

# Understand the Czech Republic

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Amid a rapidly changing world political landscape, Czechs are struggling to find their own direction.

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From the centre of the Holy Roman Empire to a Habsburg backwater, Prague and the Czech Republic are back on top.

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Czechs find themselves coping with ethnic diversity while trying to remain true to their first love: ice hockey.

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The territory of today's Czech Republic was home to Franz Kafka, Milan Kundera and Miloš Forman.

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Czech beer is widely considered the world's best, and Czechs lead the league in per capita beer consumption.

# Prague & the Czech Republic Today

These days the Czech Republic finds itself caught up in the wider international debate over the benefits of EU membership and cross-border immigration. Three decades after the Velvet Revolution, visitors aren't likely to notice anything other than a thriving economy and bustling tourism sector, though the country's overall direction feels less certain than it has since the fall of communism.

## Best on Film

**Amadeus** (1985) Mozart's love affair with Bohemia gets brilliant treatment.

**Kolya** (1996) Velvet Revolution-era Prague never looked lovelier.

**Loves of a Blonde** (1965) Miloš Forman's 'New Wave' classic.

**Burning Bush** (2013) HBO miniseries on Jan Palach, the Czech student who immolated himself in 1969.

**Anthropoid** (2016) Big-budget WWII spectacle on the assassination of Nazi leader Reinhard Heydrich.

## Best in Print

**The Unbearable Lightness of Being** (Milan Kundera; 1984) Life before the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion.

**I Served the King of England** (Bohumil Hrabal; 1990) Prague's Hotel Paříž is the backdrop to this classic.

**The Castle** (Franz Kafka; 1926) Wonder which castle Kafka was thinking about?

**The Good Soldier Švejk** (Jaroslav Hašek; 1923) Hašek's absurdist novel is set throughout the Czech Republic.

**My Merry Mornings** (Ivan Klima; 1986) The sweeter side of life under communism.

## The Czech Republic & World Politics

Leaders and citizens of the Czech Republic have found themselves grappling with the consequences of the major international events of today, including the historic vote in the UK to leave the EU and the election of Donald Trump as US president.

While it's hard to pigeon-hole Czech President Miloš Zeman – an old-school socialist with political ties that go back to communist times – he's adapting to the new era of world politics. Zeman has embraced the Brexit vote and gone one step further, calling on the Czech Republic to hold a referendum on the country's membership in both the EU and NATO.

To outside observers, Zeman appears to be conforming to a pattern emerging from leaders all around Central Europe. Voters in Poland, Slovakia and Hungary have all brought to power in recent years politicians who remain suspicious of the EU and who place significant emphasis on the perceived negative effects – legitimate or overblown – of rapid social change, multiculturalism and immigration. Here, as with just about everywhere else, Czechs appear to be firmly – and even – divided on the issues.

## From Economic Crisis to Boom

After wallowing for years in the wake of the global recession, the Czech National Bank took a dramatic decision in 2013 to devalue the currency, the crown, by 5% with respect to the euro. The move took markets by surprise at the time and was roundly criticised as potentially reigniting inflation.

With hindsight, though, it can safely be said that the naysayers have been proved wrong. Boosted by big inflows of foreign investment (including massive, EU-funded capital projects) and a strong demand for Czech exports, the economy has boomed for the past