

History

Did you know the Czech and the Slovak Republics were united under one flag for a grand total of about 88 years in all their history? That the Great Moravian Empire initially didn't include Prague? That Bratislava was officially called Pressburg (German) or Pozony (Hungarian) until 1919? Despite the disparate histories of the Czech, Moravian, Slovak and Ruthenian (more about that to come) people, they did share a united government for a time; they all have a common Slavic language base, and they all have a history of foreign domination.

Slap-bang in the middle of Europe, the current territory of the Czech Republic was controlled by the Holy Roman Empire, invaded by the Hapsburgs – then the Nazis, then the Soviets – and finally conquered by tour groups; a few Czechs even see the republic's membership of the EU as just another occupation. The territory of Slovakia came under the rule of the Magyars (you and I know them as Hungarians) for more than 1000 years, before being subsumed into a Czechoslovakia that was far from a 50–50 partnership. Oh, and there were all those years of communist rule...

WAY BACK WHEN

Celtic tribes settled in these parts in the 5th century BC. They didn't stay long, but they did leave a few artefacts behind, as well as the name Bohemia. The Latin term for the Czech Lands, *Boiohaemum*, comes from the name of a Celtic tribe; at least that's what Roman reports said. The Roman Empire didn't actually push into the Moravian, let alone the Czech Lands. The furthest north the Romans had an established garrison was at Trenčín in West Slovakia, where you can still see some of their graffiti (p364).

Slav tribes started migrating into the area during the late 5th and early 6th centuries AD; they were the first agriculturists on the scene. By 833 the initial territory of Velká Moravia (Great Moravian Empire) included Moravia and a good chunk of Slovakia. Though short-lived, the Velká Moravia was an extremely influential enterprise; it served as the historical precedent used to justify the creation of Czechoslovakia after WWI, and had an impact on all of Eastern Christianity (which would become the Orthodox Church).

Moravian Prince Rastislav (846–870) invited missionaries to visit the empire and was most taken with Christians (and later saints) Cyril and Metoděj (Methodius). Cyril and Metoděj showed up in the 860s and created the first Slavic translation of biblical text (in Old Church Slavonic, still used in some churches to date). To do so, they had to invent the Glagolitic alphabet, which was the precursor to the Cyrillic alphabet of today. Czechs and Slovaks are rightly proud of the saints, whose names you'll see on churches, streets and statues across both republics.

By 894 Velká Moravia had grown to include Prague and Bohemia, Silesia and parts of modern-day Hungary; however, fighting over succession weakened the empire and Moravian troops lost to the Magyars in 907. Slovakia gradually came under the complete control of the Hungarians. Prior to this, up north, members of the first Czech dynasty, the Přemysls, threw up a couple of huts on a hill in what was to become Prague around 870 and

The Historical Atlas of Central Europe, by Paul Robert Magocsi, illustrates the complicated comings and goings of the region's conquerors.

TIMELINE 833

Velká Moravia (the Great Moravian Empire) takes shape

907

The break-up of the Great Moravian Empire; beginning of Hungarian rule in Slovakia

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Which is correct, the Czech Republic or Czechia? Slovakia or the Slovak Republic? Most English-speakers still call the Czech Republic by that name, but some, particularly in Europe, use Czechia. There is no precedent for the use of Czechia in English, and this book doesn't use it. Surprisingly, not even in Czech is there a single word that describes the joint Czech and Moravian lands.

The situation in Slovakia is, thankfully, easier. Both Slovak Republic (Slovenská republika) and Slovakia (Slovensko) are used interchangeably in the country and abroad – although the former is a little more official – and we've done the same.

called it Pražský hrad. After the collapse of Moravian rule, the Bohemian rulers annexed Moravia.

And then came the conquerors: German King Otto I took control of Bohemia and Moravia and made them part of the Holy Roman Empire in 950. The Přemysls – including Václav, or Good 'King' Wenceslas – ruled on behalf of the Germans until 1212. The Přemysl family dynasty ruled Czech lands on behalf of the Germans for several subsequent centuries. Perhaps the most famous member of the clan was Saint Wenceslas, aka the Good 'King' (really a duke). In 1306 the last of the Přemysl line died heirless.

After a bit of manoeuvring, the royal family of Luxembourg stepped in to rule. Theirs was the line that produced Holy Roman Emperor Karel (Charles) IV (r 1316–78), who made Prague the centre of the Holy Roman Empire. He did a nice renovation job on the city, too: all that Gothic splendour you see can be attributed to him. Karel's son, the mercurial Václav IV, gave Bohemia its patron saint when he tortured Jan of Nepomuk to death over a bureaucratic dispute with Jan's boss, the archbishop.

Under Hungarian rule, Slovakia prospered for a time. In the 13th century, mining (silver, copper and gold) centres such as Banská Štiavnica were booming; in fact, the look of that town today dates to this period. Saxon German craftsmen also settled in East Slovakia during the 13th century, creating a unique Germano-Slovak style and a lot of great art in what came to be known as the Spiš region.

THOSE HUSSITES

A century before Martin Luther nailed his demands to a church door, the Czechs were agitating for church reform. Jan Hus (1372–1415), a fan of English theologian John Wycliffe, led a movement that espoused – among other things – giving services in Czech rather than Latin, letting the congregation taste the sacramental wine as well as the host (the Hussites' symbol was the chalice), and ending the selling of indulgences (really church wealth in general). When he was burned for heresy in 1415, Hus' martyrdom sparked a religious, nationalist and class-based rebellion in Bohemia. It'd be hard to overestimate the influence Jan Hus has had on the Czech nationalist spirit up to the present day.

After Hus' death, his followers moved swiftly from rhetoric to warfare: on 30 July 1419, Hussite preacher Želivský delivered a blood-stirring sermon at St Mary of the Snows in Prague, then led the congregation to the New Town Hall to confront the Catholic burghers. Militant Hussite Jan Žižka led a charge up the stairs and seven councillors were thrown out the windows

onto the spears of the mob below. After four months of church burning and street battles, the Hussites held Prague and Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund had retreated to Moravia.

The pope told Sigismund to take Prague back, but the Catholic attack in 1420 was defeated by the forces of ferocious, farm-implement-wielding commander Žižka. Vitkov Hill, where the battle took place, is now called Žižkov Hill and is topped by a massive equestrian statue of the general; see p116. The Hussites also managed to make inroads into West Slovakia, until their defeat at the Battle of Lipany in 1434. Hussite influence in general did not disappear (there are still churches) but, for the most part, the real power in Bohemia came to lie with the Protestant Utraquist nobles, the so-called Bohemian Estates.

AUSTRIANS, HUNGARIANS RULE

In 1526, Hungary suffered a major defeat by Ottoman Turks at Mohács in West Hungary. The capital of the Kingdom of Hungary was relocated from Budapest to Bratislava, Slovakia, in 1536 and Budapest fell under Turkish control for 150 years.

The Austrian Hapsburgs, already Holy Roman emperors and rulers of the Czech Lands, thereby added the Hungarian crown to their list of titles. Though the Hapsburgs defeated the Turks in 1683 (practically at the gates of Vienna), St Martin's Cathedral in Bratislava would be the coronation place of Hungarian kings and queens until 1830.

The brief, failed Hungarian War of Independence (1703–11) against the Hapsburgs was led by Transylvanian prince Ferenc Rákóczi II, headquartered in Košice, Slovakia.

It wasn't until the second half of the 18th century that Empress Maria Theresa and Emperor Joseph II made life easier for Slovaks through educational and labour reforms, including basic schooling for all children. (They also commissioned a lot of the fancy buildings you see in Bratislava's old town.)

For the Czechs the year 1526 was also important; it was when the Czech kingdom came under the control of the Catholic Austrian Hapsburgs. In the latter half of the century, Prague became the seat of their empire, which lifted the country's fortunes.

On 23 May 1618, the Bohemian Estates, angry that the Hapsburgs had failed to deliver on promised religious tolerance, threw two Hapsburg government agents from a Prague Castle window (see the boxed text, p28). The squabble escalated into the Catholic–Protestant Thirty Years' War, which was to devastate much of Central Europe and shatter Bohemia's economy.

The Czechs lost their rights and property, and almost their national identity, through forced Catholicisation and Germanisation. Saxons occupied Prague and much of Bohemia in 1631 and 1632; Swedes also seized large parts of the kingdom. By 1648 the population of the Czech Lands had been reduced by up to 40% in many areas.

The Hapsburgs eventually moved their throne back to Vienna, and with the passing of time, the Hapsburg line softened; serfdom was abolished between 1781 and 1785, and religious freedom was allowed. By the 19th century, educational reforms by Empress Maria Theresa meant that even the poor had access to schooling; a vocal middle class was emerging.

A History of Slovakia: The Struggle for Survival by Stanislav Kirshbaum, updated in 2005, is one of the most comprehensive works on Slovak History.

General Jan Žižka continued to successfully command the Hussite armies for years after he'd been blinded in battle.

1415

Czech church reformer Jan Hus burned at the stake

1419

Catholic councillors are thrown from the New Town Hall window by Hussites intent on taking Prague

1536

Royalty moves Hungarian capital to Bratislava, Slovakia, after Turks threaten Budapest.

1781–85

Serfdom abolished in the Czech Lands

DEFENESTRATION

Defenestration (the act of throwing someone out of a window) is an extreme form of political dissent, but it's a method that's been used more than once in Prague. In addition to the unlucky Catholics whom the Hussites tossed out the window in 1419, there was a second rebellious window event in 1618. This time it was when Hapsburg-backed Catholic clergy tried to reclaim land under Imperial order; members of the Czech Estates argued that it was not church land and convicted two government officials, sentencing them to be thrown from the high castle windows. They landed on a pile of manure (some say this was divine intervention) and escaped serious injury.

Possibly a third, and even more sinister defenestration occurred in 1948. Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk was found on the ground in front of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 10 March. It was ruled a suicide at the time, but a 2004 report concluded that he was murdered by communist opponents.

NATIONAL AWAKENING

During the Industrial Revolution economic and industrial reforms forced Czech labourers into the bigger towns, where they soon overwhelmed the German minorities. Political activity was banned under the Hapsburgs, so the new nationalist movement was linguistic: Josef Jungmann, Josef Dobrovský and František Palacký, the author of the *History of the Czech Nation*, all worked on regenerating the Czech language and stirred nationalistic feelings.

A similar national cultural awakening took place on intellectual levels in Slovakia. One of its early leaders was a Catholic priest named Anton Bernolák, who published the first Slovak grammar book, taking baby steps towards codifying a national language. Until this time there had been no unified written Slovak language; dialects used in the regions were distinct. Ľudovít Štúr, a major figure in the Slovak cultural renaissance, continued the process in the 1840s. His inspirational efforts would make nationalist ideas more accessible to the mass of Slovak people.

By 1848 revolutions were widespread in Europe. The Austrian Hapsburgs faced rebellion on many fronts. Hungary revolted against the Austrians, but many in Slovakia sided with the Hapsburgs. The rebellion in Bohemia was the first the Hapsburgs crushed; the Hungarians were defeated shortly after.

A gradual awakening of a Slovak national consciousness continued, with the small Central Slovakian town of Martin at the epicentre. It was there that the cultural and educational foundation for the promotion of all things Slovak, the Matica slovenská (still active today), was formed.

Despite putting down the rebellions, things were not completely hunky-dory within the Austrian Empire. After losing a war with Prussia in 1867, the Austrians were forced to rule with the Hungarians in a 'dual monarchy'. Under the new Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Hungarians pursued a policy of Magyarisation, which meant only Hungarian was to be taught in school and used in businesses across all lands, including Slovakia.

A NEW NATION

During WWI, Czechs and Slovaks had little interest in fighting the empire, and a large number defected to fight against the Germans and Austrians. Meanwhile, politicians of both Czech and Slovak nationality began

to argue the case for independence; US president Woodrow Wilson, a big proponent of linguistic self-determination and keen to establish stronger ties with Europe, was all for it. The Pittsburgh Agreement was signed by representatives of Czech, Slovak and Rusyn organisations in America, proposing the creation of a Czechoslovak State that included all three ethnolinguistic regions. Ruthenia, or Podkarpaska Rus, was the Carpathian region to the east of Slovakia that was historically part of the Kingdom of Hungary, but the majority of residents were an east Slavic people called the Rusyn. For more, see the boxed text, p434.

On 28 October 1918 the new Czechoslovak Republic was declared with Prague as its capital and Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk its first president; his son Jan Masaryk would also become a politician, and a victim of defenestration. Industry boomed in the Czech Lands, and the new republic set about industrialising Slovakia, a traditionally agrarian-based country. Czechs were happy, Slovaks mildly content, Rusyns felt left out, and Germans were downright miserable. By the mid-1930s, many of Bohemia's three million German speakers wanted to be part of a greater Germany.

WWII

Germans in the Sudetenland (an area running the length of the border between Germany/Poland and Bohemia/Moravia, encircling what is now the Czech Republic on the west, north and south) had been discriminated against by Czechs and wanted out, so when Hitler demanded the Sudetenland in 1938, the Czechs prepared for war. The British and French governments pressed the Czechoslovak president, Edvard Beneš, to give up these lands for the sake of European peace. In October 1938, under the infamous Munich Agreement between the Germans, French, British and Italians (the Czechs were notably absent), the Nazis occupied the Sudetenland. The Poles took part of Silesia in North Moravia and the Hungarians seized Ruthenia and southern areas of Slovakia (about 22% of the Slovak territory). On 15 March 1939 Germany occupied all of Bohemia and Moravia, pronouncing the whole region a 'protectorate'.

The rapid changes meant the countries' buildings suffered little damage during the war. However, the Czech intelligentsia and 80,000 Jews died at the hands of the Nazis. When Czech paratroopers assassinated the Nazi governor in 1942, the entire town of Lidice was wiped off the map in revenge. A peaceful park stands there today as a memorial.

Meanwhile, the day before the German occupation, Slovakia was declared a separate, independent state (read 'Nazi puppet'). The government of the new state was headed by Jozef Tiso, leader of the nationalist Hlinka Slovak National People's Party that had been seeking autonomy from the Czechs. Tiso immediately banned all opposition political parties and instituted censorship along Nazi lines.

The Slovak government promulgated its own 'Jewish Code'. More than 73,000 Jews were deported from Slovakia to the Nazi extermination camps. Roma (Gypsies) were also targets of the Nazi regime: the number of deaths during the war is not known, but estimates go as high as 300,000.

The Nazi state did not enjoy popular support in Slovakia. In August 1944 units of the Slovak army and thousands of poorly armed partisans took up arms in the Slovak National Uprising (Slovenské národné povstanie; SNP)

The first president of the first Czechoslovak Republic, Tomáš Masaryk, began his working life as a blacksmith.

I Never Saw Another Butterfly..., edited by Hana Volaková, is a moving collection of children's words and drawings made inside the Terezín concentration camp.

1848

Slovak nationalists stand with Austrians against the Hungarians; serfdom abolished in Slovakia

28 October 1918

First Czechoslovak Republic becomes a nation

1938

Western powers hand the Sudetenland to Hitler at the Munich Agreement

1939

An independent but fascist state declared in Slovakia

Jaroslav Hašek's iconic satire, *Good Soldier Švejk*, reveals the Czech state of mind during WWI.

based around Banská Bystrica; a great museum there fills in the details. It was quashed after two months by 35,000 German troops, apparently invited by Tiso. This short, ill-fated uprising is today remembered in monuments and street names all over Slovakia.

On 5 May 1945 as the Red Army approached from the east, Prague rose against the German forces. US troops had reached Plzeň, but held back in deference to their Soviet allies. The Czechs, assisted by Russian renegades, granted the Germans free passage out of Prague provided they left the city intact; the Germans began pulling out on 8 May. Most of Prague was thus liberated before Soviet forces arrived the following day.

COMMUNISM

At the end of the war, Czechoslovakia was reconstituted minus Ruthenia, which went to the USSR. Population ‘exchanges’ ensued – Germans were forced out of Czech Lands, Hungarians out of Slovakia. In the 1946 elections the communists became the largest party, forming a coalition government. In February 1948 the communists staged a coup d’état with the backing of the USSR. A new constitution established the Communist Party’s dominance, and government was organised along Soviet lines. Thousands of non-communists fled the country. Although the communists represented both Czech and Slovak communities, the party was based in Prague and dominated by Czechs. Slovak interests and representation were largely forgotten in the halls of power right up until the fall of the communist regime. Centuries-old buildings were ploughed under in the Slovak capital in the name of progress.

The 1950s was an era of harsh repression and decline as communist economic policies nearly bankrupted the country. Many people were imprisoned for real or imagined dissident views, and hundreds were executed or died in labour camps. As the 1960s rolled along and the rest of the world was all about peace and love, the Czechoslovak Communist Party started to let its hair down. Reformist general secretary Alexander Dubček, a Slovak, took over in January 1968 and the party started talking about ‘socialism with a human face’. The April 1968 ‘Action Programme’ of reform filled hearts with hope, and there was an outpouring of literature, art and political expression, which came to be known as the ‘Prague Spring’.

Just when Czechoslovaks thought it safe to express themselves, more than 200,000 Soviet and Warsaw Pact troops rolled into Prague on the night of 20 August 1968, killing 58 people. Dubček was replaced by the orthodox Dr Gustav Husák and exiled to Krasňany, a village close to Bratislava, to work as a mechanic. Around 14,000 Communist Party functionaries, and 500,000 members who refused to renounce their belief in reform, were expelled from the party. Many educated professionals including teachers and doctors were forbidden to work in their field. Totalitarian rule was re-established, and dissidents routinely imprisoned. But this didn’t stop Czech and Slovak authors from writing; they just went underground.

In 1977 the trial of a Czech rock group, the Plastic People of the Universe, inspired a group of 243 writers, artists and intellectuals, including the future president of the Czech Republic, Václav Havel, to sign a public demand for basic human rights known as the Charter ’77. This became a focus for opponents of the regime.

Czech fighter pilots are credited with downing 56 German planes as a part of the British Royal Air Force during the Battle of Britain in WWII.

Alexander Dubček, the Communist Party boss known for his compassionate leadership, was conceived in Chicago, USA, although he was born in the Slovak village of Uhrovec.

The Unbearable Lightness of Being, by Milan Kundera, has sections on the Prague Spring that are an easy-to-read, emotive look at this turbulent time.

PLAYWRIGHT, POLITICIAN, PRESIDENT

The Czech Republic’s first president, Václav Havel, is a rarity in the world of politics – a playwright, a poet and former dissident. Born on 5 October 1936 in Prague, Havel was supposed to be a laboratory technician, but couldn’t resist the stage. His first play, *Zahradní slavnost* (The Garden Party), premiered at divadlo na Zábřadlí in 1963. Its theme was, of course, the oppressive political system in Czechoslovakia.

Despite four spells in jail, Havel kept writing; his works were published by *samizdat* (underground) presses and in the West. Two of his better-known works are *Dopisy Olze* (Letters to Olga; 1983) a compilation of 144 letters he sent to his former wife from prison, and the play *Largo Desolato* (1984).

On 29 December 1989 he was elected president of Czechoslovakia. The obligations of the presidential office took him away from writing, but in 1991 he did manage to publish *Letní přemítání* (Summer Meditations). It’s a great read for insight into the man’s philosophy of leadership, reflections on his career and his hopes for the future.

After retiring from office in 2003, Havel suffered recurrent bouts of pneumonia. He also suffered some tarnishing of his saintly reputation – even a poet can’t run a country without getting his hands dirty occasionally. He celebrated his 70th birthday during a teaching residency at Columbia University in the US during the autumn of 2006. Many of his plays and speeches have been translated and all of those referred to are available in English.

THE VELVET REVOLUTION & DIVORCE

Even as Soviet Premier Gorbachov embraced *perestroika* and *glasnost*, and when the Berlin Wall was breached on 9 November 1989, the Czechoslovak Communist Party refused to bend. However, on 17 November 1989 things changed. Prague’s communist youth movement organised an officially sanctioned demonstration in memory of nine students executed by the Nazis in 1939. A peaceful crowd of 50,000 was cornered in Národní třída in Prague; some 500 were beaten by the police and about 100 were arrested. It is suggested now that the whole thing was precipitated by reformist party members to trigger a revolution. In Slovakia, public protests in Nám SNP in Bratislava were more peaceful, but still pronounced.

The following days saw constant demonstrations by students, artists and writers, and in the end by most of the populace. Though news of the uprising was officially kept from many Czechoslovaks, demonstrations spread throughout the country, culminating in a rally of 750,000 people on Letná Hill in Prague. Leading dissidents, with Václav Havel at the forefront, formed the Anti-Communist Civic Forum that negotiated for the government’s resignation on 3 December. A Government of National Understanding was formed, with the communists as minority members. Havel was elected president of the republic by the federal assembly on 29 December 1989, and Alexander Dubček was elected speaker of the national assembly.

There were no shots fired in the ‘Velvet Revolution’ (Sametová revoluce); the downside of the nonviolent transformation being that ex-communists were free to reintegrate themselves into government and buy up privatised properties. There was no political tradition in the country, and so there was no party system and little precedent to go on. Tensions increased between Czech and Slovak political figureheads and some of them started agitating for independence.

1944

Partisans take up arms in the short-lived Slovak National Uprising against the Nazis

1945

Czechoslovakia reunited; Ruthenian lands ceded to USSR

20 August 1968

Soviet tanks roll in, crushing the Prague Spring

17 November 1989

The Velvet Revolution overturns communist rule

INDEPENDENCE DAY *Lisa Dunford*

A bottle rocket zoomed across the tightly packed crowd, whistling shrilly as it passed. I watched as it landed on the end of a young girl's hand-crocheted scarf, which caught fire. She shrieked and threw the scarf to the ground. At first no-one moved; then an old man with a grey, stubby beard and a rumpled overcoat came forward and stomped out the small flames. Everyone around laughed. I turned back to see a policeman lighting a sparkler for a *babka* ('little grandmother').

This New Year's Eve in Bratislava was special: at 12.01am on 1 January 1993, Slovakia would become an independent nation. The night was painfully cold. Even with long underwear, two pairs of socks, jeans, two shirts and a sweater underneath my trench coat, I still hurt. I saw the man next to me take a swig of something out of a bottle. Why hadn't I thought of that? Centuries-old buildings with ornate façades, grey and sagging from years of coal-fire heating and pollution, stared down at us.

At 9pm we'd walked to within 15m of the stage on nám SNP, the same square where protestors had gathered during the Velvet Revolution in 1989. More and more bodies pressed in as midnight approached. The newspapers would later say that more than 200,000 turned out to celebrate a new capital, a new country, a new life, a new year. Not everyone who usually celebrated New Year's on the square was there though; some stayed home to mourn the loss of Czechoslovakia.

There was no violence, no revolution. This split came to be called the Velvet Divorce, and like many divorces, it just happened. Few claimed to want it. Public opinion polls did not support it. Calls for a national referendum went unheeded. But in the end, too many hateful things had been said, and both sides agreed it would be best to part. Slovakia had never before been a self-ruling nation, unless you count the 18 months during WWII when it was a Nazi protectorate. For the past 67 years Bratislava had played second fiddle to the central government of Prague. Now, for better or worse, it would get to stand alone.

Months of bickering about how to divide the assets were yet to come. The new Slovak Republic would end up with no aeroplanes of its own. Prague would put out new money so fast it would catch Bratislava off guard (the parties had agreed to wait a year). But New Year's Eve traditionally is a time for jubilation, a time of pure promise. I doubt anyone that night discussed economic feasibility.

A few minutes before the hour, Vladimír Mečiar, a thick man in a black suit, took the stage. The soon-to-be prime minister was reported to be popular with the people, a charismatic, if somewhat heavy-handed, parliamentary leader who had pushed for independence. I couldn't say I'd met anyone who liked him in the three months I'd lived in Slovakia, though.

Mečiar shouted into the microphone; I didn't understand all the words, but I knew the sentiment. He spoke about the future, about triumph. At midnight, Mečiar declared Slovakia a nation and the audience erupted. A teenage boy hoisted aloft by the crowd frantically waved the Slovak flag before falling back. The old woman with the sparklers held her daughter and cried. The man who put out the fire popped a champagne cork, sending an arc of sticky liquid cascading down. Firecrackers roared in every direction. And then as a waltz blared from the loudspeakers, the crowd fell silent and we swayed together.

No guns were fired. No soldiers died. The split just happened. And the people danced.

In the June 1992 elections, the right-of-centre Civic Democratic Party (Občanská demokratická strana; ODS) led by Václav Klaus took a slim victory in the Czech Republic. Coming to power in Slovakia was the left-leaning nationalist Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS), headed by the controversial Vladimír Mečiar, a firm believer in Slovak independence and slow economic reform. In 1991 the former boxer Mečiar had been dismissed

by the Slovak National Council from his post as prime minister because of both his autocratic temperament and revelations of involvement with the former secret police.

Mečiar held negotiations with Klaus, as neither could form a stable government. Despite numerous efforts, the two leaders could not reach a compromise. The incompatibility of Klaus and Mečiar became apparent and they decided (or perhaps one persuaded the other?) that splitting the country was the best solution. Many people on both sides, including President Havel, repeatedly called for a national referendum, but even a petition signed by a million Czechoslovaks was not enough for the federal parliament to agree on how to arrange it. On 1 January 1993 Czechoslovakia ceased to exist for the second time in the 20th century. For a first-hand account of the experience in Bratislava, see the boxed text, opposite.

Prague became capital of the new Czech Republic, and Havel was elected its first president. Thanks to Klaus' economic policies, booming tourism and a solid industrial base, the Czech Republic started strongly. Unemployment was negligible, shops were full and many cities were getting face-lifts; by 2003 Prague had the highest standard of living in Eastern Europe. However, capitalism also meant a shortage of affordable housing, rising crime and a deteriorating health system.

In 2003, after two terms as president, Havel was replaced by former prime minister Klaus. It took three elections for Czechs to settle on the new president, and the uncharismatic Klaus is far from the popular leader Havel was. While Klaus stood for a free-market economy and ever-increasing privatisation, the prime minister in 2003, Vladimír Špidla, was much more left-leaning. The Czech Republic became a member of NATO in 1999 and in May 2004 joined the EU.

Slovakia's transition from communism to capitalism was not so smooth. As the first prime minister of the Slovak Republic, Mečiar cancelled the sale of state-owned enterprises, halted Slovakia's privatisation scheme and threatened independent radio stations and newspapers with legal action if they dared criticise the government. The international community was none too pleased.

In part due to this international pressure, the elections of 1998 ousted Mečiar and ushered in Mikuláš Dzurinda, leader of the right-leaning Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK). Dzurinda changed the course of recent Slovak history by launching a policy of economic and social reform that got Slovakia into NATO and the EU alongside the Czech Republic and other new members in May 2004.

Both nations are now on the road to euro conversion by 2009. Summer 2006 parliamentary elections seem to indicate changes to come, but the history of conquerors is at an end and independence reigns – for now anyway. To read more on the current political climate, see p23.

Český Sen (Czech Dream), a 2004 documentary, follows a hoax launch of a new Czech department store. It's a wry observation of the expectations of a market-oriented Czech society.

Pluto lost its status as a planet at the annual meeting of the International Astronomical Union held in Prague in August 2006.

1 January 1993

Czechoslovakia splits into the Czech and Slovak Republics

May 2004

Czech and Slovak Republics join EU

2007

Czech and Slovak Republics aim to meet Schengen requirements and eliminate internal EU borders

2009

Goal for Czech and Slovak Republics' adoption of the euro as national currency

The Culture

THE NATIONAL PSYCHE

To equate the Czechs with big-city slickers and the Slovaks with their country cousins may sound trite, but there's some truth to it. On the whole, the Czechs are slightly more cosmopolitan and progressive, the Slovaks more traditional and religious. The grey years of communism are far enough behind that many young locals wouldn't recognise a picture of Stalin. Youthful optimism for an EU-accepted future pervades, tempered with the older generation's stoic reserve.

There's no denying German culture has had something of an influence on the Czech Lands. Here there tends to be more of a businesslike determinism, especially in Prague. That's not to say the people don't enjoy their *pivo* (beer). Strike up a conversation with the locals in a busy pub and you're likely to run into some definite opinions about politics and history – symptomatic of their intellectual streak combined with a long national history. Slovaks tend to be strongly family oriented and perhaps slightly more gregarious and less concerned about work. A friend described the difference this way: if a Czech and a Slovak family each had the same amount of money for a vacation at the Croatian seashore, the Czechs would drive, plan out and pack all their own food, rent a place where they could cook, and stay for 10 days. The Slovaks would fly, get a hotel room, throw a big party, spend all their money in the first weekend and have to go home early.

Most of the younger generations in both countries speak at least some English. Pensioners can still be a little surly on the surface (why don't people on buses ever smile?), but ask about their country, or show a little language knowledge, and the shell cracks to reveal generosity and warmth. Both nations share a deep poetic sense and a talent for literature that comes out colourfully in everyday conversation – even in English.

LIFESTYLE

Though less so in the capitals, family is still at the centre of most lives here. Because of economic realities, young adults often live with their parents in the family flat until they marry. Getting around without a car used to be quite common, but that's changed, and usually a town-living family will have at least one. In the villages, bicycles are still the way to go.

Czechs tend to have a slightly higher standard of living; dining out, especially in Prague, is commonplace. Going out to dinner is not a regular event for most older Slovaks, and the young people just frequent the cafés, nursing drinks for hours on end. Large groups of relatives and friends get together for name days, weddings, any communal event. Weekends are usually spent walking in nature whenever possible.

While things are moving towards a more American model of work (you hardly ever see a bottle of brandy brought out for morning meetings any more), both Czechs and Slovaks go to work early (many before 7am), leave early (by 4.30pm) and take long lunches and breaks. Maternity leave is extremely generous (six months paid at 90%, with up to three years off allowed). Paternity leave as such doesn't yet exist. For the most part, both incomes are necessary and mothers usually work. Divorce and remarriage are not uncommon.

Both the Czechs and Slovaks are united in their distrust of minorities in general and the Roma people (see opposite) in particular.

The A to Z of all things Czech is at your fingertips in *From Good King Wenceslas to the Good Soldier Šejk* by Andrew Roberts.

DID YOU KNOW?

Before 1848, high schools in Bohemia used German, not Czech, as the language of instruction.

The word for 'gay' in Czech and Slovak (*teplous/teplý*) also means warm or hot. Many a novice speaker has erroneously come out of the closet on a sunny day!

ECONOMY

The post-2004 EU membership years have been a time of economic boom for both nations. Gross domestic product (GDP) growth in the Czech Republic jumped from 1.5% to 4.6% in 2005; Slovakia's was up from 4% to 5.5%. EU involvement has helped with everything, from the production of shiny new tourist brochures, to improved roads for those tourists, so enticed, to travel on.

In the past few years, Peugeot-Citroën, Volkswagen and Kia auto manufacturers have built plants in Slovakia. In the Czech Republic, auto parts manufacturing is also big (many are then shipped off for assembly). Steel, refining and other heavy industries still play a key role in the Slovak economy, while tourism and service industries play an increasing role in the Czech Republic.

POPULATION

The Czech Republic is a homogenous place: of the approximately 10.2 million people living there, a little more than 94% identify themselves as ethnic Czechs. Slovaks make up 1.9%, Poles 0.5%, Germans 0.4%, Roma 0.1%, and the rest 'other'. (Activists claim the Roma figure is closer to 2%.) About 20% of those living in Moravia identify themselves as ethnic Moravians rather than Czechs. Population density is 130 people per square kilometre – a little more than half that in the UK (246). The average life span is 72 years for men and 78.5 years for women. A little more than a quarter of the population lives in the major cities, more than a tenth in Prague.

Almost 86% of Slovakia's 5.35 million people class themselves as ethnic Slovaks. The largest minority, the Hungarians, comprises around 11% of the population; they live mostly in southern and southeastern Slovakia. Czechs account for 1.2% of the population. Officially, the Roma people make up about 1.8% of the population, the vast majority living in East Slovakia. (Civil rights groups say the correct figure is closer to 4%.) The average life span is 69.9 years for men and 77.2 years for women. Population density is 111 people per square kilometre. Seven per cent of the population lives in Bratislava.

Roma

The Roma people (*Romové/Romská komunita*), sometimes called Romany, are the most conspicuous minority in both nations. (Note: the term 'gypsies' (*cikáni/cigány*) is considered derogatory.) Roma tribes migrated to Europe from India and by the 16th century had spread into Central Europe. Roma numbers are hard to pin down in both republics. Officially, the populations are around 11,800 in the Czech Republic and 90,000 in Slovakia, but advocacy groups claim the actual populations could be closer to 200,000 and 400,000, respectively. The largest concentration of Roma people is in East Slovakia.

The majority of Czechs hold a low opinion of the Roma and are not shy about saying so, blaming them for crimes, taking advantage of the social welfare system etc. Most Slovaks share this opinion, if not a more virulent version of it. (They call anything dirty and disagreeable 'gypsy business'.) In the late '90s, Slovak parliament members would deride the Roma people from the podium.

To qualify for EU membership, the government had to clean up its stance towards minorities, especially the Roma. A Ministry of Minority Affairs was created in Slovakia, and housing and other programmes got under way; a Commission on Romany Affairs was created in Prague. Both nations were welcomed into the EU in 2004 and the world is still watching.

As of late, more services for the Roma people are being offered in the Czech Republic: a computer learning centre recently opened in Prague, and

DID YOU KNOW?

Czech and Slovak jokes about misers are generally aimed at the Dutch.

Božena Němcová is loved as much for her ground-breaking views on women's rights as her literature. Some scholars see her main work, *Babička*, as a commentary on the existential struggles of women.

Fourteen female voices are heard in *Povidky: Short Stories by Czech Women*, edited by Nancy Hawkins. What may be most remarkable is that Hawkins includes the writing of Roma women.

the police force is actively recruiting more Roma candidates. But the future is uncertain in Slovakia, where the Slovak National Party (SNS) became part of the ruling coalition in June 2006. Racism is still institutionalised in Slovak villages: in one, the town government built a wall to separate the main township and the Roma settlement; in another village, the Roma were banned from a local swimming pool. Even in the Czech Republic there are still issues: the city of Brno, for example, recently refused to sponsor an exhibit on the extermination of the Roma during the Holocaust.

Tragically, sporadic violence against the Roma people also happens, but as a traveller you're unlikely to encounter it. If you are dark skinned, you might get a few sideways glances, but that's about it. On the other side of the coin, it would be difficult to deny that pickpocketing schemes targeting tourists often originate from Roma individuals.

The Roma culture has long been famous for its musical ability. For information on authentic Romany music see p51.

SPORT

Ice hockey is by far the most popular sport. Football (soccer) comes second, but everything else is very much an also-ran. Slovaks especially love the outdoors and hiking, but playing at spectator sports besides hockey or football is not really that big a deal.

Ice Hockey

The rivalry between the Czech and Slovak Republics in ice hockey is hot enough to melt the rink, but the Czechs usually come out ahead. Both countries have world-class players in the North American leagues. Most of the world's hockey pucks are made at Gulfex in the Czech Republic and Vergum in Slovakia. During the national and international playoffs, you can't escape hockey – it's on most every TV set in most every bar and restaurant in both republics. During the 2004–05 National Hockey League (NHL) lockout in North America, 51 players returned home to play in the Czech and Slovak leagues.

The Czech national ice hockey team is a world powerhouse. They took gold at the 1998 Winter Olympics in Nagano and again at the World Championships in 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2005. At the 2006 Winter Olympics in Torino, the Czechs beat the Russians to take the bronze medal.

Although only eight Czech players were selected for the NHL draft in 2006, there is still a number of famous players shooting it out on North American ice. Jaromir Jagr (New York Rangers), one of the top NHL players, is probably the most well known. He has set numerous goal-scoring records and played on the last two Czech Olympic medal-winning teams. Dominik Hašek (Detroit Red Wings), the 'Dominator', is the oldest active goalie in the NHL and has several Stanley Cups 'under his stick'. Patrik Elias (New Jersey Devils), a goal-scoring left wing, is one to watch.

Ice hockey in Slovakia has a long history; the first puck was placed on Slovak ice just after WWI. Although the Slovak national team brought home the bronze at the 2003 World Championships, Slovakia was knocked out of the Olympics medal race during the quarterfinals in Torino in 2006 – by the Czech Republic. The announcement that Slovakia will host the 2011 World Championships (and Bratislava will get a new multibillion-koruna hockey stadium) surely perked up the fans. Marián Hossa (Atlanta Thrashers), right wing, is one of the most well known Slovak players in the NHL.

There are rinks all over both republics where local games can be seen, but the major stadiums are in Prague, Bratislava and Košice. The season runs from September to April. HC Sparta Praha (2006 Czech national champions)

Romea (www.romea.cz) is a good source of news and information about the Roma communities in both countries.

DID YOU KNOW?

The heaviest train ever pulled by a man – 20 freight cars loaded with metal (total weight 1000 tonnes) – was moved by Juraj Barbaric in Košice, Slovakia. He dragged it for 4.5m.

For the history of Slovakia's triumphs in the sporting arena, see www.sportslovakia.sk.

and HC Slavia Praha are the two Prague teams. HC Slovan and HC Košice play in Bratislava, but neither were contenders in the 2006 playoffs.

As with football, women's hockey attracts very little interest in either republic.

Football

The Czech Republic national football team is currently ranked 10th in the world. They made the first round of the World Cup finals in 2006 and generally acquit themselves quite well. Czech footballers are even more loved at a local level. Most years, the top teams are from Prague: AC Sparta Praha and SK Slavia Praha. Bohemia, a lesser Prague team, has a kangaroo as its mascot – go figure! The soccer season runs from September to December and March to June. Games are usually held on Sunday afternoon and are televised. Watching football in a pub full of Czech partisans is a real experience.

The Slovak national team has yet to make its mark on the international stage, not having qualified for the World Cup or European championships, but it does have a long tradition of local league teams. SK Slovan Bratislava is the country's most famous and successful team. The Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) Cup normally sports two or three Slovak teams each year.

There are also women's leagues, but attendance figures are abysmal.

Tennis

The Czech Republic has produced more than its share of international tennis stars, including Ivan Lendl, Martina Navrátilová and Jana Novotná. However, within the country, tennis has nothing like the following of hockey or football. Radek Stepanek, who made it to the quarterfinals at Wimbledon in 2006, has been ranked as high as eighth in world standings. Up-and-comer Lukáš Dlouhý made it to the third round in the 2006 French Open. Nicole Vaidišová and Tomas Berdych are names to watch.

Slovakia has produced the occasional top player. Martina Hingis spent her formative years in Košice before moving to Switzerland. After fighting back from injuries, she is currently ranked 12th, but she has been ranked as high as first in the world. She has won nine Grand Slam titles in various opens. Local sweetheart Daniela Hantuchová has had quite some success in mixed doubles, most recently at the 2005 US Open.

Other Sports

Prague's mayor, Pavel Bém, has been pushing his city as potential host of the 2020 Olympic Games. Public response has been mixed; there was even talk of a national referendum on the issue. However, they still have time, as bids won't be finalised until 2010.

Canoeing and kayaking have been gaining in popularity over the past few years in both republics, mainly as a result of international success, including eight individual Slovak medals at the 2004 Olympics. The ICF Canoe Kayak Slalom Racing World Championships was held in Prague in 2006 and the sponsoring country did quite well, with five kayaking medals overall.

In 2005, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, held the World Mountain Bike Orienteering Championships, a testimony to the nation's hilliness.

MEDIA

In the Czech Republic the majority of media emanates from Prague. Well, sort of. Though produced in the capital city, most of the daily newspapers are owned by foreign firms. The daily broadsheet *Mlada Fronta Dnes* (owned by Mediaprint-Kappa; German) and the tabloid *Blesk* (owned by Ringier;

DID YOU KNOW?

Football tennis (*nohejbal*) originated in Czechoslovakia. Based on volleyball-like rules set down in 1936, the game involves kicking a football over a tennis net.

Sports Illustrated model Petra Nemcova, born in the Czech Republic, was caught in the 2004 tsunami. She writes about the loss of her boyfriend in the storm in *Love Always, Petra*.

Swiss) garner the largest market share. International ownership of radio outlets is not uncommon either. Public radio has about a third of the market; the classical music station Frekvence 1 is owned by the French. The nation has 72 regional broadcasts.

Czech TV has four stations: two analog variety and two digital sports. TV Nova, the biggest commercial station, was the first to operate after the former Soviet bloc crumbled, and Prima TV began broadcasting in 1997.

The Slovak media have not always been known for their independence from politics. That said, there are 13 dailies to choose from (and more evening papers), so the full range of opinions should certainly have a forum. The largest publisher is Ringier (Swiss); its daily, *Nový Čas*, is the most popular.

The country's most popular TV station, Markíza, is privately owned by Pavol Rusko, a Berlusconi-type media magnate in miniature. Slovak TV has two national stations (which often air dubbed American series) and there's a second, smaller, private station, Jój. Slovakia has 30 radio stations broadcasting.

RELIGION

Despite the Czech Republic's Hussite history (see p26), these days the country seems to be phenomenally uninterested in God. About 60% of Czech citizens call themselves agnostic. Roman Catholic believers make up 26% (mostly in Moravia), and Hussites less than 2%.

The first Christian church in Slovakia was founded at Nitra way back in 833. Despite communist suppression, the faith has really held on. More than 60% of the population claims Roman Catholic affiliation, another 6% are Lutheran, 4% are Greek Catholic and 2% are Calvinist. Churches fill to overflowing on Sunday. The late Pope John Paul II visited the country three times, so if that rate of visits continues, Benedict XVI should be arriving any day now.

Jews came to what is now the Czech Republic in the 11th century (they were among Prague's first inhabitants) and to Slovakia in the 13th century. When Czechoslovakia was founded in 1918, Jews comprised about 4% of the population. At the outbreak of WWII the Jewish population in Czechoslovakia was around 122,000; at least 70% were deported and killed. Many who did survive subsequently immigrated to Israel. In 2006 the Jewish population in Prague numbered around 1600, the total in the country being a few thousand. About 2300 Jews are registered in the Slovak Republic. Though some old synagogues have been restored and are used as concert halls and the like, many more, especially in Slovakia, are in sad decay.

ARTS Architecture

Clearly the Gothic playground, Prague is what first springs to mind when you mention architecture in the two republics, but there are also Art Nouveau flights of fancy, indigenous wooden churches, grand castles and a style unique to the Czech Republic: cubism.

CASTLE ROCK

Castles from the 12th century onwards dot hilltop outcrops in both republics. Many rocky ruins of medieval fortifications remain today. Dated to 1209, Spiš Castle (p418) in East Slovakia is the grandest and most photogenic relic. Threats came and went, later-style buildings were added and the battlements bulked up. Central Bohemia's Krivoklát Castle (p151) is one of the oldest in that region, but there are dozens more in the republics. For more information see the destination chapters and the Classic Castles itinerary (p21).

While Michael Chabon isn't Czech, his story of a Prague Jew who leaves his home and family at the beginning of WWII, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, has some grim insights and gorgeous evocations of Prague's Jewish quarter.

Track down info on even the most obscure castles in Slovakia at www.castles.sk and in the Czech Republic at www.zamky-hrady.cz.

GOTHIC TO RENAISSANCE

Prague is a gallery of Gothic architecture. In the 14th century, King Karel (Charles) IV sponsored a massive Gothic building campaign, under the guidance of his chief architect, Peter Parler. There are Gothic buildings all over town, but the most famous extant works are Charles bridge (p100) and St Vitus cathedral (p89). The style was employed from about the 13th to the 16th century, with earlier incarnations being simpler, and later ones more ornate. Look for stained glass, pointed arches, external flying buttresses, spires and gargoyles. The diamond vaulting you see in ceilings all over Prague (and the rest of the country) is also a product of the era. The cathedral of St Barbara (p157) in Kutna Hora, Central Bohemia, is one of the finest Gothic shrines anywhere, says Unesco.

Most of the Gothic grandiosity that remains in Slovakia is ecclesiastical. The examples are relatively fewer and farther between. First prize would go to either the massive Cathedral of St Elizabeth (p408) in Košice or the majestic Church of St James (p416) in Levoča.

Many of the originally Gothic burghers' houses on old Slovak town squares were remade with Renaissance façades when that Italian-influenced style arrived in the 16th century. Bardejov (p427) is a shining, uniform example that has been recognised by Unesco; Levoča (p416) comes a close second. Renaissance style characteristics include symmetry, elaborate gables and exterior walls covered in sgraffito (mural technique whereby the top layer of plaster is scraped away or incised to reveal the layer beneath; painting is done on top). Sgraffito was popular in palaces as well as town houses, so you can find examples everywhere.

In the Czech Republic, the Summer Palace (p89) at Prague Castle took the city by Renaissance storm, spawning a host of imitations. Czech designs often featured legendary or historical scenes. In the provinces, Telč (p313) is another Unesco-noted town full of Renaissance regalia, and the chateau (p254) in Litomyšl is a knockout.

BAROQUE & ROCOCO

When the Catholics thrashed the Hussites in the 1620 Battle of the White Mountain (following a couple of hundred years of sporadic street battles that demolished large parts of Prague), the Jesuits sponsored lavish baroque (17th to 18th century) rebuilding throughout Prague. Germanic landowners took a fancy to the style and it spread to the rest of the country. Look for curved walls, domes, gilding and elaborate, emotional sculpture – indoors and out – all across the nation.

The best-known practitioners of baroque architecture were the unstoppable Bavarian father-and-son team of Kristof and Kilian Ignatz Dientzenhofer, whose obsession with gold-plating can be seen all over Prague, but especially at St Nicholas church (p102). The church of Mary Magdalene (p214) in Karlovy Vary is another good example.

The baroque style, with a Viennese twist, was also appreciated by wealthy Slovak aristocrats and merchants of the 17th century. A fine example of early works is the University church of St John the Baptist (p358) in Trnava. The rococo (a lighter, more flowery outgrowth of baroque) influence of Austrian empress Maria Theresa in the 18th century can be seen in the swags and other plasterwork ornamentation of town buildings, especially in Bratislava's old town (p342).

VILLAGE VERNACULAR

Numerous villages in Slovakia are photogenic folk art in themselves. Vernacular architecture – typically log or wood structures, occasionally plastered over –

DID YOU KNOW?

Prague's Hradčany Castle, which covers 7.83 hectares, is in the *Guinness Book of World Records* as the largest ancient castle.

can be downright decorative. Examples from the 18th century are usually the oldest you'll see. In Čičmany (p379) white geometric patterns painted on dark logs create a graphic picture. The pastel plaster homes of Vlkolínec (p390) are on Unesco's World Heritage List.

You can find some of the best village architecture in a *skansen/skanzen* (open-air village museum), where houses, churches, barns and other buildings have been collected. The better ones are an attempt to show whole communities. Inside the buildings you'll find typical furniture, linen, clothing, utensils, tools and decorations. For more information see the Folk Life & Art itinerary, p22.

WOODEN CHURCHES

Dark wooden shingles cover onion-domed roofs, and brilliant icon screens decorate the interiors: East Slovakia is dotted with picturesque wooden churches, largely made without nails. These houses of worship from the 18th to the early 20th century belong primarily to the Greek Catholic and Orthodox faiths. Parts of the Sáriš region and the Eastern Borderlands were home to the Rusyn minority usually associated with these churches. See the East Slovakia chapter for more information about wooden churches around Bardejov (p430) and Snina (p432).

ART NOUVEAU

Curvaceous shapes, recurrent undulations, natural flow... the organic elements of early-20th-century Art Nouveau certainly seemed to be a reaction to uptight Victorianism. The art of Art Nouveau is in the details, so get your camera and telephoto lens ready and be prepared to look up, down and every way. The theory of Art Nouveau was there should be no line drawn between art and everyday life, so everything down to the doorknobs was designed in style.

The Czech Republic, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, embraced Art Nouveau with open arms. You can see good examples scattered throughout the country, including in Karlovy Vary (p211) in West Bohemia, but the largest concentration is in Prague. The extraordinary Municipal house (p103) in Prague is a showcase of arches and sculpture, wrought iron and stained glass; this is the Art Nouveau design not to miss! Wander around the streets of the city's Nové Město district (p105) and you can't help but notice the elaborate, whimsical façades and mosaic elements. Also look for the graphic flourishes on smaller façades, like that of the 1906 Hotel Evropa on Wenceslas Square (p107). Pragotur (p121) leads Art Nouveau-oriented walking tours of the capital.

One of the leading Czech architects of the period was Jan Kotěra, a professor at Charles University, who designed the Art Nouveau East Bohemia regional museum (p247) in Hradec Králové. Moravian designer Alfons Mucha, who specialised in Art Nouveau (p42), was one of the most influential visual artists of the period.

Examples of Art Nouveau are scattered throughout Slovakia. In Bratislava you should seek out the fanciful Blue Church (p344) designed by Hungarian architect János Ödön Lechner. Hotel Slávia (1902) in Košice (p410) has an exquisite Art Nouveau mosaic façade and café, but the rooms aren't particularly period.

CUBISM

Prague is one of the few cities in the world where you can see cubist architecture – a simple, nonconfrontational style that's extremely functional. For more information see What's in the Box? (opposite).

The vivid village photos in *Folk Treasury of Slovakia*, by Vladimír Barta, are enough to make you want to go and visit a *skanzen* today.

WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

A handful of Czech architect-artists belonged to an early-20th-century avant-garde modernist group with French influence (cubism in art took shape in France). They broke out of the box in about 1911 and *voilà!* an indigenous Czech architecture materialised. Actually, it might be fairer to call cubist architecture Pragocentric; although there are a few examples in Brno (p295) in South Moravia, the vast majority of these angular gems are in the capital city.

The theory was that a simple cube is the most basic of shapes and therefore the use of geometric forms is tantamount to boiling things down to their essential elements. Czech cubists got downright playful with the idea, creating hexagonal windows, zigzag fences, a lamppost made of dodecahedrons (20-sided 3D shapes – really, look it up). Many of the shapes were almost crystalline. The main proponents of this architecture (which some link to a search for a Czech national identity within the Austro-Hungarian Empire) were Josef Chochol and Josef Gočár.

Probably the most well-known example is Gočár's chart-topping house of the black Madonna (p103), which contains the museum of Czech cubism – three floors full of geometric dynamism. The museum shop, Kubista (p140), sells an illustrated map (190Kč) of cubist architectural sights around town. Vyšehrad (p110) should be a definite stop on your tour. Even Kafka's grave (p117) in the local cemetery is crystal shaped. When you're tired of walking, head to the cubist-style pub, U Neklana (p132), to refresh.

You won't find infinite examples, though. In the end, Czech cubism didn't compute for the masses, and the last buildings were constructed by 1919.

COMMUNIST REALISM?

The communist era basically dotted the landscape and cities with eyesores. The building material of choice was concrete. Vast, truly ugly *panelák* (concrete apartment buildings made with prefabricated panels) popped up on the outskirts of cities in both nations, especially during the 1960s and '70s. Slovakia was particularly hard hit. The communist era left some monumentally odd structures, such as the New bridge (p347) and Radio building (p347) in Bratislava.

MODERN DAY

Restoration is the biggest architectural movement these days; nothing particularly interesting is being done with new buildings. The one exception is Prague's most idiosyncratic and appealing newer building, Vlado Milunč and Frank Gehry's Dancing building (p110) – an exercise in fluid unconventionality.

Visual Arts

GOthic TO BARoque

During the Middle Ages, the style of a painting or sculpture generally followed the architectural style of the building in which it was housed, so you'll find Romanesque paintings in Romanesque churches, for instance. However, the Czechs took the Gothic template and gave it their own Bohemian twist; medieval art from this region seems brighter, more humorous and more personal than much of the dour work produced in Italy. Some of the best is contained in the National Gallery's exhibits in the convent of St Agnes (p104) in Prague. Also look there for the late-14th-century Třeboň Altar panels and the Master Theodorik panels originally in Karlštejn castle (p148) in Central Bohemia.

Slovakia's premier artist lived way back in the 15th century: Master Pavol was a woodcarver and painter extraordinaire. His impressive Gothic art (and that of his students) decorates numerous churches in the Spiš region in East Slovakia and the High Tatras, including St George Church (p399) in Poprad.

By far the most celebrated of his works is the Gothic altar in the Church of St James (p416) in Levoča; the 16m-high structure has several painted panels and sculptures depicting scenes and figures from the life of Christ.

The Counter-Reformation brought a wave of religious sculpture into both republics, including hundreds of plague columns dedicated to the Virgin Mary or the Holy Trinity, carved to give thanks for deliverance from the Black Death in the 1700s. You can't miss these ornate baroque monuments covered with gilding and sculptures; they're usually found at the centre of a main town square. Holy Trinity column (p271) in Olomouc, North Moravia, is on Unesco's World Heritage List.

ICONS

The Greek Catholic and Orthodox wooden churches of East Slovakia have their own interesting art: icons. These stylised representations of the saints and Jesus were used as a gateway to worship. Extant examples date back to the 15th century, but those from the 18th are much more common. You could spend days, even weeks, going from church to church, looking at the iconostases (icon-covered screens set before the altar with doors for the priest and the holy liturgy), but the finest works have been gathered for safekeeping in the Icon Exposition (p428) in Bardejov.

NATIONAL REVIVAL

From the late 18th to the 20th century, the Czech National Revival spurred an interest in Czech themes and representations of everyday life. The biggest name from this period is Josef Mánes; some of his work can be seen in the Centre for Modern & Contemporary Art (p113) in Prague, which is an excellent place for all kinds of post-18th-century Czech painting.

Mikuláš Aleš is regarded as one of the best artists of folk and national themes. You can see three of his murals near náměstí Republiky (p220) in Plzeň, West Bohemia. There are more of his murals in the towns of South Bohemia, including Mirovice, where his home has been turned into a small museum (p189).

Sculptors like Josef Myslbek immortalised legendary Czechs: his equestrian statue of St Wenceslas (p108) is a popular meeting place in Prague's Wenceslas Square. Bohumil Kafka's muscular 1941 statue of Jan Žižka (p114) – again, in Prague – was at the tail end of this Czech-pride movement.

The Slovak National Revival also created a crop of painters eager to do justice to the new movement. The most well-known 20th-century painter who specialised in Slovak themes was Martin Benka. In addition to his pastoral paintings in the Slovak National Gallery (p344), there's the Martin Benka museum (p384) in Martin. Miloš Bazovský also used folk themes and village life in his sometimes abstract work, and he too has his own museum: the Gallery Bazovský (p364) in Trenčín.

ART NOUVEAU

While Alfons Mucha's mystic Art Nouveau posters are known worldwide, not many people think of him as a Czech artist born in Moravia. That's how he thought of himself, though. While he predominantly lived in Paris and was associated with the French Art Nouveau movement, Mucha's heart remained Slavic to the core. He often claimed his famous Art Nouveau illustrations were based on Czech folk art themes. His more serious paintings revisit the themes of Slavic suffering, courage and crossnational brotherhood.

You can see the most outstanding of his non-Art Nouveau works – a series of 20 large canvases called *Slav Epic* – in the Mucha gallery (p310) in Moravský Krumlov. For more on this colossal work see Epic Art, opposite.

DID YOU KNOW?

The rebuilding of the Globe Theatre in London in the 1990s was based on a series of engravings done by a Czech artist from 1607 to 1677 for English King Charles II.

Want to know more about Alfons Mucha? Head to www.mucha-foundation.org.

You can check out Mucha's Art Nouveau decoration work at the Municipal house (p103) in Prague. His design and print work can be seen all over the Czech Republic, but there are good collections in Prague at the museum of Decorative Arts (p97) and the Mucha museum (p105).

AVANT-GARDE

In the early 20th century Prague became a major European centre for avant-garde art, which included movements like cubism and surrealism. The Mánes gallery (p110) in Prague was established as the counterculture to the Academy of the Arts; it still shows provocative exhibits.

Leading cubist painters included Josef Čapek and Emil Filla. Surrealists included Zdenek Rykr, Josef Šíma and Jindřich Štyrský.

Between the two World Wars, functionalism evolved and flourished within a group called Devětsil, led by Karel Teige, who worked in all kinds of media.

The lines between the artistic disciplines were blurred at the time, so in addition to looking for progressive works at the Centre for Modern & Contemporary Art (p113), check out the museum of Decorative Arts (p97) and the museum of Czech cubism (p103), all in Prague.

Illustrator Josef Váchal produced some stunning surrealist design work. The home of one of his biggest collectors has been turned into Portmoneum (p254), virtually a Váchal museum, in East Bohemia.

Mikuláš Galanda was a big Slovak name from the avant-garde movements of the 1930s, and Peter Matejka managed to capture sensualism and surrealism on canvas. The works of both are in the collection of the Slovak National Gallery (p344).

EPIC ART

Hear the name Alfons Mucha (1869–1930) and you probably think Art Nouveau. After all, it's the fanciful posters and illustrations he did in France and the USA that made him famous. But this Moravian-born boy remembered his homeland. In 1910 he moved to Prague and turned his attention to Pan-Slavism and his *Slovanská epopej* (Slav Epic). He envisioned the work taking five or six years but it ultimately took 18. During all that time, his backer, American plumbing magnate Charles Crane, kept forking out the dough. (Crane was known for investing his money to foster revolution around the world; apparently Slav nationalism fit his criteria.)

The results were, um, epic. Twenty canvases measuring up to 6m by 8m were donated to the city of Prague in 1928, with mixed success. Critics thought Mucha's 19th-century style was outdated, and after all the years he'd lived abroad, they considered him a Frenchman. The few canvases that were shown in Chicago and New York received much more acclaim there. No permanent hall was provided for Mucha's monumental art in Prague. Instead, after a temporary exhibit, in 1939 it was rolled up and put in storage. The canvases weren't to be shown as a set again until they were installed in 1967 in the castle in Moravský Krumlov, where they are now part of the Mucha gallery (p310). Not for long, though. More than 150 million crowns has been allocated for the building of a hall to house the *Slav Epic* in Prague. A modernist structure has been designed and a site in Stromovka Park chosen.

The intricate paintings allegorically appeal to Slavic unity and reproach foreign oppression, many with an overtly Christian perspective (no wonder the communists hid them away). Ten of the works have Czech themes (of which six relate to Jan Hus and the Hussite Wars) and 10 relate to events and themes in larger Slavdom, like *Praise of the Slavonic Liturgy*. The *Apotheosis of the Slavs*, representing Slavic peoples worldwide, is one of the most striking. An Art Nouveau poster commemorating the gift of the paintings (1928), also entitled *Slav Epic*, was perhaps more famous than the paintings at the time. It's expected that by 2010 the greatest Czech nationalist painting will finally be moved home to be displayed in the city the artist intended.

SOCIALIST REALISM

Communism pretty much pushed real art underground. Socialist realism was the only form of art officially tolerated. Look for statues of happy peasants and smiling soldiers holding flags patriotically aloft. Though many of the public statues have been removed, you can still find them on the main squares of smaller, modern, industrialised towns, or hidden off the main squares. (Write and tell us which you think are the best. The one on the square in Michalovce (p431), East Slovakia, is especially cheery.) Otherwise, the museum of communism in Prague (p107) is the place to go to see institutionalised art.

CONTEMPORARY

Sculptor David Černý spent much of the late communist and early postcommunist era in serious play. His major works include the *Miminka* sculpture – giant babies clambering all over the TV Tower (p117) in Žižkov, Prague. In recent years, sculptor Pavel Opočenský, once a member of Charter 77 (a group that strove for artistic freedom during the communist era), is perhaps known as much for his passion for underage girls as for his abstract, geometric works. To see what's new and current in Prague, go to the Centre for Modern & Contemporary Art (p113) and the Mánes gallery (p110).

Photographer Karol Plicka (1894–1987) was born in Vienna and spent some time in Prague, but most of his career was spent in Slovakia. In his lifetime he created an impressive portfolio of Czechoslovak images, many in villages. The small Karol Plicka museum (p386) is hidden in a little town in the Velká Fatra mountains in Central Slovakia, but his books are available everywhere.

To see the latest in Slovak art, head to the Danubiana – Meulenstein art museum (p354) outside Bratislava and the Milan Dobeš museum (p345) in Bratislava.

FOLK ART

Both republics have a deep and enduring tradition of turning everyday objects into art. Tools, utensils, musical instruments, linen, furniture and even entire buildings may be decorated with elaborate folk designs. Of the two nations, Slovakia is the more traditional and therefore the more folksy. Just about every town museum has a display of local folk art. The Ethnographic museum (p384) in Martin, Central Slovakia, has the most impressive collection, even if they could do a more dynamic job of presenting the material. Úľuv (www.uluv.sk), the national cooperative of *ľudové umelec* (folk art, literally art 'of the people'), sponsors festivals and has stores in addition to a training studio. Items to look for include reverse glass folk paintings, embroidered folk dress, ceramics from Modra (p356) in the Small Carpathians, and Hrnčiar pottery from near Michalovce (p431) in the Eastern Borderlands.

Czech and Slovak *skanseny/skanzeny* (open-air village museums) serve as repositories for home crafts. For more information see the Folk Life & Art itinerary, p22. Another place to see traditional crafts is at folk festivals and markets held around the countries, the biggest craft market being in Kežmarok (p412) in Slovakia. In the Czech Republic, the Moravské Slovácko region (p325) in South Moravia contains the country's most fascinating pocket of traditional culture and festivals.

Cinema

A strong artistic sense, a moody rawness, a willingness to deal with the grit of everyday life, characters who regularly ask ineffable questions...these are the qualities that have attracted audiences to Czech and Slovak cinema. The

CRYSTAL MADE CLEAR

Glass-making goes way back in the Czech Republic; beads dated to the Bronze Age have been found in excavations. Medieval glass-makers created 'forest glass' using the abundant wood and sand quartz in Bohemia. The impurities produced gave the glass a green tint. It's thought the intricate cut glass associated with Bohemian crystal came to be in the court of King Rudolf II, during the late 1500s, where engraving techniques were perfected. The composition of Czech crystal makes it particularly well suited to cutting (to be considered crystal, glass must have at least 24% lead, which makes it softer, and engraving easier).

In subsequent centuries the process was refined and gradually artisans learned how to take elements out to create clear crystal (or add them to give colour; cobalt, for example, turns the glass deep blue). In the 18th century Czech crystal was huge all across Europe, but the discovery of English crystal in the 19th century led to a decline. Still, the crystal industry has persevered.

Perhaps the most well-known glass-maker today is Moser (p212) in Karlovy Vary, West Bohemia. Moser crystal is not highly engraved; instead the glass-makers use translucent colour and gold enamel to great effect on simple, elegant shapes. There is a more traditional cut glass-making centre in North Bohemia, near Nový Bor (p242).

Glass-makers also create handblown ornaments and figurines. Here are some you might see, along with their traditional symbolic meanings:

- stars and moon – being close to heaven; blessing
- swan – gracefulness
- owl – wisdom
- birds – joy and cheerfulness

Czechoslovak film industry was never a powerhouse; not all that many films were made annually, and today only the Czech movie industry really remains. But what was made did garner international attention from the start.

In 1921, *Jánošík*, a US–Czechoslovak collaboration about the legendary 17th-century Slovak 'Robin Hood', came out in two versions: a domestic version showing his execution, and an American one where the hero escaped and lived happily ever after. However, it wasn't until the legendary Barrandov Studios in Prague (the biggest in the Czech Republic today) opened in 1930 that Czechoslovak film-making really took off. Notoriety ensued almost immediately. *Extaze* (Ecstasy), directed by Gustaf Machatý in 1932, was the first film ever to show full frontal nudity. (The pope objected to its screening at the 1934 Venice Film Festival.) Revealing all was one Hedwig Kiesler, who went on to Hollywood fame as Hedy Lamarr. Another early Czech director, Hugo Haas, filmed an excellent adaptation of Karel Čapek's anti-Nazi, science fiction novel, *Bílá smrt* (White Death, 1937), before finding fame in Hollywood.

Few films were made by Slovak directors before WWII, but cinematography saw a real evolution after the war, typified by the light-hearted and ever popular *Cathy* (1949) by Ján Kádar. In 1953, Koliba, Slovakia's film studio, opened in Bratislava, creating a backbone for Slovak cinema for years to come.

A NEW WAVE

The new wave (*nová vlna*) of artsy avant-garde productions washed ashore in the mid-1960s. Among the earliest and best were *Černý Petr* (Black Peter, 1963; the US version was called *Peter & Paula*) and *Lásky jedné plavovlásky* (Loves of a Blonde, 1965) by Miloš Forman. Slovak director Ján Kádar forged ahead with *Smrt si říká Engelchen* (Death Calls Itself Engelchen, 1963) and teamed up with Elmar Klos to produce *Obchod na korze* (The Shop on Main

To look through the history of famous Moser glass, go to www.moser-glass.com.

The slender novel *Utz* by British writer Bruce Chatwin looks back on the life of a Prague ceramics collector, recently deceased, and is a sharp and charming insight into Czech life. Chatwin died in 1989 and *Utz* was his last work.

Street, 1965), which won an Academy Award for best foreign film. It's a moving film depicting the life of Jews in Slovakia under Nazi occupation. In 1967, Czech director Jiří Menzel garnered the same honour with *Ostře sledované vlaky* (Closely Watched Trains), based on Bohumil Hrabal's eponymous book about growing up during WWII. František Vlácil's *Markéta Lazarová* (1967), a medieval epic of paganism versus Christianity on a personal level, usually tops polls ranking the best Czech films of all time.

It was a busy, successful period, but just a few short years later the Soviet invasion stopped the flow abruptly. Many young directors of the time escaped censorship because they were among the first graduates of the Academy of Film during communist rule and were therefore assumed to be ideologically 'clean'. Some took a hiatus; some left the country. Forman became a successful Hollywood director with films like *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *Amadeus* (filmed in Prague) and *The People vs Larry Flint*.

Films critical of the postinvasion regime were made during 1969 and 1970 but were promptly banned from public screening. The most outstanding of those from Czech directors were the morbid *Spalovač mrtvol* (The Cremator of Corpses), directed by Juraj Herz, and the gloomy *Ucho* (The Ear), directed by Karel Kachyňa. *Zert* (The Joke, 1970), directed by Jaromil Jireš, is a film version of Milan Kundera's eponymous book. The gritty and powerful documentaries by Slovak film-makers Dušan Hanák and Dušan Dušek were banned during the communist years but their popularity remained strong.

Probably the best among the films of the next two communist decades was the comedy *Vesničko má středisková* (My Sweet Little Village, 1985) directed by Jiří Menzel – a subtle look at the workings and failings of socialism in a village cooperative. One of Slovakia's best-loved directors is Juraj Jakubisko; his *Sedím na konári a je mi dobre* (I'm Sitting on a Branch and I'm Fine, 1989) is an excellent but bizarre tale of life in Slovakia after WWII involving stolen gold, murder, bad luck and tree climbing.

One of the greatest Czech exports is the animated work of Jan Švankmajer; his creepy *Alice* (1988) is a masterpiece. *The Cabinet of Jan Švankmajer* (1984) is a tribute to the film-maker by underground American animators the Quay Brothers.

THE '90S TO TODAY

Director Jan Svěrák and his screenwriting brother Zdeněk are among the biggest names of modern Czech cinema. Their 1994 hit, *Akumulátor*, was the most expensive Czech film produced at the time. In 1996 it was surpassed at the box office by the internationally acclaimed *Kolja* (Kolya), another of Svěrák's works, which managed to score the two big film prizes of 1997: best foreign film at both the Cannes Film Festival and the US Academy Awards. It's a slightly sugary story about a confirmed Czech bachelor saddled with a small Russian child on the eve of the Velvet Revolution. *Samotáři* (Loners, 2000), by director David Ondříček, centres on a group of people trying to find love in the 1990s.

Martin Sulík is one of Slovakia's most prominent current directors, winning an Oscar nomination for *Všetko, čo mám rád* (Everything I Like, 1992) and international acclaim for *Krajinka* (The Landscape, 2000). Lack of funding and the subsequent closing of the Koliba movie studios in 2000 meant moving production to Prague for more recent titles like *Sluneční stát* (City of the Sun, 2005). *Kruté Radosti* (Cruel Joys, 2003), directed by Juraj Nvota, is a comedy of unwanted family reunions and love set in small-town Slovakia c 1993.

In 2005 Czech writer-director Bohdon Sláma came out with a real winner in *Stestí* (Something Like Happiness), a black comedy about young people

Czech Film Center (www.filmcenter.cz) has the lowdown on film festivals and current Czech productions.

You can read snippets of Czech and Slovak authors in translation at <http://centomag.org/ceslit/>.

trying to make their way during economic hardship. (Part of it is set in one of the ugly concrete *panelák* buildings of the communist era.) Sláma won various awards and showings at international film festivals for *Stestí*, which is a follow-up to his acclaimed *Divoké včely* (Wild Bees, 2001).

Copies of Czech and Slovak films can be tough to track down abroad. The newer and award-winning titles are easier to find, often available with English subtitles. It's not a piece of pie in the films' countries of origin, either. Only a handful of Czech- and Slovak-language movies are box-office successes at home. Most Czech and Slovak cinemas screen Hollywood movies either dubbed (*dabovat*) or subtitled (*pod titul* or *titulky*) in the local language. Art-house cinemas in Prague (p138) are the most reliable places to catch the most recent indigenous films. Charlie Centrum (p351) in Bratislava occasionally has special showings of classic Slovak films.

ON LOCATION

Spooky Orava Castle (p386) in Central Slovakia appeared in the seminal vampire chiller, *Nosferatu*, way back in 1922. And with the republics' romantic old-town streets, hilltop fortresses and stunning scenery, it's not really surprising that both are still players in the movie biz. Because Prague has studio production capabilities, most of the international films are made there.

Prague itself has starred in numerous movies, including *Amadeus*, Barbara Streisand's *Yentl*, Tom Cruise's *Mission Impossible*, the *Bourne Identity* with Matt Damon, and the 2006 remake of the *Pink Panther* with Steve Martin, to name only a few. And the country's exposure goes beyond the capital. The 2005 blockbuster, *Chronicles of Narnia*, was filmed in part among the sandstone formations of the Adršpach Rocks (p261) in East Bohemia.

Behind Enemy Lines (2001) used Bratislava's old-town streets as a substitute for Vienna. Not all the coverage of Slovakia has been positive in recent times. For example, in the 2004 movie *Eurotrip*, the characters make a brief appearance in the capital, which is portrayed as a trash-strewn hellhole. But the movie the Slovak Tourist Board wishes had never been made is *Hostel* (2005). In this horror film presented by Quentin Tarantino and directed by Eli Roth, two young travellers are lured to a hostel in Slovakia where they get mixed up with gorgeous, easy women, human trafficking and murder. (Incidentally, the whole movie was shot in the Czech Republic – mostly Prague.) Incensed that their country was portrayed as a dangerous and licentious place, Slovak image-makers extended a formal invitation to the director to tour the country himself. He hasn't yet shown, but *Hostel II* is already in the works.

Literature CZECH

The Czech authors you're likely to have heard of are Franz Kafka, whose bleakly paranoid works were made just before WWII, and Milan Kundera, an expatriate Czech living in Paris who hit the big time in the 1980s with *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. With icons like these, it's no wonder most people think of Czech writers as dark, mystical, otherworldly, philosophical and obsessed with sex. Oppression and the legacy of history have long been Czech literary themes. The majority of the books mentioned below can be found in English translation.

Though he wrote in German, Franz Kafka, with a circle of other German-speaking Jewish writers in Prague, played a major role in the literary scene at the beginning of the 20th century. The hopelessness and sense of the absurd that pervade his writing have come to define existentialism. Kafka only published short stories during his lifetime; his novels were incomplete when

Did You Know?

Hostel, the 2005 horror movie that was set in Slovakia, was actually filmed with Czech actors in Prague.

Biographer Reiner Stach examines one of Franz Kafka's most productive periods (1910–15) in *Kafka: The Decisive Years*.

he died and were arranged by a friend, Max Brod, afterwards. You probably know his novella, *Metamorphosis*, in which a man turns into a bug, but other works include *The Trial*, *In the Penal Colony* and *Amerika*.

The 1960s liberalisation of socialism (prior to 1968) encouraged a resurgence in Czech literature. The main topic for writers like Josef Škvorecký (*The Cowards*) and Milan Kundera (*The Joke*) was communist oppression; both became known in translation. Kundera's commercially huge success, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, was made into a movie. Bohumil Hrabal wrote down-to-earth novels about the way people lived, as in *Ostře sledované vlaky* (Closely Watched Trains) about coming of age during WWII. After the crushing of the Prague Spring in 1968 (see Communism, Less Than More, p30), some writers fled; others stayed and wrote for the *samizdat* (underground) press, as did playwright and future president Vaclav Havel.

The frustration of Czech scholars unearthing their own history under domination existed even in the 19th century, when František Palacký wrote a seminal history of Bohemia and Moravia in Czech that pretty much classified history according to whether the Germans or Slavs were in control during a given period. Romantic views of traditional Slav life took hold about this time. Karel Hynek Mácha wrote probably the most famous Czech poem, *Máj* (May), which tells a tragic tale of love, betrayal and death, though it's known more for the romantic imagery of nature. (Mácha died at the age of 26, fighting a fire a few days before his scheduled wedding.) One of the nation's most beloved novels is Božena Němcová's *Babička*, a story of village life ('little grandma' comes to live with her daughter and grandchildren) that illustrates Czech customs and an affection for the native language. Czech history was a great source of inspiration for world-renowned poet and essayist Jan Neruda, whose short stories in *Povídky Malostranské* (Tales of the Malá Strana) are a satirical look at Prague's bourgeois in 1878.

After WWI, Jaroslav Hašek devoted himself to taking the piss out of the Hapsburg empire and its minions; itinerant and impoverished, he wrote *The Good Soldier Švejk*, a rambling, hysterical study of a Czech soldier during WWI (it's 'laugh out loud in public places' kind of stuff). In the years between the two World Wars, Karel Čapek was probably the best-known author; his science fiction works included *Rossum's Universal Robots*.

Most recently, there hasn't been a whole lot of Czech literature translated into English. Jáchym Topol, a rock lyricist from a dissident family, won several awards for his novel, *Sestra* (translated as *Silver City Sister*). The book is a dark and complicated romp through postcommunist Prague. Michal Viewegh's *Bringing Up Girls in Bohemia* is a satirical look at teen angst and a great snapshot of modern life in Prague. Czech native Iva Peckarková's novels span the globe, from Prague to New York to Nigeria. Names to watch include Emil Hák (Prague based) and Jaroslav Rudiš, whose graphic novels have garnered local praise.

SLOVAK

In Slovakia, too, literature – poetry and poets especially – played a big part in the national history, and vice versa. Unfortunately not very much has been translated, so unless otherwise noted, the texts mentioned below are not in English.

There was no such thing as a Slovak literary language until 1790, when Anton Bernolák published his *Slovak Grammar*, followed in 1827 by a Slovak dictionary – early cornerstones in the gathering Slovak National Revival. The 19th-century nationalist, linguist and poet Ľudovít Štúr took Bernolák's work one step further in 1845 by creating a grammar based on central Slovak dialects – a basis for the language still used today.

It's not surprising that writers of this era produced romantic fiction with a 'folk' flavour. The towering figure of the time was the Pan-Slavic poet and hero of the 1848 revolution, Janko Kráľ, who wrote in the new language and barely escaped execution by the Hungarians. (Well-known poet Jozef Šafarík wrote mostly in Czech.)

Slovakia's best-loved poet at the turn of the 20th century was Pavol O Hviezdoslav, who was also a main proponent of the Slovak language. He published some 15 volumes of verse in his lifetime. His anti-WWI *Krvavé Sonety* (Bloody Sonnets) won him a nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize. His works have been translated into several foreign languages, including English.

Post-WWI Slovak literary giants included Petr Jilemnický, whose immense leftist and visionary *Kronika* (Chronicle) describes the Slovak National Uprising (SNP), and Dominik Tatarka, who wrote in surrealist prose. Today, Michal Hvorecký is one of the most celebrated young writers. His cyberpunk novels have been translated into German, Czech and Slovenian. Not much Slovak writing has been translated into English.

Music

ROCK & POP

Rock was banned by the communist authorities because of its Western 'corrupting influence'. Pop music was allowed, but mainly harmless local clones of Western groups like ABBA. Rock found fans among political dissidents like Václav Havel but remained an underground movement, with a handful of bands playing to small audiences in obscure pubs and country houses. Raids and arrests were common. Czech band Plastic People of the Universe gained international fame when they were imprisoned in 1976 as the result of a trial intended to discourage underground music. The tactic was successful only temporarily and by the mid-1980s there was a lively underground scene.

Today, some of these bands, such as Plastic People and Tony Ducháček & Garage, have re-formed and are worth seeing live, as their music is very Czech. Veterans of the scene, Support Lesbians was once a hard rock outfit but these days is producing catchy dance pop. Bands with a harder edge include intellectual punk Už Jsme Doma and indie Freak Parade.

The Slovak scene is not as heavily into punk and rock as the Czech (DJ'd dance music is quite popular here now), nor does it have as long a history. Marián Varga and the Collegium Consortium were the progressive rock legends that played from the 1970s to 1990s. Now Varga is on his own, riffing instrumental on classical themes and appearing as a guest with other bands. Richard Muller and Paľo Habera are pop classics. Elán is another well-known pop band that's been around for years.

Slovak bands to listen out for today include No Name (pop/rock), IMT Smile (pop/rock with jazz influences) and Polemic (ska). Also listen out for individual singers Zuzana Smatanová and Jana Kirshner, who've had platinum success.

JAZZ, BLUES & FUNK

After WWII, Czechoslovak musicians were at the forefront of European jazz, but this came to an end with the 1948 communist putsch. Restrictions were gradually lifted in the 1960s. One of the top Czech bands was the SH Quintet, though it played for only three years at Prague's Reduta Jazz Club (p137), the first Czech professional jazz club. Another group was the Junior Trio, with Jan Hamr and the brothers Miroslav and Allan Vitouš, who all escaped to the USA after 1968. Jan Hamr (keyboards) became prominent in

The Book of Laughter & Forgetting by Milan Kundera is one of the author's less well-known but better books, mingling bites of philosophy with sex and humour to result in a very entertaining and thought-provoking package.

DID YOU KNOW?

The word 'robot' entered the English language because of Karel Čapek's play, *Rossum's Universal Robots*. (*Robota* means 'labour', as in hard work, in Czech.)

Year of the Frog by Martin Šimečka is the story of a young intellectual living in Bratislava during the communist era, who can work only menial jobs because he is barred from college as a result of his family's antigovernment attitudes.

In Search of Homo Sapiens: Twenty Five Contemporary Slovak Short Stories, edited by Paul Hudík and published in 2002, is one of the few places you can read writing out of modern Slovakia.

Tom Stoppard's 2006 play, *Rock 'n' Roll*, tells a love story set amidst Prague's underground dissident artistic movement of the 1960s and '70s. It features songs of the Plastic People of the Universe.

1970s American jazz rock as Jan Hammer and received a Grammy for the *Hawaii Five-O* theme. Miroslav Vitouš (bass) also rose to fame in several American jazz rock groups.

Flautist and composer Jiří Stivín sprang onto the jazz scene in the 1970s and produced two excellent albums with the band System Tandem. Still today he's an original, though his last album was classical. Another longtime jazzman is pianist Milan Svoboda, who also composes scores. Stan Wolarz is Scottish but has been pounding out the blues for 10 years in Prague. Open Sextet has three Czech and three Slovak members and plays original contemporary jazz around both countries. Band 123 belts out a healthy mix of jazz, blues and funk.

Jazz is a mainstay of the tourist entertainment scene in Prague and there are clubs on what seems like every corner. But a lot of what plays is stale, because there are fresh tourist faces to hear it nightly. One of the newer restaurant clubs, Dinitz Café (p137), has a good reputation for fresher jazz, blues and funk. There are small clubs in cities nationwide and several jazz festivals, including ones in Karlovy Vary (p215) and Český Krumlov (p174).

Peter Lipa is jazz in Slovakia. For 25 years this singer has been organising the international Bratislava Jazz Days festival (p347). In the '80s he was consistently ranked among the top performers in Europe; in the '90s he had his own club. Today you can hear his eclectic repertoire (classical jazz to Latin and funk) at venues around the country.

Good jazz bands first appeared in the 1960s, among them the Traditional Club Bratislava, Combo 4, Bratislava Jazz Quartet and Medik Quintet. Dodo Šošoka is a living jazz legend, having played drums and percussion around the country and internationally for almost 40 years. Born in Slovakia, jazz trumpeter Laco Džeczi now lives in the USA and has put out some 50 records, most with the band Celela NY.

On the funkier side, Slovakia has an active blues scene. Silvia Josifovska is a young jazz and blues singer with a big sound. Boboš Procházka is known for his soulful blues harmonica playing with band Frozen Dozen. The newest name to listen for is Juraj Haruštiak and his BluesBanda.

You'll see plenty of 'jazz cafés' throughout Slovakia, but quite often their live concerts are infrequent. The Jazz Café (p351) in Bratislava is one you can count on; Art Jazz Gallery (p362) in Piešťany is good, too.

CLASSICAL

A flowering of Czech music took place in the mid-19th century. Bedřich Smetana, the first great Czech composer and an icon of Czech pride, created a national style by incorporating folk songs and dances into his classical compositions. His best-known pieces are the operas *Prodaná Nevěsta* (The Bartered Bride) and *Dalibor a Libuše*, and the symphonic poem cycle *Má vlast* (My Country). Prague Spring (p122), the country's biggest festival, is dedicated to Smetana and begins with a parade from his grave to Smetana Hall, where *Má vlast* is performed.

Antonín Dvořák is perhaps everyone's favourite Czech composer. Among his best-known works are his symphony *From the New World* (composed in the USA while lecturing there for four years), his *Slavonic Dances* of 1878 and 1881, the operas *The Devil & Kate* and *Rusalka*, and his religious masterpiece *Stabat Mater*.

Well-known early-20th-century composers such as Zdeněk Fibich, Josef Suk and Bohuslav Martinů also became famous outside their country. Some of the most recent composers are Jan Novák, with his best-known work being the sonata *Chorea Vernales*, and Svatopluk Havelka, whose first symphony, *Pěna* (1965), is still his most notable.

For more information about jazz in the Czech Republic, go to www.jazzport.cz.

To learn more about classical music and current musicians in the Czech Republic, go to www.musica.cz.

During the 18th century the likes of Haydn, Mozart, Schubert and Beethoven graced the courts of the Hungarian nobility in Bratislava. Of the Slovak composers, the most prominent at the time were Juraj Jozef Zlatník and Anton Zimmermann, a cathedral organist who composed cantatas, symphonies, concertos and chamber music. Another contemporary was Georg Druschetzky, known for his solo, orchestral and chamber pieces.

Slovaks began to redefine their folk song heritage in the 19th century and Slovak composers of the time often used traditional folk motifs in their classical compositions. Only Ján Levoslav Bella and Mikuláš Schneider-Trnavský, however, achieved any substantial fame. Among Bella's best works are the opera *Kovář Wieland* and the symphonic poem *Fate & Dreams*.

Alexander Moyzes created probably the best Slovak compositions of the mid-20th century. One of Moyzes' students, Dezider Kardoš, has written the country's most innovative post-WWII music, especially his second symphony, *Hero's Ballad*, and *Concerto for Orchestra*.

The four main cities of Prague, Brno, Bratislava and Košice all have city orchestras that stage classical music regularly (usually September through to May), but smaller towns like Karlovy Vary also either have orchestras or occasional performances.

FOLK MUSIC

Traditional folk music, especially in Slovakia and Moravia, is well preserved by regional dance and song ensembles that play at festivals or community centres. These well-loved songs once helped conserve the native languages in villages dominated by Austrian or Hungarian rulers. Today, folk lyrics and rhythms are taken to new heights by performers who use them as a starting point on the journey to a new musical genre.

The original musical instruments were flutes or pipes, like the *fujara* (2m-long flute) and *koncovka* (strident shepherd's flute), drums and cimbalom (copper-stringed dulcimer of Middle Eastern origin that stands on four legs and is played by striking the strings with two mallets). Bagpipes (*dudy/gajdy*) were also popular. You'll likely still see the cimbalom today, accompanied by fiddle, bass, clarinet and sometimes trumpet or accordion. There are almost always dancers in regional costume, and a lot of skirt-twirling and foot-stamping to go with the music. Don't be surprised if you hear a high-pitched squeal intermittently throughout a song; it's not one dancer treading on another, but a sign of joy and enthusiasm.

In the modernised folk genre, Slovak artist Zuzana Mojžišová demands to be heard. Her eclectic, jazzy, almost Indian sound stems from original folk songs. Hrdza, a folk rock band from Prešov, uses lyrics from the national poet Janko Kráľ. Czech artist Ivana Bittová is doing earthy things with voice and sound, as an outshoot from Romany folk music (see below).

Folk ensembles keep the more traditional versions of folk music alive. You can see them perform at regional festivals, especially those in the Moravské Slovácko Region of South Moravia and in Central and Eastern Slovakia. Two of the biggest are the International Folk Festival (p326) in Strážnice and the Východná Folk Festival (p390) below the Tatras mountains in Slovakia.

Seeing musical theatre staged by folk ensembles is another way to experience the colour, showmanship and elaborate costumes of this style of music and dance. Look for performances of *Janošík* (about the Slovak Robin Hood) and *Hra a Svadba* (Play and Marriage) by folk ensemble Lúčnica.

ROMANY MUSIC

Despite hardship, the Roma people have maintained a strong musical tradition through the centuries. Traditional Romany music sung at home was often

Radio Prague (www.radio.cz) is an excellent online source of cultural news from the Czech Republic.

DID YOU KNOW?

Flamenco music from Spain and Rom pop from the Czech Republic are both music styles with Roma roots.

in the form of a long, slow lament, though dance songs did exist. For years, all anybody outside the community heard was the schmaltzy 'gypsy' music – essentially Hungarian dance tunes (*csardas*) accompanied by violin and cimbalom – first at wedding parties and then in restaurants, where you can still hear it today. Thankfully there are moves afoot to conserve and record more traditional songs. (For more information see Ancient Rhythms, opposite.)

The biggest name in Rom pop, a genre inspired by French group the Gypsy Kings, is Vera Bila. She was born in Slovakia and grew up in a village in the Czech Republic, where she still resides. Vera and her big voice have appeared worldwide, in New York, Paris and Singapore. Ida Kellarova is a teacher of Roma songs and a popular music artist with the band Roma Rats. In 2005 and 2006 she hosted a Roma music workshop; the resulting CD, *Gypsy Music Festival 2005*, is one to look for. Another Rom pop band is Gulo čar, from Brno.

Iva Bittová comes from Romany roots in Slovakia (and she lives in Brno) but her music defies classification. Her haunting violin and vocals have been likened to avant-garde art and an abstraction. Whatever you call it, her alternative music springs from the same sources as folk music variations.

A good place to experience the exuberance of Romany music is at a performance of the Romathan theatre group (p411) in Košice. You might also hear more traditional Roma folk bands at large music and folk festivals, such as the Východná Folk Festival (p390) in Central Slovakia and the Bazant Pohoda Festival (p365) in Trenčín, West Slovakia.

Theatre

MARIONETTE & PUPPET THEATRE

Marionette plays have been popular since the 16th century, and puppet plays since before then. Even under communism, puppet and marionette theatre was officially approved of and popular. A legendary figure in the 18th and early 19th century was Matěj Kopecký (1775–1847), who performed original pieces. The famous Czech composer Bedřich Smetana also wrote plays for marionettes.

After a lull, marionette theatre for adults was revived in the 20th century. Josef Skupa's legendary puppets, Špejbl & Hurvínek, still perform in Prague; replicas of the little chaps can be seen in tourist shops all over the country. The National marionette theatre (p139) in Prague is the place to see shows for adults.

In Bratislava, the State Puppet Theatre (p346) was founded in 1957. Today its shows are aimed at children as young as three. Many more theatres around both countries cater to this younger set.

BLACK-LIGHT & LATERNA MAGIKA

Anything avant-garde is bound to find a home in the city that invented cubist architecture. Black-light theatre was part of the avant-garde movement of the 1950s in France, catching on in Prague during subsequent decades.

The technique, first used by the ancient Chinese to entertain emperors, takes advantage of the imperfection of our eyesight. Our eyes have difficulty distinguishing black against black, so if a man dressed in black is inside a black box, holding a puppet painted with yellow phosphorescent paint, when a fluorescent light is turned on, the puppet appears to float.

In today's black-light theatre, technical tricks are mixed with mime, dance, puppetry and the absurd. These days, you can barely move in the Golden City without stumbling over a black-light theatre. It's touristy but it's pretty particular to Prague.

Latcho Drom (1994) is a French art film that follows the Roma people out of India, through Slovakia and into Western Europe, led by their music, which is mesmerising.

DID YOU KNOW?

Mahen's theatre in Brno, South Moravia, was the world's first electrified theatre (1882). Thomas Edison himself helped install the lighting.

ANCIENT RHYTHMS

Making an ethnolinguistic recording of traditional Romany songs in Slovakia is a revolutionary idea, given the pervasiveness of negative Roma stereotypes in the country. But ethnographer Jana Belišová and her team, which included Zuzana Mojžišová (a writer and adoptive mother of a Roma son), set out to see if they could do it. The result was spontaneous recordings, new connections, a book and now several CDs. In 2005, *Phurikane gilá: Ancient Roma Songs* came out in English translation; the book and companion CD chronicle the team's experiences. The other CDs are *Karačoňa* (contains Romany Christmas music) and *Hoj na nej* (has upbeat dance compositions). Following are Zuzana's answers to some questions we asked:

■ *How would you define the difference between 'gypsy' music played at restaurants and traditional, authentic Romany music?*

'Those two types of music could be totally different (eg have a different repertoire) or they could be an identical song. It's the performance in the bar versus at home that is so different that we may talk about other types of work. In front of an audience it's done for effect, to be pleasing; they ['gypsy' musicians] play what is expected by the audience. Roma people at home sing for personal pleasure, personal need, for sorrow or joy. The song is the way to express emotions, to share them. They really can do it more truly, more essentially, than we do.'

■ *What role does Rom pop play in the Romany music culture?*

'A big one. Rom pop is a kind of murder of authentic Roma music. It's a natural progression, which happened a long time ago in other cultures; it can't be stopped. But it's very important to make records written and recorded in the way of original songs, tunes, words – to help them survive.'

■ *Of the Romany musicians and groups performing in the Czech and Slovak Republics today, which ones are truest to the authentic sound, in your opinion?*

'I don't dare to answer in...[terms of the] whole range, because I don't know all Romany groups. There are some who came in a blaze of glory in the media; mostly those left the authentic sound. These on CD are authentic: Radišagos from Prakovce, Siblings from Markušovce, Sol.'

■ *What projects are you working on next?*

'Jana Belišová is trying to find enough money to record and print our CD and book of children's Roma songs. Dana Rusnoková, the photographer in our book, is finishing a documentary about a Roma family in Rudňany. I'm writing my dissertation about European movies in which Roma people take part and about those that take place in a Roma *osada* (settlement) with the main protagonist a Roma man.'

Laterna magika (magic lantern) is the other interesting form of Prague theatre that survived the communist censors and continues today. In 1958, director Alfréd Radok and stage designer Josef Svoboda used projected images as part of their programmes that showed at the Czech booth at the World Expo that year.

Today, the theatre performances tell a story with the use of projected images, opera, dance, some black-light techniques and occasionally live animals, but no words. This mixed-media approach is a sellout. For more information see p139.

DRAMA

Drama, historical plays and fairy tales contributed to the Czech National Revival, with the first professional companies appearing in Prague and Brno. Major 19th-century playwrights were often those who, like Ján Kolár, were

also active in writing novels. In 1883 the National theatre (p138) opened in Prague, cementing the Czech language's place on the stage.

In the early years of the first Czechoslovak Republic the leading lights among playwrights were the novelist Karel Čapek and the brilliant František Langer. During the communist era classical theatre was of a high quality, but the modern scene was stifled. Some excellent plays, including those by Václav Havel, went unperformed locally because of their antigovernment viewpoint, but appeared in the West. In the mid-1960s, free expression was explored in Prague's *divadlo na Zábradlí* (theatre on the Balustrade) with works by Ladislav Fialka, Havel, Milan Uhde and comedy duo Jiří Suchý and Jiří Šlitr. Suchý is still performing today and has a successful show.

Environment

THE LAND Czech Republic

The 78,864 sq km of the Czech Republic, squeezed between Germany, Austria, Slovakia and Poland, is made up of Bohemia in the west and Moravia in the east.

Roughly speaking, Bohemia is a 500m-high plateau surrounded by low mountains, forming a basin drained by the Labe (upper Elbe) river and its tributary, the Vltava (Moldau), the republic's longest river at 430km. Along the German border are the Šumava mountains in the southwest, and the Bohemian Forest in the west. At the eastern Polish border rises the impressive Krkonoše mountain range, which contains the republic's highest peak, Sněžka (1602m). East Bohemia, in the northeastern corner of the country, is home to the striking 'rock towns' of Český ráj and ADRŠPACH-TEPLICE Rocks. The biggest lake in the republic, the 4870-hectare Lake Lipno, is in South Bohemia.

Moravia is mostly lowlands, drained by the river Morava flowing south to the Danube, and bordered by the Odra (Oder) river, which rounds the eastern end of the Sudeten Range into Poland. While Moravia is generally flat, it does have a few mountains, namely the White Carpathians and Javorníky in the east, and Beskydy and Jeseníky in the north. The 120-sq-km Moravian Karst, north of Brno, features limestone caves and subterranean lakes.

Slovakia

The Slovak Republic is hill country; almost 80% of Slovakia's 49,035 sq km is more than 750m above sea level. Bordered by Austria, Hungary, Ukraine, Poland and the Czech Republic, it sits on the western end of the great Carpathian mountain chain that arcs up through Romania and western Ukraine.

Much of Slovakia is steep, forested mountains, which is probably its most endearing feature. Most well known are two parallel branches of the western Carpathians: the High Tatras, rising to about 2500m and spilling over into Poland, and the Low Tatras, reaching about 2000m in Central and East Slovakia. The republic's highest peak, the 2654m Gerlachovský štít, is in the High Tatras. Outdoor enthusiasts also frequent two subsidiary ranges of the Tatras: the Malá Fatra and Velká Fatra. Slovakia faces the Czech Republic across the modest White Carpathians.

At the eastern end of the Low Tatras is the Slovenský raj region, which is riddled with gorges and mountain streams. Several thousand limestone caves dot the Slovak Karst in the south.

The main exception to all this high relief is the southwestern lowland region outside Bratislava around the Danube river, which is also Slovakia's main agricultural area. The river and its two tributaries form much of the area's boundary with Hungary, and the Váh, Slovakia's longest river at 433km, joins the Danube here. Slovakia's largest natural lake is the 218-hectare Veľké Hincovo in the High Tatras.

WILDLIFE

Even though there is a plethora of plant and animal life in the Czech and Slovak Republics, wildlife-watching is not a huge tourist draw-card. This is due mainly to the republics' natural features: densely forested hills provide perfect cover for many species and the steep alpine mountains in Slovakia

There are more than 1500 sandstone spires that average 15m in height in the ADRŠPACH-TEPLICE Rocks area.

The Jasov Cave in the southern part of East Slovakia bears graffiti scrawled by Czech Hussites in 1452.

Birds of the Czech Republic, by Joseph Kren, details 394 friendly fliers to look for while you're out and about.

don't make life easy for amateur animal-spotters. Nevertheless, the **Slovak Wildlife Society** (☎ 044-5293752; www.slovakwildlife.org) occasionally organises wildlife-watching walks in the Tatras.

Animals

Slovakia's most diverse wildlife area is the High Tatras – home to brown bears, wolves, lynxes and other wildcats, marmots, otters, eagles and mink. Most of these animals are protected from hunting in national parks. One animal protected even outside parks is the chamois, a mountain antelope, which was for a time near extinction but is now making a comeback. Deer, pheasants, partridges, ducks, wild geese, storks, grouse, eagles and vultures can be seen throughout the countryside. Europe's heaviest bird, the great bustard (or dropie), makes a home on the Danube flood plains.

The most common types of wildlife in the Czech mountains are marmots (giant ground squirrels), otters, martens (weasel-like carnivores) and mink. In the woods and fields there are pheasants, partridges, deer, ducks and wild geese. Rarer animals are lynxes, eagles, vultures, ospreys (large, long-winged hawks), storks, bustards and grouse. Very occasionally, wolves and brown bears wander across the Carpathian mountains into eastern Moravia.

You might see a less frequently spotted eagle in the High Tatras; otherwise, the flood plains of the Danube river in West Slovakia are an excellent region for bird-watching, particularly during the migration periods of spring and autumn.

As for animal dangers, there's not much to speak of; Slovakia witnesses the occasional bear attack, but that's about it. Bears, wolves and lynxes roam the bigger national parks and protected areas in Slovakia, but a pile of excrement is the closest you'll likely come to them.

Plants

Despite centuries of clear-felling for cultivation, forests – mainly oak, beech and spruce – still cover about one-third of the Czech Republic. Dwarf pine is common near the tree line (1400m). Above it there is little but grasses, shrubs and lichens.

Most remaining virgin forest is in inaccessible mountain areas. Over half of the high-altitude forest in North Bohemia – especially in the Krušné hory, Jizerské hory and Krkonoše mountains – has been killed or blighted by acid rain from unregulated industrial development.

Forests still cover 41% of Slovakia, including 70 fragments of virgin forest, despite centuries of deforestation. Low-lying areas (up to 800m) are populated by oak and beech, midrange (700m to 1500m) with fir and spruce, and upper alpine areas (above 1500m) are dotted with dwarf pine. A devastating windstorm whisked through the Tatra National Park in 2004, uprooting huge swaths of midrange trees wholesale. Parts of the once heavily forested High Tatras resorts are barren. The last storm of this magnitude hit in the 1920s, so it'll be another 80 years or so until trees reach prestorm levels.

NATIONAL PARKS

Though national and local authorities have set aside numerous national parks and protected landscape areas, the emphasis is on visitor use as well as species protection.

National parks and protected areas make up approximately 16% of the Czech Republic and 23% of Slovakia. Their diverse landscapes and easy accessibility make them popular with both locals and tourists. Out of the four national parks in the Czech Republic, Šumava and Krkonoše win the popularity race hands down: both are well-known winter ski resorts and

For more on the endangered great bustard, or dropie, in Slovakia, go to www.dropy.sk.

The smallest mammal in Slovakia, the lesser shrew, is an average of 5cm long. There's a 2000Sk fine for killing one.

The bilingual pictorial *Slovak National Parks (Slovenské Národné Parky)*, by Vladimír Barta, is a stunning look at Slovakia's natural assets.

CZECH REPUBLIC NATIONAL PARKS & NOTABLE PROTECTED LANDSCAPES

Park	Features	Activities	Best time to visit	Page
Šumava National Park (685 sq km)	gentle rolling hills and pristine forest; lynxes, deer, grouse	hiking, cycling, skiing	year-round	p179
Krkonoše National Park (363 sq km)	rounded, alpine mountains; boar, deer, badgers, foxes, martens, buzzards, hawks, eagles	hiking, skiing	year-round	p262
Czech Switzerland National Park (117 sq km)	sandstone rocks and rich forest	hiking, cycling, rock climbing	May-Sep	p240
Podyjí National Park (63 sq km)	river valleys and gentle pastures; otters, bats, fire salamanders, buzzards, eagles owls	hiking, cycling	May-Sep	p320
Bohemian Paradise Protected Landscape Region (92 sq km)	sandstone rock formations and wetlands	hiking, rock climbing	May-Sep	p255
Adršpach-Teplice Rocks Protected Landscape Region (20 sq km)	mesmerising sandstone pinnacles and caves	hiking, rock climbing	May-Sep	p260

SLOVAKIA NATIONAL PARKS & NOTABLE PROTECTED LANDSCAPES

Park	Features	Activities	Best time to visit	Page
Tatra National Park (795 sq km)	pristine mountains; deer, boar, foxes, lynxes, otters, golden eagles	hiking, cycling, skiing, rock climbing	year-round	p396
Pieniny National Park (21 sq km)	steep gorge and gentle river; lynxes, otters, black storks, owls, woodpeckers	hiking, cycling, rafting	May-Sep	p414
Low Tatras National Park (810 sq km)	dense forest and alpine meadows; brown bears, wolves, deer, foxes, golden eagles	hiking, cycling, skiing, rock climbing	year-round	p388
Slovenský raj National Park (197 sq km)	waterfalls and stunning gorges; brown bears, wolves, lynxes, martens, golden eagles, deer, chamois	hiking, cycling, caving	May-Sep	p420
Malá Fatra National Park (226 sq km)	steep alpine pastures; golden eagles, deer, bears	hiking, cycling, skiing	year-round	p380
Poloniny National Park (668 sq km)	dense forest, rugged hills and mountain meadows; wolves, lynxes, wildcats, golden eagles	hiking, cycling	May-Sep	p432
Veľká Fatra National Park (403 sq km)	subalpine meadows and grassy uplands; brown bears, lynxes, boar, deer, golden eagles	hiking, cycling, skiing	year-round	p386
Slovak Karst National Park (440 sq km)	gentle hills and a plethora of caves; brown bears, wolves, lynxes, deer, otters, bats, common vipers	hiking, cycling, caving	May-Sep	p424
Murán Plain National Park (219 sq km)	dense woodlands, deep chasms and unexplored caves; brown bears, wolves, lynxes, deer	hiking, cycling	May-Sep	p424

summer hiking areas. Of the seven national parks in Slovakia, the High Tatras and the Slovenský raj are the most frequented. For more information about activities in the parks see p60.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Czech Republic

Single-minded industrial development policies during successive communist governments caused environmental havoc for decades in both republics. In the 18 years since the Velvet Revolution, policies have changed significantly; standards were increased again to meet EU regulations for 2004 membership.

In the Czech Republic improvements have been significant in several areas. In the 1980s the biggest problem was the sulphur content in the brown coal used as fuel by industries. Resulting sulphur dioxide emissions caused acid rain that decimated forests, especially in Northern Bohemia, in an area adjacent to Austria and Germany that was called the 'Black Triangle'. A reported 71% of Czech forests were affected. Stricter laws post-1989 and replanted forests have gone a long way to cleaning up this problem. About half the rivers in the country are now safe enough to swim in and fish are slowly coming back to rivers, like the Labe that in 2006 recorded the first salmon seen there since 1954.

The biggest issue today is the increase in the number of cars (four times as many in Prague as prerevolution). The Czech Republic has the highest rate of greenhouse emissions of any EU member state. But in other areas the World Economic Forum rated the state fourth best in environmental management in 2005, and the government seems committed to cleaning up past messes. The Spolana plant outside Prague, a site that contaminated local water when floods hit in 2002, is being completely dug up. It should be 'decontaminated' by 2008.

Temelín, one of two nuclear plants in the Czech Republic (the other is in Dukovany), came on line in 2000. Protests from neighbouring Austria (just 50km away) haven't died down much (some groups tried to block the Czech Republic's entry into the EU because of it). A small (3 cu metres) radioactive water leak in 2004 was contained and didn't threaten any populations, but it reignited critics' fire.

Private involvement in environmental projects is adding to environmental progress. Groups include the **Friends of Nature Society** (www.novyprales.cz), which bought a 7-hectare site in North Bohemia and plans to reforest it and return it to indigenous vegetation.

Slovakia

Compared with the Czech Republic, more agrarian Slovakia has not been as badly damaged by industrial pollution; overall, its rivers and forests are in far better shape than the Czech Republic's. That said, the Slovak government's progress in addressing environmental issues has been slower than its northern neighbour. In a 2005 study the European Environmental Agency reported improvements in emissions and waste disposal (Slovakia is on target to reach the 8% reduction of greenhouse gases required by the Kyoto agreement). But following environmental nitrate guidelines is still completely voluntary for the nation's farmers.

As of late the government's attitude towards environmental concerns has also come into question. Critics fear that the separate €25 million environmental fund, created in 2006, is a ploy to eliminate the transparency required by law in other environmental agencies. On a smaller scale, local officials in Bratislava took a lot of heat in 2005 for tearing out many of the old-growth trees in the town's main square, Hlavné nám.

Monitor Czech air and water quality online at www.chmi.cz.

Check out what the Agency for Nature Conservation and Landscape Protection is doing in the Czech Republic at www.nature.cz.

In terms of power usage, residents have, for the most part, turned to natural gas as the domestic heating source of choice, but as prices rise, brown coal again becomes attractive.

The Slovak Republic has two nuclear power plants that produce approximately 55% of Slovak power. Despite upgraded safety equipment, one of the units (two reactors) at the older plant, Jaslovské Bohunice (c 1980), is scheduled to be decommissioned in 2008 as part of the agreement for EU accession. The second plant came online at Mochovce in the late 1990s and was purchased by Italian energy company Enel in 2006, along with the majority of Slovak electric interests. There's been much talk of completing construction of two more nuclear units already planned at Mochovce.

The Gabčíkovo hydroelectric project, on the Danube west of Komárno, was not part of the Enel sale. Despite original controversy when Hungary pulled out of the project in 1989, the dam produces enough power to cover the needs of every home in Slovakia. Some believe it exacerbates the damage caused by annual floods, but studies are inconclusive. Events like **Danube Day** (www.danubeday.sk, in Slovak), which occurs every June, aim at raising awareness and money for river restoration. Groups such as the **Organisation for Forest and Wildlife Protection** (Lesochranárske zoskupenie; www.wolf.sk, in Slovak) are involved in increasing forestland and tree planting in national parks (you can buy your own tree to be planted).

Outdoor Activities

As soon as the first shoots of spring poke through the earth, people in both republics take to the trails. Though the most rugged mountains are in Slovakia, there are undulating hills in both countries just waiting to be walked. You can hike up steep gorges past waterfalls, climb sandstone formations or stroll along gentle nature trails. There are rivers to float down and cycle paths to zip along. Then, just as the last of the autumn rays dip below the horizon, skiers and snowboarders come out to carve up the slopes.

HIKING

From scrambling up ladders to meandering across meadows, you can find the hike you are looking for in the Slovak and Czech Republics. Want to go for two hours or two weeks? With a network of some 48,000km well-marked and very well-connected trails for *turistika* (hiking), it's your choice. The colour-coded paths are clearly marked (about every 300m), and are visible on the great hiking maps available. (For more on maps see opposite.) Red trails are usually the main connecting paths between points of interest. The first trail in the area was established near Banská Štiavnica in 1874; today they are mostly maintained by the volunteers of the **Czech Hiking Club** (Klub českých turistů; ☎ 235 514 529; www.klubturistu.cz in Czech) and **Slovak Hiking Club** (Klub slovenských turistov; ☎ 02-4924 9223; www.kst.sk in Slovak).

Many trailheads link up with train station bus stops or train stations, making access to starting and finishing points straightforward. *Chaty* (mountain huts), which can be anything from basic shelter to a *horský hotel* (mountain hotel), are situated along many of the primary trails. Note that camping is restricted to designated camping sites and open fires are prohibited everywhere.

Walks

Slovakia has more rugged and unspoilt mountain scenery than its neighbour, the superlative of which is the High Tatras (p394). In this compact mountain range, you'll find the tallest peaks out of both countries (above 2600m) and plenty of alpine hiking, including the Tatranská magistrála (65km), a four-day trek along the southern flank of the High Tatras between Podbanske and Tatranská Lomnica. Its southwestern neighbour, the Low Tatras around Demänova valley (p391), is no less impressive; its 80km ridge through forested slopes and bare mountain passes is well suited for backpacking trips. Otherwise, some may prefer the pleasant, lower Malá Fatra range and Vratná valley (p382), with great access and much more greenery.

Slovenský raj National Park (p420) may not be easy to get to, but the hike to stunning gorges cut by waterfalls is worth it. Make sure you're in shape and not afraid of heights; many of the trails require use of precipitous ladders anchored into sheer cliff-face. The trails through the undulating forests of remote Poloniny National Park (p432), on the far east Ukrainian border, are the least accessed and most peaceful in the nation.

The main long-distance route across Slovakia is the red, 762km-long Cesta hrdinov SNP (Path of the Heroes of the Slovak National Uprising), which takes about four weeks all told. Part of it is included in the European E8 long-distance path. To start the Slovakia section of the E8 in Bratislava, head up to the TV tower on Koliba (p345); you will eventually cross the Small Carpathians, the Low Tatras and Slovenský raj before turning north

toward Dukla Pass, where the E8 crosses into Poland. The **Footpath-Marking Club of Slovakia** (Klub značkarov Slovenska; www.kst.sk/znackari) has a full itinerary on its website.

The Czech Republic's landscapes may not be as dramatic as Slovakia's, but they still have much to offer. The gentle hills of Šumava (p178) have the best and longest hikes, some through virgin forest. It's possible to trek the length of the range from Nová Pec, at the northern tip of Lake Lipno, up to Nýrsko, southwest of Klatovy (about 120km).

Rugged sandstone formations studded with pine trees are the defining features of a Czech skalní město (rock town). You can find plenty of hiking in and among the rocks in Český ráj (p255) and the Sandstone Rocks of Labe (p240). The Adršpach-Teplice Rocks (p260), one of the most impressive, was a location for the filming of *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

The lightly forested Krkonoše mountains (p262) contain the country's highest peaks (around 1600m) and the 17km-long Czech-Polish Friendship Trail, following a border ridge from Špindlerova Bouda to Pomezní Boudy. It's part of the European E3 walking path that skirts along the northern boundaries of both Czech and Slovakia.

Equipment

Backpacks, hiking boots and other camping gear are easy to find in sports shops near parks and outdoor recreation areas, as well as at large Tesco outlets, but campers who are particular about certain high-quality brands should bring gear with them. Mountain weather is incredibly changeable here – even in summer freak snowstorms are possible – and warm, water-resistant clothing is essential.

Information

The best hiking maps are generally from **VKÚ** (www.vku.sk) and **Kartografie Praha** (www.kartografie.cz). Look for VKÚ's *edice Klub Českých turistů* series (1:50,000) and Kartografie Praha's *soubor turistických map* series (usually at 1:100,000) for the Czech Republic; and VKÚ's *turistická mapa* series (1:25,000 or 1:50,000). *Knapsacked Travel in Slovakia*, by **Dajama** (www.dajama.sk), is a series of detailed hiking books, in English and German, on the popular walking areas in Slovakia.

Both maps and books are generally available in bookshops throughout the republics as well as at chain department stores.

CYCLING

One of the best ways to enjoy the Czech and Slovak Republics is from the saddle of a bike. There are over 60 clearly marked cycle paths (*cyklotrasy*) across the length and breadth of both republics. The Czech Republic is far more organised in providing multilingual information and having plentiful rental outlets. Though mountain biking in Slovakia is quite popular it is actually fairly difficult to find bike rental in Slovak towns. You usually only find bike rental at hotels in resort areas.

If you're not willing to go it alone, but would still like to cycle through the republics, there are several tour outfitters who would be happy to assist. **Top Bicycle** (☎ 519 513 745; www.topbicycle.com; Nám 24/27, Mikulov), based in South Moravia, runs bike tours in both the Czech and Slovak Republics. They will also transport bikes to you from almost anywhere in either country, for €0.80 per km plus rental. **Cycle Tours Slovakia** (☎ 0904042833; www.cycle-sk.com) has classic, all-inclusive Slovakia cycling itineraries, as well as self-guided tours where they plan it out, but you get there on your own. A part of the proceeds goes to environmental stewardship.

For more on exploring the mountains of Bohemia and Moravia, take a look at www.czech-mountains.com.

It's possible to circumnavigate the entire Czech Republic by bicycle, a distance of some 1780km.

The Danube Cycleway, by John Higginson, maps the riverfront route from Germany through Slovakia into Hungary.

Paths

The natural areas mentioned in Hiking (p60) also have mountain-biking paths. The flat, popular Danube cycle way (200km) in Slovakia may suit some cyclists better; it follows the banks of the Danube through gentle countryside from Bratislava to Komárno. Or, if you have 20 days to spare, you can start in Donaueschingen, Germany, pass through Slovakia and end in Budapest. Another well-marked trail leads from Piešťany to Žilina (250km) along the Váh river.

Cycling is growing as a hobby in and around Prague (p117), where there are 60km of traffic-free cycle paths. You can cycle from Prague all the way to Vienna on the Greenways trail (456km), which passes through Jindřichův Hradec and Znojmo.

South Bohemia is an excellent region for cycling; highlights include the 240km Šumavská magistrála trail in the Šumava foothills (p178). A special bus transports cyclists and their bikes in the region. (For more on cycling in South Bohemia see p164.)

The South Moravian Borderlands (p317), especially the Unesco World Heritage area surrounding Lednice and Valnice, is a good place for cycling, too.

Cycle paths also link up with the Europe-wide network of trails, **Euro Velo** (www.eurovelo.org). Three trails pass through the Czech Republic: route N4 runs west to east via Prague and Brno, N7 north to south through Prague and onto Berlin, and N9 north to south via Olomouc and Brno to either Vienna or Poland. In Slovakia, the N6 hugs the Danube banks on its way to the Black Sea.

Equipment

A mountain bike or touring bike with at least 18 gears is a good choice, since both republics are hilly. There are cycle shops and repair centres in large towns, but for rural riding you should carry all essential spare parts. Security – a lock and chain for the frame and both wheels – is essential, as bikes are popular targets for theft. Children up to 15 years of age are required to wear helmets. See p458 for information on renting and buying bikes.

Information

Cycle paths are marked on hiking maps. Regional cycling maps (*cykloturistická mapa*; 1:75,000 to 1:100,000), published by **SHOCart** (www.shocart.cz) and **VKÚ** (www.vku.sk), are available in many bookshops, and often come with a handy booklet in English and German. VKÚ also produces the *Cykloturistický atlas Slovenska* (1:100,000) for Slovakia.

Czech Tourism (www.czechtourism.sk) publishes a special cycling brochure titled *Cycling – Free and Easy*, in English and German, which gives details of long-distance and regional cycle routes.

Getting Around

Away from cycle tracks, stick to minor roads where possible. Motorists tend to give cyclists a wide berth, though narrow country roads are still potentially dangerous, especially at night. Like in any big city, cycling in Prague is more of an adrenaline rush than fun.

You can take your bike on the train quite safely. The charge is usually 60% of your own fare. Present your ticket at the railway luggage office and fill out a tag, to be attached to the bike, with your name, address, departure station and destination. If time is short, take your bike directly to the freight carriage and the conductor will load it for a small fee.

Bicycles can be transported on buses at the discretion of the driver.

Everything you ever wanted to know about skiing in Slovakia is at www.ski.sk.

Prepare to ride the rapids in the Czech Republic at www.raft.cz.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR RESPONSIBLE HIKING

The popularity of hiking is placing great pressure on wilderness areas. Please consider the following tips when hiking and help preserve the ecology and beauty of the Czech and Slovak Republics.

Rubbish

Carry out all your rubbish. If you've carried it in you can carry it out. Don't overlook those easily forgotten items, such as silver paper, orange peel, cigarette butts and plastic wrappers. Empty packaging weighs very little anyway and should be stored in a dedicated rubbish bag. Make an effort to carry out rubbish left by others.

Never bury your rubbish: digging disturbs soil and ground cover and encourages erosion. Buried rubbish will more than likely be dug up by animals, who may be injured or poisoned by it. If animals don't get to the rubbish it will probably take years to decompose, especially at high altitudes.

Minimise the waste you must carry out by taking minimal packaging and no more than you'll need. Take reusable containers or stuff sacks (sacks or bags you can stuff a lot of gear into).

Don't rely on bought water in plastic bottles. Disposal of these bottles is creating a major problem, particularly in developing countries. Use iodine drops or purification tablets instead.

Human Waste Disposal

Many think our ability to rationalise separates us from the animal kingdom – we beg to differ. It's our ability to use a toilet; where there is one, please use it.

Contamination of water sources by human faeces can lead to the transmission of hepatitis, typhoid and intestinal parasites, such as *Giardia lamblia*, amoebae and roundworms. It can cause severe health risks not only to members of your party, but also to local residents and wildlife.

If there is no toilet, bury your waste. Dig a small hole 15cm deep and at least 100m from any watercourse. Consider carrying a lightweight trowel for this purpose. Cover the waste with soil and a rock. Use toilet paper sparingly and bury it with the waste. In snow, dig down to the soil otherwise your waste will be exposed when the snow melts.

Ensure that these guidelines are applied to a portable toilet tent if one is being used by a large hiking party. Encourage all party members to use the site.

Erosion

Hillsides and mountain slopes (especially high altitude) are prone to erosion, so stick to existing tracks and avoid shortcuts that bypass a switchback. If you blaze a trail down a slope, it will become a watercourse with the next heavy rainfall and eventually cause soil loss and deep scarring.

If a well-used track passes through a mud patch, walk through the mud; walking around the edge will increase the size of the patch.

Don't remove plant life; it keeps topsoil in place. Picking wildflowers is illegal in the republics.

Wildlife Conservation

Do not engage in or encourage hunting. It is illegal in all parks and reserves.

Don't buy items made from endangered species.

Don't assume animals in huts to be introduced vermin and attempt to exterminate them. In wild places they are likely to be protected native animals.

Don't encourage the presence of wildlife by leaving food scraps behind you. Do not feed the wildlife as this can lead to their dependence on trekker hand-outs, unbalanced populations and diseases such as 'lumpy jaw' (a fungal disease).

Park Regulations

Take note of and observe any rules and regulations particular to the reserve that you are visiting. Generally speaking, neither free camping nor open fires are allowed in parks in the Czech and Slovak Republics.

ROCK CLIMBING & MOUNTAINEERING

With all those rock towns in the Czech Republic, it comes as no surprise that rock climbing is big here. The majority of climbing options in the Czech Republic are concentrated in North and East Bohemia, especially the Sandstone Rocks of Labe (p240) and the Adršpach-Teplice Rocks (p260). The rock in both places is a fairly soft sandstone, which has eroded into a spectacular profusion of pinnacles, towers, walls and arêtes (a sharp ridge separating two valleys), with many routes of a high standard. The more modest Český ráj (p255) also attracts wannabe spidermen and women.

The High Tatras (p394) in Slovakia have summer mountaineering routes on a near-alpine scale (the main summits rise to 2600m) and serious winter climbing. To go off trail, you have to have a guide: contact the **Mountain Guides Society Office** (☎ 052-442 2066; www.tatraguide.sk; Starý Smokovec 38, Starý Smokovec).

Tourist offices in these regions have details of mountaineering clubs, otherwise contact the **Czech Mountaineering Union** (Český horolezecký svaz; Map p92; ☎ 233 017 347; www.horosvaz.cz; Strahov Stadium, Zátokova 100, Strahov) or the **Slovak Mountaineering Union** (Slovenský horolezecký spolok; ☎ 02-4924 9628; www.james.sk in Slovak; Junácka 6, Bratislava).

There isn't a lot of information available in English, but the websites www.adrex.cz and www.lezec.cz have some on climbing in the Czech Republic and www.tatry.sk has info on climbing in the High Tatras, Slovakia.

SKIING & SNOWBOARDING

The Alps it ain't, but skiing and snowboarding in the Czech and Slovak Republics is plentiful, popular and cheap; a ski pass at the top resorts will cost at most €25 per day, the less-frequented ski resorts can be half that price. The downhill ski areas are typically compact and crowded during school holidays. Rental equipment is decent, but skiers who are particular about certain brands should bring their own. The season lasts from late December to early April.

The best ski area is at Jasná (p392) in Slovakia's Low Tatras, where there are a dozen linked runs and chairlifts. Other good spots in Slovakia include the Štrbské Pleso and Skalnaté Pleso resorts of the High Tatras (p403) and the Vratná valley (p382) in the Malá Fatra mountains. In the Czech Republic, the Krkonoše mountains (p262) have the best downhill skiing, at the resorts of Pec pod Sněžkou, Špindlerův Mlýn and Harrachov.

VKÚ (www.vku.sk) publishes ski-touring maps (*lyžiarska a turistická mapa*) that mark downhill runs, cross-country trails, chairlifts and areas of avalanche danger. Their blue covers distinguish them from the green hiking maps.

WATER SPORTS

Canoeing and kayaking are very popular in both countries, which have produced several world- and Olympic-champion paddlers. However, there are more opportunities for you to participate in these sports in the Czech

The fastest running river in Slovakia is the Poprad in the High Tatras. It drops 1567m in just 107km before it merges with the Dunajec.

Republic than in Slovakia. The top canoe-touring rivers include the scenic Sázava (p153), which stretches from West Moravia into Central Bohemia; the equally popular upper reaches of the Vltava (p173) in South Bohemia; and the Berounka (p150) in Central and West Bohemia. In Slovakia there's the upper Váh, which can be accessed in the Low Tatras near Liptovský Mikuláš (p388). For more turbulent white-water rafting, head to the manmade rapids at Čunovo, (p354) outside Bratislava.

Flat-bottom boat trips are a tranquil way to spend a few hours. The Dunajec gorge (p414) in East Slovakia, is perhaps the most scenic, but there are also trips on the Váh river (p378) in Central Slovakia, and at the Kamenice gorge (p241) in North Bohemia.

CAVING

Both republics are honeycombed with dramatic caves, the best of which are in the Moravian Karst area (p306), north of Brno, and the Slovak Karst (p423), in East Slovakia (which includes one of the largest caves in central Europe). Another fine cave system is beneath the Demänova valley (p391) in Central Slovakia. In general, caving here is not about donning a hard hat mounted with a torch and scrambling around in a dark place on your hands and knees. It's about a gentle, albeit cold, stroll through underground caverns on a tour guide's leash.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

If you'd prefer a bird's-eye view of the republics, there are a couple of options open to you. The Low Tatras in Slovakia and the Krkonoše mountains in the Czech Republic are centres for paragliding and scenic flights. Contact **Mutton Sport Services** (☎ 0907481311; www.mutton.sk; Ul 1 mája 25, Liptovský Mikuláš) for the former, and the **Yellow Point Adventure** (☎ 499 433 505; www.yellow-point.cz; Svatopetrská 278, Špindlerův Mlýn) for the latter. For paragliding links in both republics, go to www.paragliding.net.

KNOWING THE ROPES

Though the same rules of responsible rock climbing apply in both republics, there are some extra things you need to know:

- Magnesium chalk is prohibited; it damages rocks.
- Rocks must be completely dry, or climbing is prohibited.
- If birds are nesting in the rocks, climbing is prohibited (areas are signposted).
- No metal hooks or nuts can be used on climbing ropes.

Food & Drink

Roast pork and dumplings vs fried pork and potatoes; on the surface Czech and Slovak cuisines aren't all that different. Both are solidly Central European, with shared influences from time spent as part of the Austrian empire (fried meat schnitzels is very popular). It's in the subtleties of preparation and in the secondary influences that differences exist. Northern Bohemia is big on roast meat. Slovakia's cuisine is slightly more spiced up, influenced by Hungarian traditions, and has a strong rural tradition and love for simple staples that hark back to shepherding camps. For the most part, the cuisines are national, with little regional variation. Although what they prepare may be similar, cooks in Moravia are considered the best in both countries.

Breakfast is usually a quick meal of bread and jam, sometimes augmented by cold meats and cheeses and/or yogurt. The main, hot meat-and-potatoes meal in both republics has traditionally been lunch, but the growing influence of Western business practices means the lunch break is becoming shorter and a sandwich at the desk more common. Dinner is usually a lighter version of lunch. 'Chinese' dishes – stir fries modified for local ingredients – have made inroads into home cooking and sometimes appear on the evening table.

Note: in this book where you see two italicised words separated by a slash (/), this indicates the Czech and Slovak terms, respectively.

STAPLES & SPECIALITIES

The solid heart of Czech cooking is roast pork with dumplings and sauerkraut. The *houškové knedlíky* (bread dumplings) are what Czech food is all about. Fluffy, light and soft, they are made from flour, yeast, egg yolk and milk, mixed with pieces of baguette. The mixture is raised like bread dough then boiled in hot water and sliced. These dislike pieces are served with anything that has a sauce or meat juice. They are best used for sopping up *svíčková* (roast beef served in a sour cream sauce and spices, best topped with tart cranberries). Much heavier than the bread version, *bramborové knedlíky* (potato dumplings) are made from shredded, boiled potato mixed with flour and egg yolk.

Zelí/kyslá kapusta (sauerkraut) is a usual accompaniment to roast meat dishes, but cabbage steamed with onions, apple, salt and caraway (it should be crunchy, not like English boiled cabbage) is an option. *Bramborový šalát* (potato salad) is also served as a side dish and used as the base spread for most *chlebičky* (Czech open sandwiches). Any Czech will tell you the most important thing when making potato salad (boiled potatoes mixed with carrots, onions, celeriac, mayonnaise, yogurt, pickles, ham, salami, eggs, cheese and parsley) is to let it sit for a day.

Slovakia's 'national dish', *bryndžové halušky*, was a staple in shepherding camps in Central Slovakia and is still served at home. *Gnocchi*-like dumplings made from potato batter are dropped into boiling water and served topped with soft sheep's cheese (sometimes mixed with sour cream) and bits of bacon fat. Even the most progressive menus can have *halušky* hiding on them, however, the dish is almost never as good out (where dumplings are usually made ahead) as at someone's house. Try it at a more expensive place, where they're less likely to skimp on the toppings. Some restaurants get fancy, adding sausage to the dumplings (*fumánsky halušky*) or making the dough with spinach (*špenátový halušky*). *Strapačky* is *halušky* mixed with warm sauerkraut.

Bryndža, a slightly sharp, spreadable sheep's cheese, is all but a national institution in Slovakia, especially in mountain regions such as the Low Tatras. You can have it as an appetiser served with bread and onions, or on top of

The Best of Czech Cooking by Peter Trnka has been expanded to cover even more pork dishes.

The hotel where the Czech 2006 World Cup football team stayed in Germany hired a Czech chef for the restaurant, specifically so the team could have *knedlíky* (dumplings) nightly.

TRAVEL YOUR TASTEBUDS

Lard spread on bread with onions (*chleb/chlieb s mastou a cibulou*), anyone? Czechs and Slovaks have a fondness for animal products that might generally fall under the 'miscellaneous' category. The adventurous should try *kolínko* (braised pork knuckles), a specialty, or *dršťková/držková* (sliced tripe soup), which actually has a calamari-like texture.

pirohy (moon-shaped dumpling pockets, like Polish *pierogies*) in addition to *halušky*. A particular treat is having it on top of fried potato pancakes, or in a thick soup called *demikat*. The freshest *bryndža* to be had is at a *salaš* (rustic sheep-dairy restaurant).

While pork is usually roasted in the Czech lands, *bračove rezeň* (pork cutlet) in Slovakia is almost always fried, in egg-and-flour batter, potato batter or breadcrumbs. It's also stuffed with all kinds of things, like ham and cheese (à la cordon bleu), before being dipped in hot oil, or occasionally served 'natural' without a coating. Stews and sautés are quite common. *Diabolské soté* (devil's sauté – mixed pork and semihot peppers) comes stuffed in a potato pancake (*v zemiakovéj placke*). Side dishes are extra and usually include fried, baked or boiled potatoes.

Traditionally, soups like *cesnaková* (garlic; creamy or clear, with croustons and cheese) and *kapustnica* (cabbage; with a paprika and pork base) started most meals at home. They are still on menus in both republics (portions are generally large and well worth trying) but the tradition is dying out at home.

The cheapest meal on the menu in either republic is usually *guláš* (goulash – cubes of beef or pork mixed with an equal quantity of sliced onions, fried with paprika then stewed with stock and tomatoes). The best *guláš* is three days old (though EU regulations now prohibit serving warm, cooked food that's been standing for more than three hours) and each fresh batch should be seasoned with a spoonful of the last batch.

For dessert, try *palačinky/palacinky* (crepes) stuffed with jam, chocolate or fruit. *Ovocné knedlíčky* (fruit dumplings) are ball-like dumplings filled with fruit and coated with crushed poppy seeds or breadcrumbs and melted butter, sometimes accompanied by fruit purée and ice cream.

Snacks sold at food stands or from the 'with your beer' section of the menu include: *klobásy* (sausages) served with mustard and a slice of rye bread; *párky* (frankfurters); *langoše* (fried dough coated with various savoury toppings); and *bagety* (sandwiches made on baguettes, usually pretty light on meat). 'Beer cheese' (cheese marinated in garlic, spices and oil; mainly available in the Czech Republic) is a great accompaniment to a cold lager.

DRINKS

Nonalcoholic Drinks

Bottled water is cheap and easy to get. Fizzy Mattoni is from the springs of Karlovy Vary. The Czech Republic's own 'energy drink' goes by the attention-grabbing name of Semtex (yes, it's named after the plastic explosive).

In Slovakia, the popular brand of mineral water is Bon Aqua, and the nonalcoholic drink that wins the popularity race hands-down is Vinea, a fizzy white grape juice produced by wine maker Vinarsky Zavod Pezinok.

Káva (basic coffee) is most likely to be *presso* (espresso) these days, so you needn't forego your cappuccino. Instant is usually served in homes. A range of *čaj* (tea) is available at all restaurants. Coffee and tea *bez kofein* (without caffeine) is not easy to find.

Slovak Cooking, by Jozef Rybár, is one of the few Slovak cookbooks available in English today. Too bad it doesn't have the Slovak food name translations.

Alcoholic Drinks

BEER

Did you know *pivo* is a synonym for 'Czech Republic'? Seriously, the Czech people are happy to tell you they consume more beer per capita (at least 157L, though some claim it's 161) than any other nation. There's even a consumption counter at <http://prague.tv/toys/beer/>. Slovaks consume a measly 89L per capita of beer, but they do have a few tasty local options; try full-bodied Zlatý Bažant or dark, sweet Martiner.

If you just order a *pivo* you'll get a lager; dark beers are called *černý*. Draught beer comes in *malé* (small, 300mL) or *velké* (large, 500mL). The number of degrees on a beer (10, 11 or 12) is not an indicator of alcohol content but of the amount of malt extract used; it has to do with the strength of its taste. Most beers are between 3% and 6% alcohol. You can return glass bottles to a point of purchase for a refund.

WINE

Slovaks produce and consume more *vino* (wine) per capita than the Czechs in both the *červené* and *bílé/biele* (red and white) varieties. Their wine history dates back to the 7th century BC when Celtic tribes, under the watchful Romans, planted grapevines in the hills north of Bratislava. Today, wine production is still concentrated in the Small Carpathians, around the villages of Modra and Pezinok. Though the quality may not reach snobbish standards, the varieties are eminently drinkable (read good and cheap) table wines.

BOHEMIAN BREWS

Rumour has it that Czech beer leads to a longer life, doesn't negatively affect your body shape, can cure menopause, and is so pure that it's impossible to get a hangover from drinking it. (While we can't comment on the first three, Lonely Planet authors have done thorough research disproving that last claim.) Whether or not it has healing properties, Czech beer is universally recognised as one of the world's best. The Czech Beer & Malt Association even filed for protected status of the classification 'Czech beer' with the EU. (You know, like Parma ham, or French champagne.)

Beer history in Bohemia dates back at least to the 850s, when growing hops is first mentioned in chronicles, but residents may have discovered they had ideal conditions for growing hops before that. The first larger-scale brewery was built in 1118 and beer was exported to Bavaria. In the late 13th century, Good 'King' Wenceslas granted the city of Plzeň, West Bohemia, the right to brew beer. Fast-forward to 1974 when future president Václav Havel wrote the play *Audience*, about a brewery worker in the employment of a diabolical brew master, and you'll get some idea of the influence of beer on the local psyche.

Including microbreweries, there are more than 100 beer makers in the Czech Republic. Don't get us to arguing about which is the best. You know the big guys: Prazdroj brewery (Pilsner Urquell, Gambrinus and Primus) in Plzeň (p222), and Budvar (aka Budweiser – the one in the big fight with American brewer Anheuser-Busch) in České Budějovice (p166). Both give brewery tours.

Really, you can't go wrong with any local brew: as the Czechs say, *Kde se pivo varí, tam se dobře dává* (Where beer is made, life is good). Here are a few names to look for that you may not have heard of:

- Ježek (Hedgehog; www.pivovar-jihlava.cz; South Moravia) – nine brews of varying intensity.
- Eggenberg (www.eggenberg.cz; South Bohemia) – a lager, a porter and Dia (a sugar-free beer).
- Černá Hora (Black Mountain; www.pivovarch.cz; South Moravia) – operating since 1530; its Kvasar (Light) is flavoured with honey.
- Svijany (www.pivovarsvijany.cz; East Bohemia) – a dark beer that has won honours, but the wheat beer isn't bad too.

Visit www.brandchannel.com for a rundown on the Budvar/Anheuser-Busch Budweiser dispute (see Which Bud's for You?).

The dry reds, like Frankovka and Klášťorné, are especially worth looking for. Names of makers to watch for are Masaryk and Matyšák. Slovak Tokaj, a white dessert wine from the southeast, is trying to give the more famous Hungarian version a run for its money (though it falls short).

You can taste and buy Small Carpathian wine at several wine shops in Bratislava (p352), and wine bars and shops in Modra (p356). One weekend in November, Small Carpathian vintners throw open their doors for Open Cellar Day (see boxed text, p357). You can winery-hop to your heart's content for one set price that includes a souvenir glass but not transportation.

In the Czech Republic wine is only big in Moravia. White wines are markedly better than reds. Good semidry whites are Tramin and Rulandské bílé. (Czechs tend to prefer sweetish whites.) In southeast Moravia people still gather at *vinné sklípky* (semi-underground family-run wine cellars) for a tippie and a song. You can find one in the towns of the South Moravian Borderlands (p317), which also have salons where you can taste Moravian vintages.

In both nations, a popular wine cooler and budget stretcher is a *střík* (half wine, half soda) with ice. A popular winter drink is *svažené víno/varené víno* (hot spiced wine). At the end of summer, shops and bars start selling *burčák/burčiak*, the fermented juice of the first grapes. It's a fizzy, tart sensation that tastes deceptively nonalcoholic but rapidly produces giggling and a serious need to sit down.

SPIRITS

Slivovitz is a fiery, potent plum brandy said to have originated in Moravia, where the best brands, like Jelínek, still come from. (See the boxed text, p70.) If you have a sweet tooth, try *griotka* (cherry liqueur). *Meruňkovice* is a brandy made from apricots, *borovička* from juniper berries. Czechs love the unique herbal spirit Becherovka, from the spa town of Karlovy Vary (p211); it tastes like cinnamon or cloves and is said to aid digestion. The Slovak version is Demänovka. Another popular bitter spirit is Fernet; the 'stock' version tastes like medicine, but try the citrus version with tonic water. Locally made vodka and rum (actually vodka with rum flavouring) is sold by the (incredibly cheap) shot from all kinds of outlets, including bakeries and sausage stands. For some warming grog, try rum with hot water and lemon.

CELEBRATIONS

In Slovakia, name days (the saint's day associated with your name) are more celebrated than birthdays. The person celebrating their name day provides open sandwiches and drinks; people even bring elaborate spreads into the office.

At Easter, traditional foods like Easter egg bread are part of large communal meals. Christmas means carp, and rubber tanks full of live fish pop up on the pedestrian town squares a few days before 24 December. People take them home and let them live in the bathtub until Christmas Eve dinner.

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

There isn't necessarily a difference between a *restaurace*, *kavárna/kaviareň* (café) or *vinárna* (wine bar, usually a cellar restaurant); all three may serve food and alcohol. Though a wine cellar might be a little more casual than a restaurant, in general what matters more on the fanciness scale is the price category.

In Prague, and to a lesser extent Bratislava, there is some really fine upscale dining. It may be obvious, but midrange places will have better cuts of meat and more elaborate décor than budget ones. You'll find international cuisines galore in the capitals, but as you get to smaller towns, pizza places and Chinese restaurants are usually as exotic as it gets.

According to *My Sweet Little Village* (1985), directed by Jiří Menzel, the perfect temperature for beer can be achieved by putting the beer on the seventh step down into the cellar.

A grant from the Czech Ministry of Agriculture financed research in 2006 into creating an 'antimenopausal beer' (2% alcohol, with added phytoestrogens) that may ease annoying symptoms.

Find your saint's name day at www.slovensko.com/about/calendar and then make sure to throw your friends a party!

Self-service cafeterias (*samoobsluha, jedáleň* or *bufet*) are great places for a decent meal at unbeatable prices (as little as 80Kč/Sk for a soup and main). They serve hot meals like goulash and cutlets but also usually have soup and sandwiches. Self-service places generally cater to workers, so they close early and aren't always open on weekends. A *bageteria* is a simpler establishment, with made-to-order baguettes and sandwiches. Look for food stands near train and bus stations selling anything from sausages to sandwiches to gyros. You can buy fruit and vegetables at the local *tržiště/tržnice* (market).

Koliba are Slovak-style rustic country restaurants found across both republics. Typically, you walk into a log- or wood-panelled room where folk art and farm implements hang on the wall, and aromatic wood smoke drifts from the open fire where spit-roast chicken and other barbecue specialties are sometimes cooked. The Slovak *salaš* (literally 'sheep dairy', or shepherd encampment) has come to mean a rural country restaurant where sheep's products and traditional home cooking are the specialties. The accoutrements are similar to a *koliba*, minus the barbecue. A *salaš* is the place to have the freshest *bryndžové halušky*.

A *pivnice/pivnica* is a pub without food. A *hospoda/hostinec* is a pub or beer hall that serves basic meals. They're usually pretty smoky places where diners pull up a chair at the nearest communal table. Women sitting alone may feel uncomfortable in this male-dominated arena. If the name of a place includes the word 'pub' (in English) it's usually slightly more upscale, with food and a mixed-gender crowd. A traditional *krčma* was the village tavern, but the word is used for pub-restaurants nowadays.

For coffee, a streetside table at a *kavárna/kaviareň* is the place to be; they often also have food and adult beverages. Hanging out at a café is usual evening entertainment. If 'café' is spelled out in English/French in the name of a place, it's likely to be more bar and restaurant than coffee house. A *cukrarná/cukrareně* (pastry shop/café) is like a French patisserie, serving cakes, *koláče* (pastries), coffees and ice cream. For tea, find a *čajovna* (tea-house), where Eastern influences are evident; they're often smoke free.

MORAVIAN MOONSHINE Neil Wilson

Bohemia is famous for its beer and Slovakia for its wine, but in the wooded hills of Wallachia along the Moravian-Slovakian border it's *slivovitz* that puts a warm glow in the belly. Beware – this potent plum brandy (50% alcohol by volume) is strong enough to fell an ox. Local custom says that when you take the top off a bottle of *slivovitz*, you shouldn't put it back until the bottle is empty – by which time you will be fluent in Czech and Slovak, and mysteriously able to sing all the words to Wallachian folk songs.

Common or garden variety *slivovitz* is crystal clear and is traditionally drunk straight from shot glasses. If your palate is more accustomed to fine malt whiskies, the flavour can be – how shall we put this? – a little industrial. However, there is also *zlatá slivovitz* (golden *slivovitz*), which has been infused with oak shavings, and *slivovitz sudová* (*slivovitz* from the barrel), which has been aged in oak barrels. These are golden in colour and have a much mellower flavour.

Slivovitz distilling became a Moravian cottage industry in 1835, when the Hapsburg Empire relaxed the excise laws. Each farm had its own pot still, and the *slivovitz* season was a much-anticipated part of the agricultural calendar. Although it has been produced commercially for 150 years, locals still insist that the best *slivovitz* is *domáci* (homemade – now illegal).

The biggest brand in the business is R Jelínek, based in Vizovice (p331) in South Moravia. (It recently launched a plum-flavoured vodka, too.) The smooth, distinctive *slivovitz* produced by Žufánek, a small family firm in the Zlínsko region (established only in 2000), has in recent years become one of Prague's trendiest tipples. You can find it behind the bar at the Palác Akropolis (p137), Chateau L'Enfer Rouge (p135), Velyba (p135) and Klub Újezd (p134), among others.

Check out menus for restaurants in Slovakia online at www.menu.sk, and for the Czech Republic at www.czrb.cz.

CZECH & SLOVAK REPUBLICS' TOP FIVE

Here are the authors' top picks for restaurants in their regions:

- Kampa Park (Prague, p130) – awesome views of Charles bridge.
- V Zátíší (Prague, p131) – crisp roast duckling with herb-infused dumplings.
- Hanácká Hospoda (Olomouc, p273) – rare Moravian cuisine.
- Spišský Salaš (Spiš, p419) – rustic fun, great lamb dishes.
- Zbojnícka Koliba (High Tatras, p404) – folk music and spit-roast chicken on the fire.

Most restaurants are honest, though it pays to watch out for mistakes in the bill. Prague is a different matter (see the boxed text, p135, for ways to cope with restaurants there). Tipping is the same in restaurants and pubs, ie 5% to 10%. Locals usually round the bill up to the next 10Kč/Sk. Tip at the higher end of the scale if you're in a top-end establishment. In a pub with communal tables, always ask if a chair is free before sitting down: *Je tu volno?*

Quick Eats

A *bufet* or *bageteria* is the usual place to grab a quick meal. Bakeries and supermarkets sell savoury and sweet pastries for a quick snack. In bigger towns, at most transportation stations and near the base of ski and hiking trails, food stands can provide you with a hot or cold meal and a beer; hygiene is generally pretty good. Supermarket delis have good spreads, meats and bread rolls.

VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

Outside of Prague and Bratislava, where there are dedicated restaurants, it's slim pickings for vegetarians; vegans will find eating out next to impossible. There are a few standard meatless dishes (*bezmasá jídla/bezmäsité jedlá*), but watch out for that category on the menu, as dishes like *bryndžové halušky* are usually listed there (guess those chunks of bacon fat on top don't count!). Don't assume that if something sounds vegetarian, it is (for example, most vegetable soup is made from beef stock); ask first.

The most common meatless meal is *smažený sýr/vpramázaný sýr* (fried cheese) but you may also find risotto with vegetables, or pasta. In most cities there's at least one pizzeria and sometimes Chinese food, offering more vegetarian options. Fresh fruit and vegetables, grains and other ingredients are easy to obtain at most *potraviný* (supermarkets).

EATING WITH KIDS

Children are generally welcome in eating establishments. Pubs that serve food are in a 'restaurant' class, so there's no age minimum. Children's menus are more common in the Czech Republic than in Slovakia, but you may be able to ask the staff for smaller portions, or order for yourself and get an extra plate to share. See p438 for more information on travelling with children.

HABITS & CUSTOMS

If you're invited to someone's house for a meal, bring some flowers or a bottle of wine, and when you get there ask if you should take your shoes off (most Czechs and Slovaks switch to slippers inside the house).

Whether you're drinking in a bar or with a meal, you should always toast with the first drink (it's terrible manners not to). Clink glasses and say *'na zdraví! na zdraví!'* (to your health). Before eating, you should wish your compatriots *'dobrou chut! dobrú chut'* (good appetite).

The Czech equivalent for the saying 'No pain, no gain' is *'Bez práce nejsou koláče'* (Without work, you can't eat pastries).

EAT YOUR WORDS

For more information on how to pronounce Czech and Slovak words, see the Language chapter (p469).

Useful Phrases**Can you recommend a restaurant?**

Můžete doporučit restauraci?

moo-zhe-te do-po-ru-chit res-tow-ruh-tsi

Můžete mi doporučit restauráciu?

mwo-zhe-tye mi od-po-ru-chit' resh-tow-ra-tsi-yu

We have a reservation.

Máme rezervace/rezerváciu.

ma-me re-zer-vuh-tse/re-zer-va-tsi-yu

I'd like ..., please.

Chtěl/Chtěla bych ..., prosím. (m/f)

khtyel/khtye-luh bikh ... pro-seem

Chcel/Chcela by som ..., prosím. (m/f)

khtsel/khtse-luh bi som ... pro-seem

a table for (five)

stůl pro (pět)

stool pro (pyet)

stôl pre (päť)

stwol pre (pet')

the nonsmoking section

nekuřáckou místnost

ne-ku-rzhats-koh meest-nost

nefajčiarsku časť

nye-fai-chyuhr-sku chuhst'

the smoking section

kuřáckou místnost

ku-rzhats-koh meest-nost

fajčiarsku časť

fai-chyuhr-sku chuhst'

What's the local speciality?

Co je místní specialita?

tso ye meest-nyee spe-tsi-uh-li-tuh

Čo je miestna špecialita?

cho ye myest-nuh shpe-tsyuh-li-tuh

What would you recommend?

Co by ste doporučili/doporučila? (m/f)

tso bi ste do-po-ru-chil/do-po-ru-chi-luh

Čo by ste mi odporučili?

cho bi stye mi od-po-ru-chi-li

Bon appétit.

Dobrou chut'/Dobru chut'.

do-broh khut'/do-broo khut'

Cheers!

Na zdraví!

nuh zdruh-vee

Na zdravie!

nuh zdruh-vye

Some more ..., please.

Ještě ..., prosím./Ešte ..., prosím.

yesh-tye/esh-tye ... pro-seem

mineral/bottled water

minerálka

mi-ne-ral-kuh

sparkling/still water

bublinkové/bez bubliniek

bu-blin-ko-ve/bez bu-bli-nyek

a bottle/glass of beer

fľaša/pohár piva

flyuh-shuh/po-har pi-vuh

a bottle/glass of ... wine

láhev/sklenička ... vína

la-hef/skle-nyich-kuh ... vee-nuh

fľaša/pohár ... vína

flyuh-shuh/po-har ... vee-nuh

red/sparkling/white

červeného/šumivého/

cher-ve-nair-ho/shu-mi-vair-ho/

bílého

bee-lair-ho

červeného/šumivého/bieleho

cher-ve-nair-ho/shu-mi-vair-ho/bye-le-ho

I'd like (the) ..., please.

Chtěl/Chtěla bych ..., prosím. (m/f)

khtyel/khtye-luh bikh ... pro-seem

Prosím si ...

pro-seem si ...

menu

jídelníček

yee-del-nyee-chek

jedálny lístok

ye-dal-ni lees-tok

bill

účtet

oo-chet

účtet

oo-chet

I'm a vegetarian.

Jsem/Som vegetarián/ka. (m/f)

ysem/som ve-ge-tuh-ri-yan/-ka

I don't eat ...

Nejím .../Nejem ...

ne-yeem .../nye-yem ...

meat

maso/mäso

ma-so/me-so

chicken

kuře/kuracín

ku-rzhe/ku-ruh-tsi-nu

fish

rybu

ri-bu

ham

šunku

shun ku

I'm allergic to ...

Mám alergii na ...

mam uh-ler-gi-yi nuh ...

Som alergický/

som uh-ler-gits-kee/

alergická na ... (m/f)

uh-ler-gits-ka nuh ...

nuts

orechy

o-rzhe-khi

orechy

o-re-khi

seafood

plody moře

plo-di mo-rzhe

dary mora

duh-ri mo-ruh

Food Glossary**SOUPS (POLÉVKA/POLIEVKA)**

bramborová/

bruhm-bo-ro-va/

potato

zemiaková

ze-mi-yuh-ko-va

dršťková/držková

drsh't'-ko-va/drzh-ko-va

sliced tripe

fazulová

fuh-zo-lo-va

bean soup with pork

houbová/hřibová

hoh-bo-va/hree-bo-va

mushroom

hrachová

hruh-kho-va

pea soup with bacon

kapustnica

kuh-pust-ni-tsu

cabbage with pork

slepačí vývar

sle-puh-chee vee-vuhr

chicken bouillon

zeleninová

ze-le-nyi-no-va

vegetable

COLD STARTERS (STUDENÉ PŘEDKRMY/STUDENÉ PREDJEDLÁ)

chlebičky

khle-beech-ki

open sandwiches on French bread, with cold meat, eggs, cheese, potato, ham or peas

Pražská šunka s okurkou/

pruhzh-ska shun-kuh s o-kur-koh/

Prague ham with gherkins

uhorkou

u-hor-koh

hard-boiled egg, potato and salami, with mayonnaise

ruské vejce/vajcia

rus-kair vey-tse/vay-tsi-ya

hard-boiled egg, potato and

syrový nářez/

see-ro-vee na-rzhez/

cheeseboard

syrový tanier

si-ro-vee tuh-ni-yer

MAIN DISHES (HLAVNÍ JÍDLA/HLAVNÉ JEDLÁ)

Mains are usually divided into *hotová jídla/hotová jedlá* (ready to serve) and *jídla na objednávku/jedlá na objednávku* (prepared as they're ordered).

<i>dušená roštěnka/ dusené hovädzie hovézi guláš/ hovädzí guláš karbanátky/karbonátky</i>	<i>du-she-na rosh-tyen-kuh/ du-se-nair ho-ved-zye ho-vye-zee/ ho-ved-zee gu-lash kar-ba-nat-ki/kar-bo-nat-ki</i>	braised beef slices in sauce beef goulash hamburger with breadcrumbs, egg, a sliced roll and onion chicken boiled in spicy paprika cream sauce capsicum stuffed with minced meat and rice, served with tomato sauce
<i>kuře na paprice/ kurací paprikáš plněná paprika/plněná paprika</i>	<i>ku-rzhe nuh puh-pri-tse/ ku-ruh-tsee puh-pri-kash pl-nye-na puh-pri-kuh</i>	risotto, usually mixed with meat or veggies goulash with meat and sauerkraut in a creamy paprika sauce roast beef with a sour cream sauce and spices roast veal
<i>rizoto</i>	<i>ri-zo-to</i>	
<i>segedínsky guláš</i>	<i>se-ge-dyeens-ki gu-lash</i>	roast pork with caraway seeds fried pork or veal steak, aka wiener schnitzel
<i>svíčková na smetaně/ svíčková na smotane telecí pečeně/ telacie pečené/ vepřová pečeně/ bravčové pečené viděvský řízek/ výprážený rezeň</i>	<i>sveech-ko-va nuh sme-ta-nye/ svi-ech-ko-va nuh smo-ta-nye te-le-tsee pe-che-nye/ tye-lya-tsi-e pe-che-nair vep-rzho-va pe-che-nye/ brav-cho-vair pe-che-nair vee-dyev-skee rzhee-zek/ vee-pra-zhuh-nee re-zen'</i>	

MEATLESS DISHES (BEZMASÁ JÍDLA/BEZMÄSITÉ JEDLÁ)

<i>míchaná vejce/ praženica omeleta se sýrem/ omeleta so syrom smažené šampióny/ výprážené šampióny smažený sýr/ výprážený syr</i>	<i>mee-khuh-na vey-tse/ pruh-zhe-nyi-tshuh o-me-le-tuh se see-rem/ o-me-le-tuh zo sí-rom smuh-zhe-nair zhuhm-pi-yaw-ni/ vi-pra-zhuh-nair shuhm-pi-yaw-ni smuh-zhe-nee seer/ vi-pra-zhuh-nee sir</i>	scrambled eggs cheese omelette fried mushrooms with potatoes fried cheese
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SIDE DISHES (PŘÍLOHY/PŘÍLOHA)

<i>bramborový šalát/t zemiakový šalá hranolky krokety</i>	<i>bruhm-bo-ro-vee suh-lat/ ze-mi-a-ko-vee shuh-lat hruh-nol-ki kro-ke-ti</i>	potato salad french fries deep-fried mashed potato (croquettes) fried/roast potatoes
<i>opékané brambory/ opekané zemiaky tatarská omáčka/ tatárska omáčka</i>	<i>o-pair-kuh-nair bruhm-bo-ri/ o-pe-kuh-nair ze-mi-a-ki tuh-tuhrs-ka o-mach-kuh/ tuh-tars-kuh o-mach-kuh</i>	creamy tartar sauce

SALADS (SALÁT/ŠALÁTKY)

<i>hlavkový/hlávkový míchaný/miešaný okurkový/uhorkový</i>	<i>hlaf-ko-vee/hlav-ko-vee mee-khuh-nee/mye-shuh-nee o-kur-ko-vee/u-hor-ko-vee</i>	lettuce mixed cabbage or lettuce with tomatoes cucumber
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*rajský/paradajkový
šopský/balkánský*

DESSERTS & SWEETS

<i>jablečný štrúdl/ jablková štrúďla koláč makový ovocné knedlíky palačinky/palacinky zmrzlina</i>	<i>yuh-blech-nee shtroodl/ yuh-bl-ko-va shtrood-lyuh ko-lach muh-ko-vee o-vots-nair kned-lee-ki puh-luh-chin-ki/puh-luh-tsin-ki zmrz-li-nuh</i>	apple strudel sweet filled pastries poppy seed fruit dumplings pancakes ice cream
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English-Czech/Slovak Glossary**MEAT & FISH**

beef	<i>hovězí (maso)/ hovädzie (mäso)</i>	<i>ho-vye-zee (muh-so)/ ho-ve-dzi-ye me-so</i>
beef steak	<i>biftek</i>	<i>bif-tek</i>
carp	<i>kapr/kapor</i>	<i>kuh-pri/kuh-por</i>
chicken	<i>kuře/kura</i>	<i>ku-rzhe/ku-ruh</i>
cutlet, chop	<i>kotleta/ rebiekro (karé)</i>	<i>kot-le-tuh/ re-byer-ko (kuh-rair)</i>
duck	<i>kachna/ kačica</i>	<i>kuhkh-nuh/ kuh-chi-tshuh</i>
fish	<i>ryba</i>	<i>ri-buh</i>
goose	<i>husa/hus</i>	<i>hu-suh/hus</i>
ham	<i>šunka</i>	<i>shun-kuh</i>
hamburger	<i>hamburger</i>	<i>ham-bur-ger</i>
lamb	<i>jehně or jehněčí (maso)/ jahňa or jahňacie (mäso)</i>	<i>yeh-nye-chee (muh-so)/ yuh-hnyuh/ yuh-hnya-tsi-ye (me-so)</i>
liver	<i>játra/pečeň</i>	<i>yat-ruh/pe-chen'</i>
meat	<i>maso/mäso</i>	<i>muh-so/me-so</i>
sirloin	<i>svíčková/sviečková</i>	<i>sveech-ko-va/svyech-ko-va</i>
trout	<i>pstruh</i>	<i>pst-rooh</i>
turkey	<i>krůta/ morčacie (mäso)</i>	<i>kroo-tuh/ mor-cha-tsi-ye (me-so)</i>
veal	<i>telecí (maso)/ telacie mäso</i>	<i>te-le-tsee (muh-so)/ tye-lyuh-tsi-ye me-so</i>
venison	<i>jelení (maso)/ jelenie</i>	<i>ye-le-nyee (muh-so)/ ye-le-ni-ye</i>

FRUIT & VEGETABLES

apricot	<i>meruňka/marhúla</i>	<i>me-run'-kuh/muhr-hu-lyuh</i>
beans	<i>fazolové lusky/ fazula</i>	<i>fuh-zo-lo-vair lus-ki/ fuh-zu-lyuh</i>
capsicum	<i>paprika</i>	<i>puh-pri-kuh</i>
carrot	<i>mrkev/mrkva</i>	<i>mr-kev/mrk-vuh</i>
cauliflower	<i>květák/karfiol</i>	<i>kye-tak/kuhr-fi-yol</i>
cucumber/pickle	<i>okurka/uhorka</i>	<i>o-kur-kuh/u-hor-kuh</i>
fruit	<i>ovoce/ovocie</i>	<i>o-vo-tse/o-vo-tsi-ye</i>
garlic	<i>česnek/cesnak</i>	<i>ches-nek/tses-nuhk</i>
horseradish	<i>křen/chren</i>	<i>krzhen/khren</i>
lemon	<i>citrón</i>	<i>tši-trawn</i>

tomato and onion
lettuce, tomato, onion
and cheese

mushrooms	<i>houby/hríby</i>	<i>hoh-bi/hree-bi</i>
onion	<i>cibule/cibula</i>	<i>tsi-bu-le/tsi-bu-lyuh</i>
peas	<i>hrášek/hrášok</i>	<i>hra-shek/hra-shok</i>
pickled cabbage	<i>sterilizovaná zell/ sterilizovaná kapusta</i>	<i>ste-ri-li-zo-vuh-nair ze-lee/ ste-ri-li-zo-vuh-na kuh-pus-tuh</i>
plum	<i>švestka/slívka</i>	<i>shvest-kuh/sliv-kuh</i>
potato	<i>brambor/zemiak</i>	<i>bruhm-bor/ze-myuhk</i>
raspberries	<i>maliny</i>	<i>muh-li-ni</i>
sauerkraut	<i>zell/kyslá kapusta</i>	<i>ze-lee/kis-la kuh-pus-tuh</i>
spinach	<i>špenát</i>	<i>shpe-nat</i>
strawberries	<i>jahody</i>	<i>yuh-ho-di</i>
tomato	<i>rajče/paradajka</i>	<i>rai-che/pa-ruh-duhy-kuh</i>
vegetables	<i>zelenina</i>	<i>ze-le-nyi-nuh</i>

OTHER ITEMS

black pepper	<i>pepi/čierne korenie</i>	<i>pe-przh/chyer-ne ko-re-ni-ye</i>
bread	<i>chlieb/chlieb</i>	<i>khlairb/khli-yeb</i>
butter	<i>másto/maslo</i>	<i>mas-lo/muhs-lo</i>
cheese	<i>sýr/syr</i>	<i>seer/sir</i>
chocolate	<i>čokoláda</i>	<i>cho-ko-la-duh</i>
coffee	<i>káva</i>	<i>ka-vuh</i>
cottage cheese	<i>tvaroh</i>	<i>tvuh-rawkh</i>
cream	<i>smetana/smotana</i>	<i>sme-tuh-nuh/smo-tuh-nuh</i>
eggs	<i>vejce/vajcia</i>	<i>vey-tse/vuhy-tsya</i>
honey	<i>med</i>	<i>med</i>
jam	<i>džem</i>	<i>dzhem</i>
mustard	<i>hořčice/horčica</i>	<i>horzh-chi-tse/hor-chi-tsuh</i>
salt	<i>sůl/sol'</i>	<i>sool/sol</i>
sugar	<i>cukr/cukor</i>	<i>tsu-kr/tsu-kor</i>

COOKING TERMS

boiled	<i>vařený/varený</i>	<i>vuh-rzhe-nee/vuh-re-nee</i>
broiled	<i>roštěná (na roštu)/ roštenka (na ražni)</i>	<i>rosh-tye-na (nuh rosh-tu)/ rosh-tyen-kuh (nuh ruhzh-nyi)</i>
fresh	<i>čerstvý</i>	<i>cherst-vee</i>
fried	<i>smažený/ vypřázaný</i>	<i>smuh-zhe-nee/ vi-pra-zhuh-nee</i>
grilled/ on the spit	<i>grilovaný/ na rošte</i>	<i>gri-lo-vuh-nee/ nuh rosh-tye</i>
homemade	<i>domáci/domáci</i>	<i>do-ma-tsee/do-ma-tsi</i>
roasted or baked	<i>pečený</i>	<i>pe-che-nee</i>
smoked	<i>uzený/údený</i>	<i>u-ze-nee/oo-dye-nee</i>
steamed	<i>dušený/dusený</i>	<i>du-she-nee/du-se-nee</i>
sweet	<i>sladký</i>	<i>sluhd-kee</i>

UTENSILS

ashtray	<i>popelník/popolník</i>	<i>po-pel-nyeek/po-pol-nyeek</i>
cup	<i>šálek/šálka</i>	<i>sha-lek/shal-kuh</i>
fork	<i>vidlička</i>	<i>vid-lich-kuh</i>
glass	<i>sklenice/pohár</i>	<i>skle-nyi-tse/po-har</i>
knife	<i>nůž/nůž</i>	<i>noozh/mwozh</i>
plate	<i>talíř/tanier</i>	<i>tuh-leezh/tuh-ni-yer</i>
spoon	<i>lžice/lyžica</i>	<i>lzh-tse/li-zhi-tsuh</i>

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