

Prague

Prague is the capital city of the Czech Republic and also the largest one. It is in central Bohemia on the banks of the river Vltava. There are more than 1.2 million people living in Prague. Prague is an important political, financial, cultural, educational and historical centre. It is the seat of the Czech president, the Czech government and Parliament and many other institutions.

Prague has been an important centre for many centuries, especially since the 13th century when its Old Town was built. Famous people connected with Prague include for example Matthias of Arras and Peter Parler who started to build the Saint Vitus Cathedral, brothers Dienzenhofers, who created many beautiful sculptures and buildings. There were also many famous composers, singers, musicians who lived and worked in Prague – for example the famous opera singer Ema Destinová, the composers W.A.Mozart and L.van Beethoven. Many composers are also buried in Vyšehrad cemetery - B. Smetana, A. Dvořák.

Prague is often called “Golden Prague”, “The mother of Cities”, “Hundred-spined Prague” because of its numerous monuments, towers and domes of different periods. Prague is worth visiting and many tourists come here every year. Among the most interesting places is the Royal Route, which got its name in the past when the Czech kings used this route at the time of their coronation. The first ruler who used this route was Charles IV. This Route begins at the Powder Tower and leads through Celetná Street to the Old Town Square, to the Hradčany ramp where you can have a beautiful view of Prague and where you can see the whole route and finally you get to the castle and Saint Vitus cathedral.

The Powder Tower is a gothic entrance tower into the Old Town. The Old Town Square is the oldest and most important square in Prague where people can admire Old Town Hall with its astronomical clock. The astronomical clock was first installed in 1410 and it became the third oldest astronomical clock in the world and the oldest one still working. The clock consists of three parts – the astronomical dial that represents the position of the Sun and the Moon, “the Walks of the Apostles” which is a show of figures of the apostles and other sculptures that appear regularly every hour (the figure of Death which is represented by a skeleton, strikes the time) and finally there is a calendar dial with medallions that represent the months.

Charles Bridge is the oldest and the most famous bridge in Prague. It was built by Peter Parler in gothic style in 1357 and replaced the Judith Bridge which was damaged during flood. The bridge is decorated with 30 baroque statues of saints on both sides.

Prague Castle is the largest castle complex in the world (it is written in the Guinness Book of World Records). It is a complex of several palaces, religious buildings, fortresses and houses. In the past it was the seat of the Czech kings and since 1918 it has been the seat of the Czech presidents. The most dominating place here is the Saint Vitus Cathedral which was designed by Peter Parler and Matthias of Arras. Many kings and queens are buried here. The coronation of the Czech kings took place in this Cathedral and inside the cathedral there are kept the Crown jewels. Vladislav Hall was built in late gothic style and became one of the most beautiful parts of the Prague Castle. Important political events take place in Vladislav Hall such as presidential elections, awarding state decorations and many others.

Other famous places of interest in Prague include The Lesser Quarter, which is known for its narrow streets, Wenceslas Square, which is one of the main city squares and it is the centre of business and cultural communities in the New Town in Prague. Many historical events took place here – such as demonstrations, celebrations and other public gatherings. The square is named after Saint Wenceslas, the patron saint of Bohemia.

In Prague we can also find the Jewish Quarter with its Jewish cemetery and synagogue.

The example of modern art can be the Dancing House which was built in the 1990s. The Dancing House is also called Dancing building or Ginger and Fred. It was designed by Frank Gehry in cooperation with Vlado Milunic. It was built on a place where the previous building had been destroyed by bombs during the WWII.

The design of the house was very controversial, a lot of people did not like it while others supported it. The house resembles a pair of dancers (Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers) who were one of the greatest dancing duos in the history of dance.

Prague is very cultural too, there are a lot of theatres, cinemas, galleries, museums such as the National Theatre, the State Opera House, National Museum, National Museum of Technology, the National Gallery.

Sport is also very popular in Prague. There are many possibilities where you can do some sports. Fans of golf can visit Golf Club Marina on Rohanský island, cyclists, surfers, fishermen can go to Hostivař Dam or the Vltava River, tennis players can visit Štvanice. Swimmers will enjoy their stay in the swimming pool in Podolí or in Aqua Palace. The most popular sports in Prague are football and ice-hockey, there are many teams in Prague, the most famous are Sparta and Slavia. To watch ice-hockey matches or to practice ice-skating you can go to O2 Arena which is a multifunctional building suitable not only for sports events, but also for cultural and entertaining events, concerts and markets.

In Prague there are also many parks, there is also a big Botanical garden and a ZOO. Prague is also famous for Petřín Hill and Observation which is a small version of the Eiffel Tower in Paris. The Observation tower was built in 1891 for the Jubilee Exhibition. The tower is 60m tall, it is on the top of Petřín hill and you can have a beautiful view of the whole Prague. On a clear day it is possible to see the highest peak in the Czech Republic, Sněžka, which is 150km from the tower.

There are many schools in Prague too. In 1348 the Charles University was founded and it was the first university in central Europe at that time. Other universities include the University of J.A. Komenský, College of Hotel and Spa Management, Metropolitan University, Economical University. There are also many secondary schools and each of 22 Prague districts has many primary schools.

To get from one place to another in Prague, people can use public transportation. The means of transport include buses, trams, the underground and also the railway to Petřín hill.