

Chapter 7

CENTRAL EUROPE

7



a canvas for a single artist to show off recent work or for an exhibit on a particular theme (such as historic photographs of Basel). **Pros:** great location—only three tram stops away from the main station; excellent service; good choice of food and drink options. **Cons:** no air-conditioning; no elevator in the Art Hotel; some noise in rooms facing the tram. ☎ *Rooms from:* SF198 ☎ Leonhardsgraben 49, Altstadt ☎ 061/2611010 🌐 www.teufelhof.com ➡ 33 rooms 🍷 No Meals.

★ Grand Hotel Kronenhof

\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | A grand Versailles set amid mountain peaks, the Kronenhof is the pinnacle for rest, relaxation, and pampering, with gorgeous designs inside and out, a keen attention to detail, and a sprawling lawn perfect for admiring the views of Roseg Valley. **Pros:** beautiful grounds and location; excellent dining options; top-of-the-line children's facility. **Cons:** expensive for this area; hotel check-out could be more streamlined; more modern rooms lack character of the traditional ones. ☎ *Rooms from:* SF485 ☎ Via Maistra 1, Pontresina ☎ 081/8303030 🌐 www.kronenhof.com ☺ Closed early Apr.–mid-June and mid-Oct.–early Dec. ➡ 112 rooms 🍷 Free Breakfast.

★ Hôtel Palafitte

\$\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | Unique in Europe, this one-level hotel is partly built on piles on Lac de Neuchâtel, giving it unbeatable clear-day views that include the distant Alps. **Pros:** some rooms have ladders so you can descend directly into the lake for a swim; golf-cart-style vehicle shuttles guests to rooms; unique structure with loads of character. **Cons:** despite air-conditioning, strong sun may heat your room up; some glitches in maintenance; breakfast is expensive. ☎ *Rooms from:* SF560 ☎ 2 rte. des Gouttes d'Or, Monruz ☎ 032/7230202 🌐 www.palafitte.ch ➡ 40 suites 🍷 No Meals.

★ Hotel Royal Savoy Lausanne

\$\$\$ | **HOTEL** | After a six-year, top-to-bottom renovation, the historic Royal Savoy has been unveiled as the latest—and perhaps the finest—five-star hotel in all of Suisse Romande. **Pros:** excellent value for a five-star property; rooftop lounge provides a panoramic view over the lake; large spa area for a pampered soak in various marbled pools. **Cons:** gray interiors are not for those who dislike a neutral palette; moneyed guests (and some staff) give off a haughty vibe; outdoor pool is quite small. ☎ *Rooms from:* SF370 ☎ 40 av. d'Ouchy, Ouchy ☎ 021/6148888 🌐 royalsavoylausanne.com ➡ 186 rooms 🍷 No Meals.

★ Victoria-Jungfrau Grand Hotel & Spa

\$\$\$\$ | **RESORT** | **FAMILY** | Restoration has taken this 1865 grande dame firmly into the 21st century, with glitzy touches such as the burlwood entryway, a vast belle époque lobby that spirals off into innumerable bars and tea salons, and a sprawling spa with an elegant 1940s-style indoor pool, outdoor saltwater pool with lovely views, and substantial gym. **Pros:** central Interlaken location with view of Jungfrau; wonderful spa; elegant common areas. **Cons:** hotel layout can be confusing to navigate; some call this place overpriced; not all rooms have balconies. ☎ *Rooms from:* SF655 ☎ Höhweg 41, Interlaken ☎ 033/8282828 🌐 www.victoria-jungfrau.ch ➡ 216 rooms 🍷 Free Breakfast.

Czech Republic

The experience of visiting the Czech Republic involves stepping back in time. The country's capital Prague is one of Europe's best-preserved (and justifiably popular) cities, with a romantic riverside location enhanced by graceful bridges and a magnificent skyline punctuated with medieval church spires. Its time-honored Old Town follows a plan laid out 1,000 years ago, with ancient squares and winding cobblestone streets. Everywhere you turn, there's history to see.

But, as the saying goes, the world is a book, and those who don't travel read only one page. The same applies to visitors who come to the Czech Republic but visit only Prague. Don't get us wrong: it's a great page to read. But if you want the whole story—and to really get to grips with Czech history—you need to get out of the capital and embrace the adventures beyond.

Venture outside of Prague's borders and you'll discover a whole world of wonderful attractions. There are the myriad castles that dot the landscape around the capital, from the fairy-tale chateau of Karlštejn to the historical hunting lodge of Konopiště. There are the charming towns of Bohemia, from the graceful

colonnades and dilapidated villas of spa resort Karlovy Vary to the impossibly pretty castle and gardens of red-roofed Český Krumlov. And there is the beer, including the famous Pilsner Urquell, the world's first pale lager—as well as the lesser known (but equally excellent) wines of Moravia.

In between the big-name sights, you'll find plenty of Gothic towers, Renaissance facades and Baroque interiors, as well as glorious mountain ranges and forest-covered countryside, to keep you entertained for weeks on end.

Old Town Square, Prague



One of Europe's Prettiest Squares

The hype about Staroměstské náměstí (Old Town Square) is completely justified. Picture a perimeter of colorful Baroque houses contrasting with the sweeping old-Gothic style of the Týn Church in the background. As the heart of the Old Town, the majestic square grew to its present proportions when Prague's original marketplace moved away from the river in the 12th century. Its shape and appearance have changed little since that time. During the day the square pulses with activity: in summer the square's south end is dominated by sprawling (pricey!) outdoor restaurants; during the Easter and Christmas seasons it fills with wooden booths of holiday vendors. At night, the brightly lit twin towers of the Týn Church rise gloriously over the glowing Baroque facades. The square's history has also seen violence, from defenestrations (throwing people from windows) in

the 15th century to 27 Bohemian noblemen killed by Austrian Habsburgs in 1621; 27 white crosses embedded in the square's paving stones commemorate the spot.

Don't Miss

Hundreds of visitors gravitate outside Staroměstská radnice (Old Town Hall) throughout the day to see the hour struck by the mechanical figures of the Astronomical Clock. Don't be disappointed by the lack of drama, but focus on its astonishing age: it was first installed on the tower in 1410.

Getting Here

If you are in Prague, there's almost no way to miss Old Town Square, which is at the very heart of the old city. It's a five-minute walk from the nearest metro station (Staroměstská; Line A) and not much farther from the Charles Bridge. The square is pedestrianized, as are most streets around, so wear comfortable shoes.

Charles Bridge, Prague



A Medieval Masterpiece

This is Prague's signature monument, and rightly so. The view from the foot of Karlův most (Charles Bridge) on the Old Town side, encompassing the towers and domes of Malá Strana (Lesser Town) and the soaring spires of St. Vitus Cathedral, is nothing short of breathtaking. This heavenly vista subtly changes in perspective as you walk across the bridge, attended by a host of baroque saints that decorate the bridge's peaceful Gothic stones. At night its drama is spellbinding: St. Vitus Cathedral lit in a ghostly green, Prague Castle in monumental yellow, and the Church of St. Nicholas in a voluptuous pink, all viewed through the menacing silhouettes of the bowed statues and the Gothic towers. Night is the best time to visit the bridge, which is choked with visitors, vendors, and beggars by day. The later the hour, the thinner the crowds—though the bridge is never truly empty, even at daybreak.

Don't Miss

Eighth on the right is the statue of St. John of Nepomuk, who according to legend was wrapped in chains and thrown to his death from this bridge. Touching the statue is supposed to bring good luck or, according to some versions of the story, a return visit to Prague.

Getting Here

On the Old Town side, the nearest metro station is Staroměstská (Line A). On the Lesser Town side, it's best to take a tram to Malostranské náměstí.

☒ *Between Karlova (Staré Město) and Mostecká (Malá Strana)*

St. Vitus Cathedral



The Spiritual Heart of Prague

Despite its monolithic presence, Prague Castle is not a single structure but a whole of complex of them—and the most significant is Katedrála sv. Víta (St. Vitus Cathedral). With its graceful, soaring towers, this Gothic house of worship is among Europe's most beautiful, with a long history beginning in the 10th century and continuing to its completion in 1929. Inside, the six stained-glass windows to your left and right and the large rose window behind are modern masterpieces; see if you can spot the contributions of art nouveau master Alfons Mucha. Other highlights include the Svatováclavská kaple (Chapel of St. Wenceslas); the Kralovské oratorium (Royal Oratory), a perfect example of late Gothic architecture; the ornate silver sarcophagus of St. John of Nepomuk; and the eight

chapels around the back of the cathedral. Don't miss the mosaic on the south side of the cathedral's exterior, constructed from a million glass and stone tesserae in the 1370s.

Don't Miss

Prague Castle is also home to Bazilika sv. Jiří (St. George's Basilica), virtually unchanged since the 12th century; Starý královský palác (Old Royal Palace), with the largest secular Gothic interior space in Central Europe; and Zlatá ulička (Golden Lane), a jumbled collection of brightly colored houses crouched under the fortification wall, where Franz Kafka lived briefly with his sister.

Hrad III. ☎ nádvorí 2 ☎ 224-372-434

🌐 www.katedralasvatehovita

🎫 Included in 2-day castle ticket (from 250 Kč) 🚶 Line A: Malostranská plus Tram 22 to Pražský Hrad

Karlštejn Castle



A Picture-Perfect Castle

If it's a picture-book European castle you're after, look no further. Perched atop a wooded hillside, Hrad Karlštejn (Karlštejn Castle) comes complete with battlements, turrets, and towers. Once Charles IV's summer palace, Karlštejn was originally built to hold and guard the crown jewels (which were moved to Prague Castle in 1619). There is a fairly strenuous hike up to the castle—lined with souvenir stands and overpriced snack bars—but it's worth the journey. Once you've reached the top, take time to walk the ramparts and drink in the panorama of the village and countryside below, before embarking on a tour to see the castle's greatest treasure, the Chapel of the Holy Cross. Because of its proximity to Prague, Karlštejn is the most-visited site outside of the Czech capital, so be prepared for crowds.

Don't Miss

There are two other castles nearby: Konopiště, the country retreat of Archduke Franz Ferdinand; and Křivoklát, a beautiful fortification with an atmospheric courtyard.

Getting Here

Karlštejn is a quick, simple, and scenic train journey from Prague's Hlavní nádraží; when you arrive, follow the crowds to the castle. Check the schedule for trains heading to Beroun.

Hrad Karlštejn. ☎ Karlštejn 18 🌐 www.hrad-karlstejn.cz 🎫 Tours from 190 Kč ☹ Closed Mon. Tower closed Oct.–Apr., chapel closed Nov.–Apr.

Křivoklát. ☎ Křivoklát 47 🌐 www.hrad-krivoklat.cz 🎫 Tours from 240 Kč ☹ Closed Mon. Closed weekdays Nov.–Mar.

Zámek Konopiště. 🌐 www.zamek-konopiste.cz 🎫 Tours from 240 Kč ☹ Closed Mon. and Dec.–Mar.

Pilsner Urquell Brewery



A Mecca For Beer Lovers

Plzeň—or Pilsen in German—is the industrial heart of Western Bohemia and the region's biggest city. It's also a must-see for intellectual beer aficionados, with anyone who loves the stuff flocking to pay homage to the Plzeňský prazdroj (Pilsner Urquell) brewery. The first pilsner beer was created here in 1842 using the excellent Plzeň water, a special malt fermented on the premises, and hops grown in the region around Žatec (which remains in great demand today.) Guided tours of the brewery, complete with a visit to the brewhouse and beer tastings, are offered daily. Just a short walk away is Pivotéka v Pivovarském muzeu (Brewery Museum), with all kinds of fascinating paraphernalia that trace the region's brewing history, including the horse-drawn carts used to haul the kegs.

Don't Miss

Plzeň's Náměstí Republiky (Republic Square) is one of Bohemia's largest. It's dominated by the looming Gothic Church of St. Bartholomew, but look out for other architectural jewels around, like the Renaissance Town Hall, built by Italian architects and adorned with *sgraffiti*.

Best Restaurant

U Mansfelda. A gleaming copper hood floats above the taps in this pub with an inviting patio. ☎ *Average main: Kč260* ☒ *Dřevěná 9* ☎ *377-333-844* 🌐 *umansfelda.cz*

Getting Here

There are frequent trains between Prague and Plzeň (about 1 hour 15 minutes, 260 Kč each way). The brewery is a 15-minute walk from the train station.

☎ *U Prazdroje 7, Plzeň* 🌐 *www.prazdrojvisit.cz* 📠 *Pilsner Brewery: 300 Kč; Gambrinus Brewery: 200 Kč*

Karlovy Vary



Playground of the Rich and Famous

Karlovy Vary—often known by its German name, Karlsbad—is the most famous of the Bohemian spa towns. It's named for the omnipresent Emperor Charles IV, who allegedly happened upon the springs in 1358 while on a hunting expedition. As the story goes, the emperor's hound fell into a boiling spring and was scalded. Charles had the water tested and, familiar with spas in Italy, ordered the village of Vary to be transformed into a haven for baths. The spa reached its golden age in the 19th century, when aristocrats from all over Europe came for treatments. The long list of those who “took the cure” includes Peter the Great, Goethe, and Chopin. Even Karl Marx, when he wasn't decrying wealth and privilege, spent time at the wealthy resort; he wrote some of *Das Kapital* here. The Karlovy Vary

International Film Festival, which began in 1946 and is held during every July, attracts movie stars and film fans from all over the world.

Getting Here

Frequent bus service between Prague and Karlovy Vary makes the journey only about two hours each way; tickets cost 160 Kč to 200 Kč. The train takes longer (more than three hours) and costs about 250 Kč. Once in town, you can easily get around on foot.

Stay Here

Grandhotel Pupp. The granddaddy of them all, this is one of Central Europe's most famous resorts, going back some 220 years. It's been featured in movies from *Last Holiday* to *Casino Royale*. ☎ *Rooms from: Kč6500* ☒ *Mírové nám. 2, Karlovy Vary* ☎ *353-109-631* 🌐 *www.pupp.cz* 🍳 *Free Breakfast*

Český Krumlov



The Jewel of Southern Bohemia

It's rare that a place not only lives up to its hype but exceeds it. Český Krumlov, the official residence of the Rožmberk (Rosenberg) family for centuries, is the must-see destination in Southern Bohemia, with a story-book landscape so perfect it resembles a movie set. It gets very busy with visitors, but if you stay overnight you can experience the city after the tour buses have departed, and in the evening when quiet descends, the town is twice as spellbinding. Český Krumlov's lovely looks can be put down to a castle and a river. Hrad Český Krumlov (Český Krumlov Castle) is one of the most gorgeous in the country, perched on a hill and watching over its quaint village with the Vltava River doing its picturesque winding best. The castle area offers plenty of sightseeing, and the extensive gardens are worth an hour or

two. Down in the town, the medieval streets are beyond charming.

Don't Miss

Gorgeous sgraffiti facades decorate the **Hotel Růže**, a former Jesuit school. The abundant Renaissance flourishes are a result of city once being on the Bavarian-Italian trade route. Be sure to visit the parking area (really!); the view is perfect.

Stay Here

Hotel Růže. Converted from a Jesuit school, this excellent, centrally located hotel with spacious rooms is a two-minute walk from the main square. ☎ Rooms from: Kč4157 ☎ Horní 154 ☎ 380-772-100 🌐 www.hotelruze.cz 🍷 Free Breakfast

Getting Here

Direct buses to Český Krumlov leave Prague several times a day. The trip lasts a hair under three hours, and costs in the region of 200 Kč.

Sedlec Ossuary



A Bone-Chilling Sight

Forget all the beautiful baroque architecture in Kutná Hora. This is the reason many outside the Czech Republic have heard of (and make the trip to) the small town an hour outside of Prague. The skeletal remains of around 40,000 people have been lovingly arranged in the Kaple Věch svatých (All Saints Chapel), more commonly called the Bone Church. Look out for the chandelier, which is made with every bone in the human body, as well as the Schwarzenberg coat of arms, which includes a raven (assembled from various small bones) pecking the eye of a Turkish warrior.

Don't Miss

Definitely venture into Kutná Hora itself, if only to see the dramatically beautiful Chrám sv. Barbory. Getting to this Gothic church is nearly as pleasurable as a visit; it's about a 10-minute walk from the main square along a road lined with baroque

statues, from which you can gaze at the surrounding countryside. The walk is particularly lovely in the fall, when the leaves change.

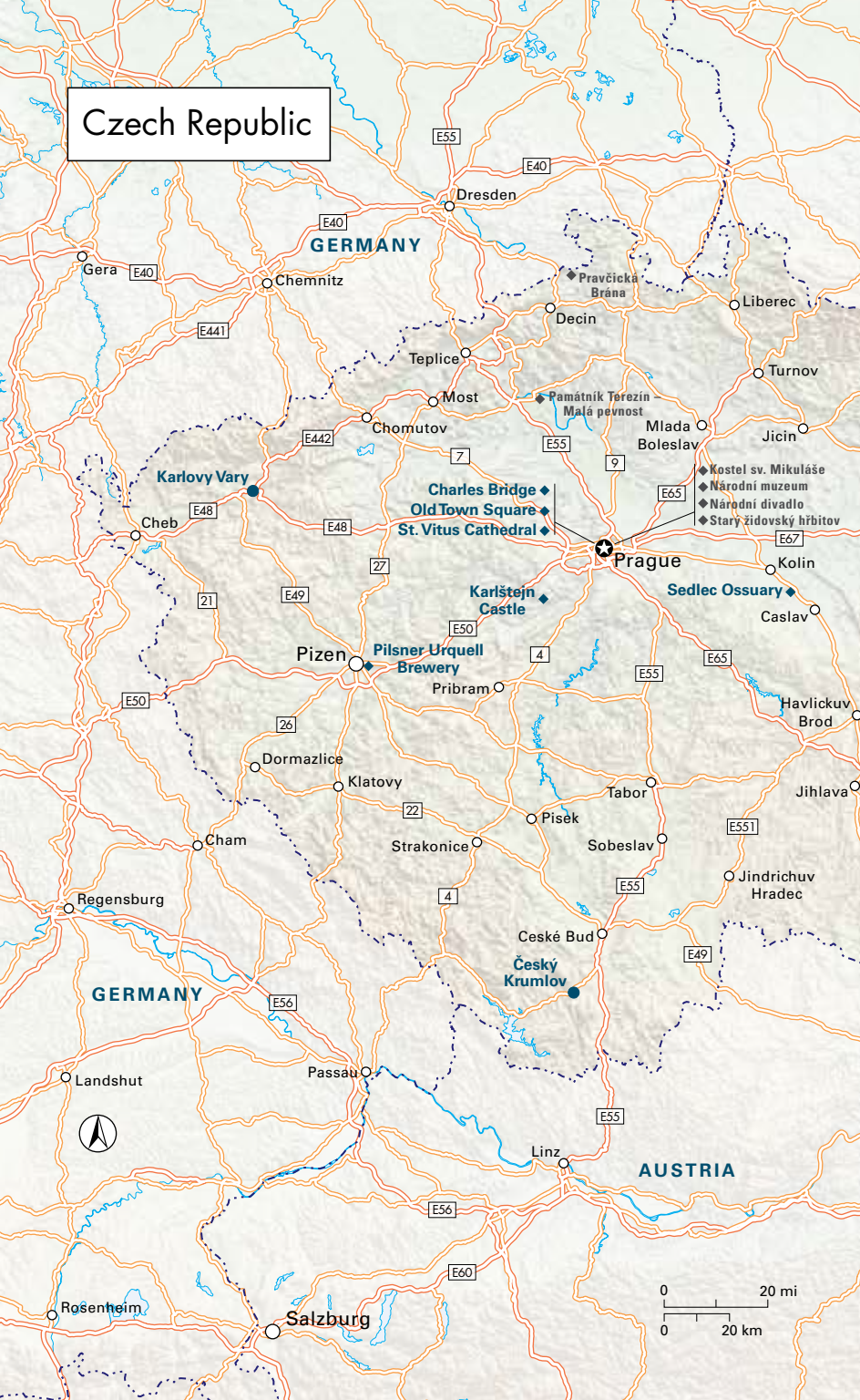
Best Restaurant

Dačický. A medieval tavern feel and big plates of Czech food make Dačický a warm, authentic experience. ☎ Average main: Kč240 ☎ Rakova 8 ☎ 603-434-367 🌐 www.dacicky.com

Getting Here

A train to the main station from Prague takes about an hour. The Bone Church is a 10-minute walk from the train station, and the town of Kutná Hora is about 30 minutes by foot; there's a riverside path that takes slightly longer but is a lovely stroll in good weather.

☎ Zámecká 🌐 www.sedlec.info 🎫 160 Kč (incl. Church of the Assumption); 300 Kč (also incl. St. Barbara's Cathedral) 🕒 Closed Mon. Nov.-Jan.



When in the Czech Republic

★ **Kostel sv. Mikuláše** (*Church of St. Nicholas*)

CONCERTS | Ballroom scenes in the movie *Van Helsing* used the interior of this beautiful baroque church, probably the most famous of its kind in Prague. The building's dome was one of the last works finished by architect Kilian Ignaz Dientzenhofer before his death in 1751, and a memorial service to Mozart was held here after his death. Local ensembles play concerts of popular classics here throughout the year. ☎ *Malostranské nám.* ☎ 257-534-215 ☎ stnicholas.cz *Line A: Malostranská.*

★ **Národní divadlo** (*National Theater*)
ARTS CENTERS | This is the main stage in the Czech Republic for drama, dance, and opera. The interior, with its ornate and etched ceilings, is worth the visit alone. Most of the theater performances are in Czech, but some operas have English subtitles, and ballet is an international language—right? Book the opera online ahead of time for fantastic discounts; you'll get to see top-quality performances in sumptuous surroundings at a snip of the price you could pay in other European capitals. The New Stage, next door, as well as the Estates Theater and Prague State Opera are all part of the National Theater system. ☎ *Národní 2* ☎ 224-901-448 ☎ narodni-divadlo.cz *Line B: Národní třída.*

★ **Národní muzeum** (*National Museum*)
HISTORY MUSEUM | Housed in a grandiose neo-Renaissance structure that dominates the top of Wenceslas Square, the National Museum was built between 1885 and 1890 as a symbol of the Czech national revival. Indeed, the building's exterior is so impressive that invading Soviet soldiers in 1968 mistook it for parliament. The holdings are a cross

between natural history and ethnography and include dinosaur bones, minerals, textiles, coins, and many, many other things. There are rotating exhibitions too, and the building itself remains a pretty spectacular draw in its own right. The gift shop has lots of treasures, too, including brooches made of the museum's original parquet flooring. ☎ *Václavské nám.* ☎ 68 ☎ 224-497-111 ☎ nm.cz ☎ 250 Kč *Lines A and C: Muzeum.*

★ **Památník Terežín – Malá pevnost** (*Terežín Memorial – Small Fortress*)
HISTORIC SIGHT | The most powerful aspect of Terežín is that you don't need much imagination to visualize how it looked under Nazi rule. When it was a Jewish ghetto, more than 59,000 people were crammed into this camp. Terežín was actually an exception among the many Nazi concentration camps in Central Europe. In the early years of the war—until as late as 1944—detainees had a semblance of a normal life, with limited self-rule, schools, a theater, and even a library. As the Nazi war effort soured, the conditions for the people in Terežín worsened. Transports to Auschwitz and other death camps were increased to several times a week. Above the entrance to the main courtyard stands the horribly false motto "Arbeit macht Frei" (Work Brings Freedom). At the far end of the fortress, opposite the main entrance, is the special wing built by the Nazis when space became tight. These windowless cells display a brutal captivity. ☎ *Principova alej 304, Terežín* ☎ 416-782-225 ☎ www.pamatnik-terezin.cz ☎ 210 Kč (incl. Magdeburg Barracks); 260 Kč (also incl. Ghetto Museum) ☺ *Crematorium closed Sat.*

★ **Pravčická Brána** (*Pravčická Archway*)
NATURE SIGHT | The largest natural rock bridge in Europe, Pravčická Archway is the symbol of the gorgeous national park that is Czech Switzerland, which

sits on the border with Germany. To reach the archway, you can either start walking from Hřensko (follow the red hiking route) or take a local bus to a stop called Tři Prameny. From here, it's a lovely and atmospheric walk up through the forest to reach the rock formation, which comes complete with a museum and restaurant called Falcon's Nest—supplies are brought in via pulley. There's also a pub where you can order fine beer in the shadow of the bridge itself. For an entrance fee, you can scramble around nearby rock formations, which have a similarly alien appeal, for a better vantage point. ☎ *Hřensko* ☎ www.pbrana.cz ☎ 95 Kč ☺ *Closed weekdays Nov.–Mar.*

★ **Starý židovský hřbitov** (*Old Jewish Cemetery*)
CEMETERY | An unforgettable sight, this cemetery is where all Jews living in Prague from the 15th century to 1787 were laid to rest. The lack of any space in the tiny ghetto forced graves to be piled on top of one another. Tilted at crazy angles, the 12,000 visible tombstones are but a fraction of thousands more buried below. Walk the path amid the gravestones; the relief symbols you see represent the names and professions of the deceased. The oldest marked grave belongs to the poet Avigdor Kara, who died in 1439; the original tombstone can be seen in the Maisel Synagogue. The best-known marker belongs to Jehuda ben Bezalel, the famed Rabbi Loew (died 1609), a chief rabbi of Prague and a profound scholar, credited with creating the mythical golem. ☎ *Široká 3* ☎ *Entrance through Pinkas Synagogue* ☎ 222-749-211 ☎ jewishmuseum.cz ☎ *Jewish Museum combination ticket 350 Kč (excl. Old-New Synagogue) or 500 Kč (incl. Old-New Synagogue) ☺ Closed Sat. and Jewish holidays* *Line A: Staroměstská.*

Where to Eat and Drink

★ **Café Savoy**
\$\$ | **CZECH** | One of the best of Prague's traditional turn-of-the-century-style grand cafés, the Savoy is popular day and night for its brunches, coffees, Czech classics, and pastries. In particular, try the *větrník*, a Czech classic made of choux pastry with cream and caramel. **Known for:** lavish interior; warm and efficient staff; long lines. ☎ *Average main: Kč150* ☎ *Vítězná 5* ☎ 731-136-144 ☎ cafesavoy.ambi.cz *Tram 1, 9, 20, 22, 23, 25, 97, 98, or 99 to Újezd.*

★ **La Degustation Bohême Bourgeoise**
\$\$\$\$ | **ECLECTIC** | One of Prague's two Michelin star holders is this elegant tasting room, where diners are taken on a superlative culinary adventure via a Czech-inspired tasting menu over an extended evening. The menu roves around Czech and European cuisine playfully and stylishly, including classic local specialties with a twist, like pork belly, cabbage, and mustard or a dessert of cream, blueberry, and basil. **Known for:** probably Prague's best food and service; playful and inventive takes on classic dishes; wine-paired tasting menu. ☎ *Average main: Kč2450* ☎ *Haštalská 18* ☎ 222-311-234 ☎ ladegustation.cz *Line A: Staroměstská.*

Rango
\$\$ | **MEDITERRANEAN** | Part of a hotel of the same name, the interior of Rango is a mash-up of medieval, baroque, and modern style—think Gothic arched ceilings and '60s modern light fixtures. Similarly, the cuisine ranges from Italy to Greece; in addition to panini, they serve excellent pasta dishes, pizzas, and grilled meat. **Known for:** historical space; friendly and quick service; superior pizza and pasta. ☎ *Average main: Kč270* ☎ *Pražská 10, Plzeň* ☎ 377-329-969 ☎ www.rango.cz.

★ Terasa U Zlaté studně

\$\$\$\$ | INTERNATIONAL | On top of the boutique Golden Well Hotel, lunch or dinner, either inside or on the terrace of this Michelin-rated restaurant overlooking the city's rooftops, is a delicious experience that more than lives up to the views and prices. The menu runs the gamut from the full degustation (3,400 Kč) to more reasonably priced à la carte. **Known for:** exceptional cooking of an inventive international menu; among the best views in Prague; feeling of exclusivity. **📍 Average main:** Kč1000 **📞 Golden Well Hotel, U Zlaté studně 4** **☎ 257-533-322** **🌐 terasauzlatstudne.cz** **🚶 Line A:** Malostranská.

Cool Places to Stay

★ Alchemist Grand Hotel and Spa

\$\$\$ | HOTEL | A baroque fever dream of Prague masterminded by an Italian developer, the Alchemist doesn't go the understated route. **Pros:** astonishing renovation of a 16th-century building; afternoon wine tastings; central yet tucked away. **Cons:** steep uphill walk from the tram; loud a/c; some rooms and suites in need of a refresh. **📍 Rooms from:** Kč5500 **📍 Tržiště 19** **☎ 257-286-011** **🌐 alchemist-hotel.com** **🚶 46 rooms** **🌞 Free Breakfast** **🚶 Line A:** Malostranská plus Tram 12, 20, or 22 to Malostranské náměstí.

★ Augustine, a Luxury Collection Hotel, Prague

\$\$\$\$ | HOTEL | There's plenty of competition in Prague's high-end hotel market, but the Augustine—now part of Marriott's Luxury Collection—continues to come out on top. **Pros:** impeccable service and tranquil feel; clever design, with hidden garden spaces; impressive spa and restaurant. **Cons:** breakfast not always included; sometimes noisy wood floors; no swimming pool. **📍 Rooms from:** Kč10000 **📍 Letenská 12** **☎ 266-112-234** **🌐 marriott.com** **🚶 101 rooms** **🌞 No Meals** **🚶 Line A:** Malostranská.

Falkensteiner Spa Resort Marienbad

\$\$\$\$ | HOTEL | Formerly the Grand Spa Marienbad, this Austrian-owned hotel is made up of three interconnected buildings and boasts the most rooms and the biggest wellness center in Mariánské Lázně. **Pros:** huge spa; excellent spa services; sleek rooms. **Cons:** officious staff; expensive; overly Teutonic vibe. **📍 Rooms from:** Kč7100 **📍 Ruska 123, Mariánské Lázně** **☎ 354-929-399** **🌐 www.falkensteiner.com/en/spa-resort-marianske-lazne** **🚶 164 rooms** **🌞 Free Breakfast**.

★ Tri Lilie

\$\$\$ | HOTEL | "Three Lilies" is thoroughly elegant, from its brasserie to its guest rooms, some of which have balconies with French doors. **Pros:** glorious a/c; rooms with balconies; extremely efficient service. **Cons:** no restaurant in the hotel (just breakfast); if you don't want spa services, much of its appeal is lost; guests report issues with Wi-Fi. **📍 Rooms from:** Kč2500 **📍 Národní 3, Františkovy Lázně** **☎ 354-208-900** **🌐 www.trililie.cz** **🚶 31 rooms** **🌞 Free Breakfast**.

Hungary

Budapest, an old-world city with a throbbing urban pulse, is a must-stop on any trip to Central Europe. Szentendre and Eger have their own charms, including majestic hilltop castles and cobblestone streets winding among lovely baroque buildings. All this, and the generosity of the Magyar soul, sustains visitors to this land of vital spirit and beauty.

Hungary sits at the crossroads of Central Europe, having retained its own identity by absorbing countless invasions and foreign occupations. Its industrious, resilient people have a history of brave but unfortunate uprisings: against the Ottomans in the 17th century, the Habsburgs in 1848, and the Soviet Union in 1956. With the withdrawal of the last Soviet soldiers from Hungarian soil in 1991, Hungary embarked on a decade of sweeping changes.

Adjusting to a free-market economy has not been easy sailing, but Hungary has regained self-determination and a chance to rebuild an economy devastated by years of Communist misrule. Hungary joined NATO in 1999, and the country joined the European Union (EU) in May 2004, though it has not yet adopted the euro as its official currency. It has been a rollercoaster of good times and bad ever since. Two rivers cross the country: the famous Duna (Danube) flows from the

west through Budapest on its way to the southern frontier, and the smaller Tisza flows from the northeast across the Nagyalföld (Great Plain). What Hungary lacks in size, it makes up for in beauty and charm. Hungarians are known for their hospitality.

Although the unusual and difficult language is anything but a quick study, English is fast becoming the second language of Hungary, even superseding German. But what all Hungarians share is a deep love of music, and the calendar is studded with it.

When in Hungary

Aggtelek National Park

CAVE | If you like caves, Aggtelek National Park is the place for you. Straddling the border with Slovakia (the park stretches into both nations), Aggtelek is home to hundreds of caves of different shapes,