

# Prague

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Prague is the capital city of the Czech Republic. It is the seat of the President, the Government and both houses of Parliament. It is situated on the Vltava river. Prague has 1.3 million inhabitants. The oldest parts are the Old Town, The Lesser Town, the New Town, Josefov, Hradčany and Vyšehrad.

## History

According to legend, Princess Libuše of the Přemyslid dynasty prophesied the future glory of Prague which would touch the stars. The city was established in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. In the Middle Ages, it was the seat of princes and later kings. Prague flourished during the reign of Charles IV in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Charles IV established an Archbishopric (1344), founded Charles University (1348) and the New Town. He also promoted the construction of Charles Bridge and St. Vitus Cathedral. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Prague was the centre of the Hussite movement. In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Thirty Years' War began with the uprising of the Czech Estates. In 1620 they were defeated in the Battle of the White Mountain. In 1621, 27 representatives of the uprising were executed in the Old Town Square. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Prague became the centre of Czech cultural life when Czech scholars began the process of the National Revival. The National Theatre was built to express the feeling of national pride. In 1918 Prague became the capital city of the independent Czechoslovak Republic. In 1939 it was occupied by German troops. Prague was witness to the assassination of one of the most powerful people in Nazi Germany, Reinhard Heydrich, in 1942. The August occupation of Prague in 1968 stopped the democratic reforms in the country. Jan Palach and Jan Zajíc committed suicide to protest against the 'normalization' of the country. On the 17<sup>th</sup> November, 1989, the Velvet Revolution began democratic changes in the society. In 1993, after the split of Czechoslovakia, Prague became the capital of the Czech Republic.

## Prague Castle

Prague Castle is the seat of the President. It is the largest ancient castle of the world. It was founded in around 880 by Prince Bořivoj. The complex includes three courtyards and over 700 rooms, for example the late Gothic Vladislav Hall, Spanish Hall and Rudolph Gallery. The most impressive building in the complex is St. Vitus Cathedral. It was founded by Charles IV. It holds the treasury of the Czech coronation jewels. The Royal Crypt contains the sarcophagus of Czech kings and queens.

## Charles Bridge

Charles Bridge is the oldest bridge in Prague. It is 520 meters long and 10 meters wide. It is decorated with 30 sculptures and groups of statues mainly of Baroque origin. The bridge replaced the Judith Bridge which had been damaged by a flood. While the bridge was being built, the builders added eggs to the mortar to make a strong substance to hold the bridge together.

## Old Town Square

The square features buildings belonging to various architectural styles. The most popular tourist attraction is the Prague Astronomical Clock. It is situated on the southern wall of Old Town Hall. Among other famous buildings belong the house At the Stone Bell, Kinský Palace and the Týn church.

## Wenceslas Square

Wenceslas Square is the heart of the New Town. It is 750 metres long. The upper end of the square is closed by the Neo-Renaissance building of the National Museum, which contains historical and natural history collections. St. Wenceslas Memorial stands in front of the museum.

### **National Theatre**

The National Theatre was built from the desire of the Czech people for national independence. The construction of the building was financed by contributions from the public. The ceremonial laying of the foundational stone became a national event. The theatre was opened in 1881 and burned down in the same year. It was reopened in 1883 by the opera *Libuše* by Bedřich Smetana. Today, it consists of three artistic ensembles: opera, ballet and drama.

### **The Estates Theatre**

The Estates Theatre is near the Old Town Square. In 1787 the world premiere of Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni* took place there. In 1834 the song 'Where Is My Home?' by the composer František Škroup and the playwright Josef Kajetán Tyl was played there for the first time. It became the Czech national anthem.

### **Vyšehrad Castle**

Vyšehrad Castle was probably built in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. It is located on the right bank of the Vltava river. The Basilica of St. Peter and St. Paul, the Vyšehrad Cemetery and Rotunda of St. Martin are situated within the fort. Many famous people from Czech history are buried there, for example Antonín Dvořák, Bedřich Smetana, Karel Čapek and Jan Neruda.

### **Petřín**

Petřín is a hill in the centre of Prague, which is covered with parks. It is a favourite recreational area for the inhabitants. There is the famous Petřín Lookout Tower, which was built in 1891. It is often described as the small version of the Eiffel Tower. There is also a mirror labyrinth and the Prague Municipal Observatory.

### **Culture**

Prague hosts many cultural events. Some of the significant cultural institutions include the National Theatre, the Estates Theatre, the Rudolfinum and the Municipal House. The Rudolfinum is home to the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra and the Municipal House is home to the Prague Symphonic Orchestra. The Prague State Opera performs at the Smetana Theatre. The city has many museums and galleries, for example the National Museum, the National Gallery, the Museum of the Capital City of Prague, the Jewish Museum and the Náprstek Museum. Prague also hosts various music festivals including the Prague Spring International Music Festival. Many films have been made at Barrandov Studios and at Prague Studios.

### **Transport**

Prague has one of the best public transportation systems in Europe. You can use the subway, buses, trams, trains, funiculars and ferries. The Metro has three lines. A fourth Metro line is planned, which would connect the city centre to southern parts of the city. In the edge of Prague-Ruzyně area there is Václav Havel Airport. It is one of the largest and busiest airports in central and eastern Europe.

### **Doplňující otázky**

1. What legend is connected with the foundation of Prague?

According to legend, the princess Libuše and her husband, prince Přemysl, ruled over the Czech lands from the hill of Vyšehrad. One day Libuše had a vision. She said: 'I see a great city whose glory will touch the stars.' She instructed people to go and build a castle where a man was building a threshold of a house. 200 years later the city of Prague became the seat of the Přemyslid dynasty.

2. What contributions did Charles IV make?

He established an Archbishopric, founded Charles University and the New Town and promoted the construction of Charles Bridge and St. Vitus Cathedral.

3. Who was Jan Palach?

Jan Palach was a Czech student. His self-immolation was a political protest against the end of the Prague Spring resulting from the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact armies.

4. What happened in Prague in 1989?

On 17<sup>th</sup> November 1989, around 15,000 students gathered in Prague to honour the memory of Jan Opletal. After the official end, they continued from the Czech National Cemetery to Wenceslas Square calling for democratic reforms. They were stopped at Národní Street. The students offered flowers to the police shouting rhythmically: 'We have bare hands' and singing. The police began to beat the demonstrators. The day was the impulse for great changes to come. The period between 17<sup>th</sup> November to 29<sup>th</sup> December is called the Velvet Revolution. Václav Havel became the President. In 1990, the first democratic elections were held.

5. What do you know about Charles University?

Charles University is the oldest and largest university in the Czech Republic. It was founded in 1348 by Charles IV as the first university in Central Europe. The historical main building from the 14<sup>th</sup> century called Carolinum is situated in the Old Town. Today, the university consists of 17 faculties.

6. What are the main attractions in Hradčany and the Lesser Town?

They include the Prague Castle with the St. Vitus Cathedral, the Charles Bridge, the Saint Nicholas Church, the Church of Our Lady Victorious and Infant Jesus of Prague and the Petřín Hill.

7. What are the main attractions in the Old Town?

They include the Old Town Square with the Astronomical Clock, the Church of Our Lady before Týn, the Old New Synagogue, the Old Jewish Cemetery, the Powder Tower and the Municipal House.

8. What cultural events does Prague host?

One of the most significant cultural events is the Prague Spring International Music Festival. It opens every year on 12<sup>th</sup> May – the anniversary of the death of Bedřich Smetana – with his cycle of symphonic poems *Má vlast*. Artists and orchestras of the highest quality are invited to perform there. The festival includes works of famous composers as well as world premieres of compositions by contemporary authors.

9. Which famous writers lived in Prague?

They include Franz Kafka, Jan Neruda, Karel Čapek, Jaroslav Hašek and Jaroslav Seifert.

10. What is Prague Zoo famous for?

It has contributed significantly to saving Przewalski's horse. In 2004, the first Western Gorilla was born in the Czech Republic.

11. What souvenirs do tourists buy in Prague?

Tourists often buy Marionettes, Bohemian glass, wooden toys, Czech garnets, Mucha posters and books of fairytales.

12. What traditional food should foreign tourists taste in Prague?

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They should try roast pork with cabbage and dumplings, beef sirloin with cream sauce, fruit dumplings and beer.

13. How can you travel around Prague?

You can use the Metro, buses, trams, trains, funiculars and ferries.

### **Důležitá slovíčka**

inhabitants	(inhebitents)	obyvatelé
prophecy	(profesáj)	věštit
flourish	(flariš)	vzkvétat
uprising	(aprajzin)	povstání
assassination	(asasinejšn)	atentát
mortar	(mórtr)	malta
threshold	(trešhould)	práh
self-immolation	(self-imolejšn)	sebeupálení
marionette	(merijonet)	loutka
Czech garnet	(ček gánit)	český granát
sirloin	(srlon)	svíčková
funicular	(fjunikjular)	lanovka
ferry	(feri)	trajekt