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TRIP TO PRAGUE (CZECH REPUBLIC) 15 – 19 December 2003

Prague, the main city of the ancient Asburgo Empire, is nowadays one of the most interesting destinations in Europe. It's really huge and full of historical and charming monuments; it's still the most important connecting point between Eastern and Western Europe.

Luckily, this wonderful Bohemian city has been partly saved from the bombs during the second World War and at present it still has an extraordinary rich architectural patrimony: gothic buildings with high vertical lines, wealthy palaces in baroque style, typical cubist building fronts and much more. It's a mix of different, historical and modern architectures that will let you astonished!

A trip to Prague can easily be low cost. One of the cheapest Airlines which connects Europe and Czech Republic is Czech Airlines, that we used too, and for some months, also Smart Wings. Czech Airlines was very comfortable and the flight Venice-Prague costed only 120 euro round trip per each.

Concerning the accommodation, we advise you not to book the hotels in the travel agencies, because here they cost more than booking them by Internet. If you are interested in some hotel, just look for it online. We stayed at City Centre Hotel (we had seen it on a brochure and then we booked it by internet because it was cheaper). We must immediately admit that it's not so beautiful, considering that it's a 3-star hotel and, above all, breakfast is not too good. However, we advise you that because it's very cheap and it's settled in a perfect position: it's in the city centre, exactly opposite to **Obecní dům**, a building in art nouveau style that at present hosts international music festivals and the most important concerts in Europe. Just next to it you can admire the old and high tower in gothic style, that is the main entrance to the old city. Thus, this hotel is settled exactly in the heart of the city and it's also very close to the underground stop.

THINGS TO SEE

First of all, you'd better know there is a special card, called Prague Card, that lasts 4 or 5 days, thanks to which you can take for free all the public transportation ways and you can have discounts when you visit museums and monuments. Included in the price you can also have a small tourist guide of Prague. But be careful: you'd better decide, before leaving, the things you want to visit, just to be sure that you use the Prague card. Actually, we didn't use it very much, since we almost never took transportation ways because we lodged in the city centre and, besides, most of the monuments we visited were free and some not included in the Prague card.

Prague is overlooked by a castle ([Pražský hrad](#)): it's a monumental complex of religious buildings, fortresses, residential palaces where in the past the Bohemian kings used to live and that became the seat of the president in 1918. There are lots of steps to reach this complex of buildings, but they worth it because, when you arrive on the top, you'll have a wonderful bird eye view of the city and, moreover, while going up, you can see lots of small stalls which sell original souvenirs.

Among the beauties to visit, you can not loose the **St. Vitus Cathedral**: it's in the third courtyard of the castle and it's the biggest church of the city. In gothic style, this monumental three aisled building was founded by Charles IV in the year 1344 and it's the spiritual symbol of the Czech state. Here there are the jewels of the coronation of Bohemian kingdom. The visitors can enter the tomb, the choir and the tower.

Close to it, you can visit the old **Royal Palace**, that was the seat of the kings until the Asburgo come and decide to transport the royal residence to the western part of the castle. In this palace you can admire the room of Vladislav, where, since 1934, there are the elections of the presidents.

This complex of monuments also hosts the **St. George's Basilica**, the oldest church in Prague. It's composed by a baroque front and by a Romanic architecture, that was renovated at the beginning of 19th century. In the Basilica there are the prince Vladislav's tomb and the ones of other princes. The building is nowadays used for concerts.

Furthermore, you can not loose the famous **Golden Lane**, a very thick and short street delimited by small and coloured houses of 16th century. In the past they were the homes of castle riflemen and craftsmen (it's said that Franz Kafka used to work here too); nowadays there are souvenir shops, where you can find beautiful handmade objects.

The real heart of the city, where the day and night life of Prague's inhabitants and tourists pulsates, is the square [Staromestske Namesti](#): the most historical and beautiful one in the city, it was built in 12th century and here there are the most important events in Prague. Since we went there before Christmas, this square was full of stalls, like all the other parts of the city. But here there is the most characteristic Christmas market, where you can warm your self by drinking a good wine.

In this square you can admire the charming **Tower with the Astronomical Clock**, that is in gothic style, with lots of rich decorations that astonish the tourists because of their beauty. On the top of the astronomic clock, built in 15th century, the 12 apostles appear every hour between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m.

Always in this square, you can see the huge and wonderful **Church of Our Lady before Tyn**, the most impressive gothic sacral building in Prague! Its construction lasted 2 centuries (from 14th to 16th) and, in the late 17th century, the church interior was rebuilt in the baroque style.

Walking among the crowded streets full of shops of the old city, you will surely reach the **Charles Bridge**, the oldest bridge in Prague, called like that because it was commissioned by Charles IV in 1357. Both ends of the bridge are fortified by towers and you can go on them where you can have a wonderful sight of the city. Moreover, 30 sculptures of saints were gradually set on the bridge piers and they were created from 1683 to 1928. We advise you to have a walk on this spectacular bridge, firstly because from here you can admire the two banks of the city on the river Moldava, with lots of huge and coloured buildings and, secondly, because on the bridge there are lots of artists, above all painters and sculptors and it's a pleasure to see (sometimes to buy) their works.

Furthermore, we even decided to have a romantic cruise on the river Moldava and, luckily, even if it was winter, the sun shined during the whole hour of our tour, so the city was brilliant, the sight from the river was simply wonderful and the photos turned out to be very beautiful!

We advise you then not to forget to visit the **Jewish District**, that is really huge and you can buy a ticket which allows you to see all the stages in a certain order, so that you don't lose anything. Since the time needed to see all the district is at least 3 hours, we advise you to go there in the morning, because everything closes around 16.30, when it's already dark, at least in Winter. In fact, even if we had already bought the ticket with all the stages, we couldn't see everything, both because we were tired and because we went in the afternoon and something was already closed.

This district is very interesting because it's the only Jewish one in Europe to be survived to the Holocaust. You can visit the museum and the old Jewish graveyard (this last one is very impressive, with 12000 tombstones one up the other), six synagogues, most of which have walls painted with names of people who died, and Kafka's house. But we unadvised you this last one because inside there is not much, a part from CD and DVD about the famous writer, just to make tourists spend their money.

Concerning museums, theatres and art galleries, Prague is full of them. We can say that this city doesn't miss culture! We advise you to visit the **National Museum**, the oldest one in the city; it was founded in 1818 and it's located in a huge neo-renaissance building that dominates the Wenceslas Square, which is so beautiful with its gardens. This museum is at the end of a very long and large boulevard, where you can find the most luxurious shops!

We have visited only the **Museum of Toys**, the second biggest one in the world according to the toy exhibition. There are the very old ones but also the modern ones. The elegance and the attention for particular things in the doll houses of 19th century are really impressive.

SHOPPING

Concerning shopping, we must admit that Prague surprised us: we thought that a city of eastern Europe (that nowadays is part of United Europe) could have low prices. But it was not true. In Prague there are huge boulevards with beautiful stores of the most important brands in the world and, obviously, they are very expensive.

Even the Christmas markets were not cheap. There were lots of original objects and lots of sweets that here don't exist. But all the prices were high.

The most popular souvenirs are the objects made by Bohemian crystal. You might know they are so beautiful and there are of every kind, shape and price. We bought a small crystal blue vase.

RESTAURANTS

Differently from shopping, eating out in Prague is really very cheap! At least you pay the half price than here. There are restaurants of every kind and there are lots of Italian ones, where the food is very good. It's usually rare to find good Italian restaurants abroad, but we assure you that, from this point of view, Prague looks like Italy!

Moreover, there are lots of fast foods, open until midnight, and lots of pubs where you can eat while listening to some good jazz music.

MONEY

Even if Czech Republic entered United Europe in 2004, its money is not euro, but crown. 1 Czech Crown = 0,0336 euro. It's always advisable not to change money in the airports, but directly in the city. There are lots of exchange points. It happened to us that a man stopped us

along the street because he wanted to change our money with his one, telling us that it was a very advantageous exchange, but we didn't trust him!

USEFUL LINKS

Airlines:

<http://www.csa.cz/en/>

<http://www.smartwings.net/>

Underground:

http://www.metroweb.cz/index_e.htm

Mini guide by Lonely Planet:

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/worldguide/destinations/europe/czech-republic/prague>

Czech Tourism Office:

<http://www.czechtourism.com/>