming here since the 14th century!

So we walked in the footsteps of Edward the Seventh, Mozart, Edison and Goethe to name a few! As we strolled down the covered promenade (at 800 meters this town is cool and gets the rain)we were treated to an orchestra playing the Monty Python theme song ! The fountain also dances to classical arias like The Barber of Seville every two hours on the hour. This country is so rich in culture and seems to be going through a renaissance after their forty years behind the iron curtain.

Our last stop was at Terezin, a sad part of Czech history, where the Nazis saw 180 thousand Jews pass through here and on to Auschwitz or other camps. The people lived here for a few years and their culture is very sensitively portrayed in the museums. The most touching are the children's writings and art works. Then it was back to Prague to take in 'Carmen' a wonderful story portrayed by opera and ballet at the same time.

At Veleztri Palace Art Gallery we feasted on Klimt, Picasso, Van Gogh and Rodin and returned to the old town square to see the astronomical clock parade the saints one more time.

Sad to leave this richly cultured country and taking memories of church bells ringing, trumpeters playing from the clocktower and marionettes dancing drunkenly in doorways. And, of course, the taste of a naturally brewed Pilsener.