



SPOTLIGHT ON: PLZEŇ

This charming Czech city, declared the 2015 European Capital of Culture, is worth a visit. International journalist **Joseph Reaney** reports

The city: Located in the the heart of Bohemia, 90 miles from Prague, Plzeň has long had its reputation for beverages, specifically rich beers. But, according to Jana Komišová, Head of Marketing for this year's event, this city has more to offer. "We intend to adapt the view of Plzeň as an industrial city to a cultural, open and inspiring metropolis... to make Plzeň more visible in Europe, to create new cultural trends and to involve the public in the cultural life of the city."

In the five years since its announcement as 2015 ECC (alongside the Belgian city of Lens) city authorities have invested more than USD19 million in the project: half spent on travel infrastructure, new buildings (including a beautiful new theatre) and marketing efforts; the other half on assembling the spectacular events calendar.

The festival: There are 50 principal cultural events scheduled in 2015, as well as over 600 other events, and these will all aim to make the most of Plzeň's appealing architecture, from its beautiful baroque square to its vast, Gothic synagogue. The public will even be afforded rare access to private interiors by modernist master Adolf Loos.

The 2015 party began with a bang back in January, with a magnificent opening ceremony bringing together classical music, lively processions, fireworks and the first peels of newly-forged bells in the city's towering medieval cathedral. This has been followed by events such as February's Festival of Light, where interactive lighting

installations were placed all along the riverside. However, the best events of 2015 are still to come.

The events: Cirque Nouveau Season (until November) will see daring acrobatics, nail-biting tightrope walks and modern clowning in 60 shows taking place through the year. Then the Gottfried Lindauer Exhibition (6 May to 20 September) will see artworks by the Plzeň-born 19th century artist, renowned for his portraits of Maori people, displayed outside New Zealand for the first time. Later in the year, visitors can enjoy the Nine Weeks of Baroque (an event between 29 June and 30 August celebrating Baroque music, art, theatre and food) and, making their debut in Eastern Europe, the Royal de Luxe (a French theatre company that operates giant mechanical marionettes, playing from 28 to 30 August).

The legacy: Without doubt, 2015 is a big year for Plzeň, but will events this year have a long-term impact? Director Jiří Suchánek believes it will put the city on the tourism radar long into the future – and have a creative legacy too. "As well as [projecting] the image of the city as an attractive tourist destination... it will also promote Plzeň as a place for creative industries, where students of art and design and local artists can execute their projects. One of our biggest goals is to create new places for people to be employed in creative businesses."

"This exacting cultural and marketing project has already made a contribution to the image transformation of Plzeň," adds Jana Komišová. "2015 is one giant step towards moving this city forward." plzen2015.cz