

East Bohemia



First impressions are deceiving. The Polabí, the fertile area of plains radiating from the Labe River, is one of the flattest parts of the Czech Republic, but within these mundane landscapes lie a tally of the Czech Republic's most interesting provincial cities.

Urban contrast is manifest in the busy provincial capital, Hradec Králové, with architectural design, history and the Labe River dividing the fascinating old and new towns. To the south is Pardubice, its beautifully preserved Renaissance square and castle surrounded by a robust industrial halo. Nearby, the Renaissance splendour of the chateau at Litomyšl has achieved Unesco World Heritage recognition, while the fantastical art of Josef Váchal coerces a longer stay at one of Bohemia's provincial gems.

Head north from the Polabí and nature shakes things up crazily in the Adršpach-Teplice Rocks and Český ráj with eccentric and bizarre sandstone landscapes carved across the millennia. In Adršpach-Teplice, your climbing or hiking will involve traversing lakes and river valleys, while in Český ráj you're more likely to see a castle sharing the horizon.

Even further north, the Krkonoše (Giant) mountains escalate to the 1602m summit of Sněžka, the country's highest mountain. And while 1602m is minor league compared to the nearby Alps or High Tatras, there are enough alpine attractions to keep skiers, hikers and climbers active across all seasons. Come in winter for affordable skiing action, while in summer the resorts of Špindlerův Mlýn and Pec pod Sněžkou are transformed into adventure-sports hubs.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Discovering the multiple layers of **Hradec Králové's** (p206) fascinating architectural heritage
- Exploring the soaring landscapes and hidden rock pathways of **Český ráj** (p215)
- Relaxing amid the rustic alpine charm of **Pec pod Sněžkou** (p222) high in the Krkonoše mountains
- Negotiating the labyrinth of bizarre sandstone rock formations in the **Adršpach-Teplice Rocks** (p218)
- Strolling through the Renaissance arcades of **Litomyšl's** (p213) beautiful town square and World Heritage chateau





HRADEC KRÁLOVÉ

pop 95,000

Hradec Králové's (*hrar-detz kra-loave-vey*) contrasting architectural styles of different eras slice the East Bohemian capital in two. On the eastern bank in Staré Město, the old town frames the appropriately named Big Square (Velké nám) with an elegant sweep of arcades and facades encompassing Gothic, Renaissance and baroque styles. To the northeast, Little Square (Malé nám) continues the same architectural theme. West of the river, the new town, Nové Mešto, is a sprawl of grandiose art nouveau and functionalist buildings that are a fascinating contrast to the frounce and frills of the old town. Kept apart by both design and the Labe River, Hradec

Králové's unity is secured by the vibrancy of its bars and restaurants, plus a fine selection of galleries and museums that cast a non-judgemental eye over all the city's different histories.

History

Two rivers and a hill: the ideal foundations for a fortified town. And it didn't take long for the local warlords to notice. By the 9th century, a stronghold had been constructed at the confluence of the Labe and Orlice Rivers and within 300 years the fledgling city had become the administrative centre of East Bohemia.

Money flooded in and by the 14th century it was one of Bohemia's most important cities,