

West Bohemia



The famous effervescent liquids of West Bohemia are a balance of virtue and vice, good and (not so) evil, and provide a relaxing distraction from the tourist commotion of Prague.

Virtue is on tap at the elegant spa towns, where visitors can immerse themselves physically and emotionally in the waters bubbling under the classy streets of Karlovy Vary, Mariánské Lázně and Františkovy Lázně. And if you're looking for that extra smidgen of spiritual guidance, it could well come from a sip of Becherovka liqueur, the so-called '13th spring of Karlovy Vary' and the real reason many visitors leave with a spring in their step.

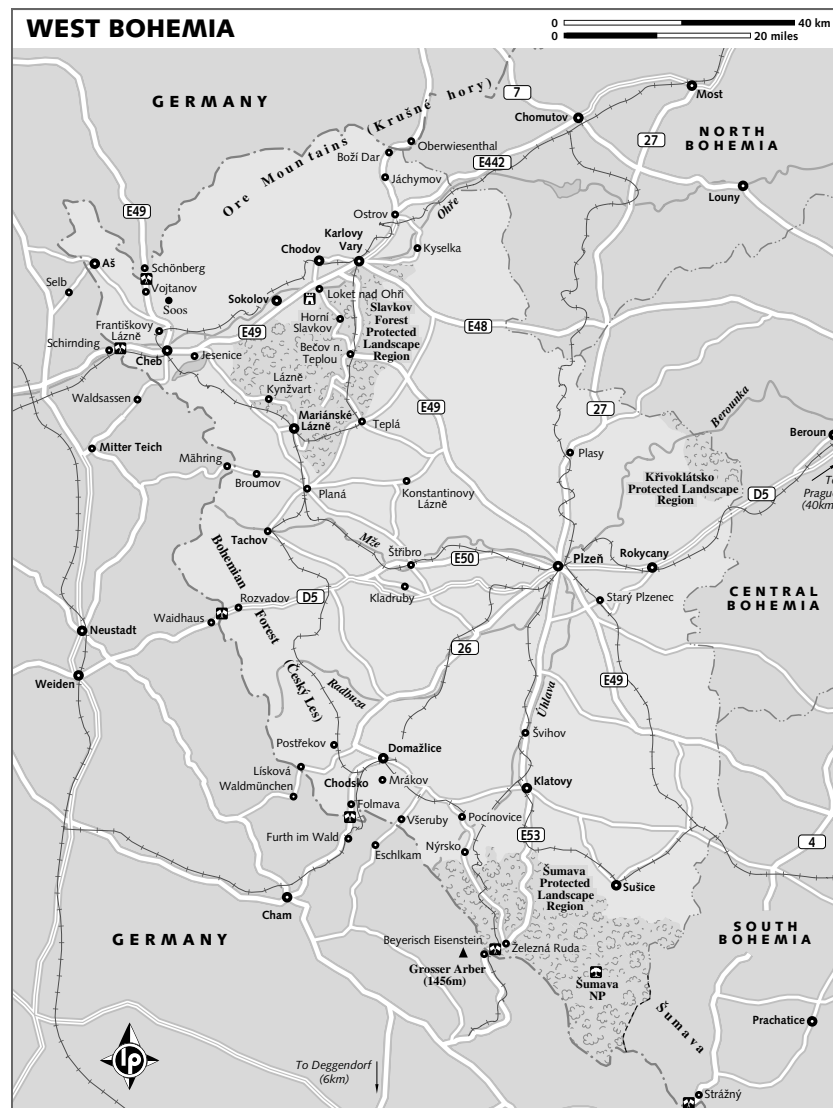
Balance is provided by the healthy and hearty vice of West Bohemia's liquid gold and true *aqua vitae*, Pilsner Urquell, the world's first (and finest) lager. There's no better spot for your first Pilsner Urquell than the bustling student pubs of brewery town Plzeň, or in the underground caverns of the town's famous brewery.

Once you've investigated your own balance of virtue and vice, there's lots more to discover. Active types can explore the rustic woodlands of the Šumava region bordering Germany and comprising the biggest national park in the Czech Republic. The rugged borderlands include the Chodsko region, home of the Chods, the traditional protectors of the border.

And a few days in beautifully sleepy villages like Loket and Domažlice will give you a glimpse into hushed West Bohemian life, well away from the thoroughly enjoyable distractions of bubbling springs and foaming beer.

HIGHLIGHTS

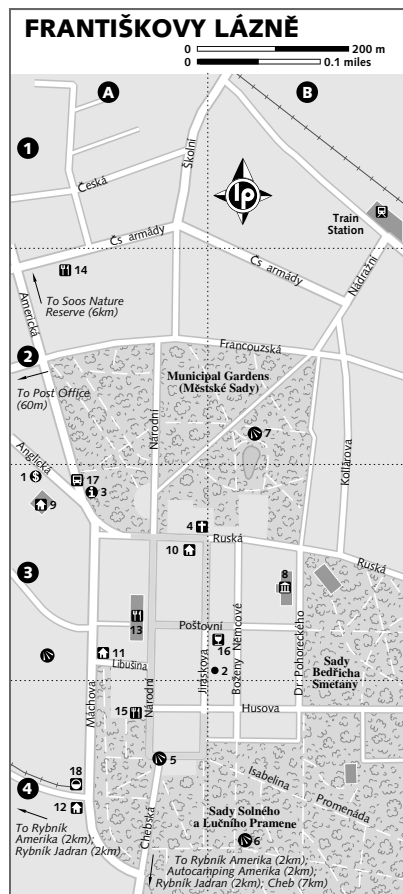
- Boost your cultural credibility at one of the elegant summertime music festivals in **Mariánské Lázně** (p209)
- Savour the subdued Euroglam ambience of spa town **Karlovy Vary** (p211)
- Meet the locals in the lively pubs of **Plzeň** (p223), home of one of the world's best beers
- Wander lazily around the captivating town of **Loket nad Ohří** (p217) and its impressive Gothic castle
- Discover the unique culture of the Chods in the delightfully sleepy town of **Domažlice** (p227)



FRANTIŠKOVY LÁZNĚ pop 5400

With a buttery veneer of yellow paint, and wide avenues with spa patients and tourists walking unbearably slowly, Františkovy Lázně is the archetypal spa town. Well-tended parkland with statues and springs is the only concession to reality in this spa-town 'theme park'.

Beethoven and Goethe were among Františkovy Lázně's most famous guests, but with the spa best known for the treatment of female infertility, they were more likely drawn by a lively café society. Today, the sidewalk cafés are relaxingly soporific, and late-night action is sound asleep in this Bohemian version of *The Truman Show*.



INFORMATION	
Česká Spořitelna.....	1 A3
Františkovy Lázně AS.....	2 B3
Internet & Library.....	(see 8)
Town Information Centre.....	3 A3
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	
Church of the Ascension of the Cross.....	4 A3
Františkovův Pramen.....	5 A4
Lučního Pramen.....	6 B4
Míru Pramen.....	7 B2
Municipal Museum.....	8 B3
SLEEPING	
Hotel Centrum.....	9 A3
Hotel Savoy.....	10 A3
Hotel Tři Lilie.....	11 A3
Milano Penzió and Kavarna.....	12 A4
EATING	
Café Slovan.....	13 A3
Saloon Bažina.....	14 A2
Videňská Kavárna.....	15 A4
DRINKING	
Selská Jizba.....	16 B3
TRANSPORT	
Long-Distance Bus Stop.....	17 A3
Terminal of Mini-Train to Rybník Amerika.....	18 A4

Česká Spořitelna (Anglická 7) has an exchange and ATM. There is a **post office** (Lidická 8), and the **library** (Dr Pohoreckého 8; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-4pm Mon-Fri, to noon only on Tue) by the Municipal museum has internet access.

Sights & Activities

Aside from the neoclassical façades, all painted the same two shades of yellow, there is the **church of the Ascension of the Cross** (kostel Povýšení sv Kříže) on Ruská, and the town's central spring, the **Františkovův pramen**, at the southern end of Národní.

If these haven't stirred you, neither will the exhibits on the spa's history at the **Municipal museum** (Městské muzeum; Dr Pohoreckého 8; adult/concession 20/8Kč; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun).

About 2km southwest of the city centre, you can rent a boat on **Rybník Amerika** or swim at **Rybník Jadran**. A **mini-train** (mikrovláček; adult/concession 20/10Kč; ☎ 10am-4.30pm Apr-Sep) shuttles to the lakes every half-hour from outside Milano Penzió on Máchova.

Six kilometres northeast of town, in the hamlet of Hájek, is **Soos Nature Reserve** featuring peat bogs and bubbling mud.

Sleeping

The Town Information Centre can help with private rooms. Accommodation here is seasonal. Prices shown are peak season – they may fall by up to 20% out of season.

Autocamping Amerika (☎ 354 542 518; tent 70Kč; ☎ May-Sep; P) Beside Rybník Amerika,

this camp site has double/quad bungalows (340/700Kč) and a restaurant.

Milano Penzió and Kavarna (☎ 604 602 080; Máchova 8; s/d 400/650Kč; P) An enthusiastic English-speaking owner offers snug, modern rooms over his café.

Hotel Savoy (☎ 354 203 000; www.franzensbad.cz; Ruská 4; s/d incl breakfast 1000/1600Kč; P) You're in spa country now, Toto, with recuperating guests in smocks and slippers shuffling through a sleepy reception, and a whole raft of treatments available.

Hotel Centrum (☎ 354 543 156; www.spahotelcentrum.cz; Anglická; s/d incl breakfast 1020/1620Kč; P) Away from the promenading hordes, the best rooms at this crisply modern spot overlook a park.

Hotel Tři Lilie (☎ 354 208 900; www.franzensbad.cz; Máchova; s/d incl breakfast 1700/2500Kč; P ☎ ☎) Quality rooms, attentive staff and the occasional B-list celeb come as standard at this luxury place that's more vibrant and friendly than other places around town.

Eating & Drinking

Videňská Kavárna (☎ 602 460 921; Národní 1; snacks 60Kč, mains to 500Kč) The 'Viennese Café' offers more than just coffee 'n' cake. If you can't make your mind up over the huge list of ice cream, come back after dark when the café morphs into a formal eatery.

Café Slovan (☎ 354 542 841; Národní 5; mains 100Kč) Ignore the frumpy retro décor and enjoy the old-fashioned prices at this café-meets-wine-bar that's the main drag's best value.

Saloon Bažina (☎ 603 236 410; Americká 95/10; mains 130Kč) Break away from your spa-town health kick with a slab of beef at this rustic 'saloon' serving Tex-Mex tucker with live country music.

Selská Jizba (☎ 602 460 921; Poštovní; meals 70-120Kč) No-nonsense and full of loyal locals, this has good, honest Bohemian food and cheaper drinks to counteract the high-priced primness of surrounding eateries.

Getting There & Away

Buses are more direct and more frequent than trains. A daily bus comes direct from Prague via Karlovy Vary (150Kč, 3½ hours), and three a day come from Plzeň (112Kč, two hours). For long-distance options and international connections, go via Cheb, with buses to Františkovy Lázně every 30 minutes (12Kč, 15 minutes).

CHEB

pop 33,500

Cheb (pronounced 'kheb'), another pretty Bohemian old town ringed by grimy industry, conceals a recent history that is fundamental to 20th-century Europe. In 1897 Cheb gave birth to German National Socialism, which later evolved into the Nazi party. Hitler visited here in 1938, just before German troops seized control of the surrounding Sudetenland. Payback came with the 1945 expulsion of Cheb's German population of 30,000. Now, significant Vietnamese, Slovak and Roma populations reflect Central Europe's evolving demography in this town that sits astride the traditional, historical and cultural fault line between Germany and the Czech Republic.

At the city's heart, winding alleys peel away from the raffish town square, and a unique red-brick fortress provides a refreshing antidote to the contrived façades of the nearby spa towns. But leave the quaint centre and Cheb's double life is reinforced, with prostitutes working sullen streets tarnished by years of heavy industry.

Orientation

From the adjacent bus and train stations it's 1km west, then northwest, along Svobody to the old town's sloping, triangular main square, náměstí krále Jiřího z Poděbrad (King George of Poděbrady square).

Information

Infocentrum (☎ 354 440 302; www.mestocheb.cz; náměstí krále Jiřího z Poděbrad 33; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10-2pm Sat, 10am-1.30pm Sun May-Sep) sells maps, books theatre and concert tickets and provides guides; internet access is 1Kč per minute.

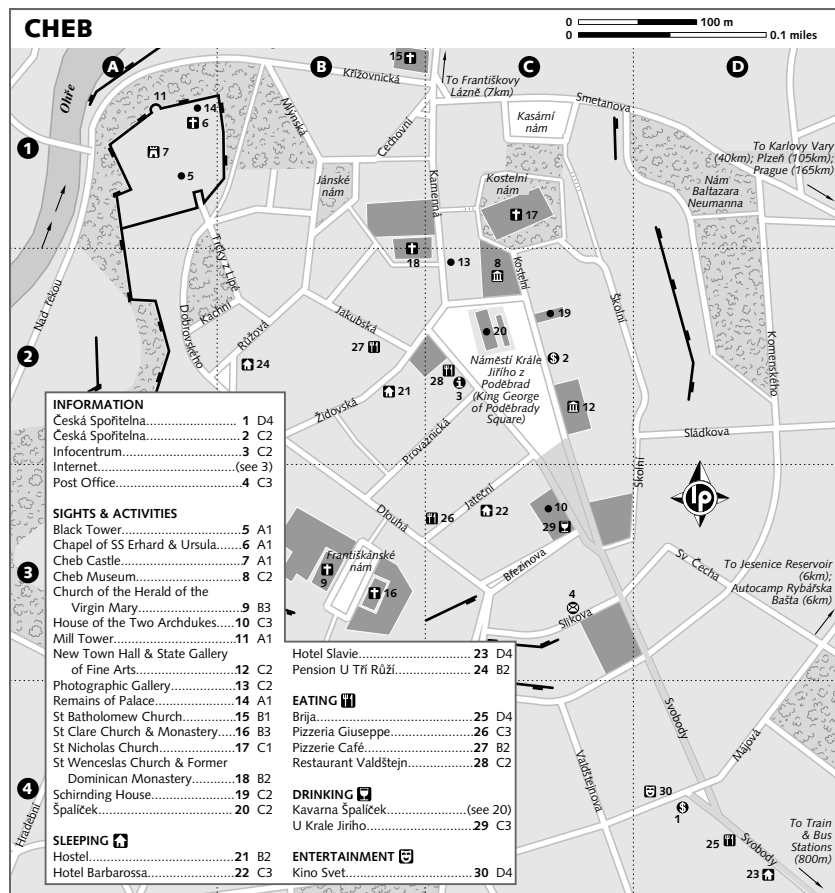
Česká Spořitelna (náměstí krále Jiřího z Poděbrad) has an ATM and exchange desk. There's a second branch at Májová 36.

The **post office** (Slikova 15) is just south of the main square.

Sights

NÁMĚSTÍ KRÁLE JIŘIHO Z PODEBRAD

The main square has a selection of architectural treats. The best is the teetering tangle of 16th-century former Jewish merchants' houses called **špalíček** ('the Block'). Another late-Gothic refugee is **Schirnding house** (Schirndingovský dům; náměstí Krále Jiřího z Poděbrad 508), with its crow-step gables.



The 18th-century baroque **New town hall** (Nová radnice; adult/concession 80/40Kč, free 1st Thu of the month; ☎ 9am-noon & 12.30-5pm Tue-Sun) incorporates the **State gallery of fine arts** (Státní galerie výtvarného umění; admission incl in town hall fee) with changing exhibits of modern Czech art. Note the **house of the two archdukes** (dům U dvou arcivévodů; náměstí Krále Jiřího z Poděbrad 26/471) at the top of the square was once the town's oldest inn and is now a **music shop** (☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) and **restaurant** (☎ noon-1am).

North on Kamenná is **St Wenceslas church** (kostel sv Václava), which once operated as a **Dominican monastery**, and a small **photographic gallery** (Galerie Fotografie; Kamenná 2; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Fri, to 5pm Sat) with a diverse selection of prints by contemporary Czech shutterbugs.

CHEB MUSEUM

Wallenstein (see opposite) met a sticky end while staying at the pink Renaissance **Pachelbel house** (Pachelblův dům; náměstí Krále Jiřího z Poděbrad 492) at the northern end of the square. It's now the **Cheb museum** (Chebské muzeum; ☎ 354 422 386; adult/concession 50/25Kč; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 1-5pm Tue-Sun).

The highlight is a gallery of 20th-century paintings of the town, which graphically illustrate Cheb's decline. There's a mock-up of the bedroom where Wallenstein was run through, a moment re-enacted in many illustrations.

ST NICHOLAS CHURCH

Baroque **St Nicholas church** (kostel sv Mikuláš) is of interest for its age (13th century), its Romanesque basilica plan and its sheer size.

FRANTIŠKÁNSKÉ NÁMĚSTÍ

On the eastern side of the square, beyond Dlouhá, is the former **St Clare church** (kostel sv Klára) and monastery, a fine piece of high baroque by Kristof Dientzenhofer. Opposite is the Gothic **church of the Herald of the Virgin Mary** (kostel Zvěstování Panny Marie).

CHEB CASTLE

The red-brick **fortress** (hrad; www.chebskyhrad.cz, Czech & German only; adult/concession 30/15Kč; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-6pm Tue-Sun Jun-Aug, to 5pm May & Sep, to 4pm Apr & Oct), mostly ruined except for its towers, is a must-see for its extraordinary chapel and because it's the biggest Romanesque castle in Bohemia. No tours are available but an English text is.

Only the northeastern corner walls are still standing, with multiple-arched windows hinting at its former elegance. Westward are the foundations of a later building, where four officers loyal to Wallenstein (see below) were killed just before his demise.

Don't miss the boxy little **chapel of SS Erhard & Ursula** (kaple sv Erharda a Ursuly). In the early-Gothic lower storey (probably once a crypt), four individually carved granite pillars

support a vaulted ceiling. Upstairs is a sublime version of the same thing, with delicate, late-Gothic marble columns, again each carved differently. The upstairs room once had its own entrance from the castle.

Above the moat bridge, the dusty, thick-walled **Black tower** (Černá věž) offers views of the river, old-town rooftops and distant apartment blocks from its 18.5m height. In an adjacent building is an interesting **archaeological exhibit** on Chebsko (the Cheb region), unfortunately without English captions.

To appreciate the scale of the fortifications, take the steep path leading down to Křížovnická, past the round, late-Gothic **Mill tower** (Mlýnská věž) and the stretch of town walls.

Sleeping

Autocamp Rybářská Bašta (☎ 354 431 951; berdy chp@quick.cz; tent/bungalow per person 60/220Kč; ☎ May-Sep; (P)) Around 6km east of the city centre at Dřenice, this well-equipped camp site is by the popular Jesenice reservoir (vodní nádrž Jesenice).

Pension U Tří Růží (☎ 354 423 384; http://penzionutriruzy.wz.cz; Růžový Kopeček 395/9; s/d 450/800Kč)

WALLENSTEIN

In an era characterised by violence and greed, Albrecht von Wallenstein (Valdštejn, 1583-1634) was more powerful and avaricious than all his contemporaries. The most infamous warlord of the Thirty Years' War, he acquired wealth by marrying a rich widow who fortuitously died soon after. Leveraging her estates in Moravia, Wallenstein forged a relationship with Prince Ferdinand, the Hapsburg heir.

Following the Battle of White Mountain in 1620, Wallenstein negotiated a crafty deal with Ferdinand, now Holy Roman Emperor. The grasping Wallenstein donated to Ferdinand the services of his private army of up to 100,000 men in exchange for the absolute right to plunder the lands they conquered. By 1625 Wallenstein was incredibly wealthy and owned a quarter of all Bohemia. Ferdinand was quick to harness Wallenstein's talent for war, and in the following years the Czech 'military entrepreneur' achieved many battlefield victories on behalf of Ferdinand in Germany. A whole raft of titles followed, including Duke of Friedland and Governor of Prague.

In 1630 the increasingly ambitious Wallenstein was relieved of his military duties when Ferdinand suspected him of planning to overthrow the Holy Roman Empire. Wallenstein retired to his duchy of Friedland in Jičín (p258). A year later the emperor had to seek Wallenstein's assistance again, when Bohemia was invaded by the Saxons. By 1633 Wallenstein had again retired from fighting Ferdinand's battles, angry at the emperor's Edict of Resolution, which transferred many Protestant assets to the Catholics. Although a staunch Catholic, Wallenstein saw the edict as interfering in the lands he owned and controlled.

Rumours surfaced that Wallenstein was preparing to join forces with the Saxon and French enemies, and on 18 February 1634 he was charged with treason. Most of his massive army defected to the emperor's cause, while Wallenstein fled to Cheb with a supposedly loyal retinue of a few hundred soldiers. On 25 February 1634, a group of his own Scottish and Irish mercenaries, actually loyal to Ferdinand, slaughtered Wallenstein in his bedchamber.

The décor is old-school frumpy but the welcome is friendly at this *pension* in a quiet square near the castle.

Hotel Barbarossa (☎ 354 423 446; www.hotel-barbarossa.cz; Jateční 7; s/d incl breakfast 1050/1350Kč; (P)) Restful jazz in reception, and flash bathrooms, make this hotel Cheb's top spot.

Also recommended:

Hostel (☎ 603 344 140; Židovská 7; per person 150Kč; ☎ 8am-noon & 4-8pm) No-frills cheap beds with strict hours of reception.

Hotel Slavie (☎ 354 433 216; www.hotel-slavie.cz; třída Svobody 75; s/d incl breakfast 850/1450Kč; (P) (Q)) Simple and spartan, but clean and convenient.

Eating & Drinking

Pizzeria Café (☎ 354 436 143; Jakubská 1; pizza 70Kč) This pizzeria is around half the price of Pizzeria Giuseppe, but the pizzas are just as good at this 'back streets' kind of place.

Restaurant Valdštejn (☎ 354 442 561; náměstí krále Jiřího z Poděbrad; mains 75-150Kč) The steak 'n' schnitzel specialties pack 'em in at this tourist-friendly main-square eatery.

Pizzeria Giuseppe (☎ 354 438 200; Jateční 18; pizza 120Kč) Bright colours light up this cosy *trattoria* while the punters enjoy the golden glow of tasty Italian specialties.

U Krále Jiřího (cnr náměstí krále Jiřího z Poděbrad & Březinova; mains 75-100Kč) The flash façade of the house of the two archdukes conceals the more rustic and raucous interior of this popular beer hall.

Also recommended:

Brija (třída Svobody 28; snacks 20Kč; ☎ 7am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-12.30pm Sat) Mini food court with salads and crepes.

Kavárna Špalíček (náměstí krále Jiřího z Poděbrad; coffee 30Kč) A cosy spot for coffee in the oddly angled špalíček.

Entertainment

Most of Cheb's so-called night clubs are really brothels or strip joints. A night at the movies in **Kino Svet** (☎ 354 437 722; Májová 29) should be safe.

Getting There & Away

There are direct buses from Prague (150Kč, three hours, four daily), Karlovy Vary (56Kč, one hour, seven daily) and Mariánské Lázně (40Kč, 30 minutes, 12 daily). Regional buses run between Cheb and Františkovy Lázně (12Kč, 15 minutes) every hour.

Express trains from Prague (250Kč, three hours) are less frequent but faster than the

bus. For shorter trips – for example, from Plzeň, Františkovy Lázně or Karlovy Vary – there are several fast trains a day but they're pricier than ordinary trains and the bus.

Cheb is a convenient point for international train connections.

MARIÁNSKÉ LÁZNĚ

pop 14,100

Any place that can bring a smile to Mr Melancholy himself, Franz Kafka, must have something going for it. At the height of Mariánské Lázně's (formerly Marienbad) popularity, Kafka was joined in West Bohemia's prettiest spa town by luminaries such as Goethe, Thomas Edison, Britain's King Edward VII and his Hapsburg contemporary, Franz-Josef I. Up to 20,000 visitors came each year for treatment amidst the neoclassical and Art Nouveau elegance sprinkled generously throughout this niche in the Slavkov forest. Walking in the crisp, fresh mountain air was as important as partaking of the precious, pure waters, and a maze of lazy trails still transects the rolling forest.

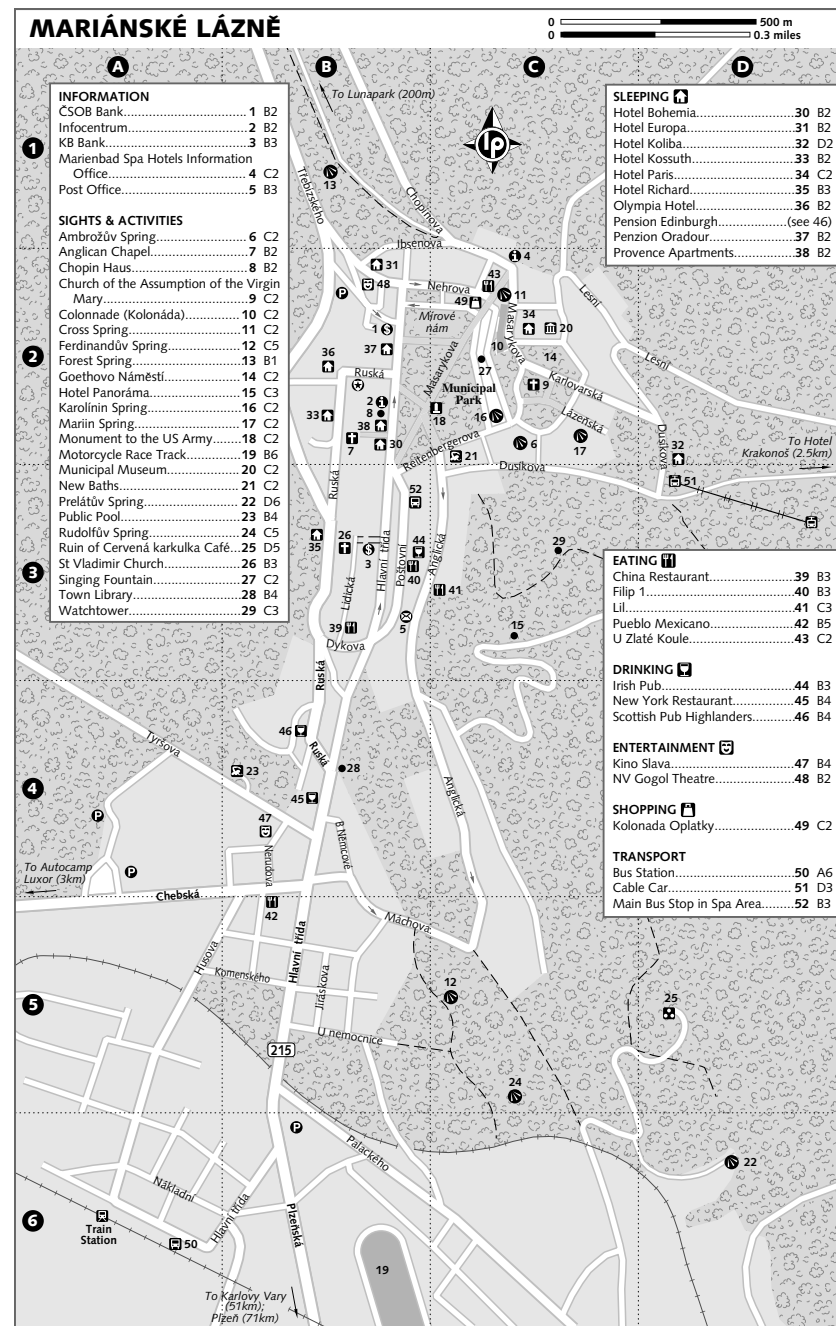
After being isolated by the Cold War from 1948, the town re-emerged in 1989, and nearly two decades later Mariánské Lázně is resurrecting its reputation. Today it's an equal-opportunity and thoroughly inclusive spa town, so don't come expecting the glitz and glamour of yesteryear. But with a robust array of good restaurants and cosy bars and a full retinue of spa services on offer, Mariánské Lázně is a top spot to explore the balance between virtue and vice.

Orientation

Mariánské Lázně stretches for 4km along Hlavní třída. From the adjacent bus and train stations at the southern, 'business' end of town, it's 2km on trolleybus 5 to the spa area's main bus stop (opposite Hotel Excelsior).

The spa area is a network of paths, parks and 39 therapeutic springs, centred on the photogenic Colonnade (Kolonáda) and surrounded by streets of plush hotels and mansions. Mírové náměstí has a summer *kavárna* (café) and an open-air stage. The spa is at the southern edge of the Slavkov Forest (Slavkovský les) Protected Landscape Region.

Parking is largely confined to pricey car parks – there's a multistorey near Hotel Europa (24Kč per hour from 8am to 7pm; 11Kč per hour after 7pm).



Information

City police office (☎ 158; Ruská) Behind the town hall.

Infocentrum (☎ 354 622 474; www.marianskelazne.cz; Hlavní 47; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-6pm) Sells theatre tickets, maps and guidebooks, organises guides, books accommodation and provides internet access at 1Kč per minute.

KB bank (Hlavní třída 132) and **ČSOB** (Hlavní třída 81) Both have ATMs and exchange desks.

Mariénbad Spa Hotels Information Office (☎ 354 655 501; www.mariénbad.cz; Masarykova 22; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) Manages and books eight of the biggest spa hotels and has information on spa packages (around €100 per person per night). Check the website for special offers.

Post office (Poštovní) South of the main bus stop (200m).

Town Library (Městská knihovna; ☎ 354 622 115; Hlavní 370/3; ☎ 9-11am & 1-6pm Mon-Fri) Charges 1Kč per minute for internet access.

Sights & Activities

HLAVNÍ TRÍDA & RUSKÁ

On the 2nd floor of **Chopin haus** (dům F Chopina), in dům U Bílé labuťe, is a little **museum** (www.chopinfestival.cz; Hlavní 47; adult/concession 20/10Kč; ☎ 2-5pm Tue, Thu & Sun Apr-Sep) to Frédéric Chopin, who stayed here in 1836.

There are two churches on Ruská (both accessible by stairways from Hlavní). The 1901 red-and-yellow **St Vladimír church** (kostel sv Vladimíra; Ruská 347-9; admission 20Kč; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 1-5pm May-Oct, 9.30-11am & 2-4pm Nov-Apr) is a plush, Byzantine-style Orthodox church with an amazing porcelain iconostasis.

Prim but equally striking is the 1879 neo-Gothic **Anglican chapel** (Anglikánský kostelík) further up the block. At the time of writing, the interior was closed and only being used for special events including concerts and festivals. Check with Infocentrum.

AROUND THE COLONNADE

The restored cast-iron **Colonnade** (Kolonáda), east of the municipal park, is the spa's visual centrepiece. From a little bandstand inside, classical and brass-band concerts are presented two or three times a day in the high season.

In its own whitewashed pavilion by the northern end of the Colonnade is **Cross spring** (Křížový pramen; ☎ 6am-6pm), the spa's first spring, where you can buy plastic drinking cups (3Kč) or choose from a galaxy of souvenir porcelain mugs. At the opposite end, the **Singing fountain** (Zpívající fontána) dances to recorded classical music every two hours from May to September.

Statues in the pristine municipal park (no dogs, no bicycles, no smoking – drinking seems to be allowed) include a **monument** to the liberation of Mariánské Lázně by the US army on 6 May 1945.

GOETHOVO NÁMĚSTÍ

This manicured square, edged with extravagant late-19th- and early-20th-century buildings, probably looks much as it did when King Edward VII et al patronised the surrounding hotels.

At the site of a house where Goethe stayed (the square is named after him) on his last visit to Mariánské Lázně is a ho-hum **Municipal museum** (Městské muzeum; Goethovo náměstí 11; adult/concession 60/30Kč; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Tue-Sun), although it does give a good overview of the town's history (with Czech captions). Ask the staff to put on the 30-minute video in English at the start of your visit.

Opposite is the bulky, octagonal **church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary** (kostel Nanebevzetí Panny Marie) built in 1848 in 'neo-Byzantine' style.

HIKING

A dozen trails wind through the surrounding woods, past pavilions and springs. Wilderness it isn't (there are signs showing cardiac, energy-use data!), but pleasant it is. The routes are shown on some city maps and on map boards at the south end of the Colonnade.

A popular trail climbs to **Hotel Panoráma**, round past an old stone **watchtower** (climb 100 steps to a sweeping forest view) and on to the ruin of **Červená karkulka Café**. Mortals can descend here to buses on Hlavní (total less than 4km). If you're serious, keep going for a 7km round trip.

An easier loop trail heads north past Forest spring (Lesní pramen) to Lunapark. In earlier times this was a fairground and a venue for afternoon teas and dances, but now Lunapark is a pleasant café in the forest.

BATHS & SWIMMING

Relax at the Roman-style **New baths** (Nové lázně; ☎ 354 644 111; Reitenbergerova 53; ☎ 2-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-8pm Sat). A one-hour Wellness Card (250Kč) gives you access to the baths, sauna and spa pools. Invest 1290Kč on a Wellness Day and you'll get a massage, juice, coffee and cake all thrown in. There's a range of one-off treatments available.

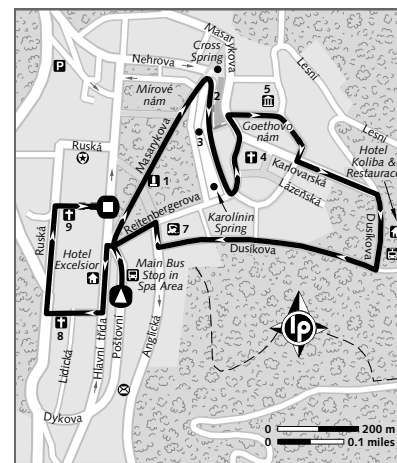
You can swim in the **public pool** (plavečký stadión; ☎ 354 623 579; Tyršova 617; adult/concession 60/25Kč; ☎ 11am-9pm Mon-Sat), southwest of the city centre.

Walking Tour

From the bus stop on Poštovní, cross north into the municipal park, past the **memorial to the American liberation (1)** of Mariánské Lázně in WWII. On the far side is the centrepiece of the spa, the **Colonnade (2)**, along with the popular **Singing fountain (3)**.

East beyond the Colonnade is Goethovo náměstí, with several venerable hotels, the octagonal **church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary (4)** and the **Municipal museum (5)**. Detour east on Karlovská and south on Dusíkova to the folksy **Hotel Koliba & Restaurace**, from where a **cable car (6)** climbs to Hotel Krakonoš every 10 minutes from 9am to 4.15pm during May to September (adult/concession 35/20Kč). Southward, for 1.5km, the woods are laced with hiking trails.

Walk west along Reitenbergerova, past the **New baths (7)** offering spa services to walk-in guests. Cross Hlavní, head south past the Hotel Excelsior and climb the steps to the Orthodox **St Vladimír church (8)**. Some 200m north on Ruská is an **Anglican chapel (9)**. Return down to Hlavní via another set of steps.



Festivals & Events

The town has a lively summertime cultural life, including the opening of the spa season in May, a week-long **Frédéric Chopin Music Festival**

(☎ 354 622 617; www.chopinfestival.cz) in mid-August, the **Mozart Festival** in October, and frequent outdoor concerts.

Sleeping

Mariánské Lázně has many hotels, but prices tend to be high (similar to Prague) and seasonal. The prices quoted are high-season summer rates (expect discounts of up to 30% during low season).

Infocentrum books private rooms from around 400Kč per person and arranges hotels.

Most hotels charge extra for overnight parking.

BUDGET

Autocamp Luxor (☎ 354 623 504; www.luxor.karlovarsko.cz; tent/bungalow per person 70/230Kč; ☎ mid-Apr-Sep; P) Autocamp Luxor is located in Velká Hledebe (2km west along Chebská, then 1km south). Catch trolleybus 6 from the town centre to Velká Hledebe.

Penzion Oradour (☎ 354 624 304; www.penzion-oradour.wz.cz; Hlavní 43; s/d incl breakfast 355/710Kč; P) A super central location, clean rooms and a huge breakfast make this the best budget option in an expensive town.

MIDRANGE

Pension Edinburgh (☎ 354 620 804; www.pension-edinburgh.com; Ruská 56; s/d from 600/840Kč, apt 1740Kč; P) Five refurbished rooms and one apartment are tucked away upstairs from a Scottish pub. In keeping with the Celtic theme, each room has a well-stocked minibar...and dressing gowns.

Hotel Europa (☎ 354 622 063; www.kosev.cz; Třebízského 2; d without/with bathroom incl breakfast 910/1500Kč; P) With a location that's rubbing (well-massaged) shoulders with the flash hotels, the Europa combines friendly staff, OK rooms and a full range of treatments for that more affordable spa experience.

Provence Apartments (☎ 608 161 415; www.apartma-mariénbad.com; Hlavní 51; d 1800Kč; P) Spacious self-catering apartments around a quiet courtyard bring a touch of the south of France to the west of Bohemia. Massage and physiotherapy sessions are available.

Hotel Paris (☎ 354 628 894; hotelparis@seznam.cz; Goethovo náměstí 15/3; s/d incl breakfast 1450/2100Kč; P) High on the hill overlooking Goethovo náměstí, this is your chance to stay in the same ritzy area as King Edward VII, but at slightly less regal prices.

OPLATKY

To quote Monty Python, 'Do you get wafers with it?' The answer is a resounding 'yes' according to locals, who prescribe the following method of taking your spring water: have a sip from your *lázeňský pohárek* (spa cup), then dull the sulphurous taste with a big, round, sweet wafer called *oplatky*. *Oplatky* are sold for 5Kč each at a few spa hotels and speciality shops, or you can pick them up at **Kolonada Oplatky** (cnr Nehrova & Masarykova). Steer clear of the fancy chocolate or hazelnut flavours, though; they're never as crunchily fresh and warm as the standard flavour.

Also recommended:

Hotel Kossuth (☎ 354 622 861; www.kosev.cz; Ruská 77; d without/with bathroom incl breakfast 970/1400Kč) Great location high on Ruská, but so-so rooms.

Hotel Koliba (☎ 354 625 169; www.hotel-koliba.cz; Dusikova 592; s/d incl breakfast 1220/1760Kč; P) Tucked away amidst the pines is this Swiss-style chalet with alpine hush.

TOP END

Olympia Hotel (☎ 354 931 111; www.olympiariamienbad.cz; Ruská 88/861; s/d incl breakfast 1900/3800Kč; P ☒ ☒ ☒) With a slick but friendly edge, the newly opened Olympia offers great top-end value with comfortable rooms, youthful staff, and a Greek-themed bar and restaurant in the lobby – just what you always wanted, right?

Hotel Bohemia (☎ 354 610 111; www.orea.cz/bohemia; Hlavní 100; s/d incl breakfast 2550/3640Kč; P ☒ ☒ ☒) Even with its façade transplanted from the French Riviera, a ritzy self-opening front door and very comfortable rooms, we can't excuse the snobby staff at reception on our visit. Flash? Yes. Friendly? Could try harder.

Hotel Richard (☎ 354 696 111; www.hotelrichard.com; Ruská 487/28; s/d incl breakfast 2690/3690Kč; P ☒ ☒ ☒) Named after composer Richard Wagner, but the rooms and décor are thankfully more stylish and low-key than his overwrought music.

Eating

Eating grandly is all part of 'the cure' and Mariánské Lázně is full of elegant, high-priced restaurants.

Pueblo Mexicano (☎ 354 620 318; Chebská; mains 90-200Kč; ☒ 5pm-5am) About as authentic as a

fake Mayan pyramid (yes, they do have one), but mucho east-of-the-German-border fun when the tequila and fajitas begin to flow. And who needs Chopin or Mozart when there's live country music every Thursday from 8pm?

Lil (☎ 354 603 339; Anglická 36; mains 250Kč; ☒ 11.30am-2am) Experience old-school Marienbad dining in this elegant villa sitting amidst a grove of shady pines. There's an extensive wine list, and cheek-to-cheek dancing on a Sunday to complete the illusion of days gone by.

U Zlaté Koule (☎ 354 624 455; Nehrova 26; mains 300Kč; ☒ 11am-11pm) A stunning cocktail of five-star class and cosy informality, this swish eatery features creaking wooden beams, sparkling glassware and antiques. The game-rich menu effortlessly whips up the 'wow' factor.

Also recommended:
Filip 1 (☎ 354 626 161; Poštovní 96; mains 100-150Kč) Czech food without the tourist mark-up but with a strong recommendation from the folks at Infocentrum.

China Restaurant (☎ 354 626 819; Lidická 125; mains 120Kč) Befitting spa country, this velvet-bedecked Asian eatery is a cut above your average noodle bar.

Drinking

Irish Pub (☎ 354 620 828; Poštovní 96; Guinness 65Kč; ☒ from 5pm) Old typewriters and vintage green bicycles create a suitably Irish ambience for the best *craic* in Mariánské Lázně. Follow the signs that say 'Irish Pub'.

Scottish Pub Highlanders (Ruská 56; ☒ from 4pm) Lovers of all things Scottish should cross the Irish Sea to this pub for more Celtic shenanigans amidst single malt heaven and a memorial to Mel Gibson (sorry, we mean William Wallace).

New York (☎ 354 623 033; Hlavní třída 233; ☒ to 2am) Jazz bands play this snug club venue most evenings from 8pm. Close your eyes and you can almost hear the 'A-Train'.

Entertainment

NV Gogol theatre (divadlo NV Gogola; ☎ 354 622 036; Třebízského 106) Check the programme here for musical and theatrical performances. Many events are also held at **Chopin haus** (Hlavní třída 47) and there are regular daily concerts at the **Colonnade** from May to September. Ask at Infocentrum (p208).

Kino Slava (☎ 354 622 347; Nerudova 437) For the latest Hollywood blockbusters.

Getting There & Away

Half a dozen fast trains a day run from Prague (224Kč, three hours) all via Plzeň (98Kč, 1 hour), and more from Cheb (40Kč, 30 minutes). Buses from Prague (136Kč, three hours), Plzeň (74Kč, 1¼ hours) and Cheb (40Kč, 25 minutes) are less frequent (up to five a day) and take as long as the train. The train journey from Karlovy Vary (76Kč, 1¼ hours) is slow but scenic.

**AROUND MARIÁNSKÉ LÁZNĚ
Teplá Monastery**

pop 3100

Founded in 1193, the **Premonstratensian monastery** (Premonstrátský klášter; ☎ 354 392 264; www.klastertepla.cz, Czech & German only; tour in Czech/English 60/120Kč; ☒ 9am-4pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4.30pm Sun May-Oct, 11am-3pm Nov-Apr, closed Jan) at Teplá was one of the richest landowners in Bohemia in the 16th century. Among its holdings was Mariánské Lázně itself.

Though a bit run-down now (it served as an army barracks during the communist years), it boasts a sturdy Romanesque-Gothic church that has survived almost intact from 1232, and the second-largest library in the country, with around 80,000 books.

Organ and chamber concerts are held here in summer, and on 14 July there is an annual procession by former political prisoners incarcerated by the Nazis and communists.

Klášteří Hospice (The Cloister Inn; ☎ 354 392 264; www.hotelklastertepla.cz; s/d incl breakfast 950/1650Kč; P) Part of the monastery itself, this hotel has swish rooms that are anything but monastic.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are eight trains a day to/from Mariánské Lázně (28Kč, 30 minutes). By car, take the Karlovy Vary road for 7km and turn east.

KARLOVY VARY

pop 52,000

If you've been hiding a designer dog or an ostentatious pair of sunglasses in your luggage, then Karlovy Vary (Karlsbad in German) is your chance to give them both an airing. This fashionable town is the closest the Czech Republic has to a glam resort, but Karlovy Vary is still glam with a small 'g'. Well-heeled hypochondriacs from Germany, Austria, Russia and, increasingly, Arab nations make the pilgrimage to try to enjoy courses of 'lymphatic drainage' and 'hydrocolonotherapy' –

all activities that should be outlawed under several international agreements.

If you're really keen to discover the dubious pleasures of a steam inhalation session or a sulphur bath, you'll need to make a prior appointment. If not, there's good hiking in the surrounding hills, and a busy arts and entertainment programme. Sample the tepid mineral-rich water on offer, or just have a drink at the riverside cafés. In our opinion, a beer or a coffee is a better option than the sulphurous gunk everyone else is sipping on.

History

Today it may look like a monument to order and good sense, but according to legend, Karlovy Vary's springs were chanced upon. They were discovered by a dog that fell into the first of the town's springs while hunting with Emperor Charles IV. The loss of the dog was negligible compared with the profits to be made from the warm springs, and in 1358 Charles had a hunting lodge built near the largest, and granted the town status as 'Charles Spa'.

The town soon became a magnet for European aristocrats, who flocked to the growing watering hole hoping to purge themselves of the digestive disorders that were fashionable at the time. Russian tsar Peter the Great, Frederick I of Prussia and Empress Maria Theresa all made a splash in the early years.

Its popularity was further enhanced when Dr David Becher invented Becherovka, a potent herb liqueur, while analysing the composition of the town's waters in about 1790. This gave people the opportunity to get sozzled and healthier simultaneously. Unsurprisingly, Becherovka remains the mainstay of Karlovy Vary's souvenir industry today.

Attracting a growing population of aristocrats with plenty of money and plenty of time to kill between treatments, Karlovy Vary soon became a centre for the arts. The playwright Johann Schiller honeymooned here, and Goethe returned 13 times. Visiting composers included Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Wagner, Tchaikovsky, Schumann, Liszt and Grieg. Dvořák's symphony *From the New World* premiered here in 1884, and the Dvořák Autumn Festival is held each September.

As the money and famous faces poured in, the buildings went up and the 'neo'-style and Art Nouveau structures that graced the skyline in the late 19th and early 20th centuries remain in fabulous condition today.

Now the celebrities are more B-list, attending the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in July while wondering how their invitation to Cannes got lost in the mail.

Orientation

The business end of town is centred on Dr Bechera, while the spa sprawls for 3km up the Teplá valley, in the northern corner of the Slavkov forest (Slavkovský les).

Trains from Cheb, Plzeň and Prague, and most international connections, arrive at the upper station (horní nádraží), also called main station (hlavní nádraží), 400m from the other side of the Ohře. Those from Mariánské Lázně and the south use the lower station (dolní nádraží), on the spa side of the Ohře.

Long-distance buses and international buses to Germany use stands by the lower train station. The main junction for city and regional buses is on Varšavská.

MAPS

Infocentrum sells a useful *Karlovy Vary* map (30Kč), as well as one incorporating the surrounding area. Both are published by Paret.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Nava (TG Masaryka 12) This bookshop sells regional maps.

EMERGENCY

Tourist Police (☎ 974 366 803; Závodu míru 16, Stará Role) Reached on bus 3 from Tržnice bus station.

INTERNET ACCESS

Moonstorm Internet (TG Masaryka 31; ☎ 9am-9pm) Charges 12Kč per 15 minutes for internet access.

Kino Panasonic (☎ 353 233 933; www.kinopanasonic.cz; Vítězná 48) Free wi-fi at this art-house cinema's café.

INTERNET RESOURCES

The town's website, www.karlovyvary.cz, is a good resource with many useful contacts.

MEDIA

Promenáda (www.promenada.cz; 20Kč) is a monthly multilingual booklet full of information on spa history, cultural events, shopping and transport.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Aesculap (☎ 353 222 870; náměstí Dr M Horákové 8) Pharmacy near Dolní nádraží.

Nemocnice Karlovy Vary (☎ 353 115 111; Bezručova 19) The town hospital.

MONEY

Česká Společna (TG Masaryka 14) Has an exchange counter and ATM.

POST

Main post office (TG Masaryka 1)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Infocentrum (☎ 353 232 838; www.karlovyvary.cz; Západní; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun) In Dolní nádraží. Stocks maps, books accommodation and gives transport advice. A **second branch** (☎ 353 224 097; Lázeňská 1) in the centre stays open for two additional hours each day.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Čedok (☎ 353 227 837; Dr Bechera 21-23) Caters to most travel needs.

Sights & Activities

AROUND THE COLONNADES

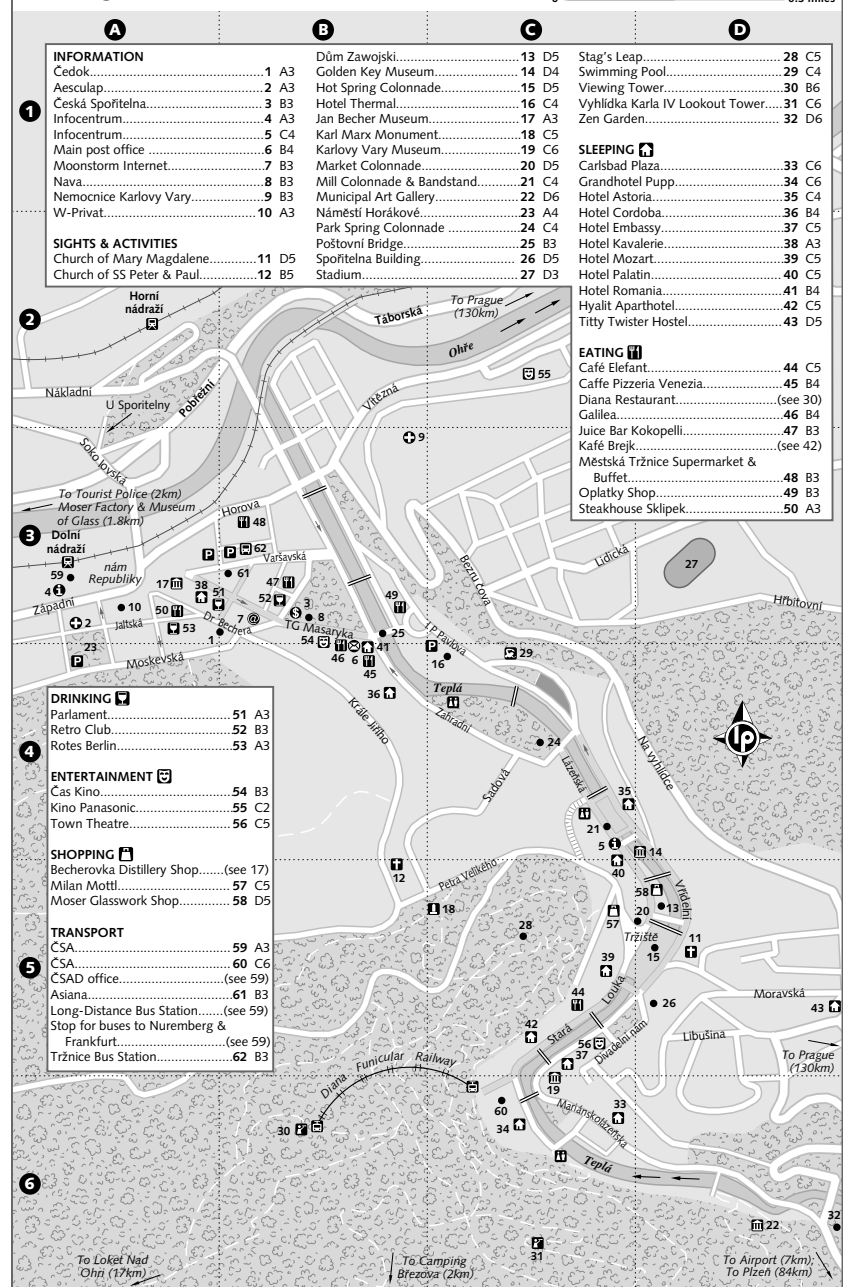
The spa proper starts at **Poštovní bridge**, where late-19th- and early-20th-century mansions face off the blockish communist-era (1976) **Hotel Thermal** sanatorium across the river.

The 13th spring is the most famous but there are 15 springs housed in or near five colonnades (*kolonády*) along the Teplá. The first is the whitewashed and wrought-iron **Park spring colonnade** (Sadová kolonáda).

Further on is the biggest and most popular, the neo-Renaissance **Mill colonnade** (Mlýnská kolonáda; 1881), with five different springs, rooftop statues depicting the months of the year and a small bandstand (see also Entertainment, p216). **Petra Restaurant**, opposite, is the spot (but not the original building) where Peter the Great allegedly stayed in 1711.

Straight up Lázeňská is a gorgeous Art Nouveau building called **dům Zawojski** (1901). Nearby you can do some very upmarket window shopping along Lázeňská and Tržiště, including at the **Moser glasswork shop** (Tržiště 7). The Moser company opened its first shop in Karlovy Vary in 1857 and by 1893 had established a glassworks in the town. Less than a decade later Moser became the official supplier to the Imperial Court of Franz Josef I, who obviously put in a good word with his friend, King Edward VII, as Moser also became the official supplier of glass to British royalty in 1907. (See also Moser museum of Glass, p214.)

KARLOVY VARY



Across the road is the **Market colonnade** (Tržní kolonáda) with its delicate, white 1883 woodwork; one of its two springs, **pramen Karla IV**, is the spa's oldest. Behind this is the **Castle colonnade** (Zámecká kolonáda) and a castle tower, the **Zámecká věž**, erected in place of Charles IV's hunting lodge after it was destroyed by fire in 1604.

The steam billowing from the direction of the river comes from the incongruous, modern, 1975 building around the **Hot spring colonnade** (Vřídelní kolonáda). Inside is the spa's biggest, hottest spring, **pramen Vřídlo** (Sprudel to Germans), belching 15m into the air. People lounge in the geyser room for the vapours, or sample the waters from a line of progressively cooler taps in the next room.

EAST OF THE TEPLÁ

The **church of Mary Magdalene** (kostel sv Maří Magdaléná; 1737) is across the river. Whatever your thoughts on the excesses of baroque architecture, it's hard not to fall for this confection by Kilian Ignatz Dientzenhofer.

Southward on Moravská is a striking cluster of mansions, from neo-Gothic (No 4, where Dvořák stayed in 1879) to Art Nouveau (**Spořitelna building**, Divadelní náměstí). Across the square is the 1886 **Town theatre** (p216).

UPPER VALLEY

Back on the western side you can have coffee at the classic **Café Elefant** (p216) or peek into the concert hall and two-storey-high dining rooms of the gigantic **Grandhotel Pupp**, the spa's first hotel.

About 500m past the Pupp is the **Municipal Art Gallery**, and a little further still, you can unwind in the **Zen Japanese garden**.

CHURCH OF SS PETER & PAUL

On Krále Jiřího is the incongruous but deluxe Orthodox **church of SS Peter & Paul** (kostel sv Petra a Pavla), with five polished onion domes and vaguely Art Nouveau exterior murals.

MUSEUMS & GALLERIES

There's an art gallery and four relatively interesting museums in town:

Municipal Art Gallery (Galerie Umění; ☎ 353 224 387; Goethova stezka 6; adult/concession 30/20Kč; ☎ 9.30am-noon & 1-5pm Tue-Sun) Features a modest collection of 20th-century Czech art.

Karlovy Vary museum (Krajské muzeum Karlovy Vary; ☎ 353 226 252; Nová Louka 23; adult/concession

30/15Kč; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-5pm Wed-Sun) Has exhibits on Karlovy Vary's history and natural history, and Czech glasswork.

Golden key museum (muzeum Zlatý klíč; ☎ 353 223 888; Lázeňská 3; adult/concession 20/10Kč; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-5pm Wed-Sun) Has a low-key display of old-time Karlovy Vary and paintings of the spa by Viennese artist Wilhelm Gause.

Jan Becher museum (☎ 353 170 156; www.becherovka.cz; TG Masaryka 57; adult/concession 100/50Kč; ☎ 9am-5pm) Deals with all things Becherovka, the town's famed herbal liqueur.

Moser museum of Glass (Sklářské muzeum Moser; ☎ 353 449 455; www.moser.cz; Kpt Jaroše 19; admission free; ☎ 8am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat) Offers a history of local glass-making and visits to the glassworks.

Moser factory glassworks (admission adult/concession 90/45Kč; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Fri). Book visits in advance through Moser museum of Glass.

HIKING

For light relief, follow one of the steep trails from the Teplá into fragrant woods filled with statues and decaying pavilions. One of the most popular trails ascends 1.5km from the Grandhotel Pupp to a hilltop **viewing tower** (vyhlídka vez; admission free; ☎ 9.15am-5.45pm), with the garden **Diana Restaurant** (☎ 353 222 872). The woods on the way to the lookout are peppered with monuments, including one to that crusty old bourgeois, Karl Marx, who visited Karlsbad (Karlovy Vary) three times between 1874 and 1876.

Alternatively, you can ride a **funicular railway** (lanovka; single/return 36/60Kč; ☎ 9am-6pm) from behind Grandhotel Pupp. The trip to Diana takes five minutes. **Stag's leap** (Jelení skok), the promontory where Charles IV's dog made its famous discovery, is 500m northeast from an intermediate stop on the funicular. Another lookout tower is on **vyhlídka Karla IV**, south of Grandhotel Pupp.

If you're feeling energetic, it's 17km on a blue-marked trail, via the Diana lookout, along the Ohře to the romantic castle and village of **Loket nad Ohří** (p217).

SWIMMING

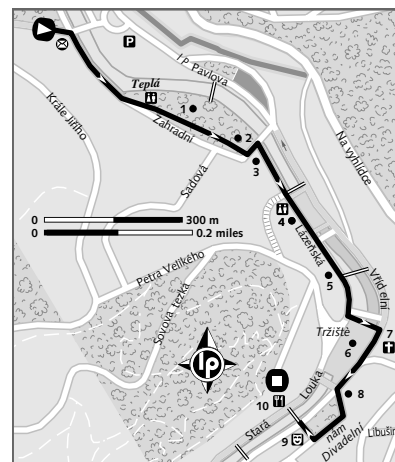
For a quick dip, the **swimming pool** (admission per hr 40Kč; ☎ 8am-8.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-9.30pm Sun, closed every 3rd Mon) at Hotel Thermal offers simple swimming, or there's a range of spa treatments. There's also a **sauna** (☎ 10am-9.30pm), solarium and fitness club here. Head up the left-hand staircase at the rear of the hotel.

Walking Tour

Starting from the post office at the eastern end of TG Masaryka, turn right and follow Zahradní southeast along the southern bank of the Teplá river. Just after the river curves, leave Zahradní and follow the footpath into the **Dvořák gardens (1)**. At the garden's eastern end is the delicate wrought-iron filigree of the **Park spring colonnade (2)**. Continue east to Lázeňská. On your right is **Spa No 3 (3)**, a popular spa for drinking. Tacky souvenir spa cups (*becher*) are available from a stall near the spring.

Further along Lázeňská is the **Mill colonnade (4)**, Karlovy Vary's most impressive, neo-Renaissance colonnade with four different springs, each progressively hotter. Continue round the next bend in the river to the **Market colonnade (5)** on Tržiště. From the Market colonnade head towards the billowing steam emanating from the ugly concrete **Hot spring colonnade (6)** dominating the middle of the river. Inside is the spectacular pramen Vřídlo. Buy a few *oplatky* (spa wafers), grab a seat and take in the action.

Exit the Hot spring colonnade on the opposite (eastern) side of the river. After the brutal Stalinist architecture of the Hot spring colonnade, the baroque **church of Mary Magdalene (7)** is a welcome contrast. Continue southward (with the river on your right) to the Art Nouveau **Spořitelna building (8)** on Divadelní náměstí. At the southwest end of the square is Karlovy Vary's **Town theatre (9)**. Cross the river again to Stará Louka on the western bank, which is brimming with the town's



flashes boutiques; a good spot to relax and recharge with coffee and cake is the elegant **Café Elefant (10)**.

Festivals & Events

The **Karlovy Vary Film Festival** (www.kviff.com) in July always features the year's top films as well as attracting plenty of (B-list) stars. It's rather behind the pace of the likes of Cannes, Venice and Berlin but is well worth the trip. The next generation of film-makers strut their stuff at the **International Student Film Festival** (www.freshfilmfestival.net; ☎ late Aug).

Other cultural events are the **Jazz Festival** in May and the **Dvořák Autumn Festival** in September.

Sleeping

Accommodation costs are similar to Prague, especially in the peak film festival month of July. Budget accommodation is at a premium. Book ahead in summer. Prices quoted are for high season (May to September, plus Christmas and New Year). During low season, discounts of up to 40% are available. Expect to pay an additional 'spa tax' (15Kč per bed per night).

Čedok (☎ 353 222 994; Dr Bechera 21; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) and **W-Privat** (☎ 353 227 768; nám Republiky 5; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1pm Sat) can book private rooms from 400Kč per person, but you may need to stay for three or more nights. Infocentrum (p212) can find hostel, *pension* and hotel rooms.

BUDGET

Camping Březova (☎ 353 222 665; www.brezova-haj.cz; tent/bungalow per person 90/150Kč; ☎ Apr-Oct; P) Beside a river valley, this camp site is 3km south of town. Catch the Březova bus from Tržnice bus station to the village of Březova.

Titty Twister Hostel (☎ 353 239 071; www.hosteltt.cz; Moravská 44; per person from 390Kč) In a town where cheap sleeps aren't exactly bubbling over, this little hostel with a silly name rises to the top. Accommodation is in apartments with two, four or six beds, and all have separate kitchens.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Kavalerie (☎ 353 229 613; www.kavalerie.cz; TG Masaryka 43; s/d incl breakfast from 950/1225Kč) Friendly staff abound in this cosy spot above a café near the bus and train stations and away from the high restaurant prices of the spa district.

Hotel Romania (☎ 353 222 822; www.romania.cz; Zahradní 49; s/d incl breakfast 1000/1750Kč; (P)) Don't be put off by the ugly monolith of the Hotel Thermal dominating the views from this good-value reader-recommended hotel. Just squint a little, because the spacious rooms are very tidy and the English-speaking staff very helpful.

Hotel Astoria (☎ 353 335 111; www.astoria-spa.cz; Vřídelská 92; s/d incl breakfast from €40/80; ♿) A snazzy riverside location opposite the Mill colonnade completes this classy option with a full range of treatments. The leafy lobby relaxes you as soon as you walk in.

Hyalit Aparthotel (☎ 353 229 638; www.hyalit.cz; Stará Luka 62; d from 1900Kč; (P)) With stylish décor and kitchens, these five apartments are recommended for self-caterers. Children under 15 stay free.

Also recommended:

Hotel Mozart (☎ 353 236 072; www.hotel-mozart.cz; Stará Luka 18; s/d incl breakfast €50/75) Not quite a full-blown symphony inside, but the romantic exterior will definitely pull at your heart strings.

Hotel Palatin (☎ 353 304 111; www.energoutour.com; Lázeňská 10; s/d incl breakfast 1600/2200Kč) Crisp, clean and on a good street for shopping.

Hotel Cordoba (☎ 353 200 255; www.hotel-cordoba.com; Zahradní 37; d incl breakfast 1800Kč) A worthwhile backup.

TOP END

Hotel Embassy (☎ 353 221 161; www.embassy.cz; Nová Louka 21; s/d incl breakfast 2190/2980Kč; (P)) This riverside place is very proud that both Michael Douglas and Sir Ben Kingsley have dropped in at the Embassy Pub downstairs. Upstairs the rooms are cosy and comfortable, matching the charming exterior.

Carlsbad Plaza (☎ 353 225 501; www.carlsbadplaza.cz; Mariánskolázeňská 23; s/d €120/170; (P)) Seriously stylish, this new hotel has raised the bar in spa town with soothingly modern treatment facilities, classy rooms and a smoothly Zen Asian restaurant. Who's top dog now, Grandhotel Pupp?

Eating

Food prices, especially around the colonnades, will seem high unless you've arrived from Prague. And check your bill: 'mistakes' happen.

You can buy *oplatky* (see p210) at the Městská tržnice supermarket by the bus stop on Varšavská, or at many locations across town.

Caffe Pizzeria Venezia (☎ 353 229 721; Zahradní 43; pizza 120Kč) After a few espressos blur your eyes through your designer sunnies, see if you can spot any gondoliers from this pretty-in-pink spot looking out on the Teplá river.

Galilea (☎ 353 221 183; TG Masaryka 3A, Pasáž Alfa; mains 130-180Kč) Hookah pipes are optional at this authentic Middle Eastern spot with creamy dips and Arabic bread. Downstairs grab a felafel kebab (65Kč) and relax by the river. Both the restaurant and kebab shop have good vegetarian options.

Steakhouse Sklipek (☎ 353 229 197; Zeyerova 1; steaks 180Kč) With red checked tablecloths and rustic wood furniture this place looks like a hang-out for Tony Soprano and his mates. The huge meaty meals are big enough to feed your entire mob too.

Also recommended:

Juice Bar Kokopelli (☎ 353 236 254; Bulharská 9; juice & smoothies 20-37Kč; ☎ 10am-7pm) For fruit smoothies that are probably healthier than sulphur-laden spa water.

Café Elefant (☎ 353 223 406; Stará Louka 30; coffee 45Kč) Classy old-school spot for coffee and calorie-rich cake.

Kafé Brejk (Stará Louka 62; coffee 35Kč, baguettes 50Kč; ☎ 9am-5pm) Trendy new-school spot for takeaway coffees and healthy design-your-own sandwiches and baguettes.

Drinking

Parlament (☎ 353 586 155; Zeyerova 5; ☎ closed Sun) With outdoor tables on the bustling TG Masaryka pedestrian mall, this is a favoured drinking place for locals. And the food's pretty good too.

Retro Club (TG Masaryka 18; ☎ 10am-midnight, to 3am Fri & Sat) Here's the most accurate name in all the Czech Republic, with regular nights celebrating the unique musical decade that was the 1980s.

Rotes Berlin (☎ 353 233 792; www.rotesberlin.com; Jaltská 7; ☎ to 3am) Outside this club is promised 'music and propaganda'. Inside you'll hear everything from hip-hop and world music to nicely thrashy indie rock.

Entertainment

Town theatre (Městské divadlo v Karlových Varech; ☎ 353 224 302; www.divadlokarlovy.cz; Divadelní náměstí 2) Drama, comedy and musicals are all featured. Tickets (100Kč to 500Kč) are available from the theatre or Infocentrum (p212).

Karlovy Vary Symphony Orchestra (☎ 353 228 707; www.kso.cz; IP Pavlova 14) The town's orchestra

stages a regular programme of concerts. See its website or *Promenáda* for details. From mid-May to mid-September, **concerts** are also held in the **Mill colonnade** (p212) from Tuesday to Sunday.

Čas Kino (☎ 353 223 272; TG Masaryka 3) Cinema-lovers can get their flick fix here.

Kino Panasonic (☎ 353 233 933; www.kinopanasonic.cz; Vítězná 48) A compact art-house cinema with a good café and free wi-fi access.

Shopping

Becherovka distillery shop (☎ 353 170 156; TG Masaryka 57; ☎ 9am-5pm) This shop is next to the Jan Becher museum (p214) and is the place to stock up on the goodies from the 13th spring – you'll find the Becherovka cheaper here than in souvenir shops.

Moser glasswork shop (☎ 353 235 303; Tržiště 7; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat). If you can't make it to the factory (p214) on the Cheb road in the western outskirts, this is the spot to pick up the glasses for your Becherovka, among other things.

For more contemporary styles head to **Milan Mottl** (☎ 353 222 011; Tržiště 29; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat). This innovative company was established in 1993 and specialises in handcrafted leadless crystal. There are many other excellent shops on **Tržiště** worth getting lost in.

Karlovy Vary porcelain is also famous, and not just those funny spa cups. The top local name is Pirkenhammer.

Getting There & Away

AIR

ČSA (☎ 239 007 007; www.csa.cz; Mírové náměstí 2) flies to Moscow four times a week (12,600Kč) from **Karlovy Vary International Airport** (KLV; ☎ 353 360 611; www.airport-k-vary.cz), 7km from the town.

Bus 8 runs to and from the airport from Tržnice bus station. The cost is 10Kč with an additional charge of 10Kč for luggage.

BUS & TRAIN

Regular **ČSAD** (☎ 353 913 550; Terminal Dolní Nádraží) buses run to Prague (150Kč, two hours) and are faster than **trains** (☎ 353 913 559), which take four hours (275Kč).

Asiana (☎ 353 360 411; Varšavská 11/1141; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) runs buses to Prague Florenc (140Kč) and Prague's Ruzyně Airport (190Kč) every hour. There is another office at **Terminal Dolní Nádraží** (☎ 353 633 283; ☎ 7am-6pm).

A seat reservation (*místěnka*) is recommended for Prague (book a day or two in advance) and for international connections (book at least a week in advance).

There are also departures to Nuremberg and Frankfurt once a week (you need to book this as it does not stop in Karlovy Vary if there are no bookings), and Amsterdam once a week, from the lower train station.

Getting Around

Local buses run at 20- to 30-minute intervals; routes are posted at the stop on Varšavská. Bus tickets (10Kč) are sold in kiosks and from machines at major stops. Transfer tickets (15Kč) can be re-used within 40 minutes but are only available from the driver.

Bus 11 runs hourly from Karlovy Vary horní nádraží train station to the Tržnice bus station at the market, then over the hills to Divadlo náměstí and the Vřídelská colonnade. Bus 2 runs between Tržnice and Grandhotel Pupp (Spa No 1) every half-hour or so from 6am to 11pm daily.

TAXIS & PARKING

A 24-hour taxi service is **Willy Taxi** (☎ 800 100 154).

A large, partially underground car park is next to Hotel Thermal sanatorium on IP Pavlova (50/100Kč for two/24 hours).

LOKET NAD OHŘĚ

pop 3200

Surrounded by a wickedly serpentine loop in the river Ohřě, the almost unbearably picturesque village of Loket may as well be on an island. According to the local tourist office it was 'JW Goethe's favourite town' and, after a lazily subdued stroll around the gorgeous main square and castle, it may be yours as well.

Loket's German name is Elbogen (German for 'elbow', after the extreme bend in the river) and it's been famous by that name since 1815 for the manufacture of porcelain, as have the neighbouring towns of Horní Slavkov (Schlackenwald) and Chodov (Chodan). Shops in town have a fine selection of the local craftsmanship.

Orientation & Information

The bus from Karlovy Vary provides a cinematic look at the town, almost completely circling it on approach.

The local tourist information office, **Infocentrum** (☎ 352 684 123; www.loket.cz; TG Masaryka 12; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 1-5pm), is by the bridge. Internet access is 10Kč per 15 minutes.

Česká Spořitelna (TG Masaryka 101) has an exchange counter and an ATM.

At the end of July, the **Loket Summer Cultural Festival** (www.loketfestival.info) features opera performances in the open-air theatre below the castle walls (contact Infocentrum for details).

Sights & Activities

CASTLE

The beautiful **castle** (hrad Loket; ☎ 352 684 104; adult/concession with English guide 90/60Kč, with English text 80/45Kč; ☎ 9am-4.30pm May-Oct, to 3.30pm Nov-Apr) was built on the site of an earlier Romanesque fort, of which the only surviving bits are the tall square tower and fragments of a rotunda and palace. Its present late-Gothic look dates from the late 14th century. From 1788 to 1947 it was used as the town prison. The town, not the state, did the impressive restoration work in the 1970s.

A tour isn't necessary, and the English text on the castle's history has little on the exhibits inside; several cutaway sections from archaeological work on the castle and two rooms full of luscious ceramics are barely enough to whet the appetite. Check out the postcard views of the village and forest from the tower.

OTHER SIGHTS

The narrow, curving square, TG Masaryka, has its fair share of handsome Gothic façades. But one of the most eye-catching buildings is the recently renovated neo-Gothic **Hostinec Bílý kůň** (White Horse Inn), where Goethe stayed.

In the early-baroque **town hall** (radnice), you can visit the town's vaguely interesting (for bibliophiles) **bookbinding museum** (adult/concession 35/20Kč; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-6pm). Ceramics junkies can also get a fix wandering around the town's **ceramics showrooms**, including a shop selling Loket's own Epiag brand.

Two old gate towers, Černá věž and Robičská věž, are still standing. Join in the Czech fascination with lookout towers and climb the **Black gate tower** (Černá věž; TG Masaryka; admission 15Kč; ☎ 10am-5pm Jul & Aug, Fri-Sun only May, Jun & Sep), which houses a small art gallery and wine shop and offers some tip-top photo opportunities. Outside the gate towers is the tiny baroque **St Anne chapel** (kaple sv Anny), now empty.

The red-and-white 18th-century **church of St Wenceslas** (kostel sv Václava) is on your way to the castle.

RAFTING

Rafting Ohře (☎ 606 902 310; www.putzer.cz) offers canoeing and rafting trips on the Ohře river, beginning in Loket. Especially beautiful is the stretch between Sokolov and Kadaň. Trip duration varies from two hours to eight hours. Prices for canoes (two people) range from 500Kč to 750Kč and rafts (four to six people) from 1200Kč to 2400Kč. Bookings can be made through Infocentrum.

Sleeping

Lazy River Hostel (☎ 352 685 204; www.lazyriverhostel.com; Kostelni 72; per person 250Kč) Tucked in under the castle, this friendly, laid-back budget spot is also worth considering as a base for visiting flasher-than-flash Karlovy Vary. Book ahead because there are only nine beds.

Pension Hála (☎ 352 684 440; TG Masaryka 115; per person incl breakfast 400Kč) On the square, Pension Hála is slightly less flash than Pension Ulrika, but just as comfy and 100Kč less.

Pension Ulrika (☎ 352 684 103; Zámecká 19/1; per person incl breakfast 500Kč) Four newly renovated rooms with wooden floors and cheerily rustic furniture look out on the main square.

Hotel Bílý kůň (☎ 352 685 002; www.hotel-horse.cz; TG Masaryka 8; s/d incl breakfast 1190/1690Kč) A favourite of that incurable romantic, Goethe, but the renovated and comfortable rooms lack the 19th-century charm he would remember. Eat and drink to his memory on the summer terrace overlooking the river.

Eating

Pizzeria na Růžka (☎ 606 433 282; cnr TG Masaryka & Kostelni; pizza 110Kč) Add sunflower paintings to a cosy wood-fired oven and you've got more indisputable proof that you're never far from a good pizza anywhere in the Czech Republic.

U Šejk (☎ 353 221 401; TG Masaryka 115; mains 140Kč) Once called U Fausta and now called U Šejk, this spot is yet another U Biquitous 'Good Soldier' theme restaurant – always a reliable choice for hearty Czech food.

Getting There & Away

Buses link Loket with Karlovy Vary's lower train station (20Kč, 25 minutes). There are seven departures per day on weekdays, fewer on weekends.

You can hike from Karlovy Vary on a very fine 17km trail (marked blue) beside the Ohře (p214).

PLZEŇ

pop 163,000

After the quaintly contrived elegance of the West Bohemian spa towns, the rugged blue-collar energy of Plzeň comes as a welcome relief. The capital of West Bohemia has authentic industrial credibility as the home of the Skoda Engineering Works and as the original source of Pilsner beer. Workers the world over are especially pleased with that last fact.

As the country's fourth-largest city, Plzeň's gritty suburbs sprawl across the surrounding hills, but at its heart lies a spectacular old town square wrapped in a halo of tree-lined gardens.

A lively student population ensures the town's pubs provide many opportunities to sample Plzeň's heritage as the original fountain of eternal golden froth. A varied programme of music and arts allows you to feed your soul as well as quench your thirst, and excellent museums cover everything from Pilsner to Patton.

Plzeň may not have the immediate and elegant extravagance of nearby Karlovy Vary or Mariánské Lázně, and it takes hold rather more slowly. But after a day of imbibing the city's raffish charm (and its most famous liquid export), you won't be missing the crowded bus parks, the pushy tour groups or the surface gloss of the spa towns at all.

History

Founded as West Bohemia's administrative capital in 1295 by Přemysl King Václav II, the fortified, solidly Catholic Plzeň grew quickly, becoming Bohemia's third-largest town, after Prague and Kutná Hora, by the 14th century.

Among other things, Václav II granted to some 260 Plzeň burghers the exclusive right to brew beer. By the time of the Thirty Years' War there were 26 separate basement breweries, each with its own beer hall – though many of the products were not particularly drinkable. In 1842 the crafty brewers pooled their experience, installed 'modern' technology and founded a single municipal brewery, with spectacular results. Their golden beer, labelled Plzeňský Prazdroj (*prazdroj* is old

Czech for 'the original source'; Pilsner Urquell in German), is now one of the world's best – and most imitated – beers.

At the same time, Plzeň began to industrialise. The Škoda Engineering Works was founded in 1869 and prospered as a manufacturer of armaments. Since WWII it has been known mainly for the ubiquitous Škoda car, as well as locomotives and industrial machinery. In the midst of post-1989 euphoria, Volkswagen offered Škoda a staggering US\$1 billion development loan, and the German car manufacturer now has a majority share in the company.

Orientation

Plzeň sits near the confluence of four sizable rivers, two of which, the Mže and the Radbuza, flow past the old town centre.

The central bus station (centrální autobusové nádraží) is west of the town centre, 1km along Husova to the main square, náměstí Republiky. The main train station (hlavní nádraží) is the same distance on the other side of town; turn right under the tracks and left (west) onto Americká, then cross the Radbuza; the second, third and fourth right turns will take you to náměstí Republiky.

Information

CULTURAL CENTRES

American Center Plzeň (☎ 377 237 722; www.americancenter.cz; Dominikánská 9; ☎ 9am-10pm) Mainly a business resource centre, with a restaurant/bar and CNN news.

INTERNET ACCESS

American Center Plzeň (☎ 377 237 722; www.americancenter.cz; Dominikánská 9; per hr 60Kč; ☎ 9am-10pm) Also see above.

Internet Kavarna (☎ 377 222 146; 1st fl, Tylova 6; per hr 40Kč; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Thu, 8am-7.30pm Fri, noon-8pm Sat & Sun)

City Information Centre (Městské Informační Středisko; ☎ 378 035 330; www.plzen-city.cz; náměstí Republiky 41; per min 1Kč; ☎ 9am-7pm) Also see p220.

MONEY

Česká Spořitelna (náměstí Republiky) By the Archdeacon's house; has an ATM and exchange counter.

ČSOB (cnr Sady 5 kvetna & Františkánská) Just south of the main square.

POST

Main post office (Solni) West of the main square.

PRAZDROJ (PILSNER URQUELL) BREWERY

Across the Radbuza is the **brewery** (pivovar; ☎ 377 062 888; www.prazdroj.cz.cz; U Prazdroje 7; admission 120Kč; ☎ 10am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-8pm Sun, tours in English at 12.30pm & 2pm) that put Plzeň on the map, entered via the gate that has graced the label of its beer since 6 October 1842. Individual visitors can join an interesting (for beer aficionados) one-hour tour with a film, a visit to the brewing rooms and chilly fermentation cellars and, of course, beer tasting. You can also visit at the weekend, but you have to book ahead.

Head east on Pražská, then cross the river and bear left onto U Prazdroje; the gate is near a pedestrian bridge, 750m from náměstí Republiky.

Through a similar gate 500m on is the **Gambrinus brewery**. Sorry, no tours here.

GREAT SYNAGOGUE

The neo-Renaissance **Great synagogue** (Velká synagoga; ☎ 377 223 346; Sady Pětatřicátníků 11; adult/concession 45/30Kč, English tours 50Kč extra; ☎ 11am-6pm Sun-Fri Apr-Sep, to 5pm Jun, to 4pm Oct, closed Nov-Mar), the third-largest in the world after those in Jerusalem and Budapest, was built in 1892 by the 2000 or so Jews who lived in Plzeň then.

MUSEUMS & GALLERIES

The **Brewery museum** (☎ 377 235 574; www.prazdroj.cz; Veleslavínova 6; adult/concession 80/50Kč, with text 120/60Kč; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Sun, 9am-5pm Oct-Mar) offers an insight into how beer was made (and drunk) in the days before Prazdroj was founded. Highlights include a mock-up of a 19th-century pub, a huge wooden beer tankard from Siberia and a collection of beer mats. All have English captions and there's a good English written guide available. Look out for the pic of Louis Armstrong enjoying a cold one, and enjoy a glass of tasty unfiltered beer afterwards in the attached pub.

North of the Great synagogue is the interesting **Patton Memorial Pilsen** (☎ 377 320 414; Podřežní 10; adult/concession 45/25Kč; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) detailing the liberation of Plzeň in 1945 by the American army under General George Patton. Especially poignant are the handwritten memories of former American soldiers who have returned to Plzeň in a new century, and the museum's response to the communist-era revisionist fabrications that claimed Soviet troops, not Americans, were responsible for the city's liberation.

The **West Bohemian museum** (Západočeské muzeum; ☎ 377 329 380; Kopeckého sady 2; adult/concession per exhibit 20/10Kč; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) fills a magnificent agglomeration of buildings. In the basement the original armoury (*zbrojnice*) features a weapons collection; the ground floor has changing exhibits while the second floor houses an exhibit of glass and porcelain in the magnificent Art Nouveau Jubilee hall (Jubilejní sál).

The **Town Art Gallery** (Galerie Města Plzně; ☎ 378 035 310; Dominikánská 3; adult/concession 20/10Kč; ☎ 10am-noon & 1-6pm Tue-Sun) hosts art and design exhibitions.

The **Ethnographic museum** (☎ 377 324 028; náměstí Republiky 106/13; adult/concession 20/10Kč; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) has a small collection of moderate interest.

Festivals & Events

Liberated by the US army two days earlier than the rest of the country, Plzeň celebrates the national **Liberation Day Holiday** two days earlier, on 6 May. Celebrated with perennial gusto, the event features a huge parade of Czechs dressed in WWII army surplus.

There is also an **International Folk Festival** in mid-June. At the end of September, **Pilsner Fest** (www.pilsnerfest.cz) celebrates a momentous day: the first brewing of Pilsner Urquell.

Sleeping

The City Information Centre (p220) and CKM (p220) can book private rooms for around 350Kč per person.

BUDGET

Autocamp Ostende (☎ 377 520 194; www.cbx.cz/atc-ostende; tent/bungalow per person 80/200Kč; ☎ May-Sep; P) Autocamp Ostende is on Velký Bolevecký rybník, a lake 6km north of the city centre and accessible by bus 20 near the train station.

University of Karlov Vary and Prague Student Hostel (☎ 377 259 381; www.webpark.cz/bolevecká; Bolevecká 34; s/d 250/500Kč; P) The university has student rooms. Take tram 4 two stops north from the Great synagogue. There is a similar operation at the Bolevecká 30 (☎ 377 259 814). Both get busy so try to phone ahead.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Slovan (☎ 377 227 256; http://hotelslovan.pilsen.cz; Smetanovy sady 1; s/d without bathroom 530/810Kč, s/d with bathroom 1450/2100Kč, all incl breakfast; P) The Slovan's old-world glamour is now a tad faded

and the rooms are functional, but it's a good central and historic option. In WWII the hotel was the US Army Officers' Club, and it's just a matter of time before it is redeveloped to luxury status. Stay there while you can still afford it.

Pivnice USalzmannů (☎ 377 235 855; www.usalzmannu.cz; Pražská 8; s 550-1350Kč, d 750-1500Kč) Right above one of Plzeň's most historic pubs is a range of rooms from budget to midrange. Your big decision: do you go for a cheaper room and then have more to spend downstairs on the beer and hearty food?

Penzion v Solní (☎ 377 236 652; www.volny.cz/penzion-solni; Solní 8; s/d 600/1020Kč) The best deal in town is at this compact and friendly spot sandwiched between a deli and a clothes shop. With only three rooms, it's essential to book ahead.

Pension City (☎ 377 326 069; fax 377 222 976; Sady 5 kvetna 52; s/d incl breakfast 1000/1390Kč; P) On a quiet street near the river, the City has comfortable rooms and friendly, English-speaking staff armed with lots of local information.

Also recommended:

Pension K (☎ 337 329 683; pensionk@volny.cz; Bezručova 13; s/d with breakfast 890/1350Kč) Slightly dowdy but clean rooms in a central street with restaurants and music clubs.

Sandra Pension (☎ 377 325 358; sandra.101@seznam.cz; Kopeckého sady 15; s/d with breakfast 990/1260Kč; P) Three clean rooms above a parkside restaurant; good English spoken.

TOP END

Hotel Continental (☎ 377 235 292; www.hotelcontinental.cz; Zbrojnicka 8; s/d without bathroom 860/1460Kč, s/d with bathroom 1580/2150Kč, all incl breakfast) The Continental has survived being hit by an Allied bomb in WWII and playing host to Gerard Depardieu and John Malkovich – we're not sure what's worse. Before the war, Ingrid Bergman and Marlene Dietrich also stayed here, and the hotel still retains its Art Deco glamour. There are also flasher rooms called 'luxury parlors' (2450Kč to 4500Kč).

Hotel Rango (☎ 377 221 188; www.rango.cz; Pražská 10; s/d 1450/2150Kč) The 11 rooms at this spot near the main square are tasteful enough to almost push the Rango into 'boutique hotel' status. Downstairs there's a good restaurant.

Also recommended:

Hotel Central (☎ 377 226 757; www.central-hotel.cz; náměstí Republiky 33; s/d incl breakfast 1700/2390Kč; P) Business-oriented hotel with internet connections in all rooms, and a wi-fi hotspot.

Eating

Denni Bar & Pizzeria (☎ 377 237 965; Solní 9; pizza 75Kč) Come for the interesting photographs of old Plzeň and stay for the tasty food in this snug little place.

U Mansfelda (☎ 377 333 844; cnr Ďřevěna & Křížkivovy sady; mains 90-140Kč) In a city of raucous pubs, this spot is a classier option with a summer terrace, an upstairs wine bar and interesting takes on Czech cuisine such as wild boar *gulaš* (spicy meat and potato soup).

Dominik Jazz Rock Café (☎ 377 323 226; Dominikánská 3; mains 100Kč; ☎ 9am-11pm Mon-Thu, 9am-1am Fri, 3pm-midnight Sat, 3pm-10pm Sun) Get lost in the nooks and crannies of this vast student hang-out, or take on Plzeň's best at pool or *foosball* (table soccer). There are cool beats all day, every day, and good-value salads and sandwiches at lunchtime. After dark it gets enjoyably raucous.

Rhodos (☎ 736 677 344; Bezručova 20; mains 130Kč) More 'Alan the Very Good' than Alexander the Great, this spot serves up Greek fare in leafy surroundings with a sunny skylight. The 'assemble yourself' *gyros* with pita bread are good value and we recommend you finish with a slice of naughtily sweet *baklava*.

Also recommended:

Slunečnice (Jungmanova 10; baguettes 50Kč; ☎ 7.30am-6pm) For fresh, tasty baguettes and sandwiches on the go.

Asia Bistro (Pražská 31; mains from 70Kč; ☎ 11am-11pm) Mr Han from Hanoi cooks up tasty Vietnamese fare including good spring rolls.

Drinking

Plzeň is a both a brewery town and a big student town, so there are plenty of good places to kick back with your beverage of choice.

PUBS

Zach's Pub (☎ 377 223 176; Palackého náměstí 2; ☎ 1-9pm Mon-Thu, 1pm-2am Fri, 5pm-2am Sat, to midnight Sun) Head to Zach's for live music, filling and tasty pub food and a suitably student atmosphere.

Plzeňská Bašta (☎ 377 237 262; Riegrova 5; ☎ 11am-1am) Wooden beams and cosy booths make this a nicely rustic spot for your first (and just maybe your best) Pilsner Urquell.

CLUBS

Music Bar Anděl (☎ 377 323 226; Bezručova 7; ☎ 10am-3am) By day a coolly hip café, the Anděl is transformed after dark into a rocking live-music

venue featuring the best of touring Czech bands and occasional international acts.

For pre-recorded beats until the early hours try:

Dance Club 28 (☎ 608 701 470; Prokopova 28)

Music Club 21 (☎ 377 220 860; Prokopova 21)

Entertainment

THEATRE & MUSIC

JK Tyla Theatre (☎ 378 038 001; Prokopova 14) Plzeň's main theatre stages regular performances.

Konzervatoř (Conservatory; ☎ 377 226 325; Kopeckého sady 10) The majority of classical concerts are held here.

Kino Elektra (☎ 377 270 243; Americká 24) Film buffs can catch a flick before heading to the attached Rock Bar Elektra for late-night drinks and tunes.

Getting There & Away

There are plenty of direct buses (80Kč, 1½ hours) and trains (140Kč, 1¾ hours) daily to/from Prague.

To and from Karlovy Vary, buses are quicker (76Kč, 1¾ hours) and more frequent (about eight a day) than the train (no direct services).

For České Budějovice, the train (162Kč, 1¾ hours) is usually quicker but more expensive than the bus (110Kč, 2½ hours).

Getting Around

You can buy tickets (12Kč) for the buses, trolleybuses and trams from kiosks and *tabák* (tobacco) shops, or from machines at major stops. There are also day passes available (40Kč per day).

AROUND PLZEŇ

Kladrubby

pop 750

A Benedictine abbey was founded here in 1115 by Prince Vladislav I. Following repeated plundering during the Thirty Years' War, the Counter-Reformation abbots undertook a major face-lift of the buildings by two of the most prominent Bohemian artists of the time, Giovanni Santini and Kilian Ignatz Dientzenhofer.

The main attraction is the **abbey church of the Holy Virgin** rebuilt between 1712 and 1726 by Santini in an extraordinary 'baroque Gothic' style seen nowhere outside Bohemia. (An earlier Santini work in this style is the abbey church at Sedlec, near Kutná Hora;

see p159.) Bohemia abounds in fine but often repetitive architecture; here is something very different.

The church has the original floor plan of a Romanesque basilica and is the longest in Bohemia (85m). The church itself – Santini's design, from the fantastically complex vaulting right down to the pews – is an improbable marriage of baroque flamboyance and Gothic severity that would verge on tongue-in-cheek if it weren't so beautiful. At the front, to the left, is the **tomb of Vladislav I**, one of the few Přemysl rulers not buried either at Prague castle or Zbraslav.

The standard tour includes the cloisters, with several dozen allegorical sculptures from the workshop of the celebrated baroque sculptor Matthias Bernard Braun. Of the monastery buildings themselves (not on the tour), the west wing is the **Old prelatore** (abbot's residence), now a church library. The baroque east wing is the so-called **New convent** built to a design by Dientzenhofer between 1729 and 1739 and now beautifully renovated.

The **abbey** (☎ 374 631 773; www.klasterkladruby.cz; adult/concession 40/30Kč; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun Jun-Aug, 9am-4pm Tue-Sun May & Sep, Sat & Sun Apr & Oct) hosts hourly group tours in Czech (foreign text available for 60Kč extra). There are two circuits: Tour I (one hour) includes the monastery and church; Tour II (45 minutes) takes in the chateau. In summer, occasional classical concerts are held in the abbey's grounds. See the website for details.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Kladrubby village is about 35km west of Plzeň, just south of Stříbro. Getting there as a day trip from Plzeň involves taking one of the frequent trains to Stříbro (46Kč, 45 minutes) and then catching a local bus the last 6km to Kladrubby (10Kč, 12 minutes).

From Kladrubby's main square, walk (in the direction of the parish church) 1.5km to the monastery.

KLATOVY & AROUND

pop 22,900

Fine views of the Šumava mountains herald Klatovy's place as the gateway to this pristine, romantic region. A sleepy Renaissance square provides more than enough for a few hours of meandering, but the town, which was founded in 1262, is really just a stopover en route to bigger (and more beautiful) things.

Orientation & Information

The main train station and the bus station are about 1.5km northwest of the central square, náměstí Míru. Take bus 1 or 2 from either one.

Informančí Centrum (☎ 376 347 240; www.klatovy.cz/cklatovy; náměstí Míru 63; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-5pm May-Sep, Mon-Fri only Oct-Apr), beside the Old town hall, has information on Klatovy and the Šumava area.

KB (nr náměstí Míru & Křížová) changes money and has an ATM.

The **main post office** (Domažlická) is west of the centre.

Internet Café (Václavská 19; ☎ noon-4pm & 6-10pm Mon-Fri, 2-10pm Sat & Sun) is where you can get online.

Sights & Activities

BLACK TOWER & AROUND

The **Black tower** (Černá věž; adult/concession 20/10Kč; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-5pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, to 4pm Apr & Oct) at the hub of the old town was completed in 1557 and given its present roof in 1872 after the old one blew off in a storm. It has also burnt down three times.

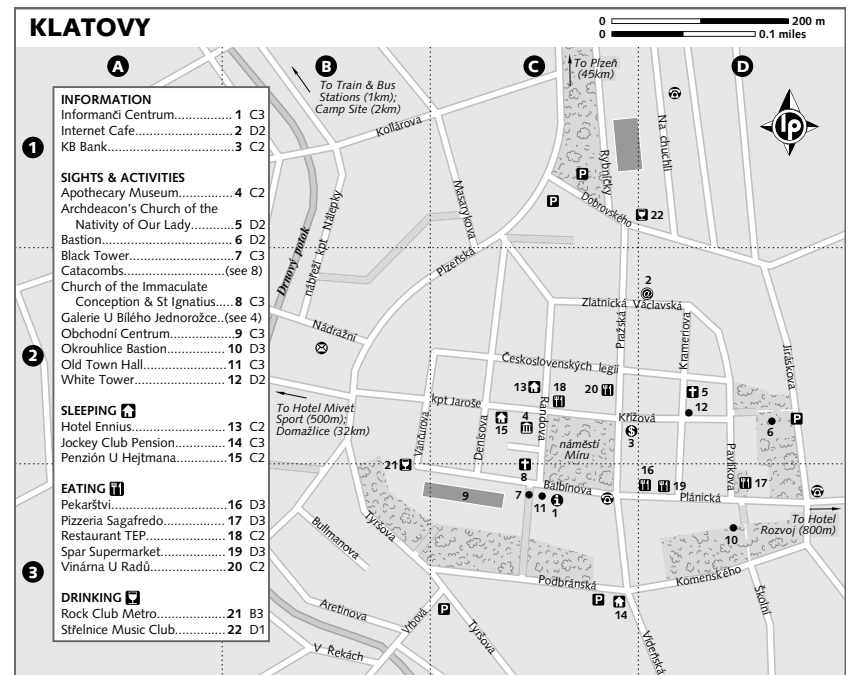
Next door is the late-16th-century **Old town hall**. The handsome neo-Renaissance façade was added in 1925 by architect Josef Fanta.

JESUIT CHURCH & CATACOMBS

Opposite the Black tower is the sober-faced **church of the Immaculate Conception & St Ignatius**, worth a visit for its extraordinary trompe l'oeil frescoes. Towering over the tiny main altar is a painting of the immense altar and domes the Jesuits possibly wished they could have had.

Across Balbínova is the **former Jesuit hostel**. After the Jesuits were forced out of Bohemia, the two-block-long building was subdivided into a school, brewery and army barracks. It's now a shopping mall.

Klatovy's most ghoulish attraction lies beneath the Jesuit church. In the **catacombs** (☎ 376 347 240; adult/concession 50/25Kč; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-5pm May-Sep, Sat & Sun only Oct-Apr) more than 200 corpses, including Jesuit monks and many local luminaries, were buried from 1676 to 1783. Over the centuries a clever system of natural air-conditioning preserved the corpses, although many were desecrated by grave-robbers. The



arrival of tourists in recent decades has further upset this delicate balance of humidity and dignity, and now only 30 cadavers remain in the catacombs; many others have been reburied in the local graveyard. Despite the escalation in decay caused by tourists, the catacombs are Klatovy's most popular attraction. Ironically, their very popularity may eventually become their ruination.

APOTHECARY MUSEUM

A few doors down, on the western side of náměstí Míru, is the **White unicorn apothecary** (U bílého jednorožce) with its lavish original rococo furnishings from the 17th and 18th centuries. It was a working pharmacy until the 1960s and is now a **museum** (☎ 376 313 109; adult/concession 40/20Kč; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-5pm Tue-Sun May-Oct) offering guided tours. Book ahead if there are fewer than five in your group.

Next door is an art gallery, **Galerie U bílého jednorožce** (☎ 376 312 049; náměstí Míru 149; adult/concession 25/15Kč; ☎ 10am-noon & 1-5pm Tue-Sun), with mostly modern exhibits.

WHITE TOWER & ARCHDEACON'S CHURCH

East of náměstí Míru is another of Klatovy's great towers, a Renaissance belfry called the **White tower** (Bílá věž). Nearby is the town's oldest church, the early-Gothic (16th century) **Archdeacon's church of the Nativity of Our Lady**, restored to its present state by Josef Fanta early in the 20th century.

A block east is one of the surviving **bastions** of the **old town walls**. Another, a round bastion called **Okrouhlice bastion**, is beside a path between Balbínova and Komenského.

ŠUMAVA MOUNTAINS

The ancient Šumava range along the German-Czech border begins southeast of Klatovy and boasts some of Bohemia's most pristine mountains. It forms one of the Czech Republic's most recent national parks and lies mainly in South Bohemia (p178).

Sleeping

There are plenty of private rooms – ask Informanči Centrum for help.

Camp site (☎ 376 310 779; pour@tsklatovy.cz; Dr Sedlaka; tent per person 65Kč; ☎ May-Sep; ♀) There is a camp site north of town.

Hotel Mivet Sport (☎ 376 310 910; www.sumavanet.cz/hotelsport; Domažlická 609; per person without/with bathroom 300/350Kč; ♀) Noisy quads and triples

come attached to a smoky beer hall. It's a 1.2km walk from the town centre (west on Domažlická, north on Nerudova), or catch bus 2 to the Zimní Stadion stop. The accommodation is tucked away on the left-hand side of the Zimní Stadion.

Penzión U Hejtmána (☎ 376 317 918; www.uhejtmana.klatovynet.cz; kpt Jaroše 145; s/d 340/590Kč) Don't expect flash but do expect good value and central rooms with private bathrooms.

Jockey Club Pension (☎ 376 313 060; www.sweb.cz/jockeyclub/; cnr Videňská & Podbránská; s/d incl breakfast 570/840Kč; ♀) Downstairs in the restaurant there are more horse photos than you can crack a whip at, but Mr Ed is obviously not allowed upstairs because the rooms are groomed to be super clean.

Also recommended:

Hotel Rozvoj (☎ 376 311 609; www.klatovynet.cz/rozvoj; Prochazkova 110/5; s/d 450/650Kč) A basic cheapie just out of the centre that's a good bet for self-drive travellers.

Hotel Ennius (☎ 376 320 567; www.sweb.cz/ennius; Randova 111; s/d incl breakfast 800/1200Kč) Up a notch, cosy and welcoming.

Eating & Drinking

Pizzeria Sagafredo (☎ 771 101 764; Pavlíkova 6; pizza 100Kč; ☎ 10am-midnight Sun-Thu, 10am-2am Fri & Sat) The combination of classy leather seats and modern wooden furniture completes a nicely restored space. Expect fun times with cocktails after dark.

Vinárna U Radů (☎ 376 314 594; cnr Pražská & Československých legií; mains 100-130Kč) The faded publicity shots in the window (still!) remain since the previous Lonely Planet update, and the robust Czech food remains popular with locals and passing German tourists.

Restaurant TEP (☎ 376 311 958; cnr Randova & náměstí Míru; mains 100-160Kč) On level one there's a cosy pub, with a more flash eatery and velvet-lined booths on level two. The menu is surprisingly cosmopolitan and includes Mexican and Argentinean flavours.

Also recommended:

Pekárství (Plánická 70; donuts 8Kč; ☎ 6.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 7-11am Sat) Fresh donuts and takeaway coffee complete the tasty essentials at this bakery.

Spar Supermarket (Plánická 67; ☎ 6.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 7am-1pm Sat) For self-caterers.

Rock Club Metro (Vančurova 57; ☎ 5pm-1am)

Hosts live bands as a good background to good drinking.

Střelnice Music Club (Pražská 122; ☎ 5pm-1am) Same deal as Rock Club Metro.

Getting There & Away

In general, the bus is the most convenient way to get here from Prague (110Kč, three hours), running about twice a day; Plzeň (48Kč, one hour) five times; and Domažlice (38Kč, 45 minutes) five times. If you're going to carry on south to Železná Ruda on the German border, trains are better, with four fast ones daily.

Getting Around

Informanči Centrum rents out mountain bikes for 200/300Kč per half/full day.

CHODSKO REGION

Chodsko (pronounced 'khodsko') is the Bohemian border region where the Bohemian forest (Český les) and Šumava ranges splice together. The Chods, a sturdy, independent people traditionally from 11 villages situated in an arc from Postřekov to Pocinovice, were first entrusted with patrolling the Bavarian border by King John of Luxembourg in 1325, in return for formal exemption from feudal servitude.

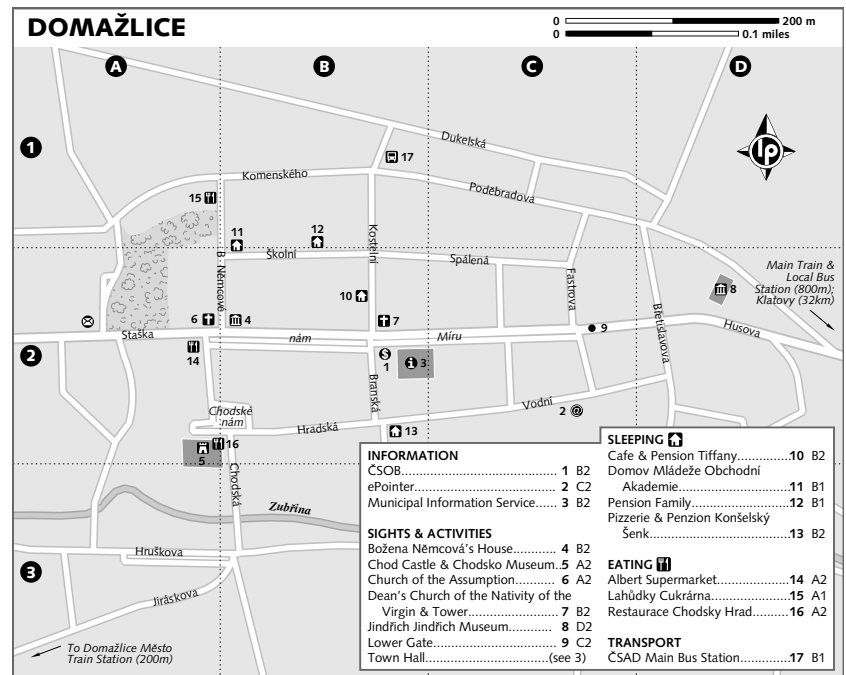
After the Thirty Years' War the Hapsburgs reneged, handing over the region to favoured courtiers and generals. When these courtiers and generals refused to honour the old agreements, the Chods took up arms, briefly and disastrously.

The Chod way of life, which is neither Bohemian nor Germanic, survives in unique customs and speech, although only on special occasions are you likely to hear the Chod *dudy* (bagpipes) or catch sight of Chod women's long, printed dresses. The most likely place is in the upper Chod region around the village of Mrákov. One such occasion is the annual summer Chod Festival (Chodské slavnosti) held in Domažlice on the Friday and weekend around 14 August, St Lawrence's (sv Vavřinec) Day.

DOMAŽLICE

pop 10,800

Depending on the day of the week, the energy levels in little Domažlice ebb and flow considerably. Come for market day on a Wednesday and the main square is awash with stalls and shoppers. On other days it reverts to the 10th-century customs settlement it once was, and



you get the impression that no-one would notice if the already leaning 13th-century church tower were to topple over.

Orientation & Information

From the joint train and local bus station it's about 1km on Masarykova and Husova to the main square, náměstí Míru. A few trains, such as those from Planá, also stop at Domažlice město station, which is 500m from the centre via Jiráskova and Chodská. The ČSAD bus station is on the corner of Poděbradova and Prokopa Velikého.

The **Municipal Information Service** (Městská Informační Centrum; ☎ 379 725 852; www.mesto-domazlice.cz; náměstí Míru 51; 🕒 7.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat Jun-Sep, to 4pm Mon-Fri Sep-May) is in the town hall and can also advise on accommodation.

ČSOB, next door, changes money and has an ATM.

The **post office** (Staška) is just west of the main square.

There is internet access at **ePointer** (Vodní 90; 🕒 9am-9pm).

Sights & Activities

NÁMĚSTÍ MÍRU

The narrow, 500m-long square is almost closed at the eastern end by the 13th-century **Lower gate** (Dolní brána) and a Gothic **gatehouse**.

Dominating the square is the slightly leaning tower of the **Dean's church of the Nativity of the Virgin** (Děkanský kostel Narození Panny Marie), a little gem in cream and gold by Kilian Ignatz Dientzenhofer. It's a long climb up the 56m **tower** (adult/concession 20/10Kč; 🕒 9am-noon & 1-5pm Apr-Oct), but the views of the Šumava are fine.

Across the square is the neo-Renaissance **town hall**. A block west is a house where the Czech writer **Božena Němcová** lived and worked between 1845 and 1847, and beyond it the Gothic monastery **church of the Assumption** (Nanebevzetí Panny Marie).

CHOD CASTLE & CHODSKO MUSEUM

Southwest of the square, and as old as Domažlice itself, is the town **castle** (adult/concession 35/15Kč; 🕒 9am-noon & 1-5pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-noon & 1-3pm Mon-Fri Nov-Mar). There is a lapidarium in the basement with statues and parts of façade decorations from the old castle; other

rooms have rich exhibits of local folklore including bagpipes and dresses.

JINDŘICH JINDŘICH MUSEUM

You can get a good look at some aspects of the Chod lifestyle – such as handicrafts, clothing, a typical home – at a little **museum** (Husova; adult/concession 20/10Kč; 🕒 10am-noon & 1-5pm 15 Apr-15 Oct) based on the collections of a composer named Jindřich Jindřich, who lived here in the 1960s. It's just outside the Lower gate.

Sleeping & Eating

Domov Mládeže Obchodní Akademie (☎ 379 722 386; B Němcové 116; dm per person 160Kč) Basic dorm beds are on offer here, but phone ahead as reception isn't always staffed.

Café & Pension Tiffany (☎ 379 725 591; www.tiffany.wz.cz; Kostelní 102; s/d incl breakfast 570/1140Kč) Spacious, eclectic rooms complement a funky downstairs café run by English-speaking Otto. Bring along any interesting banknotes you have to decorate the walls around the bar.

Pension Family (☎ 379 725 962; pavla.michl@volny.cz; Školní 107; s/d 580/980Kč; 🕒 café 8am-7pm Mon-Thu, 8am-11pm Fri & Sat, 8am-6pm Sun) Pleasant rooms, a quiet garden courtyard and a relaxed café downstairs make this a good choice.

Pizzeria & Penzion Konšlský Šenk (☎ 379 720 200; www.konselskysenk.cz; Vodní 33; s/d incl breakfast 660/1060Kč) With a cosy Italian restaurant, tastefully furnished rooms and a delightful garden, this is easily the nicest spot in town – especially if you like the glowing warmth of terracotta tiles.

Restaurace Chodský Hrad (☎ 379 776 010; Chodské náměstí 96; mains 100-170Kč) Its location by the castle drags in the crowds, but the Chod speciality food is tasty, not touristy, and it's a good spot to try the local Chodovar beer.

Also recommended:

Lahůdky Cukrárna (B Němcové; snacks 20Kč; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) For super-cheap snacks and coffees.

Albert Supermarket (cnr Staška & Chodská; 🕒 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 7am-4pm Sat & Sun) For self-caterers.

Getting There & Away

Regular trains (76Kč, 1½ hours) and buses (54Kč, 1½ hours) run to Plzeň. There are also less frequent train (204Kč, three hours) and bus (96Kč, three hours) services to Prague. Buses (38Kč, 58 minutes) and trains (52Kč, 50 minutes) also run to Klatovy.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'