

# Welcome to Prague & the Czech Republic

*Since the fall of communism in 1989, the Czech Republic – and its capital in particular – has evolved into one of Europe’s most popular travel destinations.*

## Prague, Cradle of Culture

Everyone who visits the Czech Republic starts with Prague, the cradle of Czech culture and one of Europe’s most fascinating cities. Prague offers a near-intact medieval core of Gothic architecture that can transport you back 500 years – the 14th-century Charles Bridge, connecting two historic neighbourhoods across the Vltava River, with the castle ramparts and the spires of St Vitus Cathedral rising above, is one of the classic sights of world travel. But the city is not just about history; it’s a vital urban centre with a rich array of cultural offerings, and a newly emerging foodie scene.

## Castles & Chateaux

The Czech Republic’s location at the heart of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire has seen a long history of raiding tribes, conquering armies and triumphant dynasties. This turbulent past has left a legacy of hundreds of castles – everywhere you look there seems to be a turreted fortress perched above a town, or a summer palace lazing peacefully amid manicured parkland. The number and variety of castles is simply awe-inspiring – everything from grim Gothic ruins clinging to a dizzy pinnacle of rock, to majestic, baroque mansions filled with the finest furniture that Europe’s artisans could provide.

## Folklore & Tradition

The Czech Republic may be a modern, forward-thinking nation riding into the future on the back of the EU and NATO, but it is also a country rich in tradition. This is most apparent in South Bohemia and Moravia, where a still-thriving folk culture sparks into life during the summer festival season. During this time, communities from Český Krumlov to Telč to Mikulov don traditional garb, pick up their musical instruments – and wine glasses – and sing and dance themselves silly, animating ancient traditions in one of the best examples of ‘living history’ in the Czech Republic.

## 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. Never before have Czech pubs offered such a wide range of ales – names you’ll now have to get your head around include Kout na Šumavě, Svijanský Rytíř and Velkopopovický Kozel.



## Why I Love Prague & the Czech Republic

By Neil Wilson, Writer

Well, there's the beer. Not only did the Czechs invent the best beer in the world, they've been reinventing it over the last decade with a wave of innovative new microbreweries. And the history. If you want to learn about European history, you'll find it all here compressed into an easily digested package – from Good King Wenceslas and the Defenestration of Prague to the Habsburg empire, two world wars, the Cold War and the Velvet Revolution. Then there's cubist architecture, weird art and the Czechs' deliciously dark sense of humour. And did I mention the beer?

**For more about our writers, see p320**