

Czech Republic

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Prague** Come for the awe-inspiring architectural over-achievement, and stay for the energy of this exciting city rushing confidently into the 21st century (p283)
- **Český Krumlov** An audacious, cliff-top castle, riverside pubs and cafés, and lazy days drifting down the river (p296)
- **Plzeň** A buzzy student vibe keeps alive the traditional pub culture of the original source of the world's best beer (p294)

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 78,864 sq km
- **ATMs** Widespread
- **Budget** 450-700Kč per day
- **Capital** Prague
- **Country code** ☎ 420
- **Famous for** beer, ice hockey, Franz Kafka, Antonin Dvořák
- **Head of State** President Václav Klaus
- **Language** Czech
- **Money** Czech crown (Kč); \$A1 = 16.65Kč; CA\$1 = 20.14Kč; €1 = 28.55Kč; A100 = 19.41Kč; NZ\$1 = 13.55Kč; UK£1 = 41.14Kč; US\$1 = 22.41Kč
- **Phrases** *dobry den/ahoj* (hello/informal); *na shledanou* (goodbye);



díkuji (thank you);
promiňte (excuse me)

- **Population** 10.2 million
- **Time** GMT/UTC + 1
- **Visas** None required for most travellers

TRAVEL HINT

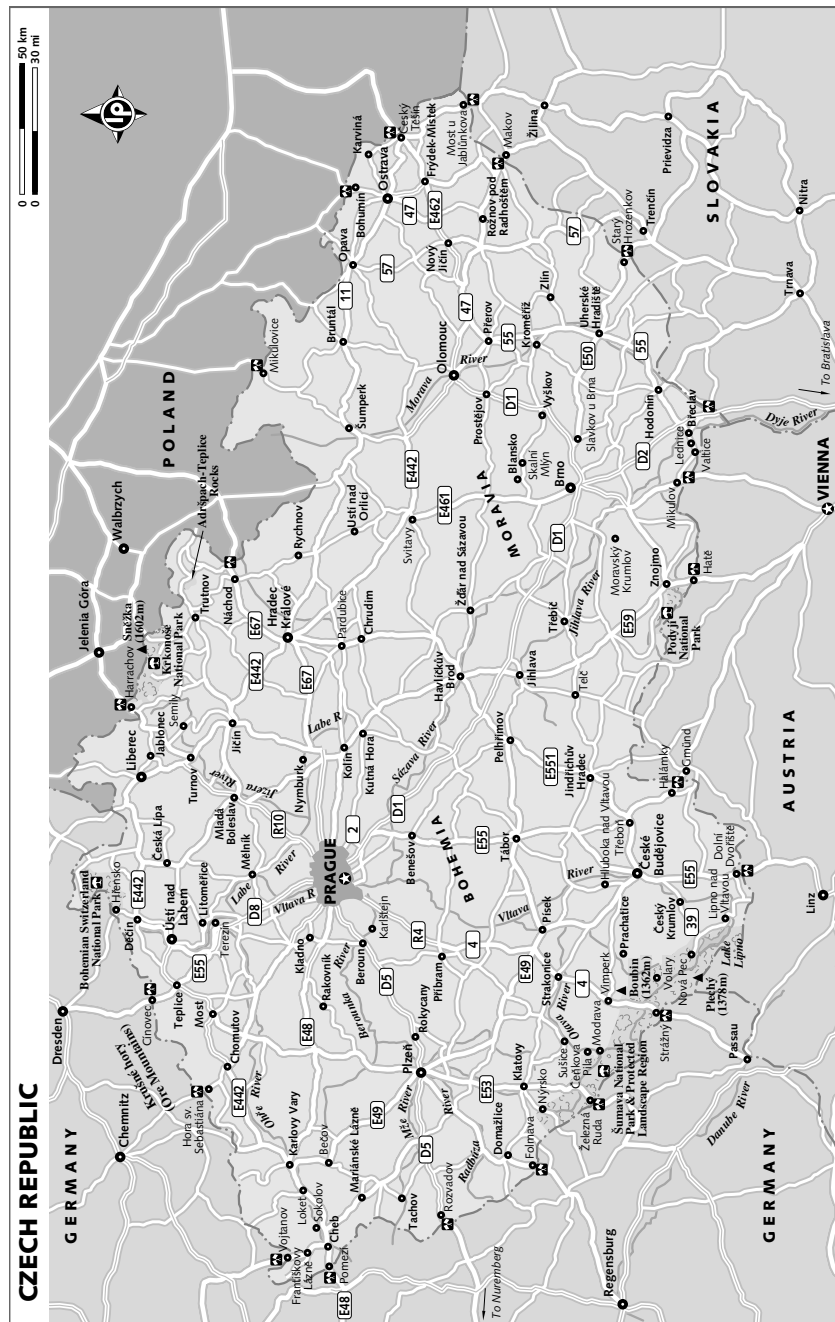
Save money, (and have more interesting conversations), by eating and drinking at local restaurants a few blocks away from tourist hotspots.

ROAMING THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Drink up Plzeň's golden nectar, discover Prague's stellar combo of past, present and future, and relax beside Český Krumlov's meandering river.

For a country that's only been around since 1993, the Czech Republic does a fine job of showcasing an exciting history. Here the past becomes real. Castles and chateaux abound, illuminating the stories of powerful families and individuals whose influence was felt well beyond the nation's current borders. Unravel the history of Bohemia and Moravia, the two ancient lands that now make up the modern Czech Republic and you're unearthing the history of Europe itself.

And when you've had your fill of the past, return to Prague, one of the world's most beautiful and cultured cities, and one of the most exciting with a dynamic music and arts scene. Down the world's best beer in the brewery towns of Plzeň and České Budějovice, and discover the laid-back backpacker scenes in Český Krumlov and Telč. Everywhere you go, you'll meet a forthright people, proud of their heritage, but now confidently taking their place in a modern, united Europe.



HISTORY

The Good King Wenceslas of the Christmas carol fame was actually a prince, and the land he looked out over was the ancient territory of Bohemia. Beatified as St Wenceslas (svatý Václav in Czech), he remains the country's patron saint.

In the heart of Europe, the tides of war and imperial domination have washed through Bohemia and Moravia for centuries. Events in Czech history have impacted throughout Europe. Two Habsburg councillors were thrown from a Prague Castle window in 1618 (the famous Defenestration of Prague), igniting the Thirty Years War. Hitler's 1938 annexation of the Sudetenland (the western borderlands of Czechoslovakia) triggered the final slide towards WWII.

The two 'Golden Ages' of Czech history were the rule of Charles IV (1346–78), who founded Prague's St Vitus Cathedral, built Charles Bridge and established Charles University; and the reign of Rudolf II (1576–1612), who made Prague the capital of the Habsburg Empire and drew many great artists, scholars and scientists to his court. Bohemia and Moravia remained under Habsburg dominion for four centuries.

The 20th century was notable for the 'years of eight'. Czechoslovakia was created after the fall of the Habsburg Empire in 1918, was occupied by the Nazis in 1938 and fell to a communist coup in 1948. The hopeful 'Prague Spring', when censorship was relaxed and political prisoners were released, was crushed by the Soviet invasion of 1968.

The Velvet Revolution – the bloodless overthrow of the communist regime – however, didn't happen until 1989. It was soon followed by the Velvet Divorce of 1993, when Czechoslovakia split into separate Czech and Slovak republics, the former led by famous playwright and former political prisoner Václav Havel, whose term in office lasted until 2003. The Czech Republic joined the European Union (EU) in 2004.

THE CULTURE

The Czech Republic is fairly homogeneous in terms of population; 95% of the population are Czech and 3% are Slovak. There is a significant Roma population (0.3%), which is subject to widespread hostility and racist attitudes, and suffers from high levels of poverty and unemployment.

In March 2006, the Czech Republic was the first former communist country in Europe to grant legal recognition to same-sex partnerships.

ARTS

Famous Czech writers include Franz Kafka (1883–1924); *The Trial*, *The Castle*; *Metamorphosis*, Milan Kundera (b 1929); *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* and Bohumil Hrabal (1914–97, *I Served The King of England*, *The Little Town Where Time Stood Still*). And, of course, the playwright and ex-president Václav Havel (b 1936).

Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904; *New World Symphony*) is the country's best-known composer, while the painter and designer Alfons Mucha (1860–1939), famous for his Art Nouveau posters, is the most widely known Czech artist. There are many accomplished Czech film directors, including Miloš Forman (b 1932), best known for *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* (1975) and *Amadeus* (1984).

ENVIRONMENT

The Czech Republic consists of two low-lying river basins ringed by rounded, forest-clad hills. Acid rain caused by air pollution from intensive industry has damaged the forests in northern Bohemia and Moravia, but the situation has improved since the fall of communism; once-filthy rivers have also been cleaned up.

Following the entry of the Czech Republic into the EU in 2004, local industries are being forced to adopt stronger environmental codes alleviating domestic pollution.

TRANSPORT

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

The national carrier, **Czech Airlines** (code ČSA; Map pp286–7; ☎ 220 104 620; www.csa.cz; V celnici 5, Nové Město), has direct flights to Prague from Europe, the Middle East and North America.

The budget airline **easyJet** (code U2; www.easyjet.com) has direct flights to Prague from several British airports. **SmartWings** (code QS; www.smartwings.net) and **SkyEurope** (code 6Q; www.skyeurope.com) have low-cost flights from other European cities.

Bus

Prague's main international bus station is ÚAN Praha Florenc, also known as Ústřední autobusové nádraží (central bus station); it is located 600m north of the main train station. The peak season for bus travel is from mid-June to the end of September, with daily buses to major European cities; outside this season, frequency falls to two or three a week.

The following international bus operators serve Prague:

Capital Express (☎ 220 870 368; www.capitalexpress.cz; I výstaviště 3, Holešovice; 🕒 8am-6pm Mon-Thu, 8am-5pm Fri) Daily service between London and Prague.

Eurolines-Bohemia Euroexpress International (Map pp286-7; ☎ 224 218 680; www.bei.cz; ÚAN Praha Florenc Bus Station, Křižíkova 4-6, Karlín; 🕒 8am-6pm Mon-Fri) Destinations throughout Europe.

Eurolines-Sodeli (Map pp286-7; ☎ 224 239 318; www.eurolines.cz, in Czech; Senovážné nám 6, Nové Město; 🕒 8am-6pm Mon-Fri) Destinations throughout Europe. Another branch in Florenc bus station.

Student Agency Florenc bus station (☎ 224 894 430; www.studentagency.cz, in Czech; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Fri), Nové Město (Map pp286-7; ☎ 224 999 666; Ječná 37; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Fri) Destinations throughout Europe.

Car & Motorcycle

Road rules are the same as in the rest of Europe; foreign driving licences are valid for up to 90 days. The legal blood-alcohol limit is zero.

You will need to buy a motorway tax coupon (*nálepka*) – on sale at border crossings, petrol stations and post offices – in order to use Czech motorways (100/200Kč for 10 days/one month).

Train

International trains arrive at Prague's main train station, **Praha-hlavní nádraží** (Praha hl. n.; Wilsonova, Nové Město), or the outlying **Holešovice** (Praha Hol; Vrbenského, Holešovice) and **Smíchov** (Praha Smv; Nádražní, Smíchov) stations.

READING UP

Readable histories (both Prague-oriented) with a personal touch include *The Coasts of Bohemia*, by Derek Sayer, and *Prague in Black and Gold*, by Peter Demetz. For an insight into the paranoia of the communist era, read Milan Kundera's novel *The Joke*.

Prague and Brno lie on the main line from Berlin and Dresden to Bratislava and Budapest, and from Hamburg and Berlin to Vienna. Trains from Frankfurt and Munich pass through Nuremberg and Plzeň on the way to Prague. There are daily express trains between Prague and Warsaw via Wrocław or Katowice.

Buy tickets in advance from Czech Railways (České dráhy; ČD) ticket offices and travel agencies. Reservations are compulsory on international trains. International tickets are valid for two months with unlimited stopovers. Inter-Rail (Zone D) passes are valid in the Czech Republic, but Eurail passes are not.

GETTING AROUND

Bus

Within the Czech Republic, buses are often faster, cheaper and more convenient than trains. Many bus routes have reduced frequency (or none) at weekends. Check bus timetables on www.idos.cz. Buses occasionally leave early, so be ready at least 15 minutes before the official departure time.

Bus ticketing at main stations is computerised, so you can book a seat ahead and be sure of a comfortable trip. Otherwise ticketing is rarely computerised. You must line up and pay the driver.

Car & Motorcycle

All international car-rental chains have offices in Prague. Small local companies offer better prices, but are less likely to have English-speaking staff – it's easier to book by email than by phone. Typical rates for a Škoda Felicia are around 800Kč a day including unlimited kilometres, collision damage waiver (CDW) and VAT. The following are reputable local companies:

Secco Car (☎ 220 802 361; www.seccocar.cz; Přístavní 39, Holešovice)

Vecar (☎ 224 314 361; www.vecar.cz; Svatovítská 7, Dejvice)

West Car Praha (☎ 235 365 307; www.westcarpraha.cz; Veleslavínská 17, Veleslavín)

Local Transport

City buses and trams operate from 4.30am to midnight daily. Purchase tickets in advance – they're sold at bus and train stations, newsstands and vending machines. You must validate tickets in the time-stamping machines on buses and trams, and at the entrance to

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

- All emergencies ☎ 112
- Ambulance ☎ 155
- Automobile emergencies (ÚAMK) ☎ 1230
- Fire ☎ 150
- Police ☎ 158

metro stations. Tickets are hard to find at night, at weekends and out in residential areas, so carry a good supply.

All taxis have meters – make sure they are switched on.

Train

Czech Railways provides efficient train services to almost every part of the country. Fares are based on distance – one-way, 2nd-class fares cost around 64/120/224/424Kč for 50/100/200/400km.

For travel within the Czech Republic only, the Czech Flexipass is available (from US\$78 to US\$138 for three to eight days' travel in a 15-day period).

Ticket sellers seldom speak English, so write down your destination, with the date and time you wish to travel and show it to them. Check train timetables on www.idos.cz.

If you have to purchase a ticket or pay a supplement on the train for any reason, you'll have to pay a fine if you do not tell the conductor *before* you're asked for your ticket.

Some Czech train conductors try to intimidate foreigners by pretending there's a problem with their ticket. Don't pay any 'fine', 'supplement' or 'reservation fee' unless you first get a *doklad* (written receipt).

PRAGUE

pop 1.19 million

It's the perfect irony of Prague. You're lured there by the past, but compelled to linger by the present and the future. Fill your days with an architectural heritage from Gothic and Renaissance to Art Nouveau and Cubist, but after dark move your focus to lively bars, cutting-edge galleries and pumping clubs.

And if Prague's army of tourists wears thin that's OK. Relax. Have a glass of premium

Bohemian lager. Relax, and be reassured that quiet moments still exist in one of Europe's most exciting cities: a private dawn on Charles Bridge; a chilled beer in Letná as you gaze upon the surreal cityscape of Staré Město; getting reassuringly lost in the intimate streets of Malá Strana. You'll then be ready to dive once more into this thrilling collage of past and future.

Prague's a must-see stop on Europe's backpacker trail. Just be prepared to stay longer than you planned. As Franz Kafka once wrote, 'this little mother has claws'.

ORIENTATION

Central Prague nestles in a bend of the Vltava River, which separates Hradčany, the medieval castle district, and Malá Strana (Little Quarter) on the west bank from Staré Město (Old Town) and Nové Město (New Town) on the east.

Prague Castle overlooks Malá Strana, while the twin Gothic spires of Týn Church dominate the open space of Staroměstské nám, the Old Town Square. The broad avenue of Václavské nám (Wenceslas Square) stretches southeast from Staré Město towards the National Museum and the main train station.

You can walk from the main train station, Praha-hlavní nádraží, to Staroměstské nám (Old Town Square) in around 10 minutes. From Praha-Holešovice, take the metro (10 minutes).

There's a metro station at ÚAN Praha Florenc bus station too – take Line B (yellow) two stops west to Můstek for the city centre.

All places mentioned in the Prague section of this chapter appear on the Central Prague map (pp286-7) unless otherwise mentioned.

INFORMATION

Internet Access

There are lots of internet cafés in the city centre.

Bohemia Bagel Staré Město (Masná 2; per min 1.50Kč; 🕒 7am-midnight); Malá Strana (Újezd 16; per min 1.50Kč; 🕒 7am-midnight) Also provides low-cost international phone calls (see p284).

mobilarium (Rathova Pasáž, Na příkopě 23, Nové Město; per min 1.50Kč; 10am-8pm Mon-Fri, from 11am Sat & Sun)
Planeta (Vinohradská 102, Vinohrady; per min 0.40-0.80Kč; 🕒 8am-11pm) Cheap rates before 10am and after 8pm Monday to Friday, and from 8am to 11pm Saturday and Sunday.

Medical Services

Canadian Medical Care (☎ 235 360 133, after hr 724 300 301; Veleslavinská 1, Veleslavín; ☎ 8am–6pm Mon, Wed & Fri, 8am–8pm Tue & Thu) English-speaking doctors, 24-hour medical aid, physiotherapist and pharmacy.

Na Homolce hospital (☎ 257 271 111, after hr 257 272 527; www.homolka.cz; 5th fl, Foreign Pavilion, Roentgenova 2, Motol) City's main casualty department.

Polyclinic at Národní (☎ 222 075 120; 24hr emergencies 720 427 634; www.poliklinika.narodni.cz; Národní třída 9, Nové Město) With English-, French- and German-speaking staff.

Praha lékárna (☎ 224 946 982; Palackého 5, Nové Město; ☎ 24hr) Ring the bell for emergency service after hours.

Money

The major banks – Komerční banka, ČSOB and Živnostenská banka – are the best places for changing cash, but using a debit card in an ATM gives a better rate of exchange. Avoid private exchange booths (*směnárna*), which advertise misleading rates and make exorbitant charges.

American Express (☎ 222 800 237; Václavské nám 56, Nové Město; ☎ 9am–7pm; M) Můstek)

Travelex (☎ 221 105 276; Národní třída 28, Nové Město; ☎ 9am–1.30pm & 2–6.30pm; M) Národní Třída)

Post & Telephone

Main post office (☎ 221 131 111; Jindřišská 14, Nové Město; ☎ 7am–8pm; M) Můstek) Pick up poste restante here. There's a 24-hour telephone centre to the left of the right-hand entrance.

Bohemia Bagel (per min 6Kč; ☎ 7am–midnight) Staré Město (☎ 224 812 560; Masná 2; M) Staroměstská); Malá Strana (☎ 257 310 694; Újezd 16) Has phones for making international calls.

Tourist Information

Prague Information Service (Pražská informační služba; PIS; ☎ 12 444; www.prague-info.cz) Main train station (Praha hlavní nádraží; Wilsonova 2, Nové Město; ☎ 9am–7pm Mon–Fri, 9am–6pm Sat & Sun Apr–Oct, 9am–6pm Mon–Fri, 9am–5pm Sat & Sun Nov–Mar); Malá Strana Bridge Tower (Charles Bridge; ☎ 10am–6pm Apr–Oct); Old Town Hall (Staroměstské nám 5, Staré Město; ☎ 9am–7pm Mon–Fri, 9am–6pm Sat & Sun Apr–Oct, 9am–6pm Mon–Fri, 9am–5pm Sat & Sun Nov–Mar)

Travel Agencies

CKM Travel Centre (☎ 222 721 595; www.ckm.cz; Mánesova 77, Vinohrady; ☎ 10am–6pm Mon–Thu, 10am–4pm Fri) Books air and bus tickets, with discounts for those aged under 26. Sells youth cards.

Eurolines-Sodeli CZ (☎ 224 239 318; Senovážné nám 6, Nové Město; ☎ 8am–6pm Mon–Fri) Agent for Eurolines buses.

GTS International (☎ 222 211 204; www.gtsint.cz; Ve Smečkách 33, Nové Město; ☎ 8am–8pm Mon–Fri, 11am–4pm Sat) Youth cards and air, bus and train tickets. Sells International Youth Travel Cards (IYT).

SIGHTS

All the main sights are in central Prague, and are easily reached on foot – you can take in the castle, Charles Bridge and the Staroměstské nám in a day. Get to the castle on tram 22 or 23 (from Národní třída on the southern edge of Staré Město, Malostranská nám in Malá Strana, or Malostranská metro station) to the U Prašného mostu stop.

Prague Castle & Hradčany

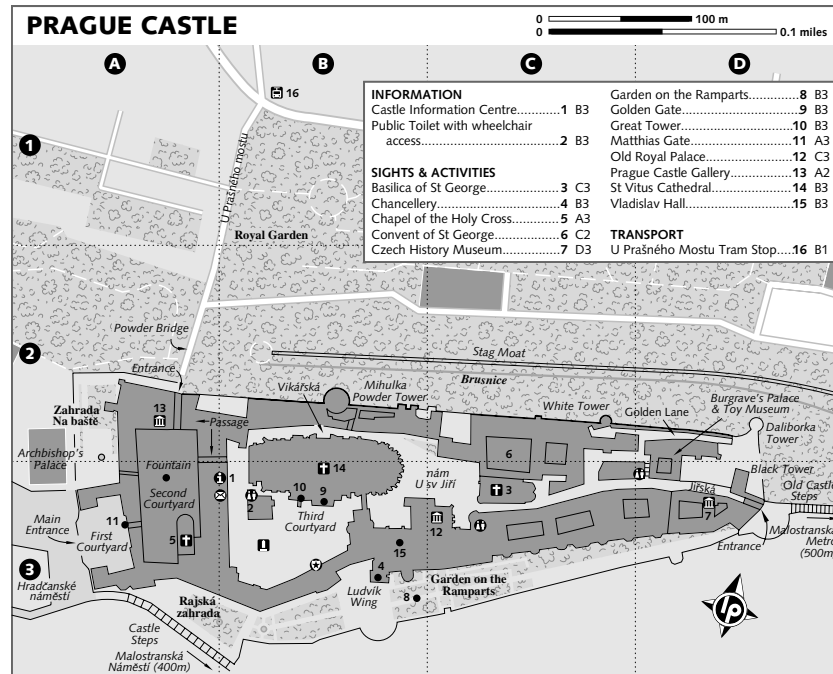
Find your inner tourist and head straight for the city's number-one attraction, **Prague Castle** (Pražský hrad; Map p285; ☎ 224 373 368; www.hrad.cz, in Czech; ☎ 9am–5pm Apr–Oct, 9am–4pm Nov–Mar, grounds 5am–midnight Apr–Oct, 6am–11pm Nov–Mar). Ticket B (adult/concession 220/110Kč) gives access to St Vitus Cathedral (choir, crypt and tower), the Old Royal Palace and Golden Lane; Ticket A (350/175Kč) includes these plus the Basilica of St George, Powder Tower and the Story of Prague Castle exhibit. There's no charge to wander around the castle courtyards and gardens and the cathedral nave, and you can also watch the changing of the guard at noon for free.

Castle highlights include jewel-studded **St Wenceslas Chapel** in **St Vitus Cathedral**; Has the view

GETTING INTO TOWN

Prague's Ruzyně airport is 17km west of the city centre. To get into town, buy a ticket from the public transport (DPP) desk in arrivals and take bus 119 (20Kč, 20 minutes, every 15 minutes) to the end of the line (Dejvická), then continue by metro into the city centre (another 10 minutes; no new ticket needed). Note you will also need a half-fare ticket (10Kč) for your backpack or suitcase.

Alternatively, take a **Cedaz minibus** (☎ 220 114 296) to the city centre at nám Republiky (90Kč, 20 minutes, every 30 minutes, 5.30am to 9.30pm); buy your ticket from the driver.



from the **cathedral tower**; the spectacular **Vladislav Hall** in the Old Royal Palace; and the **Basilica of St George**, Prague's finest Romanesque church. **Golden Lane**, a 16th-century tradesmen's quarter of tiny houses built into the castle walls, is a souvenir-laden tourist trap you can safely bypass.

For art rather than spectacle, head for the **Convent of St George** (Map p285; adult/concession 100/50Kč; ☎ 10am–6pm Tue–Sun), which is beside the basilica and houses the National Gallery's collection of Czech art from the 16th to 18th centuries. Outside the castle entrance is the 18th-century Sternberg Palace housing the **National Gallery** (☎ 220 514 599; adult/concession 150/70Kč; ☎ 10am–6pm Tue–Sun), the country's principal collection of 14th- to 18th-century European art.

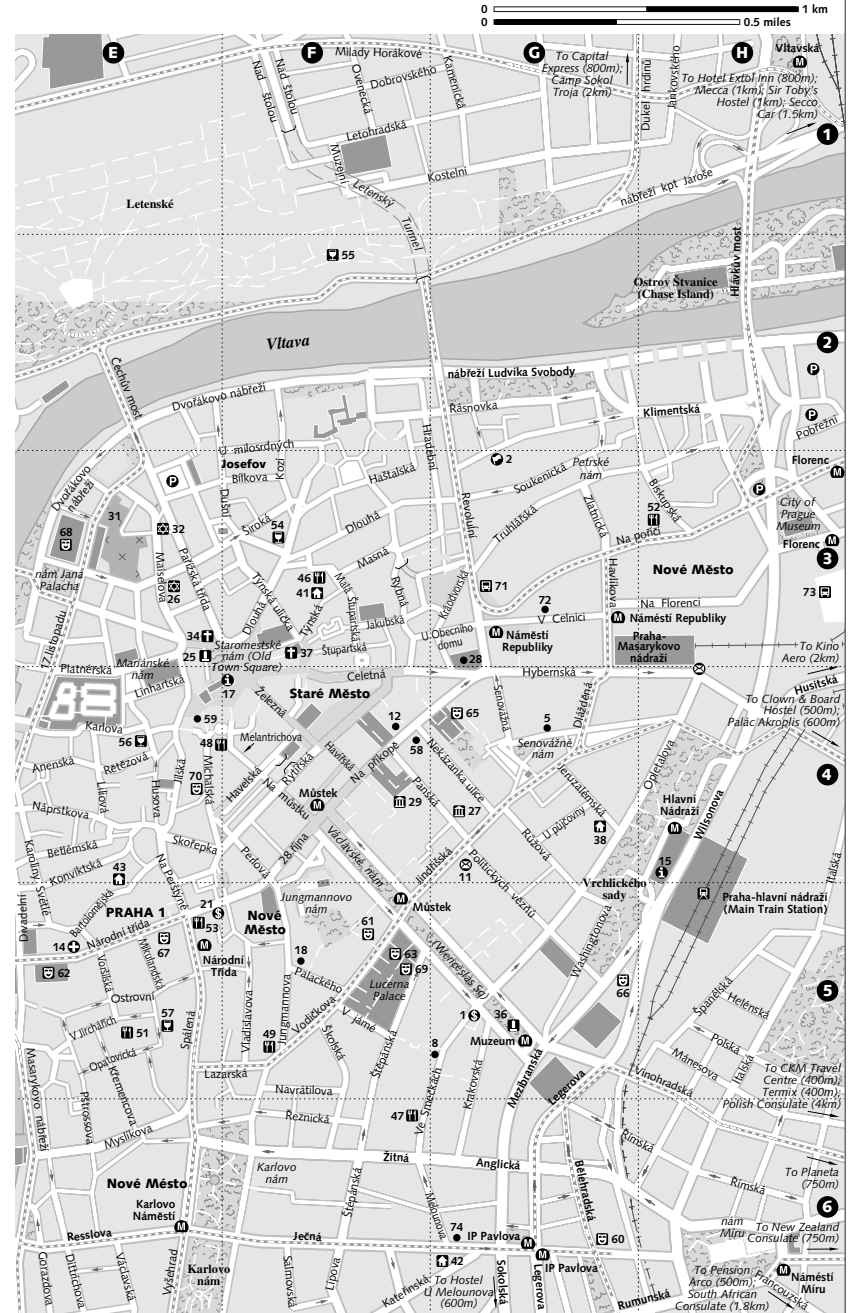
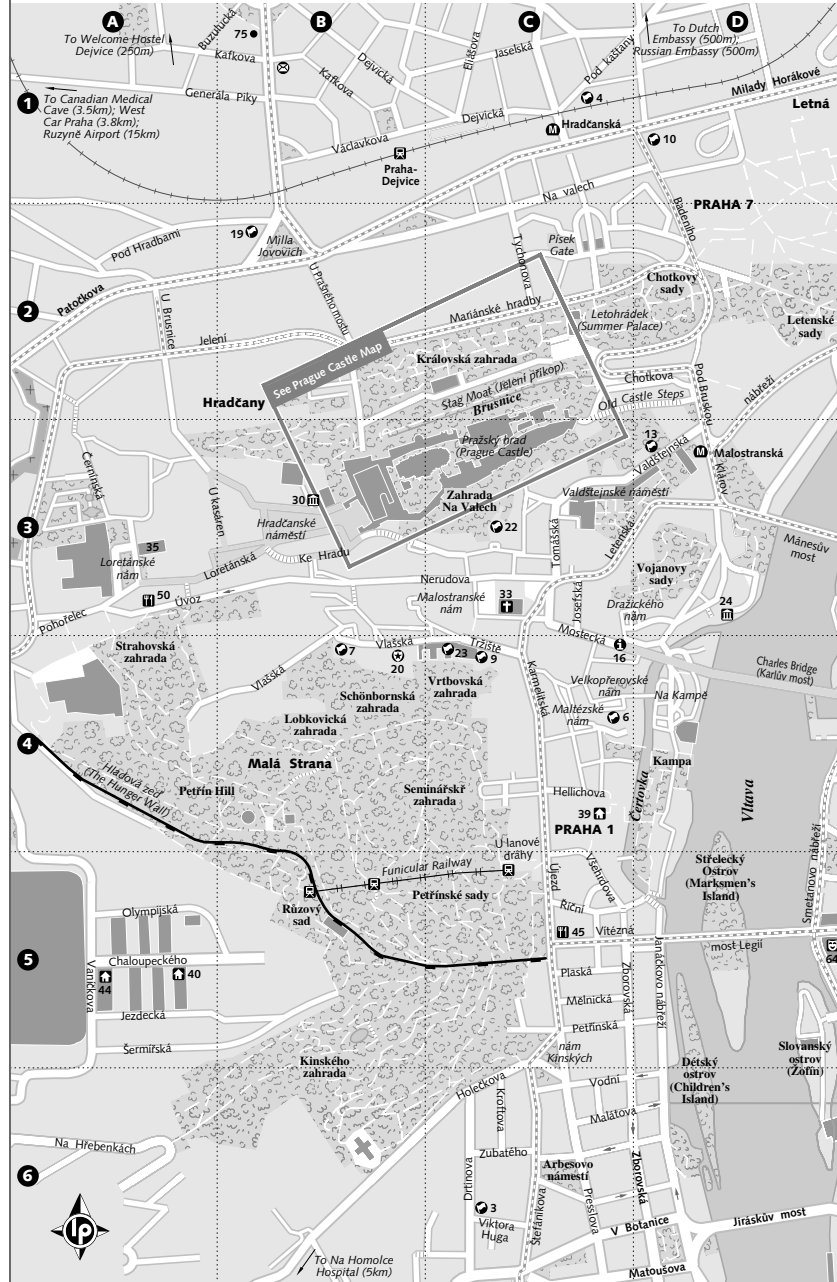
The baroque **Sanctuary of Our Lady of Loreta** (Loretanské nám 7; adult/concession 90/70Kč; ☎ 9.15am–12.15pm & 1–4.30pm), just west of the castle, is an important place of pilgrimage housing a replica of the Santa Casa (the house of St Anne, mother of the Virgin Mary), as well as a priceless treasury of gem-encrusted religious artefacts.

Malá Strana

Head downhill from the castle to the beautifully baroque backstreets of Malá Strana (Little Quarter), built in the 17th and 18th centuries by Catholic clerics and nobles. Close to the café-crowded main square, Malostranské nám, is **St Nicholas Church** (adult/concession 60/30Kč; ☎ 9am–6pm Mar–Oct, 9am–4pm Nov–Feb), one of the city's greatest baroque buildings – if you only visit one church in Prague, this is it. Climb the stairs to the gallery to see the 17th-century Passion cycle paintings and the doodlings of bored 1820s tourists and wannabe Franz Kafkas.

If the old legs are a little tired and need a rest, grab some picnic munchies and head for **Kampa**, a broad park on a low-lying island beside the river, and one of Prague's favourite chill-out zones. At the north end of Kampa is the famous and elegant **Charles Bridge** (Karlův Most), graced by 30 statues dating from the 18th century, and lined with jewellery stalls, portrait artists and street performers. In high season it's one of Prague's most crowded places. Try and visit at dawn before the hordes arrive.

CENTRAL PRAGUE



INFORMATION			
American Express.....	1 G5	Mucha Museum.....	27 G4
Australian Consulate.....	2 G3	Municipal House.....	28 G3
Austrian Embassy.....	3 C6	Museum of Communism.....	29 F4
Bohemia Bagel.....(see 46)		National Gallery.....	30 B3
Bohemia Bagel.....(see 45)		Old Jewish Cemetery.....	31 F3
Canadian Embassy.....	4 C1	Old Town Hall.....(see 17)	
Eurolines-Sodeli CZ.....	5 G4	Old-New Synagogue.....	32 E3
French Embassy.....	6 C4	St Nicholas Church (Malá Strana).....	33 C3
German Embassy.....	7 B4	St Nicholas Church (Staré Město).....	34 E3
GTS International.....	8 G5	Sanctuary of Our Lady of Loretta.....	35 A3
Irish Embassy.....	9 C4	Statue of St Wenceslas.....	36 G5
Israeli Embassy.....	10 D1	Týn Church.....	37 F3
Main Post Office.....	11 G4		
Mobiliarium.....	12 F4	SLEEPING ☒	
Polish Embassy.....	13 D3	Dasha.....	38 G4
Polyclinic at Národní.....	14 E5	Hostel Sokol.....	39 C4
Prague Information Service (main train station).....	15 H4	Hostel SPUS Strahov.....	40 A5
Prague Information Service (Malá Strana Bridge Tower).....	16 C4	Hostel Týn.....	41 F3
Prague Information Service (Old Town Hall).....	17 F4	Miss Sophies.....	42 G6
Praha Lékárna.....	18 F5	Pension Unitas.....	43 E4
Slovak Embassy.....	19 B2	Welcome Hostel Strahov.....	44 A5
State Police Station.....	20 B4		
Travellex.....	21 E5	EATING ☒	
UK Embassy.....	22 C3	Bohemia Bagel (Malá Strana).....	45 C5
US Embassy.....	23 C4	Bohemia Bagel (Staré Město).....	46 F3
		Café FX.....(see 60)	
		Café Vesmírna.....	47 F6
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		Country Life.....	48 E4
Astronomical Clock.....(see 17)		Country Life (Nové Město).....	49 F5
Franz Kafka Museum.....	24 D3	Malý Buddha.....	50 A3
Jan Hus Monument.....	25 E3	Pizzeria Kmotra.....	51 E5
Maisel Synagogue.....	26 E3	Siam Orchid.....	52 H3
		Tesco Department Store.....	53 E5
		DRINKING ☒	
		Kozicka.....	54 F3
		Letenské sady.....	55 F2
		U Zlatého Tygra.....	56 E4
		Velryba.....	57 E5
		ENTERTAINMENT ☒	
		Black Theatre of Jiří Srnec.....(see 67)	
		Bohemia Ticket International.....	58 F4
		Bohemia Ticket International.....	59 E4
		Club Radost FX.....	60 G6
		Kino Světozor.....	61 F5
		Laterna Magika.....	62 E5
		Lucerna Music Bar.....	63 F5
		Municipal House.....(see 28)	
		National Theatre.....	64 D5
		Palace Cinemas.....	65 G4
		Prague State Opera.....	66 G5
		Reduta Jazz Club.....	67 E5
		Rudolfinum.....	68 E3
		Ticketpro.....	69 F5
		USP Jazz Lounge.....	70 E4
		TRANSPORT	
		Čedaz Minibus Stop.....	71 G3
		Czech Airlines (CSA).....	72 G3
		Eurolines-Bohemia Euroexpress International.....(see 73)	
		Eurolines-Sodeli CZ.....(see 55)	
		Florenc Bus Station.....	73 H3
		Student Agency.....	74 G6
		Vecar.....	75 B1

Further north past Charles Bridge is the **Franz Kafka Museum** (☎ 420 221 333; www.kafka-museum.cz; Cihelná 2b; adult/concession 120/60Kč; ☎ 10am-6pm), proving the writer was much more than the T-shirt logo he's become.

Staré Město

On the Staré Město (Old Town) side of Charles Bridge, narrow and crowded Karlova leads east towards Prague's **Staroměstské nám** (☒ Staroměstská), dominated by the twin Gothic steeples of **Týn Church** (1365), the baroque wedding cake of **St Nicholas Church** (1730s) and the clock tower of the **Old Town Hall**, where the **astronomical clock** (1410) entertains the crowds on the hour with its parade of apostles and a bell-ringing skeleton. At the square's centre is the **Jan Hus Monument**, erected in 1915 on the 500th anniversary of the religious reformer's execution.

East along Celetná is the Art Nouveau **Municipal House** (Obecní dům; ☎ 222 002 100; nám Republiky 5; guided tours 150Kč; ☎ 10am-1pm; ☒ Náměstí Republiky), a cultural centre decorated by the finest Czech artists of the early 20th century. If the murals in the Lord Mayor's Hall pique your

interest in artist Alfons Mucha, discover more at the nearby **Mucha Museum** (☎ 221 451 333; Panská 7, Nové Město; adult/concession 120/60Kč; ☎ 10am-6pm; ☒ Můstek).

Josefov – the area north and northwest of Staroměstské nám – was once the city's Jewish Quarter, and its fascinating monuments are now all part of the **Prague Jewish Museum** (☎ 222 317 191; www.jewishmuseum.cz; adult/concession 300/200Kč; ☎ 9am-6pm Sun-Fri Apr-Oct, to 4.30pm Nov-Mar; ☒ Staroměstská). Highlights are the **Old-New Synagogue**, the **Maisel Synagogue** and the **Old Jewish Cemetery**.

Nové Město

Literally 'New Town', Nové Město is new only in relation to Staré Město, which was founded in 1348! Its main focus is the broad, sloping avenue of **Wenceslas Square** (Václavské nám; ☒ Můstek), lined with shops, banks and restaurants and dominated by a **statue of St Wenceslas** on horseback. The square has always been a focus for demonstrations and public gatherings. Beneath the Wenceslas statue there is a **shrine to the victims of communism**, including students Jan Palach and Jan Zajíc, both of

whom burned themselves alive in 1969 in protest at the Soviet invasion.

The fascinating **Museum of Communism** (☎ 224 212 966; www.muzeumkomunismu.cz; Na příkopě 10; adult/concession 180/140Kč; ☎ 8am-9pm) is tucked ironically behind Prague's biggest McDonald's.

To escape the tourist crowds, take a picnic and the metro to **Vyšehrad** (☎ 241 410 348; V Pevnosti 5, Vyšehrad; admission free; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Apr-Oct, 9.30am-5pm Nov-Mar; ☒ Vyšehrad) on the southern edge of Nové Město. This ancient hill-top fortress has superb views from the southern battlements.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Prague Spring (www.festival.cz) Europe's biggest festival of classical music, held from 12 May to 3 June.

United Islands (www.unitedislands.cz) World music, hip-hop and reggae, held in mid-June.

Mystic Skate Cup (www.mystick8cup.cz) International skateboarding competition in early July.

Loveplanet (www.loveplanet.cz) Outdoor music festival in August.

Prague International Jazz Festival (www.jazz-festivalpraha.cz) In late October.

New Year's Eve Lunacy in Staroměstské nám and fireworks over Prague Castle, on 31 December.

SLEEPING

If you're visiting during Christmas, Easter or from May to September, book a room. High-season prices, charged from April to October, are quoted in the following reviews; but these rates can increase a further 15% at Christmas, New Year, Easter and on weekends in May (during the Prague Spring festival). Some hotels have slightly lower rates in July and August. November to March is the low season.

The following accommodation agencies are recommended:

AVE (☎ 224 223 226; reservations 251 551 011; www.avetravel.cz) Convenient offices at Praha-hlavní nádraží and Praha-Holešovice train stations, Ruzyň airport and PIS offices.

Hostels in Prague (☎ 415 658 580; www.hostel.cz) Database of around 60 hostels, with a secure online booking system.

Camping

There are half-a-dozen riverside camping grounds in Troja, 15 minutes north of the centre, including **Camp Sokol Troja** (☎ 233 542 908; www.camp-sokol-troja.cz; Trojská 171A; per adult 125Kč; ☒; trams 14, 17), with kitchen and laundry, and open year-round.

Hostels

Clown & Bard Hostel (☎ 222 716 453; www.clownandbard.com; Bořivojova 102, Žižkov; dm 300-380Kč, d 1000Kč, apt 2400Kč; ☒) Maybe Prague's most full-on hostel – party in the basement bar, and recharge at the all-you-can-eat breakfast until 1pm. The self-catering apartments offer slightly more seclusion.

Sir Toby's Hostel (☎ 283 870 635; www.sirtobys.com; Dělnická 24, Holešovice; dm 340-400Kč, s/d 1000/1350Kč; ☒) A 10-minute tram ride from the city centre, the friendly Sir Toby's is in a refurbished apartment building down a quiet side street. There is a shared kitchen and lounge.

Hostel U Melounu (☎ 224 918 322; www.hostel-umelounu.cz; Ke Karlovu 7, Vinohrady; dm/s/d 390/700/1000Kč; ☒) Attractive hostel in a historic building on a quiet street, U Melounu has a sunny barbecue area, and shared kitchen and laundry.

Hostel Sokol (☎ 257 007 397; post@sokol-cos.cz; Týrův dům, Nosticova 2, Malá Strana; dm 390Kč; ☒) In a converted riverside mansion, the location is great, but the dorms can get crowded (and hot) in summer – a worthwhile backup though.

Hostel Týn (☎ 224 808 333; www.tyn-prague-hostels.cz; Týnská 19, Staré Město; dm/d/tr 400/1200/1200Kč; ☒) In a quiet lane metres from Old Town Square, you'll struggle to find better-value central accommodation. The 14 two to six bed rooms are very popular so book ahead.

There's plenty of accommodation at the student dormitories opposite the Strahov stadium, west of the centre. Try **Hostel SPUS Strahov** (☎ 220 513 419; www.spushostels.cz; Block 4, Chaloupeckého, Strahov; dm/s/d 250/480/760Kč; ☎ Jul-Sep) or **Welcome Hostel Strahov** (☎ 224 320 202; www.bed.cz; Block 3, Vaníčková, Strahov; dm/s/d 250/400/600Kč).

There's another concentration of student dorms in Dejvice, five minutes' walk from Dejvická metro station, including **Welcome Hostel Dejvice** (☎ 224 320 202; www.bed.cz; Žikova 13, Dejvice; s/d 500/700Kč; ☒; ☒ Dejvická).

our pick **Miss Sophies** (☎ 296 303 530; www.miss-sophies.com; Melounova 3; dm 440Kč, s/d from 1500/1700Kč, apt from 2100Kč) Best described as a 'boutique hostel', Miss Sophies is in a converted apartment building on the southern edge of the New Town. Polished concrete blends with oak flooring and neutral colours. Don't come expecting party central, but if you need to let some steam off, transport is a breeze with the IP Pavlova metro station just outside. There's free high-speed internet and the friendly English-speaking staff will ensure you get the most out of the city.

Pensions & Hotels

Pension Unitas (☎ 224 211 020; www.unitas.cz; Bartolomějská 9; dm per person 350-510Kč; s/d 1280/1580Kč; ☒) This former convent has an interesting past – the rooms were once prison cells (ex-president Havel did time here). Breakfast is included and bathrooms are shared. Choose between cramped dorms or more spacious *pension* rooms.

Hotel Extol Inn (☎ 220 876 541; www.extolinn.cz; Přístavní 2, Holešovice; s/d from 790/1350Kč; ☒) The reader-recommended rooms here are excellent value. The cheapest rooms with shared bathrooms are no-frills but totally spick-and-span, and the city is only 10 minutes away by tram.

Pension Arco (☎ 217 742 908; www.arco-guesthouse.cz; Voroněžská 21, Vinohrady; d/aprt from 1200/1900Kč) This gay-owned *pension* has comfortably furnished rooms, and excellent value two to four-person apartments. Vinohrady's after-dark action is nearby.

Dasha (☎ 602 210 716; www.accommodation-dasha.cz; Jeruzalemská 10; s/d from €30/40, apts €50-110) A restored apartment building 200m from the main train station has private rooms and flats accommodating up to 10 people. With kitchen facilities the apartments are a good choice for larger groups or families. Booking ahead by phone or online is essential.

EATING

Traditional Czech cuisine is strong on meat, dumplings and gravy, and weak on fresh vegetables – the classic Bohemian dish is *knedlo-zelo-vepřo* (bread dumplings, sauerkraut and roast pork). Other home-grown delicacies to try include *cesneková* (garlic soup) and *kapr na kmíní* (fried or baked carp with caraway seed).

Vegetarian restaurants are becoming popular in Prague and other main cities. Elsewhere, *bezmasá* (without meat) dishes are often limited to pizzas, *smažený sýr* (fried cheese) and *knedlíky s vejci* (scrambled eggs with dumplings).

Café Vesmírna (☎ 222 212 363; Ve Smečkách 5, Nové Město; snacks 70Kč; ☒) 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, 1-8pm Sat) The laid-back Vesmírna provides training and opportunities for people with special needs, and has a menu featuring healthy snacks and a 'how do I choose?' selection of teas and coffees.

Malý Buddha (☎ 220 513 894; Úvoz 46, Hradčany; mains 60-120Kč; ☒) noon-10.30pm Tue-Sun) Vietnam-

ese-owned Malý (Little) Buddha is an incense-infused haven atop Hradčany hill. If the castle's crowds wear you down, restore your *chi* with healing tea and tasty spring rolls.

Country Life Staré Město (☎ 224 213 366; Melantrichova 15; mains 75-150Kč; ☒) 9am-8.30pm Mon-Thu, 9am-6pm Fri, 11am-8.30pm; Nové Město ☎ 224 247 280; Jungmannova 1; mains 75-150Kč; ☒) 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Thu, 9am-6pm Fri) This all-vegan cafeteria offers inexpensive salads, sandwiches, pizzas, goulash, soy drinks, sunflower-seed burgers etc.

Bohemia Bagel (☎ 257 310 694; Újezd 18, Malá Strana; mains 90-270Kč; ☒) 7am-midnight Mon-Fri, from 8am Sat & Sun) Expat heaven with fresh bagel sandwiches, soups and coffee. There's another branch at Masná 2 in Staré Město – both are good spots for breakfast as you check your email.

Pizzeria Kmotra (☎ 224 934 100; V Jirchářích 12; pizza 95-145Kč; ☒) 11am-midnight) More than 30 varieties are on offer at this cellar pizzeria, which gets busy after 8pm. With over 50 additional toppings you can get really creative.

Siam Orchid (☎ 222 319 410; Na počičí 21; mains 160-280Kč; ☒) 10am-10pm) The waiter may be from Cambodia, but that doesn't stop the Thai food in this tiny restaurant from being Prague's most authentic Asian cuisine. Try the fiery *laap kai* (spicy chicken salad).

Café FX (☎ 224 254 776; Bělehradská 120, Vinohrady; mains 100-200Kč; ☒) 11.30am-2am) Café FX is shabbily chic, draped in hippy-drippy chiffon, with Prague's best vegetarian flavours. Relax at weekend brunch and lose yourself in the eclectic CD store nearby.

Tesco (☎ 222 003 111; Národní třída 26, Nové Město; ☒) 7am-10pm Mon-Fri, 8am-8pm Sat, 9am-8pm Sun) Stock up at Prague's best-stocked supermarket.

DRINKING

Bohemian beer is probably the world's best. The most famous brands are Budvar, Plzeňský Prazdroj (Pilsner Urquell) and Prague's own Staropramen; and there's no shortage of opportunities to imbibe.

Avoid the tourist areas and you'll discover local bars selling half-litres for 30Kč or less, (compared with 65Kč and up around Malostranské nám and Staroměstské nám).

U Zlatého Tygra (☎ 222 221 111; Husova 17, Staré Město; ☒) 3-11pm) The 'Golden Tiger' is a well-known Prague institution where President Havel took President Clinton to show him an authentic Czech *pivnice* (traditional pub). Be there at opening time for any chance of a seat.

Velryba (☎ 224 912 484; Opatovická 24, Nové Město; ☒) 11am-midnight Sat-Thu, 11am-2am Fri) The 'Whale' fulfils your expectations of 'Bohemian' with intense conversations between local students and a basement art gallery. Bring your own black polo-neck jumper.

Kozička (☎ 224 818 308; Kozí 1, Staré Město; ☒) noon-4am Mon-Fri, 6pm-4am Sat & Sun) The 'Little Goat' (look for the iron goat sculpture outside) rocks in standing room-only fashion until well after midnight in a buzzing basement bar. Your need for midnight munchies will be answered by the late-night kitchen.

Letenské sady (Letna Gardens, Bubeneč) In summer this garden bar is packed with punters enjoying cheap beer, grilled sausages and views across the river. Sometimes the simple things in life are the best.

CLUBBING

Mecca (☎ 283 870 522; www.mecca.cz; U Průhonu 3, Holešovice; cover 90-390Kč Fri & Sat, free Wed & Thu; ☒) 10pm-6am Wed-Sat) Prague's most fashionable club attracts film stars and fab types with pumping dance-floor action.

Lucerna Music Bar (☎ 224 217 108; www.musicbar.cz; Lucerna pasáž, Vodičkova 36, Nové Město; ☒) 8pm-4am) Leave your musical snobbery in the cloak room at the '80s nights on Friday and Saturday with everything from The Human League to Soft Cell.

Palác Akropolis (☎ 296 330 911; www.palacakropolis.cz; Kubelíková 27, Žižkov; ☒) club 7pm-5am) Get lost in the labyrinth of theatre, music, clubbing, drinking and eating of Prague's coolest venue. Hip-hop, house, reggae, world music – anything goes.

Club Radost FX (☎ 224 254 776; www.radostfx.cz; Bělehradská 120, Vinohrady; cover 100-250Kč; ☒) 10pm-6am) Prague's most self-assured club remains hip for its bohemian boudoir décor, and its popular Thursday hip-hop night FXBounce (www.fxbounce.com).

Termix (☎ 222 710 462; www.club-termix.cz; Třebízského 4A, Vinohrady; admission free; ☒) 8pm-5am Wed-Sun) A mixed gay and lesbian scene with an industrial-high-tech vibe. You'll need to queue for Thursday's popular techno party.

ENTERTAINMENT

Check the listings in the Night & Day section of the weekly **Prague Post** (www.praguepost.cz), and the monthly free magazine **Provokátor** (www.provokator.org), available from clubs, cafés, art-house cinemas and backpacker hostels). For online listings see www.prague.tv.

For classical music, opera, ballet, theatre and some rock concerts – even the most *vyprodáno* (sold-out) events – a few tickets are on sale at the box office 30 minutes before concert time.

There are ticket agencies around Prague selling the same tickets at a high commission, including **Ticketpro** (☎ 296 333 333; www.ticketpro.cz; pasáž Lucerna, Štěpánská 61, Nové Město; ☒) 9am-12.30pm & 1-5pm Mon-Fri). It also has branches in PIS offices. **Bohemia Ticket International** (☎ 224 227 832; www.ticketsbti.cz; Malé nám 13, Staré Město; ☒) 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) sells tickets to all kinds of events. There's another **branch** (☎ 224 227 832; Na příkopě 16, Nové Město; ☒) 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat, to 3pm Sun) near the Municipal House.

Jazz

Reduta Jazz Club (☎ 224 912 246; www.redutajazzclub.cz; Národní třída 20, Nové Město; cover 300Kč; ☒) 9pm-3am) Founded in 1958 and one of the oldest in Europe.

USP Jazz Lounge (☎ 603 551 680; www.jazzlounge.cz; Michalská 9, Staré Město; ☒) 9pm-3am) Less traditional than Reduta, with modern live jazz and DJs after midnight.

Cinema

Most films are screened in their original language with Czech subtitles (*české titulky*), but Hollywood blockbusters are often dubbed into Czech (*dabing*); look for the labels *tit* or *dab* on cinema listings. Tickets cost from 90Kč to 170Kč.

Kino Aero (☎ 271 771 349; www.kinoaero.cz; Biskupcova 31, Žižkov) Prague's best-loved art-house cinema, often with English subtitles.

Kino Světozor (☎ 224 946 824; www.kinosvetozor.cz; Vodičkova 41, Nové Město) Your best bet for seeing Czech films with English subtitles.

Palace Cinemas (☎ 257 181 212; www.palacecinemas.cz; Slovanský dům, Na příkopě 22, Nové Město) A 10-screen multiplex showing first-run Hollywood films.

Classical Music & Performance Arts

The main concert venues in Prague are the Dvořák Hall in the neo-Renaissance **Rudolfinum** (nám Jana Palacha, Staré Město) and the Smetana Hall in the Art Nouveau **Municipal House** (Obecní dům; nám Republiky 5, Staré Město; ☒) (Nám Republiky). The latter hosts the opening concert of the Prague Spring festival. See www.obecnidum.cz for performance listings. The box office is open from 10am to 6pm.

Opera, ballet and classical drama (in Czech) is performed at the neo-Renaissance **Prague State Opera** (☎ 224 227 266; Wilsonova, Nové Město) and **National Theatre** (☎ 224 901 377; Národní třída 2, Nové Město). Next door is the modern **Laterna Magika** (☎ 224 931 482; Národní třída 4, Nové Město), which offers a modern combo of theatre, dance and film.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

See p281.

GETTING AROUND Public Transport

Buy a ticket before you enter a tram, bus or metro – available from metro stations, vending machines, newsstands, tobacco kiosks, hotels and tourist information offices.

Validate your ticket (once only, even if you transfer) by sticking it in the yellow machine in the metro station lobby or on the bus or tram. Once validated, a 20Kč *jízdenka* (ticket) remains valid for 75 minutes from the time of stamping (90 minutes, if stamped between 8pm and 5am weekdays, or at any time on weekends). Within this period, unlimited transfers between tram, metro and bus are allowed. You also need a half-fare ticket (10Kč) for large backpacks.

The metro operates from 5am to midnight daily. Night trams and buses rumble across the city every 40 minutes all night.

Taxi

The best way to avoid being ripped off is to telephone a reliable taxi company such as **AAA** (☎ 14 014) or **ProfiTaxi** (☎ 844 700 800). If you feel you're being overcharged, ask for an *účet* (bill). Most taxi trips within the city centre should cost from 125Kč to 150Kč.

AROUND PRAGUE

The following places are easy day trips from Prague.

KARLŠTEJN

Fairytales **Karlštejn Castle** (☎ 274 008 154; www.hrad.karlstejn.cz; Karlštejn; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Sun Jul & Aug, to 5pm May, Jun & Sep, to 4pm Apr & Oct, to 3pm Nov-Mar) perches above the Berounka River, 30km southwest of Prague. The highlight is the **Chapel of the Holy Rood**, with walls covered in 14th-century painted panels and precious stones. The 45-

minute guided tours (in English) on Rte I cost 200/100Kč adult/concession tickets. Rte II, including the chapel (June to October only), must be prebooked at 300/200Kč.

Trains from Praha-hlavní nádraží and Praha-Smíchov train stations to Beroun stop at Karlštejn (46Kč, 45 minutes, hourly).

KUTNÁ HORA

pop 22,000

In the 14th-century Kutná Hora rivalled Prague as the most important town in Bohemia, growing rich on the silver ore lacing the rocks beneath it. Today it's an attractive medieval town with fascinating historical attractions.

The **information office** (☎ 327 512 378; http://infocentrum.kh.cz; Palackého nám 377; 9am-6.30pm Apr-Oct, to 5pm Sat & Sun, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri Oct-Mar) books accommodation and has internet access.

Walk 10 minutes south from Kutná Hora-hlavní nádraží train station to the remarkable **Sedlec Kostnice** (Sedlec Ossuary; ☎ 327 561 143; adult/concession 45/30Kč; ☎ 8am-6pm Apr-Sep, 9am-noon & 1-5pm Oct, to 4pm Nov-Mar). This chapel crypt contains the bones of 40,000 people arranged in the form of pyramids, garlands, a chandelier and even the Schwarzenberg coat of arms – a truly macabre sight. It's another 15-minute walk or five-minute bus ride to central Kutná Hora.

In the town centre is the **Czech Silver Museum** (České Muzeum Stříbra; ☎ 327 512 159; adult/concession 60/30Kč; ☎ 10am-6pm Jul & Aug, 9am-6pm May, Jun & Sep, 9am-5pm Apr & Oct, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov, closed Mon year-round), a 15th-century palace housing an exhibit on the mines that made Kutná Hora wealthy. Don a miner's helmet and lamp for a 45-minute **guided tour** (adult/concession 110/70Kč) through 500m of **medieval mine shafts**.

Kutná Hora's greatest monument is the Gothic **Cathedral of St Barbara** (☎ 327 512 115; adult/concession 30/15Kč; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, 10am-11.30am & 1-4pm Apr & Oct, 10am-11.30am & 2-3.30pm Nov-Mar), rivalling Prague's St Vitus in size and magnificence.

There are direct trains from Prague's main train station to Kutná Hora-hlavní nádraží (98Kč, 55 minutes, seven daily). The train station is 3km northeast of the town centre.

Buses to Kutná Hora from Prague (64Kč, 1½ hours, hourly) depart from stand 2 at ÚAN Praha Florenc bus station; services are less frequent at weekends. Kutná Hora's bus station is on the northern edge of the old town.

BOHEMIA

KARLOVY VARY

pop 60,000

If you've been hiding a designer dog or a flash pair of sunglasses in your backpack, then Karlovy Vary (Karlsbad in German) is your chance to give them both an airing. Well-heeled Euro hypochondriacs come to this glam (with a small 'g') resort, and try to enjoy courses of 'lymphatic drainage' and 'hydrocolonoherapy'; all activities that should be outlawed under several international agreements.

If Russian matrons walking canine 'bling-on-a-string' don't appeal, there's good hiking in the surrounding hills and good drinking at the riverside cafés.

According to legend Emperor Charles IV discovered the hot springs accidentally in 1350 when one of his hunting dogs fell into the waters (Karlovy Vary means 'Charles' Hot Springs'). The spa's glory days lasted from the early 18th century until WWI, with guests including Emperor Franz Josef I and Beethoven.

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

Karlovy Vary has two train stations – Dolní nádraží (Lower Station), beside the main bus station, and Horní nádraží (Upper Station), across the Ohře River north of the city centre.

Trains from Prague arrive at Horní nádraží. To get into town, take bus 11, 12 or 13 from the stop across the road to the Tržnice stop; bus 11 continues to Divadelní nám in the spa district. It's 10 minutes to the centre on foot; cross the road outside the train station and go right, then first left on a footpath that leads downhill under the highway. At its foot, turn right on U Spořitelny, then left at the end of the big building and head for the bridge over the river.

The Tržnice bus stop is three blocks east of Dolní nádraží, in the middle of the town's modern commercial district. Pedestrianised TG Masaryka leads east to the Teplá River; the old spa district stretches upstream from here for 2km.

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.

Infocentrum (☎ 353 224 097; Lázeňská 1) This second branch stays open two hours later.

Moonstorm Internet (TG Masaryka 31; per 15min 12Kč; ☎ 9am-9pm)

Sights & Activities

At the heart of the old spa district, on the west bank of the river, is the neoclassical **Mlýnská Kolonáda** (Mill Colonnade; Lázeňská), where bands play in summer. There are several other elegant colonnades and imposing 19th-century spa centres scattered along the Teplá River, though the 1970s concrete monstrosities of the **Hotel Thermal** and the **Vřídlní Kolonáda** (Geyser Colonnade) spoil the effect slightly.

Pretend to be a spa patient by purchasing a *lázeňské pohár* (spa cup) and a box of *oplátky* (spa wafers), and sampling the various hot springs (free). There are 12 springs in the 'drinking cure', ranging from the **Skalní Pramen** (Rock Spring), which dribbles a measly 1.3L per minute, to the **Vřídlo** (Geyser), which spurts 2000L per minute in a steaming, 14m-high jet. The tourist office has a leaflet detailing the 12 different springs.

The sulphurous water carries a whiff of rotten eggs. **Becherovka**, a local herbal liqueur, is known as the '13th spring'. A few shots will take away the taste of sulphur and leave you feeling sprightlier than a week's worth of hydrocolonoherapy.

You can swim in the **open-air thermal pool** (bazén; admission per hr 40Kč; ☎ 8am-8.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-9.30pm Sun, closed every 3rd Mon) above the Hotel Thermal.

Sleeping

Accommodation is pricey, and can be tight at weekends and during festivals; book ahead. Agencies **Čedok** (☎ 353 227 837; 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) book private rooms from 400Kč per person. **Infocentrum** (☎ 353 224 097; www.karlovyvary.cz; Lázeňská 1; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun) books hostels, *pensjons* and hotels.

Titty Twister Hostel (☎ 353 239 071; www.hosteltt.cz; Moravská 44; from 390Kč per person) In a town where cheap sleeps aren't bubbling over, this hostel with a silly name rises to the top.

Accommodation is in apartments with two, four or six beds – all with separate kitchens.

Europension (☎ 353 332 117; www.pension-euro.cz; Studentská 45; s/d incl breakfast 750/1200Kč) To the west of town on the Plzeň road (take bus 6 from Tržnice to the U Zámečku stop), this bright 15-room place has good-value rooms.

Hotel Kavalerie (☎ 353 229 613; www.kavalerie.cz; TG Masaryka 43; s/d incl breakfast from 950/1225Kč) This cosy café-hotel has a good location; it's near the bus and train stations, and away from the spa district's high food prices.

Eating

In the spa district, prices are similar to central Prague; cheaper places are in the commercial district.

Galilea (☎ 353 221 183; TG Masaryka 3A, Pasáz Alfa; mains 110-160Kč) Try the creamy dips and Arabic bread, or grab a falafel kebab (65Kč) and relax by the river. Both the restaurant and the kebab shop have good vegetarian options.

Steakhouse Sklipek (☎ 353 229 197; Zeyerova 1; steaks 170Kč) With red-checked tablecloths 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; juices & smoothies 20-37Kč) For fruit smoothies that are probably healthier than sulphur-laden spa water.

Kafé Brejk (Stará Louka 62; coffee 35Kč, baguettes 50Kč; ☎ 9am-5pm) Takeaway coffees and baguettes.

Getting There & Away

Direct buses to Prague (130Kč, 2¼ hours, eight daily) and Plzeň (76Kč, 1½ hours, ten daily) depart from the bus station beside Dolní nádraží train station.

There are direct (but slow) trains from Karlovy Vary to Prague (274Kč, four hours, three daily). Heading west to Nuremberg (980Kč, three hours, two daily) and beyond, you'll have to change at Cheb (known as Eger in German).

PLZEŇ

pop 175,000

Brew aficionados flock to this city where lager was invented in 1842. Plzeň (Pilsen in German) is the home town of Pilsner Urquell (Plzeňský prazdroj), the world's first lager beer, and now imitated around the world. *Urquell* (in German; *prazdroj* in Czech) means 'original source' or 'fountainhead', and the

authentic hoppy marvel from the town's brewery puts all pretenders in the shade.

The capital of West Bohemia is a sprawling industrial city, but at its heart lies an attractive old town wrapped in a halo of tree-lined gardens. It's a big student town too, with loads of pubs for sampling Plzeň's eternal golden froth.

The central bus station is west of the centre on Husova, opposite the Škoda Engineering Works. The main train station, Plzeň-hlavní nádraží, is on the eastern side of town, 10 minutes' walk from the old town square.

Information

City Information Centre (městské informační středisko; ☎ 378 035 330; www.plzen-city.cz; nám Republiky 41; ☎ 9am-6pm) Train station (☎ 972 524 313; ☎ 9am-5pm) Charges 1Kč per minute for Internet access.

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

Sights

In summer people congregate at the outdoor beer bar in nám Republiky, the broad and sunny old town square, beneath the towering, Gothic **Church of St Bartholomew**. You can climb the 102m **church tower** (adult/concession 20/10Kč; 10am-6pm Wed-Sat Apr-Sep, Wed-Fri Oct-Dec), the highest in Bohemia, for a great view of the city.

The **Brewery Museum** (☎ 377 235 574; Vele-slavinova 6; adult/concession 80/50Kč, with text 120/60Kč; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Dec, to 5pm Jan-Mar) is a block east of the square in an authentic medieval malt house.

In previous centuries beer was brewed, stored and served in a labyrinth of tunnels under the old town. The earliest were dug in the 14th century and the latest date from the 19th century. The 30-minute guided tour at the **Plzeň Historical Underground** (☎ 377 225 214; Perlová 4; adult/concession 45/25Kč; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun Jul-Sep, Wed-Sun Apr-Jun, Oct & Nov) takes in around 500m of tunnels. Underground it's a constant 10°C, so wrap up.

Beer fans should make the pilgrimage east across the river to the famous **Pilsner Urquell Brewery** (☎ 377 062 888; www.beerworld.cz; tours adult/concession 120/50Kč; ☎ 10am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-8pm Sun). One-hour guided tours (with beer tasting) in English or German begin at 12.30pm and 2pm daily; no advance booking is needed.

Sleeping

Autocamp Ostende (☎ 377 520 194; www.cbox.cz/atc-ostende; tents/bungalows per person 80/200Kč) On Velký Bolevecký rybník, a lake about 6km north of the city centre and accessible by bus 20 from near the train station. Open May to September.

CKM (☎ 377 236 393; info@ckmplzen.cz; Dominikánská 1; dm from 200Kč; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri) Books summer rooms in student hostels.

University of Karlov Vary and Prague (☎ 377 259 381; www.webpark.cz/bolevcka; Bolevecká 34; s/d 250/500Kč) The university has student rooms. Take tram 4 two stops north from the Great Synagogue. There is a similar setup at Bolevecká 30. Phone ahead.

Penzion v Solní (☎ 377 236 652; www.volny.cz/pensionsolni; Solní 8; s/d 600/1020Kč) Plzeň's best deal is this friendly spot just off the main square. With only three rooms, book ahead.

Pension City (☎ 377 326 069; fax 377 222 976; Sady 5 kvetna 52; s/d incl breakfast 1000/1390Kč) Down near the river, the City has friendly English-speaking staff providing lots of local information.

Eating & Drinking

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

Dominik Jazz Rock Café (☎ 377 323 226; Dominikánská 3; mains 100Kč) There's cool beats all day every day, and good-value salads and sandwiches at lunchtime. After dark has a student vibe.

Also recommended:

Asia Bistro (Pražská 31; mains from 70Kč) Try the Vietnamese spring rolls.

Slunečnice (Jungmannova 10; baguettes 50Kč; ☎ 7.30am-6pm) For baguettes and sandwiches.

Enjoy Plzeň's lively pub culture at **Zach's Pub** (☎ 377 223 176; Palackého nám 2; 1-9pm Mon-Thu, 1pm-2am Fri, 5pm-2am Sat, to midnight Sun) and **Plzeňská bašta** (☎ 377 237 262; Riegrova 5), a top spot for your first (and maybe your best) Pilsner Urquell.

Getting There & Away

All international trains from Munich and Nuremberg to Prague stop at Plzeň. There are fast trains from Plzeň to Prague (140Kč, 1½ hours, eight daily) and České Budějovice (162Kč, two hours, five daily).

If you're heading for Karlovy Vary, take a bus (76Kč, 1½ hours, ten daily). There are also express buses to Prague (80Kč, 1½ hours, hourly).

ČESKÉ BUDĚJOVICE

pop 100,000

The **City Information Centre** (Městské Informační Centrum; ☎ 386 801 413; www.c-budejovice.cz; nám Přemysla Otakara II 2; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) sells maps and arranges tickets and accommodation.

Post Plzeň, conduct the ultimate Bohemian beer taste test at České Budějovice (Budweis in German), the home of Budweiser Budvar lager. The regional capital of South Bohemia is a picturesque medieval city with one of Europe's largest old town squares. Its 18th-century arcades lead to bars that get raffishly rowdy on weekends.

Just as beer from Pilsen is called Pilsner (see opposite), beer from Budweis is dubbed **Budweiser**. The founders of US brewer Anheuser-Busch chose the brand name Budweiser in 1876 because it was synonymous with good beer. Since the late 19th century, both breweries have used the name and the legal arm-wrestle over the brand continues. There's no debate about which is superior; one taste of Budvar and you'll be converted.

The **Budweiser Budvar Brewery** (☎ 387 705 341; www.budweiser.cz; cnr Pražská & K Světletě; adult/concession 100/50Kč; ☎ 9am-4pm) is 3km north of the main square. The 2pm tour (Monday to Friday only) is open to individual travellers; beer tasting costs 22Kč extra. The brewery's **beer hall** is open 10am to 10pm daily.

Sleeping & Eating

The youth travel agency **CKM** (☎ 386 351 270; Lannova třída 63; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Thu, 9am-3.30pm Fri) and the City Information Centre can arrange dorm accommodation from 200Kč per person. Small private *pensions* are a better deal than hotels.

Pension U výstaviště (☎ 387 240 148; trpkadl@email.cz; U výstaviště 17; per person 270Kč) The closest thing to a travellers' hostel is this student accommodation block. It's 30 minutes from the city centre on bus 1, from outside the bus station to the fifth stop (U parku); the *pension* is about 100m up the street (Čajkovského) on the right.

Kolej jihocheské univerzity (☎ 387 774 201; Studentská 13-19; d 440Kč) From July to September cheap beds are available at the university 2km west of the centre.

AT Pension (☎ 603 441 069; Dukelská 15; s/d 500/800Kč, breakfast 50Kč) Don't hold your breath for stunning (or even 20th-century) décor, but this spot is friendly and quiet.

Penzion Barbara (☎ 736 426 472; www.penzionbarbara.cz; Siroká 15; s/d 500/1000Kč) A newish, central spot with bright rooms above a café.

There are good restaurants and bars in the streets around the main square, including **pizza/grill** (Panská 17; pizzas 100Kč; ☎ closed Sun), with authentic wood-fired pizza and **U Tří Sedláků** (☎ 387 222 303; Hroznová 488; mains 100-160Kč), where locals celebrate that not much has changed since it opened in 1897.

The best coffee in town is at **Caffé Bar Piccolo** (Na Mlýnskéstoce 9; ☎ 7.30am-7pm Mon-Thu, 7.30am-10pm Fri & Sat), and at the **Singer Pub** (Česká 55); challenge the locals to *foosball*, to a soundtrack of nicely noisy rock.

Albert supermarket (Lannova 22) To the east of the square.

Getting There & Away

There are fast trains from České Budějovice to Plzeň (162Kč, two hours, five daily), Prague (204Kč, 2½ hours, hourly). Heading for Viena (780Kč, four hours, two daily), you'll have to change at Gmünd, or take a direct train to Linz (410Kč, 2¼ hours, one daily) and change there.

The bus to Brno (210Kč, 3½ to 4½ hours, four daily) travels via Telč. Twice a week there's a direct Eurolines bus to Linz (430Kč, 2½ hours) and Salzburg (750Kč, 4½ hours) in Austria.

ČESKÝ KRUMLOV

pop 14,600

Crowned by an audacious castle and centred on an elegant old town square, Český Krumlov is a pocket-sized Prague. Renaissance and Baroque buildings enclose the looping arc of the Vltava River, housing plenty of riverside cafés and bars. During summer Český Krumlov may feel like a Middle Europe theme park, but visit a few months either side of July and August and the narrow lanes and footbridges will be (slightly) more subdued and secluded. There's a buzzy backpacker vibe with plenty of funky hostels, cheap beer from the local Eggenberg brewery, and lots of activities on offer including cruising down the meandering Vltava.

Arriving by bus from České Budějovice, get off at the Špičák bus stop, the first in town. The train station is located 1.5km north of the old town centre; buses 1, 2 and 3 make the run from the station to the Špičák bus stop.

Information

Infocentrum (☎ 380 704 622; www.ckrumlov.cz; nám Svornosti 1; ☎ 9am-8pm Jul-Aug, to 7pm Jun & Sep, to 6pm Apr, May & Oct, to 5pm Nov-Mar) Tourism, transport, accommodation and maps. Internet access is 5Kč per 5 minutes.

Unios Tourist Service (☎ 380 725 110; tourist.servic@unios.cz; Zámek 57; ☎ 9am-6pm) Tourist information, accommodation booking and internet café with international calls (1Kč per minute).

Shakespeare & Sons (☎ 380 711 203; Soukenická 44; ☎ 11am-7pm) Good for English-language paperbacks. Art-house movies are screened in a cinema downstairs.

Sights & Activities

Wander for free through the courtyards and gardens of **Český Krumlov Castle** (☎ 380 704 721; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Sun Jun-Aug, 9am-5pm Apr, May, Sep & Oct); guided tour 1 (adult/concession 160/80Kč) takes in the Renaissance and baroque apartments that the aristocratic Rožmberk and Schwarzenberg families once called home. The **Castle Tower** (adult/concession 35/20Kč) provides superb views.

Across the river is Nám Svornosti, the old town square, ringed by pleasant outdoor cafés. The big attraction on a hot summer day is just messing about on the river. Rent canoes, rafts and rubber rings from various places, including **Maleček** (☎ 380 712 508; www.malecek.cz; Rooseveltova 28; ☎ 9am-5pm); a half-hour splash in a two-person canoe costs 350Kč. **Vltava Tourist Services** (☎ 380 711 988; Kájovská 62; ☎ 9am-7pm) rents bikes (320Kč a day) and organises horse riding (250Kč an hour). Maleček also offers more sedate river trips on giant wooden rafts seating up to 36 people (280Kč for 45 minutes).

For details on the Five-Petalled Rose Festival and the Český Krumlov International Music Festival, see p300.

Sleeping

Kemp Nové Spolí (☎ 380 728 305; per adult 65Kč; ☎ Jun-Aug) You can camp at this basic riverside camping ground about 2.5km south of town; take bus 3 from the train or bus station.

hostel postel (☎ 380 715 631; www.hostelpostel.cz; Rybářská 35; dm/d 250/600Kč) Conveniently situated near good bars in Rybářská, hostel postel has a sunny courtyard with shady umbrellas to wake you up slowly after a big night.

Krumlov House (☎ 380 711 935; www.krumlovhostel.com; Rooseveltova 68; dm/d 300/650Kč) Perched above the river, Krumlov House is friendly and comfortable, with plenty of books, DVDs, and

local info to feed your inner backpacker. Lots of daytrips are available.

Hostel 99 (☎ 380 712 812; www.hostel99.com; Věžní 99; dm/d 300/700Kč; ☎) Laid-back lodgings right in the city walls, with a sunny terrace and barbecue. There are bikes for hire and daytrips on offer.

Pension Lobo (☎ 380 713 153; www.pensionlobo.cz; Latrán 73; d incl breakfast 1100Kč) Pension Lobo offers spotless, central rooms and one of the country's only laundromats outside of Prague.

Eating & Drinking

Laibon (☎ 728 676 654; Parkán 105; mains 80-160Kč) Candles and vaulted ceilings create a nicely boho ambience in the best veggie teahouse in Bohemia.

Nonna Gina (☎ 380 717 187; Klášteriní ul 52; pizza 110Kč) Authentic Italian flavours from the authentically Italian Massaro family feature in this pizzeria down a quiet lane.

Na louži (☎ 380 711 280; Kájovská 66; mains 120-180Kč) Locals pack in here for dark beer from the local Eggenberg brewery, in a *pivo* parlour that's been unchanged for a century.

Horor Bar (☎ 728 682 724; Masná 22; ☎ 6pm-late) There are occasional live gigs at this kitschy labyrinth celebrating the (un)dead.

Potraviný (supermarket; Latrán 55) Fancy a picnic?

Getting There & Away

The bus station is on Tavrna, on the eastern edge of the town centre; the train station is 1.5km north of town. There are buses from Prague to Český Krumlov (140Kč, three hours, seven daily) via České Budějovice. Buses depart from Na Knížecí bus station, near the Anděl metro station in Smíchov, or from ŮAN Praha Florenc bus station.

Local buses (26Kč, 50 minutes, seven daily) and trains (46Kč, one hour, eight daily) run to/from České Budějovice, where you can change for onward travel to Brno, Plzeň or Austria.

MORAVIA

BRNO

pop 387,200

Brno, the Czech Republic's second city and the capital of Moravia, might seem a tad buttoned-down after the buzz of Prague. Stay a while though because that traditional Moravian reserve melts away in the old town's bars. A cosmopolitan array of galleries and

museums lets you experience modern Czech urban life away from the touristy commotion of the capital.

The train station (Brno-hlavní nádraží) is at the southern edge of the old town, which can be easily covered on foot. The main bus station (Brno ŮAN Zvonarka) is 800m south of the train station (Zvonarka) through the Galerie Vankovka shopping centre.

The **City Information Office** (Kulturní a Informační Centrum; KIC; ☎ 542 211 090; www.ticbrno.cz; Radnická 8; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5.30pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep, 9am-5pm Sat, 9am-3pm Sun Nov-Mar) provides maps and books accommodation.

Sights & Activities

Above the old town looms **Špilberk Castle** (☎ 542 215 012; www.spilberk.cz; ☎ 9am-6pm May-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Apr, closed Mon Sep-Jun). Founded in the 13th century and converted into a citadel during the 17th century, it served as a prison for opponents of the Habsburgs until 1855. The tunnels of the **Casemates** (adult/concession 60/30Kč) house a creepy prison museum, and the main building houses the fascinating **Brno City Museum** (adult/concession 100/50Kč).

In the old town is the gruesome **Capuchin Monastery** (☎ 542 213 232; Kapucínské nám 5; adult/concession 40/20Kč; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-4.30pm Tue-Sat, 11-11.45am & 2-4.30pm Sun, closed Dec & Jan), where the desiccated corpses of 18th-century monks and local aristocrats are displayed in the crypt.

Gregor Mendel (1822-84), the monk who established the modern science of genetics, is commemorated in the **Mendel Museum** (☎ 543 424 043; www.mendel-museum.org; Mendlovo nám 1; adult/concession 80/40Kč; ☎ 10am-6pm May-Oct,

SPURGE

Krčma v Šatlavské (☎ 380 713 344; Horní 157; mains 80-150Kč) Nirvana for meat-lovers is this medieval barbecue cellar, serving sizzling delights, tasty dark beer from Český Krumlov's Eggenberg brewery and Moravian wine in earthenware goblets. Try the mixed platter (200Kč), a combo of chicken, pork and beef accompanied by robust dark bread and good, honest mustard with a real kick. In the summer the grill-ups head outside, and are accompanied by live medieval music in one of the country's prettiest squares. Book ahead, and trust us, it's really not as naff as it sounds.

10am-4pm Wed-Sun Nov-Apr). Brno has many other museums and art galleries. Ask at the City Information Office.

Fans of modern architecture will love Brno, with examples of cubist, functionalist and internationalist styles. The finest is the functionalist **Vila Tugendhat** (☎ 545 212 118; Černopolní 45; tours adult/concession 120/60Kč; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Sun), designed by Mies van der Rohe in 1930. It's essential to phone and book ahead.

Sleeping & Eating

Čedok (☎ 542 321 267; Nádražní 10/12) and the tourist information office can book student dormitories (from 180Kč per person) during July and August, and private rooms year-round (from 550Kč per person).

Obora Camping (☎ 546 223 334; www.autocampobora.cz; tents per person 80Kč, dm 200Kč; ☎ May-Sep) At the Brněnská přehrada (Brno dam) northwest of the city centre. From the main train station, take tram 1 to the zoo then change to bus 103. Get off at the seventh stop.

Traveller's Hostel (☎ 542 213 573; www.travellers.cz; Jánská 22; dm incl breakfast 290Kč; ☎ Jul-Aug) Set in a grand old building in the old town, this has the most central, cheap beds in the city.

Penzion Na Starém Brně (☎ 543 247 872; www.penzion-brno.com; Mendlovo nám 1a; s/d incl breakfast 850/1050Kč) An atmospheric Augustinian monastery conceals five compact rooms that come reader-recommended.

Rebio (☎ 542 211 110; Orli 16; mains 60-90Kč; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat) has risottos, vege pies and tasty desserts, while **Spolek** (☎ 542 213 002; Orli 22; mains 70-100Kč; ☎ 10am-10pm Mon-Sat) is an unpretentious and coolly bohemian spot with good salads and pasta. Self-caterers should head to the Tesco supermarket 300m south of the main train station through a pedestrian tunnel.

At the **Pivnice Pegas micro-brewery** (Jakubská 4), try the refreshing wheat beer with a slice of lemon.

Getting There & Away

There are frequent buses from Brno to Prague (130Kč, 2½ hours, hourly), Bratislava (110Kč, 2½ hours, hourly) and Vienna (200Kč, 2½ hours, two daily). The departure point is either the bus station or near the railway station opposite the Grand Hotel. Check your tickets.

All trains travelling between Berlin and Budapest via Prague stop at Brno (160Kč, three

hours, every two hours). If you're travelling on to Vienna, change trains at Břeclav.

TELČ

pop 6000

The **information office** (☎ 567 243 145; nám Zachariáše z Hradce 10; www.telc-etc.cz; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-4pm Sat & Sun) is in the town hall; you can check email here (1Kč a minute).

Telč is a quiet and pretty town – a good place to relax with a book and a glass of wine. Its vast and unspoilt old town square, ringed with Gothic arcades and elegant Renaissance façades, is a Unesco World Heritage site. At the square's northwestern end is its greatest monument, the **Water Castle** (☎ 567 243 821; tours in English adult/concession 140/70Kč; ☎ 9am-11.45am & 1-5pm Tue-Sun May-Aug, to 4pm Apr, Sep & Oct), a jewel of Renaissance architecture.

At **Hostel Pantof** (☎ 776 887 466; www.pantof.cz; nám Zachariáše z Hradce 42; dm 300Kč, d 800Kč; ☎ Jul-Aug) a relaxed atmosphere and rooms overlooking the square add up to one of the country's best hostels.

Look forward to B&B service at (almost) hostel prices at **Garni Penzion Vacek** (☎ 567 213 099; www.penzionvacek.cz; Mlýnská 104; s/d incl breakfast 400/800Kč).

Telč's hipper young citizens crowd **U Marušky** (☎ 605 870 854; Palackého), a buzzy restaurant with good-value food and drinks amid cool jazz.

Buses from České Budějovice to Brno stop at Telč (90Kč, two hours, two daily); there are five buses a day to Prague (120Kč, 2½ hours). The bus station is on the eastern side of town.

CZECH REPUBLIC DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

You'll have to show your passport when checking in at accommodation in the Czech Republic – some older places may insist on keeping it for the duration of your stay, but you can demand it back when your details are registered. If they hang on to it, get it back before you leave!

Klub Mladých Cestovatelů (KMC: Young Travellers Club; ☎ 222 220 347; www.kmc.cz; Karolíny Světlé 30, Prague 1) is the HI affiliate in Prague, and books hostel accommodation throughout the country. In July and August many student dormitories be-

come temporary hostels, and some in Prague are now year-round backpacker hostels. Only Prague and Český Krumlov have a choice of backpacker-oriented hostels.

Dorm beds costs around 400Kč in Prague, and 300Kč to 350Kč elsewhere; book ahead. An HI-membership card is not usually needed, but it may get you a reduced rate. An **ISIC** (International Student Identity Card; www.isic.org), **ITIC** (International Teacher Identity Card; www.isic.org), **IYTC** (International Youth Travel Card; www.isic.com) or **Euro26 card** (www.euro26.org) may also secure discounts.

Another category of hostel accommodation is *turistické ubytovny* (tourist hostels), providing basic (175Kč to 300Kč) dormitory accommodation. Book these through the local tourist office or KMC branch.

There are private rooms in most tourist towns (look for signs reading *privát* or *Zimmer frei* – like B&Bs without the breakfast). Tourist offices can book them for you; expect to pay from 300Kč to 500Kč per person outside Prague. Some have a three-night minimum-stay requirement. These are classified as beds per person in reviews.

Penzióny (*pensions*) are a step up – small, homely and often family-run, but offering rooms with private bathroom and often breakfast too. Rates range from 1000Kč to 1500Kč for a double room (1750Kč to 2500Kč in Prague).

Hotels in central Prague and Brno are expensive, but in smaller towns are much cheaper. Two-star hotels usually offer reasonable comfort for about 600Kč to 800Kč for a double, or 1000Kč to 1200Kč with private bathroom (about 50% higher in Prague).

The Czech Republic has several hundred camping grounds; most are open from May to September and charge from 60Kč to 100Kč per person. Camping on public land is forbidden.

For more information on the seasonal price variations in Prague, see p289. Outside Prague, hotel and *pension* rates can fall by up to 40% in low season (October to March).

ACTIVITIES

There is good hiking in the Šumava hills south of Český Krumlov, in the forests around Karlovy Vary and in the Moravian Karst area north of Brno. Canoeing and rafting are popular on the Vltava River around Český Krumlov (p296), and the whole country is ideal for cycling and cycle touring.

BUSINESS HOURS

Outside Prague, almost everything closes on Saturday afternoon and all day Sunday. Most restaurants are open every day, other businesses are generally open the following times:

Banks ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon to Fri

Bars ☎ 11am-11pm daily

Post Offices ☎ 8am-6pm Mon to Fri and 8am-noon Sat

Shops ☎ 8.30am-5pm or 6pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon or 1pm Sat

CUSTOMS

Customs officers can be strict about antiques and will confiscate goods that are even slightly suspect. There is no limit to the amount of Czech or foreign currency that can be taken into or out of the country, but amounts exceeding 500,000Kč must be declared.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Pickpockets can be a problem in Prague's tourist zone, and there are occasional reports of robberies on overnight international trains. There is intense racism towards the local Roma population, which sometimes boils over into assaults by gangs of skinheads on darker-skinned people.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Embassies & Consulates in the Czech Republic

Most embassies and consulates are open at least from 9am to noon Monday to Friday.

Australia (☎ 296 578 350; www.embassy.gov.au

/cz.html; 6th fl, Klimentská 10, Nové Město) Honorary consulate for emergency assistance only (eg a stolen passport); nearest Australian embassy is in Vienna.

Austria (☎ 257 090 511; www.austria.cz; Viktora Huga 10, Smíchov)

Canada (☎ 272 101 800; www.canada.cz; Muchova 6, Bubeneč)

France (☎ 251 171 711; www.france.cz; Velkopřevraská nám 2, Malá Strana)

Germany (☎ 257 113 111; www.deutschland.cz; Vlašská 19, Malá Strana)

Ireland (☎ 257 530 061; pragueembassy@dfa.ie; Tržiště 13, Malá Strana)

Israel (☎ 233 097 500; info@prague.mfa.gov.il; Badeniho 2, Bubeneč)

Netherlands (☎ 233 015 200; www.netherlands.embassy.cz; Gotthardská 6/27, Bubeneč)

New Zealand (☎ 222 514 672; egermayer@nzconsul.cz; Dykova 19, Vinohrady) Honorary consulate providing emergency assistance only (eg stolen passport); the nearest NZ embassy is in Berlin.

Poland Embassy (☎ 257 099 500; www.prague.polemb.net; Valdštejnská 8, Malá Strana); Consulate (☎ 224 228 722; konspol@mbox.vol.cz; V úžlabině 14, Strašnice) This is the place to get visas.

Russia (☎ 233 374 100; embrus@tiscali.cz; Pod Kaštany 1, Bubeneč)

Slovakia (☎ 233 113 051; www.slovakemb.cz, in Slovak; Pod Hradbami 1, Dejvice)

South Africa (☎ 267 311 114; saprague@terminal.cz; Ruská 65, Vršovice)

UK (☎ 257 402 111; www.britain.cz; Thunovská 14, Malá Strana)

USA (☎ 257 022 000; www.usembassy.cz; Tržiště 15, Malá Strana)

Czech Embassies & Consulates Abroad

Australia (☎ 02-6290 1386; www.mzv.cz/canberra; 8 Culgoa Circuit, O'Malley, Canberra ACT 2606)

Canada (☎ 613-562 3875; www.mzv.cz/ottawa; 251 Cooper St, Ottawa, Ontario K2P 0G2)

France (☎ 01 40 65 13 00; www.mzv.cz/paris; 15 Ave Charles Floquet, 75007 Paris)

Germany (☎ 030-22 63 80; www.mzv.cz/berlin; Wilhelmstrasse 44, 10117 Berlin)

Ireland (☎ 031-668 1135; www.mzv.cz/dublin; 57 Northumberland Rd, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4)

Netherlands (☎ 070-313 0031; www.mzv.cz/hague; Paleisstraat 4, 2514 JA The Hague)

New Zealand (☎ 09-522 8736; auckland@honorary.mzv.cz; Level 3, BMW Mini Centre, 11-15 Great South Rd, Newmarket, Auckland; PO Box 7488, Auckland)

South Africa (☎ 012 431 2380; www.mzv.cz/pretoria; 936 Pretorius St, Arcadia, Pretoria 0083)

UK (☎ 020-7243 1115; www.mzv.cz/london; 26 Kensington Palace Gardens, London W8 4QY)

USA (☎ 202-274-9100; www.mzv.cz/washington; 3900 Spring of Freedom St NW, Washington, DC 20008)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Prague Spring (www.festival.cz) International music festival in May.

United Islands (www.unitedislands.cz) World music festival, held in Prague in June.

Loveplanet (www.loveplanet.cz) Rock and hip-hop festival, held in Prague in August.

Five-Petalled Rose Festival (www.ckrumlov.info/docs/en/atr40.xml) Medieval festival, held in Český Krumlov in June.

Karlovy Vary International Film Festival (www.kviff.com) Held in July.

Český Krumlov International Music Festival (www.auviex.cz) Held in July and August.

Dvořák Autumn Classical music festival, held in Karlovy Vary in September.

Prague Autumn (www.pragueautumn.cz) International music festival in September.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Prague Saints (www.praguesaints.cz) is the most comprehensive online source for English-language information.

HOLIDAYS

New Year's Day 1 January

Easter Monday March/April

Labour Day 1 May

Liberation Day 8 May

SS Cyril and Methodius Day 5 July

Jan Hus Day 6 July

Czech Statehood Day 28 September

Republic Day 28 October

Struggle for Freedom and Democracy Day

17 November

Christmas 24 to 26 December

INTERNET RESOURCES

Czech Tourism (www.czechtourism.com) Official tourist information.

IDOS (www.idos.cz) Train and bus timetables.

Prague Information Service (www.prague-info.cz)

Official tourist site for Prague.

PragueTV (www.praguetv.cz) Independent city guide.

MONEY

Currency

The Czech crown (Koruna česká; Kč) is divided into 100 hellers (haléřů; h). Banknotes come in denominations of 20, 50, 100, 200, 500, 1000, 2000 and 5000 Czech crowns; coins are of 10, 20 and 50 hellers, and one, two, five, 10, 20 and 50 Czech crowns. Keep small change handy for use in public toilets, telephones and tram-ticket machines. For more information on costs and money, see p36.

Exchanging Money

There's a nationwide network of ATMs (*bankomaty*). The main banks – Komerční banka, Česká spořitelna, ČSOB and Živnostenská banka – are the best places to change cash and travellers cheques or get a cash advance on Visa or MasterCard. American Express and Thomas Cook offices change their own-brand cheques without commission.

Beware of the private exchange offices (*směnárna*), especially in Prague – they advertise misleading rates and often charge exorbitant commissions or 'handling fees'.

Credit cards are widely accepted in petrol stations, midrange and top-end hotels, restaurants and shops.

Tipping

Tipping in restaurants is optional but increasingly expected in Prague. If there is no service charge you should certainly round up the bill to the next 10Kč or 20Kč (a 5% to 10% tip is normal in Prague). The same applies to tipping taxi drivers.

POST

General delivery mail can be addressed to Poste Restante, Pošta 1, in most major cities. For Prague, the address is: Poste Restante, Jindřišská 14, 11000 Praha 1, Czech Republic. International postcards cost 11Kč.

TELEPHONE

The international access code is ☎ 00 and the Czech Republic's country code is ☎ 420. All Czech phone numbers have nine digits – you must dial all nine for any call, local or long

distance. Make international calls at main post offices or directly from phonocard booths. Phonecards are available from post offices and newsstands stores for 150Kč to 1000Kč.

VISAS & DOCUMENTS

Everyone requires a valid passport (or identity card for EU citizens) to enter the Czech Republic. Citizens of EU and EEA countries do not need a visa for any type of visit. Citizens of Australia, Canada, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, Switzerland and the USA can stay for up to 90 days without a visa; other nationalities do need a visa. Visas are not available at border crossings or at Prague's Ruzyně airport; you'll be refused entry if you need one and arrive without one.

Visa regulations change from time to time, so check www.czech.cz, or one of the Czech embassy websites listed on p299.

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