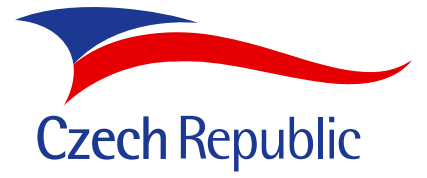


Rich in History







Magic Crossroads

Whenever European nations were set in motion, they met in a rather small area called the Czech Republic today. Since the early Middle Ages, this area was crossed by long trade routes from the severe North to the sunny South; at the beginning of the first millennium, Christianity emerged from the West, and at its end communism arrived from the East. For six hundred years, the country was an independent Czech kingdom, for three hundred years, it belonged among Austro-Hungarian Empire lands, and since 1918 it has been a republic. In the 14th century, under the Bohemian and German King and Roman Emperor Charles IV, as well as in the 16th century under the Emperor Rudolf II, the country enjoyed a favourable position in European history and also played a great role internationally in the arts and in social affairs. In 1989, the whole world admired the Czechoslovak “velvet revolution” lead by charismatic dramatist Václav Havel, which put an end to socialist experimentation.

Numerous famous architects, who built Romanesque churches in Germany but were no longer commissioned to build in their home countries due to the coming Gothic period, succeeded there; at the same time, the French type of Gothic architecture took root in Bohemia. A number of Italian Renaissance or Baroque architects, painters and sculptors, who crossed the Alps to find new opportunity for creating master works and look for well-paid jobs, were hired by members of Czech nobility and clergy; astonished by the mastery of Czech builders and craftsmen with whom they cooperated, they created wonderful castles and breathtaking Catholic churches. This may be seen in several hundreds of masterpieces of architecture – castles, châteaux, churches and cathedrals, complete historic cities – including twelve gems listed in the UNESCO heritage list.

A number of times, entire cities and lands were burned down and destroyed by wars or by ideologies, even more devastating, making thousands of exiles flee from terrible absurdities of the time; however, they brought with them the Czech sense of inspiration, as e.g. Comenius his humanistic spirit, Antonín Dvořák his music, Miloš Forman his art of film-making, or Martina Navrátilová her tennis playing. Recent modern DNA tests proved what historians had only assumed: 51 % inhabitants of the historic lands of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, which form the Czech Republic, are of Slavonic origin, the others bear genetic codes of their Roman, German, Jewish, Finno-Ugric, and South-Caucasian ancestors.

1. The memorable Říp mountain – a symbolic place where Czech history started. According to an old legend, the primal father Czech chose this particular beautiful countryside surrounding it as a home for his people.

2. The rotunda on the top dates back to the beginning of the Czech state.



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Once Upon a Time...

Unlike attractive Czech models as Eva Herzigová, Karolina Kurková or Petra Němcová, who represent the well-known beauty of Czech girls in the world, the 11,5 cm clay statue of Venus of Věstonice had – according to the standards of ancient men, mammoth hunters of 30 000 years ago, – ideal proportions. This famous statuette was excavated in 1925 in South Moravia, where archaeologists unearth fascinating objects from the past even today. Among them, there are numerous objects from the earliest West Slavonic empire in the 9th century (the Great Moravian Empire – in Latin Moravia Magna): bones, ceramics, jewels, guns and even special witchcraft tools found in ritual graves, which fascinate people looking at finds from excavation sites or visiting the Anthropos museum, an outstanding archaeological museum in Brno.



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Lovers of mystery and magic may prefer visiting a magic cult mountain that bears an old Celtic name, Radhošť, in the Beskydy mountains, which is said to have been the seat of Radegast, a kind of Slavonic “Zeus”, who had power over thunder and lightening. Another legend tells a story of a mysterious clairvoyant prophetess, Princess Libuše, daughter of the legendary primal father Czech: standing on a steep rock over the river Vltava she fell in a trance and prophesied immortal glory to the town of her future descendants – Prague. Also Alfons Mucha, a famous Art Nouveau artist, had his unbounded imagination, focused on the nation’s blurred early past, thrust upon giant canvases of his Slavonic Epic, exhibited in the Moravský Krumlov castle.

1. Venus of Věstonice – the oldest ceramic human figure in the world

2. Exhibits in the Anthropos Pavillon of the Moravian Land Museum in Brno give evidence of the earliest settlement in Moravia and on the entire European continent

3. Vyšehrad – the legendary seat of Princess Libuše

4. The oldest Czech rulers depicted in unique wall paintings, the rotunda of St. Catherine in Znojmo

5. The three metres high statue of God Radegast on the Radhošť mountain.



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Christian Tradition

The Baroque place of pilgrimage called “Baptism” situated in the heart of Moravia, a masterpiece built by Jan Santini, a great Czech architect, resembles one of the places where the first Christian missionaries Konstantin and Method are said to have baptised pagans. Both Greek apostles, later canonized and declared patron saints of Europe, arrived in this country in 863 invited by Prince Rastislav from the Great Moravian Empire to celebrate the Mass, teach the new religion, and spread it in the Slavonic language. The basilica at Velehrad, their legendary seat, was favoured with a symbolic Golden Rose by the Pope in 1985; it is the greatest honour enjoyed, among others, by Lourdes in France, Guadeloupe in Mexico, or Czenstochowa in Poland. Earlier in the past, Bohemia, the western part of the country, was under the influence of Latin Christianity from neighbouring Germany. The first Czech rulers were ardent Christians. The





most famous Czech priest Master Jan Hus, who was a great church reformer in the 15th century inspired by John Wicleff, died at the stake for the purity of Christian faith. He became a martyr and his tragic death brought about one of the biggest religious conflicts in the Middle Ages – the Hussite wars. Later, the Catholic world order was consistently forced upon Czech inhabitants by the church, especially in the Baroque period. The church did not hesitate to use huge sums of money for building monumental churches, monasteries, places of pilgrimage, for providing them with magnificent decoration including valuable rare organs, and for developing all art forms. Then in his reform from 1781, the enlightened Emperor Joseph II limited Catholic influence to a large extent and radically opened the door to modern reason, human progress, science and technology. In the 19th century, national problems in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, where Catholicism was part of the official state ideology, contributed to most Czech people’s reserved attitude to religion. Last but not least, socialist atheism, forced on people most recently, also strongly contributed to this attitude. Today, in a country with the highest density of religious monuments, it is merely a third of the population that declare to have any religious beliefs.



1. The pilgrimage chapel of St. Sebastian on the Holy Hill near Mikulov
2. The pilgrimage church of St. Mary in Křtiny near Brno – a Baroque master work by architect J. B. Santini
3. The panel painting of the Virgin Marie Deštová from mid-14th century in Vyšehrad, Prague
4. The basilica in Velehrad, consecrated by the Pope, is one of the most memorable Catholic monuments in the Czech lands
5. The Santa Casa in the Loretto, Prague, is one of the most often visited places of pilgrimage.
6. The Sculptural group of St. Adalbert and his brother Radim, Liblice on Cidlina, is a reminder of early Christianity in Slavonic Central Europe.



Jewish Culture

An old legend says that the first Jews settled in the area of Czech lands before the arrival of Slavonic tribes – allegedly shortly after the Romans destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem (70 A. D.). From the historical point of view, there is proof that Jewish settlements had existed by the 10th century at the latest. The Jewish Quarter in Třebíč was listed in the UNESCO heritage list as the first Jewish monument outside Israel; others are part of larger complexes (e.g. the unique complex of historic monuments in Prague’s Old Town includes the Old Jewish Cemetery, with its 12 000 tombstones the largest in Europe, and one of the oldest Jewish buildings in the world – the Old-New Synagogue from the 13th century).



1.,2.,3. The Old Jewish Cemetery in Prague is one of most significant Jewish monuments in the world.

4. The Old-New Synagogue and the Jewish Town Hall are the core of the former Prague ghetto.

5. The New Synagogue (Neuschul) in Třebíč dates back to 1669.

6. Inscriptions on the Pinkas Synagogue walls evoke memories of Czech and Moravian Jewish holocaust victims.

7. The Great Synagogue in Pilsen is the second biggest synagogue in Europe and the third in the world.



The Jews lived in all historic Czech towns, isolated from the Christian world for a long time. They followed their own laws and had a different way of life, which was associated with a number of mysterious stories and with mystical learning. Most of them were poor, some were incredibly rich. The atmosphere of Prague's famous Jewish ghetto, the works of the Renaissance thinker Rabbi Judah Löw ben Bezalel and his Golem, an artificial creature made of clay that was brought to life thanks to the rabbi's profound knowledge of kabbalistic learning, inspired innumerable writers to give various accounts of a mysterious city within a city. Since the 19th century, the Jews' orthodox inner and outer isolation eased gradually; Czechs, Germans, and German speaking Jews lived together, and this peaceful co-existence gave birth to significant personalities of modern Jewish literature: Gustav Meyring, Franz Werfel, Max Brod and Franz Kafka...

Unfortunately, Jewish history is full of intolerance, degradation, violence and pogroms. These tragic events culminated in the Czech lands during World War II, when German Nazis deported 84 % Czech Jews to concentration camps, usually through Terezín, a "gathering and transition" camp, where, in addition to Czech and German Jews, also Austrian, Dutch, Danish, Hungarian and Slovak Jews (140 000 people in total) were interned.



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Prague – a Great City Whose Glory Touches the Stars

At the end of the last century, young Americans flooded Prague: it was cool to see the Paris of the East, supposedly the most beautiful historic city in the world, even more exciting because of the fact that it had been hidden behind the communist iron curtain for half a century. Its monumental panorama showing the Prague Castle over the river Vltava with a medieval stone bridge straddling the river is depicted in millions of tourist pictures. Prague is admired for its incredible concentration of historic monuments in all styles of architecture including avant-garde fads designed by world-famous modern architects. The historic city centre is situated on both sides of the Vltava: on the one side, the Old Town with its Gothic





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streets and magnificent churches, on the other, the Lesser Town with beautiful Baroque churches, Renaissance palaces and gardens lying below the castle, the biggest presidential seat in the world. With a guide-book in the pocket, one may endlessly wander in the city and look for masterpieces of architecture, bookshops, antique shops, museums, galleries of Czech glass, auction rooms, and perhaps also for well-known gourmet pubs, merry beer gardens, Czech life-style boutiques and fashion designers' shops, or may relax in large old parks and on the river islands. Those who settled in Prague for good cannot stop praising its distinctive atmosphere filled with culture, its music clubs, music festivals, street theatres, alternative film shows, numerous sports events, wonderful shops, dynamic job opportunities, business prospects, and scientific potential. Like New York not being the same as America, also Prague is rather a non-Czech city – it is a unique European city living its own life.



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1. A magnificent view of Prague from the top of St. Vitus Cathedral at the Prague Castle

2. Churches, palaces, and narrow streets create a charming atmosphere in the most picturesque Prague quarter – the Lesser Town.

3. The medieval Old Town Hall Clock was constructed in 1410 by clockmaker Mikuláš from Kadaň. The oldest parts of the clock are a mechanical clockwork and an astronomical face showing positions of celestial bodies.

4. The Old Town Square – the centre of Prague history

5. An exhibition of photos in Prague Castle gardens

6. The statue of Czech patron saint St. Wenceslas on horseback gave name to the former horse market – today the busiest Prague square.



6



Historic Towns

The main square in the town of Telč looks like a scene from a fairy tale filmed by a director with powerful imagination: there are rows of Renaissance gables in sugary pastel colours, three Gothic churches with spires, a Baroque fountain, and a plague column in the middle. The city centre is surrounded by medieval ramparts and in its vicinity there is a group of ponds reflecting the blue sky and high summer clouds. Telč and also other forty Czech towns are authentic well-preserved historic monuments. The most attractive ones are Český Krumlov, a unique Gothic-Renaissance town with crooked medieval streets and a huge castle over the river (the second biggest in the country after the

1. Český Krumlov – a unique holiday town at the foothill of Šumava
- 2.,4. Old towns are attractive scenes of historic celebrations, markets, and folk festivals.
3. Kroměříž – the Květná garden with a summerhouse in Italian style
5. Telč – a Renaissance gem in the South of Czech-Moravian Highlands
6. Třeboň – a medieval city protected by a ring of fortifications and a massive dike of the Svět pond



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Prague Castle), Kutná Hora, one of the richest towns in Europe in the past, because a third of the world's silver was mined there in the Middle Ages, splendid towns of Olomouc, a seat of archbishops, and Kroměříž, famous for its gardens and art collections, Znojmo, a winegrowing town. Moreover, Czech historic cities are not quite open-air museums; local inhabitants live their everyday lives in peace there and, on some occasions, hold various cultural events, music festivals, theatre festivals, historical celebrations and pilgrimages.



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1

Medieval Treasures

A member of the Luxemburg dynasty, the most significant European ruler in the late Middle Ages Charles IV (1316—1378), was brought up at the French royal court, but in his heart he belonged in the country of his mother, the Czech Queen Elisabeth, the last of the Přemyslides. Born in Prague, he started to govern the Czech Kingdom as a seventeen-year old, first to replace his absent father and after his father's death as the king. After being elected King of the Roman-German Empire (1346), he rebuilt Prague, made it a magnificent metropolis and the seat of the oldest university north of the Alps. His knowledge of astrology and the then popular mysticism is said to have contributed to a number of his important decisions: e.g. the foundation stone of the



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famous Prague bridge was supposedly laid, in order to protect it, at a magic moment at dawn: at 5.31, on 9.7., in 1357. He died in his beloved Prague, and was buried in the tomb of Czech kings in St. Vitus Cathedral, which he had built at the Prague Castle. The building boom brought the best architects and other artists of the Gothic period to Prague and gave rise to imposing cities, noble cathedrals, monasteries of catholic orders that were growing rich, inaccessible castle complexes. Since the 13th century, the Gothic style influenced Czech architecture for as long as three hundred years.



1. In the course of centuries, the medieval town of Znojmo developed on the steep slopes of the Dyje river.

2. Christ on the Mount of Olives (14th century), by Master of the Třeboň altar, is one of the treasures of the National Gallery in Prague.

3. St. Prokop's basilica in Třebíč – a master work of late Romanesque architecture

4. St. Vitus Cathedral at the Prague Castle

5. Czech coronation jewels – symbols of Czech kings' power

6. The metropolitan cathedral in Olomouc is situated close to the site of an ancient Přemyslid castle.





1

Italy of the North

Italian artists brought Renaissance architecture from the sunny South to Bohemia. However, they soon integrated into the society of the new country, which had a strong Gothic tradition; together with local architects, builders, sculptors, painters, and masters of all crafts, they created an original Czech Renaissance architectural style, adapted to the relatively rough climate. As they had no building stone, they used bricks; palaces, splendid gables of burgers' houses, and château facades were decorated not only with rich graffito scenes, but also with typical graffiti known as "letter envelopes" imitating stonework.



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1. *The Royal Summer Palace of Queen Ann (Bevedere) in Prague*

2. *The Big Ball Game House in Prague Castle gardens*

3.,4. *Emperor Rudolf II (depicted as Vertumnus by Giuseppe Archimboldo, 1590), not only collected art, but also invited outstanding artists of his time to Prague.*

5.,6. *Graffito houses in Slavonice*

7. *Polychromic gilded grill at the courtyard of the Jindřichův Hradec castle (1604)*



Since the second part of the 15th century, after the dramatic period of Hussite wars, which manifested the distinctive Czech reformation of the Catholic church (1419—1471), with the Jagiello family coming to the Czech throne, the Czech countryside and cities became more inviting and welcoming. A gloomy medieval way of life and also medieval architecture were replaced by cheerful Renaissance in the arts, in thinking and in living. Refined flowerbeds in castle gardens with singing fountains, gazebos overgrown with wild grapevine, and comfortable summerhouses were attractive places for light-hearted assignments. The applied arts and the art of living set the trend for noblemen's way of life; they grew rich thanks to profits from fields, forests, vineyards and newly founded ponds, which provided the famous Czech fish for royal tables all over Europe. Under the rule of the art-loving and extravagant Emperor Rudolf II (1576—1612), surrounded by obscure alchemists and astrologists as well as the best scholars of his time, the Prague Castle became not only a curiosity repository, but also a real treasury of European art, comparable only with Venice or Milano.





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2

The Baroque Storm

The monumental Baroque culture reflected well enough the political situation in Czech society – dramatic emotions, passion and asceticism, big gestures, and humbly sinking down on one’s knees in front of too much light or loud organ music from above. The Czech Protestant noblemen were defeated by the Catholic Habsburg Emperor Ferdinand II in the battle at the White Mountain ((1620), their possessions subsequently confiscated; the Thirty Years War broke out, and was followed by ardent recatholization. All these events made a large number of prominent Czech personalities emigrate, gave

1. The organ loft in the church of Our Lady of the Snows in Olomouc

2.,3. The church of St. Nicholas in the Lesser Town in Prague – a master work by K. I. Dientzenhofer

4. Vranov on Dyje – a medieval castle was rebuilt into a monumental chateau.

5. Splendid rooms of a large chateau in Jaroměřice on Rokytná are evidence of the rich social life of the owners, generous patrons of opera.

6.,7. The Kuks castle beautifully integrated into the surrounding countryside, architecture and statues by the greatest Czech Baroque sculptor M. B. Braun



rise to unbounded arrogance of the newly rich, such as the warrior Albrecht of Wallenstein, caused an inflow of foreign noblemen, who competed for power with the ruling Catholic church.

The church representatives, especially from the Jesuit Order, invited to Bohemia elite European artists, who, like many times before, found new inspiration in Bohemia. With the help of local craft and genius, they created a unique form of the Czech Baroque style connected with the names as Santini, Dientzehofer, Kaňka, Brokoff, Braun, or Brandl. On the one hand, this monumental style of architecture may be seen in superb churches, monasteries and places of pilgrimage, noble palaces built on the ground plans of entire town sectors, profligate châteaux surrounded by large parks and game preserves; on the other, surprisingly, its folk variant may be also found in rural structures, such as country farm houses, water mills, parish houses, chapels, which intensify the natural beauty of the dynamically rounded Czech countryside, and may be felt in numerous places evidencing great heartfelt popularity of the Virgin Mary and the martyr St. John of Nepomuk.





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My People from Prague Understand me



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In no other city did Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart feel as happy as in Prague. The opera *Figaro's Wedding*, which had left Vienna's audience bored, was a sensational hit in Prague at the end of 1786. In January, soon after its premiere, Mozart arrived in Prague to conduct it himself and could not believe his eyes when he heard Prague craftsmen whistling his arias in the streets. His immortal opera *Don Giovanni*, composed in Prague itself, was also a great success. The Czechs truly understood music; the saying "Each Czech is a musician" was born in the 18th century. In the past, music was the most famous of all the arts, and the country was called "Europe's conservatoire". Actually, the first Academy of Music (founded in Prague in 1811) became so famous that many well-known foreign artists, to add to their prestige, declared to have studied there. Czech musicians influenced the European music scene as outstanding



performers, music teachers, conductors and composers. Josef Mysliveček (1737—1781), an opera composer, Mozart’s friend and model, was adored immensely and called *Il divino Boemo* (a divine Czech) in Italy; Jan Dismas Zelenka (1679—1745), a composer, is often compared to J. S. Bach. Jan Václav Antonín Stamic (1717—1757), a Czech musician at the court in Mannheim, gave rise to today’s sonata form and symphony form.

Definitely, the most popular Czech composers in the world are Bedřich Smetana (1824—1884) and Antonín Dvořák (1841—1904), whose ninth symphony in e-minor, *The New World*, accompanied the American astronaut Neil Amstrong, the first man on the Moon, during his trip to outer space. Nowadays, it is Leoš Janáček (1854—1928), an original composer who created distinctive music, that is being recognised more and more. The tradition of high quality Czech music is developed every year in the form of numerous music festivals and countless concerts, where music of all genres is performed. However, the most frequently played Czech piece of music is undoubtedly the polka “Roll out the Barrel”, originally called “Škoda lásky”, by Jaromír Vejvoda.



1. *The Antonín Dvořák museum in Prague is situated in the Baroque Amerika Pavillion*
2. *Czech cultural events include music festivals of all genres.*
3. *Antonín Dvořák*
4. *House At the Three Fiddles in Neruda street illustrates the atmosphere of music in the old Prague.*
5. *Music events often add to the beauty of historic monuments (a chamber music concert in St. George’s Basilica at the Prague Castle).*



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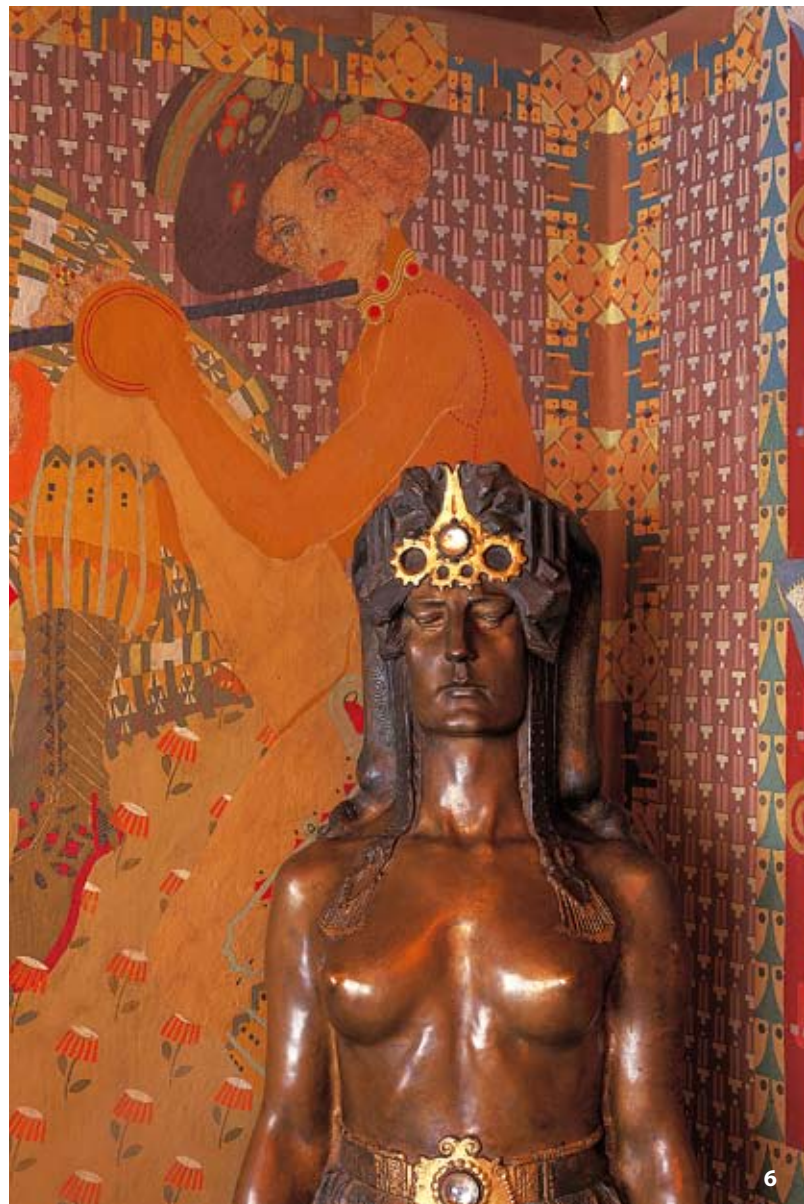
Belle Epoque

The Eiffel Tower, a symbol of the free-thinking France called “the Lighthouse of the Modern Times”, has a two years younger (1891) and five times smaller (60 m) sister standing on the Petřín hill in Prague; this observation tower affords a similarly magnificent view of historic roofs, spires, and also of white housing estates on the horizon. The tower was born in the framework of a big industrial trade fair, which proved that the Czech element in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy had, after three centuries, rallied and taken a new dynamic breath.

The end of the 19th century supported pure science and enthusiastic study, technical innovation, and women’s liberation. Then also sport, done for exercise and amusement, was introduced because a healthy mind could be only in a healthy body. Members of the Club of Czech Tourism themselves built many other observation towers and started discovering local beauty spots; they also invented an ingenious tourist path marking system (unique in the world, today totals 40 000 km crisscrossing the whole of the Czech Republic);



in the Czech mountains numerous mountain chalets were constructed. Since 1874, every autumn a great steeplechase cross-country, the most difficult horse course on the European continent – also a big fashion show – was held in Pardubice. People danced at balls in new Art Nouveau town palaces and travelled to various spas. The health resorts, in addition to wonderful curative effects due to combining mineral springs, thermal springs, bog baths, and the beneficially soothing power of their beautiful surroundings, always provided attractive social life. Many renowned Czech spas as Karlsbad, Marienbad, Františkovy Lázně were visited by innumerable famous people; they provided plenty of opportunity for unexpected meetings, an example being the love story of more than eighty-year-old J. W. Goethe and young Ulrika von Levetzow. Moreover, decadent artists, neurosis, hypnosis and hysteria contributed to the spirit of the time; perhaps Sigmund Freud, a native of the Moravian town of Příbor, might tell some stories about that.



1. Wooden Art Nouveau mountain chalets in Pustevny in Beskydy, designed by architect D. Jurkovič, financed by Moravian tourists

2. An Art Nouveau gem in the centre of Prague – The Municipal House – is the centre of Prague’s cultural and social life.

3. The Emperor’s Bath in Karlsbad

4. Unique in the world, dancing lessons and etiquette classes for teenagers were introduced in the 19th century.

5. A well-designed hydroelectric power station at the Hradec Králové lake, built by architect F. Sander

6. The Art Nouveau National House in Prostějov shows a perfect taste of its architect J. Kotěra and his collaborators.



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Black Coal, White Sugar

Not only castles and châteaux, but also historic water mills, breweries, ironworks, lime works, waterworks, bridges, railway stations, mining towers, and factories are part of the typical picture of Czech and Moravian towns and countryside. They appeared mostly in the course of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century, when almost 70 % of the Austro-Hungarian Empire's total industrial production concentrated in the Czech lands.

Thanks to its ample raw materials, especially rich in black coal resources, limestone, iron ore deposits, its population size, and maybe the highest railway network density in Europe, the Czech lands became one of the most developed industrial countries. The best-known industries were, in particular, coal mining, iron and



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steel production in the Ostrava region in northern Moravia, and also in the Kladno region near Prague, extensive beet sugar production (including lump sugar, a convenient beverage sweetener, which was invented in Dačice in Moravia), world-famous hop growing – the Saatz variety from Žatec, beer production (especially the light lager Pilsner Urquell, which gave its name to a general type of beer), textile industry, glassworks, shoe industry founded in Zlín by the Baťa family, products of engineering industry, and Škoda cars. At the same time, a number of industrial premises, technical buildings or power stations were designed by prominent architects and added to the reputation of their owners.



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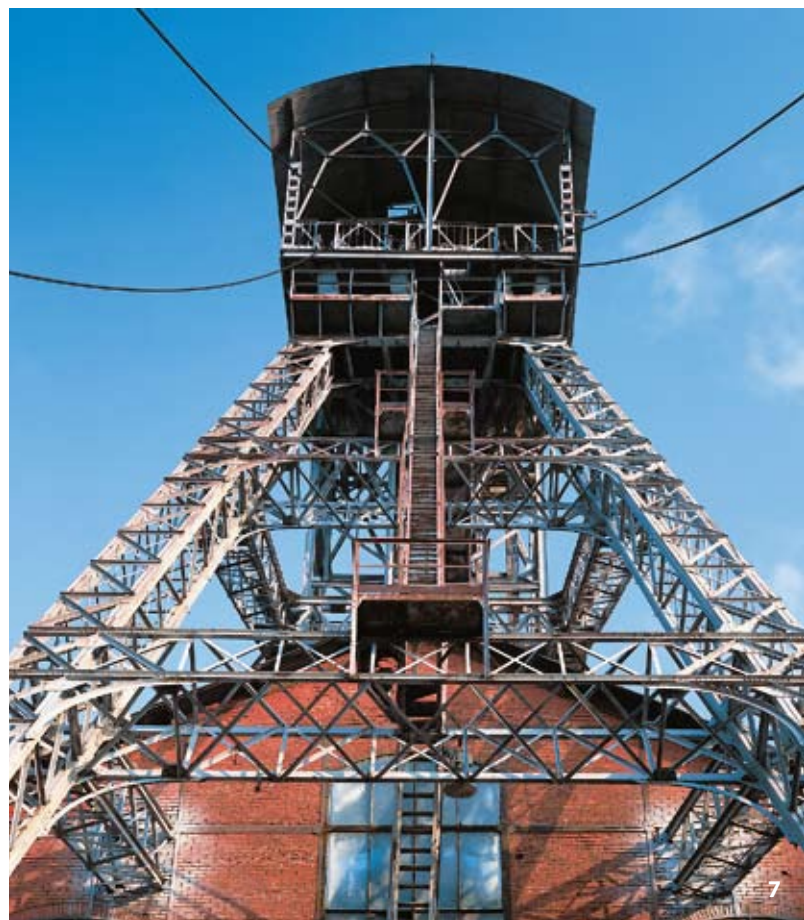
1.,2. Waterworks and a water purification plant, still working, in Podolí, Prague (1929)

3. The water purification plant in Bubeneč, Prague, from the early 20th century, houses the Eco-technical Museum.

4. Blast furnaces in former iron works in Ostrava-Vítkovice, nominated to be listed in the UNESCO heritage list

5. Pardubice's automatic mill buildings, designed by the famous Czech architect J. Gočár

4.,7. A mining tower and other unique facilities and machines in the complex of the former Michal mine, open to the public, evidence of the mining tradition in the Ostrava region



7



1

Rise and Fall

Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, the first president of the Czechoslovak Republic, is often compared to George Washington. On 28th October 1918, at the end of World War II, which led to the demise of the then unstable Habsburg Austro-Hungarian Empire, a new independent state was created comprising a group of historic lands: Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, Slovakia, and Transcarpathian Ukraine. President Masaryk, a proponent of modern sociology and a humanistic philosopher promoting cooperation of nations and personal freedom, became a symbol of the period called the first republic.

The period was short-lived as it took mere twenty years until the Munich Agreement in 1938; yet all generations hit by the post-war socialist development recall it nostalgically as an example of a well-organized and efficient democracy. The euphoria of the first freedom years was followed, in the 1930s, by a period of the world-wide economic crisis and,



2



3

at the same time, gathering fascist war clouds. Although Czechoslovak citizens were determined and ready to face the German threat and provided the borders with a unique fortification system, the country fell one of the first victims to Hitler's crazy plans. It became the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, did not enter the war actively, but experienced wartime atrocities: the sad fate of Lidice and Ležáky, two villages brutally obliterated by the Nazis in 1942, will leave a bloody scar in people's hearts forever.



4



5

1. House At the Black Mother of God is an example of the original Czech use of Cubism in architecture (J. Gočár).

2. Jan Zrzavý's Kleopatra and other outstanding modern works are exhibited in the National Gallery in Prague.

3. Memorial to the Lidice victims

4. After 1926, future technicians and designers of the famous Škoda car factory in Mladá Boleslav studied at a new industrial school designed by J. Kroha

5,6. The Králové Hradec Museum building and most of its furnishings were designed by the founder of modern Czech architecture J. Kotěra



6



Family Silver

The most striking change that anyone who had visited the socialist Czechoslovakia before 1989 will notice may be seen in the colours in today's streets and in people's minds. The sad grey country with miserable citizens, fed up with decades of communist rule, woke up as a sleeping beauty; it has straightened up, wants to join the world and eagerly tries to make up for the lost time.

Czechoslovakia became part of the so-called Eastern bloc shortly after World War II. As it was agreed by the Allies, it was liberated by the Soviet Army; moreover, communist ideals fit very well in the era of the post-war constructive enthusiasm. After the election in 1948, the model pre-war democracy moved in the direction of socialism.

In the first years of communist rule, political trials took place, as a result of which some people were executed and many sentenced to forced labour in uranium mines; then in the sixties, the country experienced a reform spirit, subsequently leading to the "Prague Spring" in 1968 and resulting in a military invasion carried out by five Warsaw Pact states. In the next twenty years, a period of "normalisation" with strict censorship and powerful secret police followed. The socialist Czechoslovakia readily took pride in its "family silver", even though it was inherited





from the country's capitalist predecessors. It went on exporting outstanding Czech beer and hops, Bohemian crystal, Petrof pianos, as well as iron and steel, Zetor tractors, Tatra and Škoda cars, railway engines, tramways, or guns. Before socialist realism, a pretentious art form, had time to take root in the country, the Czech works of art and architecture were a great success at the EXPO world exhibitions (Laterna Magika, a unique audio-visual project, in Brussels in 1958, and Kinoautomat, a famous film project, in Montreal in 1967). Apart from uniform prefab housing estates, also some quality structures were erected, e.g. a transmitting tower on the Ještěd mountain, awarded by a prestigious international Perret prize. In addition to those who wanted to please the regime, there were other authors who did not bow their heads to communist rule, such as the poet Jaroslav Seifert (a Nobel prize winner in literature in 1984), or the dramatist Václav Havel. Today, talented Czechs are no longer obliged to emigrate to be able to voice their views, as was the case with Milan Kundera in 1975. Many of them are demanded in the world, e.g. hockey players Jaromír Jágr and Dominik Hašek, the football player Pavel Nedvěd, or the skier Kateřina Neumannová; however, they are still natives to the Czech Republic.



1. The Brno Trade Fair is a traditional trade fair complex, unique for its Functionalist architecture.
2. Škoda works in Pilsen, known for the production of cars, tramways, aeroplanes and ships
3. Fine aromatic hops grown near Žatec guarantee outstanding taste and smell of Czech beer, exported world-wide.
4. Aero, an aircraft factory, extended its range of products in 1929 to produce an original "small car for big travels".
5. The Dancing House at the Vltava river (called Ginger and Fred), an exceptional work of architecture internationally, by Frank O. Gehry and V. Milunič (1995)



The Ještěd hill near Liberec completes the story of Czech architecture by a symbolic combination of modern technologies, outstanding architecture, and beautiful countryside. Its TV tower and a mountain hotel, designed by K. Hubáček, awarded by a European prestigious August Perret prize in land architecture, is a challenge to the 21st century.



This indicates officially certified accommodation facilities



This indicates official tourist information centres

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