

# Welcome to Prague & the Czech Republic

*Prague is the equal of Paris in  
terms of beauty. Its history goes  
back a millennium. And the beer?  
The best in Europe.*

## European Hotspot

The 1989 Velvet Revolution that freed the Czechs from communism bequeathed to Europe a gem of a city to stand beside stalwarts such as Rome, Amsterdam and London. Not surprisingly, visitors from around the world have come in droves, and on a hot summer's day it can feel like you're sharing Charles Bridge with half of humanity. But even the crowds can't take away from the spectacle of a 14th-century stone bridge, a hilltop castle and a lovely, lazy river that inspired one of the most beautiful pieces of 19th-century classical music, Smetana's *Moldau*.

## Art All Around

Prague's art galleries may not have the allure of the Louvre, but Bohemian art offers much to admire, from the glowing Gothic altarpieces in the Convent of St Agnes, to the luscious art nouveau of Alfons Mucha, and the magnificent collection of 20th-century surrealists, cubists and constructivists in the Veletržní Palác. The weird and witty sculpture of David Černý punctuates Prague's public spaces, and the city itself offers a smorgasbord of stunning architecture, from the soaring verticals of Gothic and the exuberance of baroque to the sensual elegance of art nouveau and the chiselled cheekbones of cubist facades.

## Where Beer is God

The best beer in the world just got better. Since the invention of Pilsner Urquell in 1842, the Czechs have been famous for producing some of the world's finest brews. But the internationally famous brand names – Urquell, Staropramen and Budvar – have been equalled, and even surpassed, by a bunch of regional Czech beers and micro-breweries that are catering to a renewed interest in traditional brewing. Names you'll now have to get your head around include Kout na Šumavě, Svijanský Rytíř and Velkopopovický Kozel.

## Urban Explorations

Prague's maze of cobbled lanes and hidden courtyards, always beckoning you to explore a little further, is a paradise for the aimless wanderer. Just a few blocks away from the Old Town Square you can stumble across ancient chapels, unexpected gardens, cute cafes and old-fashioned bars with hardly a tourist in sight. One of the great joys of the city is its potential for exploration – neighbourhoods such as Vinohrady and Bubeneč can reward the urban adventurer with countless memorable scenes, from the setting sun glinting off church domes, to the strains of Dvořák wafting from an open window.



## Why I Love Prague

By Neil Wilson

How can you not love a city that has a pub with cushions above the gents' urinal, so you can rest your head while you 'go'? Where you can order a beer without speaking, simply by placing a beer mat on the table? And where the beer is probably the best in the world? But it's not just exquisite ale and a wonderfully relaxed drinking culture that keep bringing me back to Prague – there's wit and weirdness in equal measure: a public fountain where two figures pee in a puddle, spelling out literary quotations; a 1950s nuclear bunker hidden beneath a city-centre hotel; and a cubist lamp post. Quirky doesn't even begin to describe it.

**For more about our authors, see p352.**