

# West Bohemia



Life's meant to be about balance, right? Relatively cocooned from Prague's tourist commotion, West Bohemia is the ideal destination to explore a balance of virtue and vice, good and (not so) evil.

Virtue is effortlessly on tap at the region's elegant spa towns, where visitors can immerse themselves physically and emotionally in the waters bubbling under the classy streets of Karlovy Vary, Mariánské Lázně and Františkovy Lázně. And when you're looking for an extra kick of spiritual guidance, take a bracing sip of Becherovka liqueur, the so-called '13th spring' of Karlovy Vary.

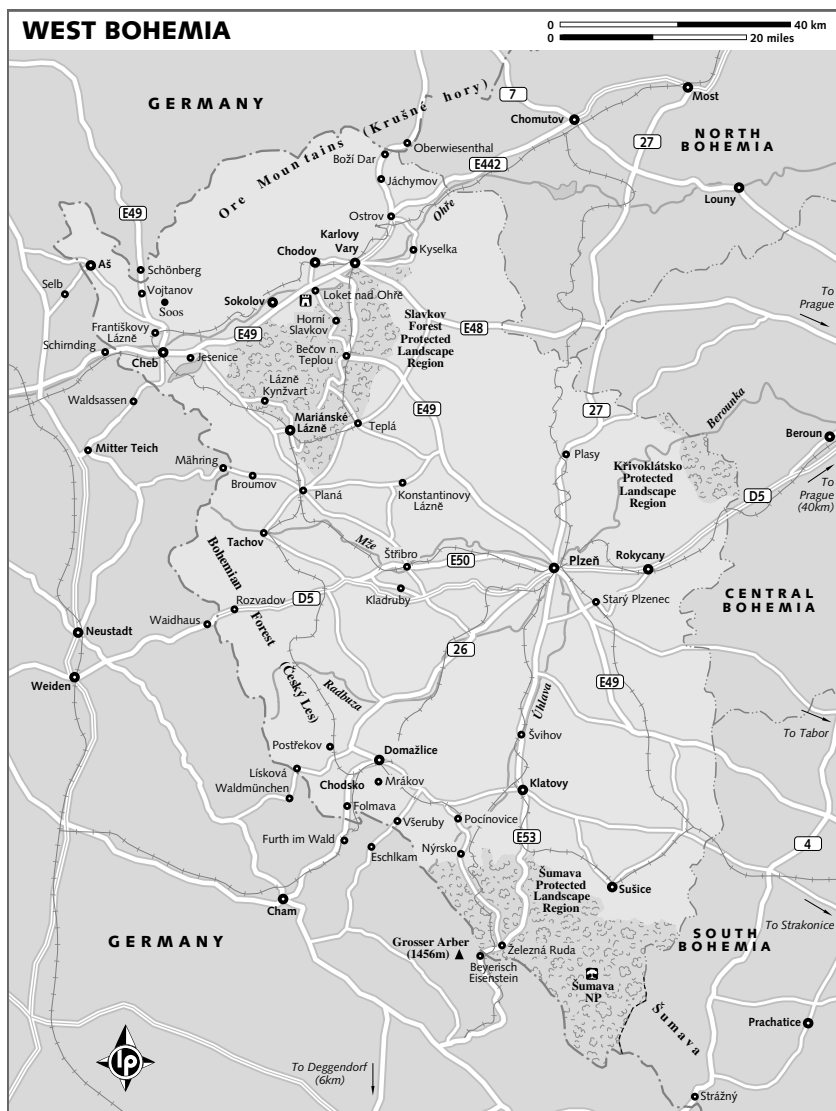
Balance is provided by the hearty and hoppy vice of West Bohemia's liquid gold. Plzeň's brewing alchemists created Pilsner Urquell, the world's first lager, way back in 1842, and there's no better spot for your first (or 100th) Pilsner Urquell than the underground caverns of the town's famous brewery. A passion for brewing infuses the entire region, and another essential stop is the Chodovar beer spa in the nearby village of Planá, where both of West Bohemia's famous effervescent liquids combine in glorious harmony.

By now you'll be ready to get active, and the town of Klatovy provides a convenient gateway to the rugged and rustic woodlands of the Šumava region bordering Germany. Welcome to the biggest national park in the Czech Republic, and scores of opportunities to hike, cycle and camp. Complete your West Bohemia sojourn with a couple of nights in the delightful town of Loket nad Ohřě. There's even hiking, river rafting, and an excellent local microbrewery if you're still seeking true balance in life.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Becoming a cosmopolitan 'culture vulture' at an elegant summertime music festival in **Mariánské Lázně** (p177)
- Discovering Karlovy Vary's other, more vibrant, face at the spa town's **July International Film Festival** (p186)
- Going underground to explore the heritage of **Plzeň** (p191), the original hometown of golden Pilsner
- Easing off the travel accelerator in the sleepy riverside town of **Loket nad Ohřě** (p188)
- Discovering the best way to sample Bohemia's golden brew at the **Chodovar Brewery's beer spa** (p181) in Planá





## FRANTIŠKOVY LÁZNĚ

pop 5400

With a buttery veneer of yellow park, well-tended parkland with statues and springs, and spa patients and tourists walking unbearably s...l...o...w...l...y, Františkovy Lázně (frantish-kovee larz-nee) is the archetypal spa town.

Beethoven and Goethe were Františkovy Lázně's most famous guests, but with the spa best known for the treatment of female infertility, they were more likely drawn by a lively cafe society. Today, the sidewalk cafes are relaxingly soporific, and late-night action is sound asleep. So, make a visit here just for a sleepy day.