

# PRAGUE

Steeped in gothic spires, Velvet revolutions and divorces, Prague is a city that sweats history. **Christina Bridge** finds its bohemian heart

Alighting in Prague from The City Line overnight sleeper train from Cologne, you'll step out into the heart of a park shaped by Bohemia and Communism, where the cobblestones have been polished by the footsteps of princes, pilgrims, revolutionaries and peacemakers. Just a glance above will affirm why the city of Prague is known as "The city of a hundred spires."

The Imposing Powder Tower from 1475, aptly named for the gunpowder that lies hidden within its walls, is one of Prague's 13 original city gates, displaying a curious mix of 17 centuries. Baroque architecture sits atop a contemporary shopping mall consisting of over 100 international shops, Tankard only Beer Cellars snuggle up to four-hour lunch degustation style restaurants comparable to Heston Blumenthal's Fat Duck.

Prague is a long way to go to get drunk on Pilsner Urquell. Instead, keep your wits about you and trek across Wenceslas Square, where

the Good King Wenceslas, patron saint of the Czech Republic and the Christmas carol, was murdered by his brother in the 10th Century. Quite a few others met their untimely deaths there as well; 27 Czech lords in the Thirty Years War, a couple of martyrs called Jan: Hus and Palach, the former burnt at the stake in 1415, and then the latter burning himself in protest against the invasion of the Soviet troops in 1968. The Velvet Revolution, started by a group of students in November 1989, became so loud that it forced the communist government to resign, the Velvet Divorce that followed in 1992, divided the Czechoslovakian state into what is now known as Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

Knife and club wielding Romanesque statues guard the entrance to the largest castle complex in the world which houses three Cathedrals and a history of banquets, indoor jousting and coronations, along with a series of incidents

where officials were thrown out of windows. It's little wonder that Mission Impossible, Van Helsing, or xXx have all been filmed here.

Prague also has its fair share of modern surprises. The mini Eiffel Tower on Petrin Hill, where you can ride up in the funicular gives a great view of the city. On the other side of town, the Zizkov TV Tower, which has a permanent exterior installation of black climbing babies by Czech Artist David Czerny can seem quite unnerving as you ride up in the express elevator to the tower restaurant. You can wear out the same leather seats as Einstein and Kafka at the grand old Café Louvre and then check out the stage at the O2 Arena, where you can see Sade, Rihanna and Judas Priest among others. It's bohemian, sophisticated, and with such a violent, dramatic past, the contrasts in this compact city may leave you feeling unbearably light, and just a little drunk, on the poetic symbiosis of it all.



## SEE - THE CITY BY SEGWAY

VLAŠSKÁ 364/2  
118 00 PRAGUE-MALÁ  
STRANA  
+42 (0) 775 588 588  
WWW.PRAGUEON  
SEGWAY.COM

You can see Prague by participating in the International Marathon, or you can save your muscles and go on a Segway tour. There's the historical tour, the trip to the zoo and the one that takes you past the numerous locations of movies filmed in Prague. The guide has a portable LCD where you can view the film clip as you roll around town. There is also a similar route in an open-top bus, if you would rather sit down before dancing until dawn in the Vinohrady area of town.

## STAY - HOTEL JOSEF

RYBNA 20, 11000  
PRAGUE 1  
+42 (0) 221 700 111  
WWW.HOTELJOSEF.COM

Surrounded by medieval sculptures and a history lesson on every corner, let yourself indulge in a little tabula rasa, by staying in a highly minimalistic hotel. Open since 2002, the hotel designed by Czech architect Eva Jiricna, incorporates an innovative use of space and conceptual design ideas to create comfortable, futuristic-looking rooms with glass bathrooms, clear furniture and bright orange bed-covers in all-white rooms. Undeniably relaxing; sleep here to find your inner peace or just until you get over your hangover.



## EAT - V ZATISI

BETLEMSKE NAMESTI  
LILIOVA 1, PRAHA 1  
+42 (0) 222 221 155  
WWW.ZATISIGROUP.CZ

This is the kind of place you wish you found at the beginning of your trip. Chef Milan Horejs' new and creative 'degustation plates' served alongside an a la carte menu lets you mix and match to suit your palette. Tell them about your favourite wine and they'll compose a menu for it. There are three stunning rooms designed by Rony Plesl, one for a business style lunch, one for an intimate dinner and a private alcove. A choice dinner and friendly and knowledgeable staff to boot!

## DRINK - LA CASA DE LA HAVANA VIEJA

OPATOVICKA 28,  
NARODNI TRIDA  
PRAHA 1  
+42 (0) 222 523 858  
WWW.CASAHAVANA.CZ

As Czech Pilsner Urquell is served almost everywhere, why not drink rum? On its way to becoming a classic Prague hangout this dark and stylish leathered upholstered bar with over 100 different kinds of rum, would make any rum runner relax and have a Hemingway moment. A cocktail list apparently the length of Cuba and some serious vintage reserves of Irish Whisky with mellow Cuban tunes and hip shaking live music on a Wednesday and Thursday.



PHOTOGRAPHY: GHETU DANIEL, JESSICA CHANG FOR EAT ME MAGAZINE