

Gate

magazine for visitors
to the Ústí Region

Issue No. 1

Interview

The Gate to Bohemia and to my inner self
Elbe River fisherman Tomáš Töpfer

Nature

From the bottom of cracked rocks
to the gate of heaven

History

Stone fairy on the Ohře River

Winemaking

Wandering around in the name of wine

Active rest

A lake that cannot be found anywhere else



Gate to Bohemia

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Dear Readers!

Come with us and walk through the Gate to Bohemia! The gate, which consists of four coal (carbon) stones and four not yet fully discovered and beautiful tourists areas, four options to discover breathtaking nature, to admire the impressive traces of history, to relax, play sports, or simply to be fascinated by the region, which only recently emerged from a plethora of tourist destinations.

Two years ago we decided to change the perception people have about the Ústí Region. A new project called the GATE TO BOHEMIA soon became the only active volcano in the country – and we have many extinct volcanoes here. This volcano has constantly spewed out a wide range of information materials, websites, guides, maps and publications ever since. Under this project many bike and nature trails appeared and many historical monuments have been restored and made more visible. Four regions – Bohemian Switzerland, the Czech Central Mountains, the Krušné Mountains and the Lower Ohře Region are screaming for recognition, and have actually now become very popular tourist destinations. Already during the first year of the existence and operation of the Gate to Bohemia project, the Ústí Region reached the highest number of tourists within the entire Czech Republic. For those of us who work here and walk back and forth through the entire region, it is no surprise at all. The entire region is beautiful, and tourists will find more than they expect here.

This magazine, which you just opened, actually serves as a showcase for the entire Gate to Bohemia region. Year after year you will be able to find tips and advice, ideas and opportunities on how to get to know our region, what are the most effulgent and mysterious sites, and what is unique and special here. Plus you will learn about the people who live here. So I would like to invite you here! Read this magazine but most importantly – come and visit us!


Radek Vonka

Author's invitation

For some time now I have been enjoying the delights of my wise return to the land of my youth. Some time ago, when I began writing about Saxon-Bohemian Switzerland, I was so fascinated because day after day I kept discovering everything I knew as a child and later as a teenager all over again. Now I have the opportunity to run through the Gate to Bohemia and around the entire region and would like to invite you to go with me. Let us take this opulent trip together. The truth is that even if a man lives in the most beautiful environment he tends to ignore many nice things, takes them for granted or even downplay their significance and tends to see things that are not so nice. So let us be amazed together, let us wander around, let us get carried away by the breathtaking landscape with human footprints everywhere. And if you find here and there in this text a personal note, please do not be surprised – there are times when, in the face of beauty, a man cannot remain rational and in control.

Rostislav Křivánek



Power and energy from Mother Earth

I am standing with my arms open, palms facing upward, eyes wide open. Above me is a multi-fingered hand, so eager to touch the sky, but it never will, and through which the jubilantly azure summer sky shines. I feel intense tingling in my legs and energy, coming from somewhere in the depths of the earth, passes through my entire body. I am made entirely of metal, connected to a network of telluric currents, and invisible balls of energy radiate from my hands. The strength and healing power of this spot – where an enlightened man once wanted to build a temple but he was not given the chance to complete his project, is so intense that I am sad to leave this intersection of an imaginary cross full of peace and inner strength to another man waiting in a long line, where people are kindly and patiently waiting their turn to draw the nourishing stamina from the Earth.

MAGICAL PANENSKÝ TÝNEC

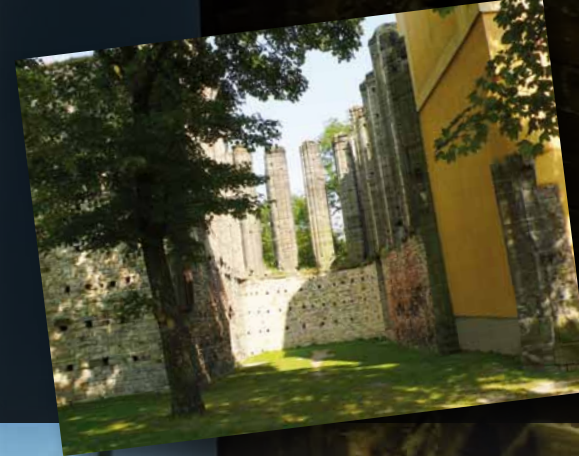
Panenský Týnec is an inconspicuous and humble village which hides many mysteries. Regardless what direction we take, we soon encounter traces of the famous Czech aristocratic clan, the Žirotín family. Between 1230–1253 the first man of this clan, Jan of Žirotín, built nearby Žirotín Castle, sometimes called Žerotín. To this date, you may see two distinctive double rampart walls, which are probably the last remnants of the palace, or perhaps of the castle towers. The son of Jan named Habart of Žirotín made his mark on history by building another project. It was actually a generous thank-you gift to Lady Anežka Přemyslovna, also known as Saint Agnes of Bohemia, who healed his infertile wife. Around the end of the thirteenth century, Habart had a convent built which was used by the Poor Clares – their third after convents in Prague and Cheb. A city, mentioned as early as in 1321, was built around the convent. There are even some rumours that Saint Agnes could have lived here. And because in 1420 her remains were transported from Hussite-occupied Prague to Panenský Týnec – nuns lived here for two hundred and twenty years – it is possible that her remains are still here.

The Celtic word “taun” means a place with fencing around, i.e. “otýněné” poles (hence Týn). And indeed – already in the Bronze Age people were erecting fences and building healing sanctuaries here. These extraordinary powers of this place caused another member of the Žirotín family to lose sleep at night. It was Jaroslav of Žirotín. Unfortunately, Jaroslav was the last member of the Žirotín clan. This significant Czech nobleman, a Bailiff and friend of King Jiří of Poděbrady, began in 1443 with the construction of a massive three-aisled Gothic cathedral. It was a unique concept, designed to be one of its kind and unparalleled in neighbouring countries. Sadly, Jaroslav's death in 1467 ended work on this project. Only an impressive, mystical and unfinished torso remained. A twenty-one metre long, nine-metre wide and over twenty-metre high section of the temple. If you stand under these half-arched and unfinished columns, you can hardly imagine the intended dimensions of the temple. Because what you see is just an unfinished chancellery, which had yet to be completed with the three-aisle space – roughly at the place where the preserved entry portal is today. Originally, the three-aisle roof was meant to be supported by four columns, which were actually built. Three of them were demolished over the century, but on the fourth column you can see a completed belfry, which was built many years later.



HEALING POWERS OF THIS PLACE

Most people who come here are not so interested in the original and ambitious plans, but instead they are fascinated by the unique atmosphere of this place and by the romantic and mysterious mood of the temple remains, but above all – the healing powers of the place itself. Throughout the year, you will find here humbly waiting crowds of people who quietly watch anyone whose turn to try just came. Some stand, some sit, some are silent and others sing. People who have experienced depression, brain incidents and head injuries gather here, but also those who do not expect any healing from this genius loci, but need only to boost their positive mood, appetite for life or telluric energy, which strengthens the immune system and the soul. Each Gothic cathedral was designed as an amplifier of positive vibrations existing at the place where it was built, and where the land was interwoven with a network of “veins” carrying telluric currents. So the temple was built to amplify something that existed here from the beginning of time. The ancient power of a place where people felt good and where they were healed.



MENHIR NEAR KLOBUKY



Not only temples were built on sites like these. People, for example, erected stones – menhirs in these places. Moreover, near Panenský Týnec you may see one famous menhir and it would be a shame not to include it in our quests searching for local magical places. A stone called Shepherd is about a hundred metres to the right from the road going from Klobuky to Telce. It is 340 cm tall and a part of the stone is buried in the ground, and its energy field is clearly visible. Already at the end of the nineteenth century it was proven that the stone had been erected by people. Most likely by a Celtic tribe called the Boii. Stones made from the same material were plowed out from the surrounding field, which only supports the theory that menhir was originally surrounded by a small circle of megaliths. When you touch the stone, you may perhaps connect to the same source of pulsating underground energy, which heals and gives strength to people coming to the uncompleted temple in Panenský Týnec.

From the bottom of cracked rocks to the gate of heaven

“A breathtaking canyon with a wild river tamed with barrages followed by a contoured path running along rock walls and offering fabulous views of the region crowned with the famous rocky gate – which aspires to acceptance as one of wonders of the world. You can be sure that you will not see anything like it anywhere else in the world.”



WALKING AFOOT ON BOARD

Today, the Kamenice is an elegant young lady again, who enjoys being watched and peeked at from bridges, paths, rock tunnels and galleries stuck to the surrounding rocks which one would not be able to reach without support. Here and there, these rocks fall straight down to the water, while their pine crowns – some hundred feet above the water surface, are ruffled by strong winds. We shall now make use of a comfortable boat which will take us through the navigable sections of the river. First we go through the Edmund gorge and later through Divoká soutěska (Wild gorge). We will see dozens of bizarre rocks and sail under the stream of the spaghetti-like Niagara, and somewhere below us we will see the mysterious Podloudnice trail and, just maybe, at some of the artificial crossings we may catch a glimpse of salmon returning from the sea back to their birthplace and finally, a blue rocket may fly over our heads – a kingfisher – the prince of the river.

INNOCENT FACE OF A DEVILISH RIVER

It is barely one kilometre from Hřensko, upstream along the Kamenice River before you reach the entrance to the famous gorges and ravines. Just close your eyes and you will see hundreds of ancient woodcutters directing slender logs heading towards the Elbe River, from where they will follow until they reach the city of Hamburg to become masts of large ocean ships as well as other products. Or you may picture yourself only few years ago, and suddenly remember that the water level of the Kamenice River reached high above your head. Do not be fooled by the innocent-looking river happily bouncing among the stones. The river can be devilishly fierce, strong and cruel. Not so long ago we saw logs picked up by the river in the woods flying around and taking anything in their way, including tables buried in concrete and everything that had been built here for tourists over a long period of time.

IN THE SHADOWS OF ROCKY WALLS

When we leave the Kamenice River, we will climb through a breathtaking and steep gorge until we reach Mezní Louka. Here, the old Gabriela Trail comes to our rescue, a path walked down by millions of feet that will take us around fantastic and rugged rocky walls allowing us to view the surrounding countryside and to sit on natural balustrades and landings, reveal to us views of the legendary Křídelní stěna (Wing Wall) and the legendary Homole, which looks like a petrified pagoda of an ancient Japanese emperor ... And what is the most beautiful thing about the Gabriela Trail? Of course the fact that it ends under the gate of all gates, near the rocky arch of the Pravčická Gate.



IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OUR ANCESTORS

And when a man leaves this wonder of wonders and walks down through forested slopes back to Hřensko, he experiences a strange feeling of humbleness and insignificance in the face of nature, but also blissful awareness that man too is a part of nature. And if he manages to remain completely silent, he may see among the trees a flowing robe of the romantic ancient pilgrim, tourist and the great fairytale teller Hans Christian Andersen, who fell in love with this place many years before we had a chance to do so.

THROUGH THE ELBE CANYON

Starting point – Bohemian Switzerland, the little town of Hřensko situated where the great Elbe River and wild Kamenice River meet. The trip that is awaiting you could be a very romantic one. Let us first tell you how to get to Hřensko. Of course it is not a problem to go there by car but that is so obvious and not exciting. Much more exciting is to board a steamer called Poseidon in the town of Děčín (or even a raft which you can rent here and return it when you come back to Hřensko) and enjoy the gentle swinging motions of a steamer carried by strong currents of the mighty Elbe River and admire the unbelievable scenery of the Elbe Canyon lined with massive rocks and solitary towers and breathlessly stare at sunlight covered sandstones and forests coloured with all shades of green.

A GATE TO THE LAND OF WONDERS

It is not important how many times you have been here. It will always take your breath away. However, your first time is just like seeing a steamer on the wide-open ocean for the first time. To stay below the gate is beautiful and chilling but to climb up the steep rocks in front of you, is a thrill for true connoisseurs. The Pravčická Gate is most beautiful when viewed from the top of this rocky ridge. Only here will you realize that through this gate you will enter a land of rocky towns, deep and forested ravines and crystal clear brooks and streams decorated with the green hair of fairies, and half-timbered houses resembling pearls randomly scattered around meadows and hillsides. Nothing will give you a stronger experience than standing on a rocky cliff and letting your eyes float away and behind the primordial tooth of the Malý Pravčický kužel (Little Pravčický cone) all the way to the horizon overtaken by mesa mountains. Then you may let yourself get lost in the ocean of immense forests where only the mysterious island called Růžovský Hill can save you – the local Mount Fuji...

A summer residence dream come true

To walk through the park at the Chateau in Ploskovice (Ploskovický Chateau) is an enjoyable and almost magical experience. Traces of old times are seen everywhere. Regardless of where you may wander in this 8 hectare kingdom of rare trees, ponds, alleys, fountains, skilfully trimmed hedges and shady corners, after a certain while you will always see the emerging, noble building of the castle, which seems to offer you its long arms made of arcades and galleries and which embrace the entire park. But from all sides, it is an uplifting sight, oozing with fantasy and scented with history.

If you walk around the lower pond and indulge yourself in the exotic shade of arbors, chestnut, elms, maples, sycamores, or giant and dignified paulownias, you may suddenly hear the noise of a horse carriage wheels carrying a generous and remarkable woman of that time. The Grand Duchess Anna Maria Franziska of Tuscany. A footman who has just helped her out of the carriage, is staring at her in disbelief, because the Duchess is not heading for the shadowy chambers of the Chateau, but rushes to the lower part of the park to personally inspect the progress of the creation of decorative artificial caves. It is the spring of 1729 and work is slowly coming to an end. The Ploskovice Chateau is Anna's vision and dream that she stubbornly tries to make a reality. Regardless of the cost – it must be beautiful. And if worse comes to worst, she will burn all the bills and let the Grand Duke Gaston, the last of the Medici family, figure out himself how much he is actually paying. Although it's rumoured to be around one million florins – a staggering amount, but Anna Maria Franziska does not care. She alone pays the workers and then goes to see the slowly emerging park to admire the work of a secret builder (perhaps it was Kilian Ignac Dientzenhofer himself). It is a late Baroque Chateau, raised with a basement grotto full of fountains and large galleries resembling crabs' claws...

Or imagine a man standing on a decorative gloriette with the golden emperor's eagle above, and observing the facade of the castle beneath where servants are frantically running around and closing windows, and the gardener quickly removes the last weed found on the path.... Imagine, the Emperor's carriage from Terezín and from the Prague train is just entering the Chateau. People standing by begin to cheer and her first Imperial Majesty, Maria Anna Carolina followed by the Emperor himself Ferdinand I, the Benevolent as well as Ferdinand V - the last crowned Czech king, are stepping down from their carriage. Moments later, the Emperor sits in his comfortable office and listens to communications read by the administrator of his summer residence, while the Empress with her head tilted back, breathlessly observes the painter Josef Navrátil standing on a scaffold, who is just finishing magnificent paintings on the ceiling of her formal parlor. By now it is the year 1853, and the Chateau has been rebuilt and extended by one extra floor, which is now decorated with an exclusive Baroque mantle including late Rococo elements.



If a visitor climbs up a winding wooden staircase leading to the second floor, he may be suddenly surprised by the strange sounds of a someone nervously walking upstairs. Mrs. Hana Benešová is standing at the door and holds an upright finger against her lips. Her husband, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Edvard Beneš instead of enjoying his stay at the summer residence, is walking from window to window, sitting down and nervously getting up again and again – in 1920, young Czechoslovakia was very busy on the international scene. And so Hana walks down the stairs and greets us by nodding her head and then goes for a walk to the park which has always been and still is an oasis of peace and harmony for all.

The Ploskovický Chateau is full of memories. These memories are not only written into the walls, but are present in all areas and in each room where visitors are allowed to go. This is the most valuable virtue of this Chateau exhibition. Whether you pass through the engraved parlor, lady's bedroom, study, dining room, the Emperor's parlor, or perhaps through the Emperor's morning room, bedroom or his office, you feel a sneaking feeling that some of those former Chateau inhabitants have just left and that they are somewhere around and will be back shortly to finish their work, read a book or finish a cup of tea. That is what the impeccable decorations and skilful arrangements in individual rooms will do to you. Paintings of Josef Navrátil will force you to walk with your head tilted back and eyes glued to his work. The strong presence of the Czech national awareness is underlined by significant stucco art pieces created by Václav Levý and Josef Effenberger, and if you consider the fact that the last major reconstruction of the Chateau took place in the middle of the nineteenth century under the direction of the builder and architect Jan Bělský and architect Josef Pokorný, you have no choice but to bow before the Imperial Majesties, especially before the Empress who entrusted the construction of this summer residence to Czech experts and artists.

A visit to Ploskovice has always been a great idea. It was here that the first night and costumed tours took place and, of course, you can still see them today. However, the locals from Ploskovice keep coming up with additional significant events and experiences – theatrical performances and concerts held in the Chateau park (to experience an Opera performance enhanced by the romantically lit background of the Chateau is a simply breathtaking event), exhibitions, children's tours guided by a Princess, traditional castle and Chateau nights, movie soundtrack nights, etc. To see more you can go to: www.zamek-ploskovice.cz where you can browse through the entire offer for this year. But even if you came just to walk through the Chateau and wander for a while through the park to be stunned by one of the devilish fountains in the Chateau grottoes you will still have a unique experience.



The Krušné Mountains, dedicated to winter

“If the world is best viewed from horseback then the Krušné Mountains are best viewed if you are cutting through their slopes covered with white snow on skis or a snowboard. Taciturn and deeply submerged into themselves, cruel from the beginning of time with chillingly sharp views covered in mist but always dignified and majestic. You see, you will find here many undiscovered mountain ridges where a cross-country skier can get lost easily and wonder through mountain ridges and forest ravines alone for hours. Hand on heart – who knows all the places where you can ski in the Krušné Mountains?”



THE KLÍNOVEC MOUNTAIN IS THE NUMBER ONE CHOICE

OK, it is no wonder that every true snowman knows Klínovec. 1244 metres above the mean sea level, 12 km of downhill skiing slopes, the most modern four-seat cable car lift in the country offering magical views through its tinted windows, options to choose from various skiing terrains also available at neighbouring Fichtelberg rising above Oberwiesenthal (a multi-day ski pass is necessary), but mostly the famous telecommunication tower frosted by a master confectioner, trees covered with bizarre snow hats and ice laces and finally, views reaching far into the Bohemian landscape... The Krušné Mountains do not have a problem with snow, not even when in the Alps there is nothing to do but to sip on your bombardino. And of course the wide range of fun activities offered here are almost the same as in the Alps – snowtubing, a snowpark with an excellent U ramp, skiing schools, facilities for children, a swimming pool in the Nástup Hotel or archery. You do not need to tell skiers that Klínovec is one of the best skiing sites in the country. No, that is not necessary.



But how about Klíny near Litvínov? The ski area slopes down to the valley of the Bílý potok (White Brook) equipped with a brand new four-seat cable lift and a shiny new POMA ski-lift, enhanced lighting for night skiing, rugged snow park, artificial snow covering, chip cards, bobsleigh track, sauna, fitness room and an excellent restaurant in the Emeran Hotel, where a new sport hall is also being built... Klíny offers very high standards without the long queues for ski lifts. And we can go on – what about Český Jiřetín with three downhill skiing slopes, four ski lifts and a natural bobsleigh track? Or for example Telnice, offering diverse terrains and many interwoven downhill ski slopes with various difficulties or Boží Dar or Bublava? And we cannot forget families with children and senior citizens and more reserved skiers looking for smaller skiing facilities – such as Hora Svaté Kateřiny (Mount of St. Catherine), Meziboří near Litvínov, Komáří vížka nad Krupkou (Mosquito tower above Krupka), Pyšná near Jirkov or Mezihoří... The Krušné Mountains simply offer far more than is generally known.

IF YOU HAVE NOT CROSS-COUNTRY SKIED THROUGH THE KRUŠNÉ MOUNTAINS YOU CANNOT POSSIBLY KNOW THEM

If downhill skiers have so many things to enjoy here, cross-country skiers can also be sure that they will not find better terrains anywhere else in Bohemia. The beautiful and pristine nature of the Krušné Mountains ridges and forested giants offer a large network of perfectly maintained cross-country skiing trails. And the number is rising every year. Cross-country skiing connoisseurs are very familiar with the lavish menu offered by the Krušnohorská White Trail, a unique link between nearly 250 km of trails around Klíny, Lesná and Dlouhá Louka, all the way to Bouřňák, Fojtovice and Telnice, smoothly connected to other several-hundred-kilometre-long trails in Germany – for example around Holzgau, Altenberg or Seiffen. The enlightened founders of this cross-country skiing miracle cooperate with each other and if one side cannot maintain the trail the other side is happy to help – regardless of what language they speak. The Krušnohorská White Trail also uses unique and legible markings and it is equipped with rest areas and signs with maps. The mean level above the sea ranges from 740 m to almost 1000 m, so there is no shortage of snow. Plus you have the option to check the current snow situation on the Internet at www.kbstopa.cz, where you can see through webcams, read snow reports and snow forecast as well as reports about the current conditions of ski trails. And this is only a small part of all the cross-country trails ready and available to hungry skiers yearning to swallow up white kilometres. For example, in the area around Klínovec alone you have 30 km of trails and almost all of the above-mentioned ski facilities are connected to one facility or trail after another, integrated more or less in the Krušnohorská Trail which runs through the entire mountain ridge from one end to the other. Simply put, the Krušné Mountains are simply outstanding throughout the entire winter. They shine with a magic so strong that even a simple walk with snowshoes and without skis is well worth trying. The snow under your feet cracks like glass, the frost is doing its magic and the landscape covered in a white robe decorated with filigree ornaments shows off like a model on a catwalk and the ever present tranquility deep as an abyss surrounds it all. Blessed be the winter time in the Krušné Mountains.



The best place in the world

“Mr. Werner Stütz was born in 1934 in a small village called Kamenná u Měděnce and has been living here ever since. Before the war he attended a German school and after the war he went to a Czech school, married here, had his family and lived here. His hobby is hunting and protecting his friends in Kamenná, which still remains on the map thanks to his presence in the village. Petr Mikšíček asked him about his life story.”

TODAY, KAMENNÁ IS A SETTLEMENT BEAUTIFULLY SITUATED ON A STEEP HILL CALLED POD MĚDĚNCEM. BUT IN THE PAST, MOST LIKELY THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY WAS HERE. HOW DO YOU REMEMBER YOUR VILLAGE WHEN YOU WERE CHILD?

About 50 houses were here before the war, where usually two families lived together – the old and young, but even three families lived in some houses. They were living off the land, they had goats with kids. In the Ohře River you would find plenty of fish. We used to catch 20 or 30 trout per day. Rivers had a lot of fish, not like today. Today, we restock the fish but still, there are not that many. Nature has changed. Until the displacement of people we had two stores. Only Germans lived here.



DO YOU REMEMBER THE TIME OF THE DISPLACEMENT OF PEOPLE? YOU WERE ONLY A SMALL BOY AT THAT TIME...

Of course I remember that. During the wild displacement both fascists and anti-fascists were persecuted. The fact that my dad was communist did not help at all. The good thing was that someone had to stay behind because we had a lot of livestock here that had to be taken care of. But we were put on a list and when all the Germans left for Germany, we had to do forced labour. The vast majority of families who did not have Czech citizenship had to travel inland to work in mines. Somehow we managed to avoid it. In 1952 we received Czech citizenship and I had to undergo my mandatory army service immediately after that. I had to join the “special” Army department called the black barons. Due to our improper political background we worked in mines in 60 cm high tunnels laying down and digging, so it looked like we were under a table at all times.

HOW DID YOU MANAGE TO FINISH THE SETTLEMENT OF KAMENNÁ AFTER THE WAR? OR DID YOU STAY HERE AS THE ONLY FAMILY?

After the war no one came to Kamenná. During the sixties the Army demolished many houses. When I came back from my military service, there was nothing to do here so I began to work in the Jáchymovské mines. I was working there for three years before the mine buried me alive. I was 28 years old. And I suffered a serious spine injury. Later my wife and I settled down in this house and had a family. But unfortunately, soon after that my wife died from cancer. At that time we did not have medications as we have today. She died when she was 43 years old. At that time my daughter was 11 and my son 16. Only 10 families stayed here during the fifties and sixties. But there was no hope and no work. Before you would see many road and forest workers here, but then machines took over and work which required 10 people before was suddenly done by one. So gradually everybody left for Měděnec, where they could find work. No transportation was available here so I bought a Škoda car and then a Lada Niva so I could go through rough and hilly terrain. My parents stayed down in Kamenná. It was the worst time for me, because I had to go to work, take care of my household, my parents and my children. I was still partially disabled due to the accident in the mine but I worked because I needed some extra cash. When I exceeded the limit that I was allowed to earn as extra cash they took away my disability payments. In the end I managed to cure my spine by myself, because from 1963 I was working at a state agricultural settlement and rode horses almost everyday while grazing cattle. And as I was riding my spine gradually got better and better. Doctors prohibited me from cutting down trees but if they only saw how many I cut – and I am 80 years old. Everyone who needs wood comes to me. But my age is getting to me.

YOU ARE WELL-KNOWN FOR THE FACT THAT YOU MAINTAIN A TRADITIONAL FARM IN THE KRUŠNÉ MOUNTAINS. HOW DID YOU CREATE IT AND HOW DO YOU KEEP MAINTAINING SUCH TRADITIONAL FARM?

My current farm is the same as before the war – sufficient to feed one family. We keep cows, goats, pigs, rabbits, ducks, hens, guinea fowl, pigeons, canaries, fish, deer and bees. We also have a dachshund and a guard dog – a German shepherd... And we also grow vegetables for the kitchen, potatoes, herbs for teas and lots of flowers... Despite the high altitude above the sea level we have fruit trees, plums, apples, pears, cherries, currants, raspberries and nuts. Only apricots, peaches and vines do not do well here. I also do fruit tree cultivation – I graft wild trees with new varieties. Now my friend Klaus Frank from Breitenbrunn and myself are trying to save and grow old fruit trees in Saxony. Trees typical for the Krušné Mountains. And when we have fruit trees, we must also have bees. I am not a beekeeper who keep bees just for honey. If the year is good I harvest the honey and if it is bad I leave part of the honey for winter as the feed for the bees. And if there is none then there is none. You see, fruit trees and alleys on this steep hillside are very good to have. Bees can pollinate here much longer than in open meadows. Flowers on open meadows fade and are done within three weeks. Here, they have several months to do that. Around April 10 everything is blooming down in the valley of the Ohře River and then it moves slowly upwards. On the top of the Měděnec Hill, trees are sometimes still in bloom at the end of May.



HOW DO YOU PERCEIVE THE LIFE IN KAMENNÁ TODAY AND IN THE SURROUNDING VILLAGES?

There is no culture anymore in villages. Before we had many associations, dances and fun fairs. I am still a member of a beekeepers association and hunting association, but we do not have any dances. When I was young you could not get in. Everything was full. Now nothing is happening at night. In Klášterec on Fridays and Saturdays we used to have dances and fun fairs and today everything is dead and I do not know why. And at the same time if you look around you see history everywhere! When we go hunting I keep swearing and shaking my head in disbelief as I do not understand where all the traditions disappeared to. Hunting performances are no longer organized, hunting slang is disappearing, mostly thanks to private hunters who basically buy the hunt.

YOU HAVE BEEN LIVING YOUR ENTIRE LIFE IN THE KRUŠNÉ MOUNTAINS IN A SMALL VILLAGE. HOW STRONG IS YOUR BOND TO THESE MOUNTAINS?

The Krušné Mountains are the best mountains and the best place in the world for me. There's nowhere I could feel as good as I feel here. Definitely not in the lowlands. When you are in lowlands and you want to sit somewhere you cannot find a place to sit. If you are in a hilly terrain you will always find a slope or stump. Plus, you do not get any view in lowlands. I need to see far because I am used to it. As far as the Doupovské Hills. Young people of today, they do not know what I am talking about. I am pretty old now but when I am on a hunt I can see a deer a kilometre away from me and I do not wear any glasses. When you are in the lowlands, all you see is the sky above you. That is horrible. I could never live there. I am glad that I was born in Kamenná and could live my life here on the hillsides of the Krušné Mountains.

You will find other very interesting life stories of people living in the Ore Mountains in the book by Petr Mikšíček called Tváře Krušnohoří (Faces of the Krušné Mountains), or as an audio book available at a very special web page at www.znkr.cz

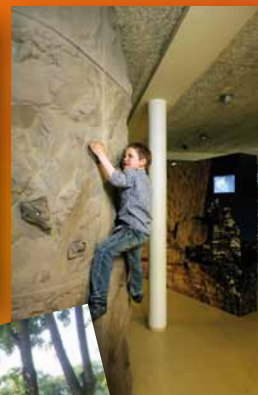


What if the devils play with children?

WHATEVER MOOD YOU ARE IN, ITS FINE

So, where should we go?..... do your children like animals but they have been to zoos too many times? Okay – so, we may try for example the Zoo Centre in Srdcov near Ústě, where they have mainly hoofed animals and children can pet for example, a mouflon, stag or doe – and for a piece of bread they may even get a kiss. Or you may go to Mstišov park in Dubí near Teplice, where they can move freely and naturally among domestic animals. And what about horses? Do your children like horses? Well, in that case you will be very busy – you can try all types of rides, for example at the Třebušín farm – Zababež near Litoměřice, an organic farm Babiny near Ústí nad Labem, in Bohemian Switzerland the JV Ranch in Rybníště near Krásná Lípa, Čeřeniště stone barn or an organic farm in Klíny, where you can also visit a Centre of forgotten crafts and learn how to process, for example, sheep's wool, how to work the spinning wheel, how to make candles from beeswax, how to weave baskets, how to bobbin, how to bake bread or make cheese... Or do you prefer fun in the water? So, in that case you will be interested in some of our water parks – in Děčín or Teplice (both with mineral water), or in Klášterec (with a super-long water slide), or possibly in the legendary thermal pool in Brná near Ústí, or Na Sladovce in Benešov above Ploučnice, or in our mineral water pool in Duchcov, and finally, you may want to see some of our natural lakes – such as the Barbara pond near Teplice or the already mentioned “Kamenčák” near Chomutov... We will also pass through a unique gallery of decorated Easter eggs in Libotenice near Litoměřice, where they will show you the Easter eggs, but also teach you how to decorate them. Or you may go for the open-air museum in Zubrnice, where you can experience a wonderful historic village with an old school and may even take a train ride pulled by a locomotive like that described in fairy tales written by Mr. Zababa. A plethora of activities for children offered by many castles or a great interactive experience is available in the House of Bohemian Switzerland in Krásná Lípa... And we did not mention yet the most exciting experience – various tours and trekking trips, nature trails, rock towns, ... So, what do you say? Is that enough? Not yet? Well, go the hell!

“Originally, we wanted you to read here what you can do with children when you visiting the Gate to Bohemia. But that would take the entire issue! So you will learn and read about zoos, Kamencové Lake (Stone Lake), and droms in the city of Most – this article that you are reading right now was meant to get you all excited and then we shall take you to an unusual museum, which would probably lose its purpose without children. And next time, we shall continue our journey through children's paradises.”



HOW A DEVIL HATCHES OUT

There are only two devil museums in the entire world. One is in Lithuania, but it is a mere gallery of statues, and one is in Ústě. But beware, it is not a peaceful exhibition! It is a devilishly powerful experience. The museum exists thanks to a carver and artist Jaroslav Stejný, who will welcome you in the Pikart tower, the most massive part of the city fortification walls, built in 1428 by the Hussites – sometimes offensively called – the Pikarti. During daylight, which forces its way inside through windows, it is not that bad. But you cannot use dirty words or even worse, speak words such as “oh my God” – for that you get whip-lashed. For example, you may see a Punishment of a sinful woman by the righteousness of hell – the entire play in strange mechanical motions performed by a constantly added-to and improved mechanical Hell – the only one in the world, equipped with statues of devils from Mexico and Bali. Here, you will learn that a picture of a somewhat kind and silly devil is really only a Czech invention. You may even tickle one little lazy devil on its hoof. What an unforgettable and pleasant sight! But then ... The creaking gate to Hell opens and we walk down into a Gothic castle cellar – a rugged space with supporting stone columns. Darkness, dim light and crazy sounds (when you learn at: www.certi-muzeum.com that an event called “Alive Devils” will take place). Otherwise you're just walking with a guide. But we think the guide is also from Hell, and you will see a scale for human souls, a time machine which measures your remaining days, but can also run the time, days and years backwards, you will observe a devil egg shortly before hatching! And then – a mouth of a terrible corridor opens and when “Lucifer forbid” the egg breaks, the devils fly out screaming. You will also see a wrought-iron cage used to teach sinners some manners, especially female sinners and a grinding wheel used for devil's claw sharpening. You will also learn that from all the senses the devil's eyesight is the weakest. Of course it is just a game, but devilishly effective and impressive. Children are scared with eyes wide open, but obviously they love every minute of it. And you will not see any high-end computer technology behind it or 3-D effects. None. Only amazing craft work, great ideas and skilful hands, motors and drives invented at home which are able to handle 16 different motions at the same time. You cannot see this anywhere else but in Bohemia. In short – honest Czech crafts made from almost nothing, but devilishly funny and spectacular. And right next to the tower you will see hospitable innkeepers waiting in the local Čertovna to feed you with devilishly tasty pizzas including the local specialty, rare even in the Czech Republic – an American pizza with white rustic sauce called “White Asmodeo Dream” – Hmmm, for that, one might even sell his soul to the devil.



Zoological gardens – three decorations of the Gate to Bohemia

“And each is different. But they do have one thing in common – visiting one of them is a very pleasant and unique experience, especially for children. Děčín, Ústí nad Labem, Chomutov. Let us take a look and see why each one is uniquely different.”

DĚČÍN – ANIMALS EXPERIENCED THROUGH ALL THE SENSES

Whoever climbs up to the forest park at the Pastýřská Wall, high above the city of Děčín, will be sucked into a tempting game within a very short time, because this zoo is almost entirely interactive. Every moment you will have an urge to touch something, to solve something or try something. And you will love it. The zoo focuses on endangered species from around the world but also on fauna living in Bohemian Switzerland. It is an excellent idea, because what good is it to know that martens, badgers or even lynxes live in the surrounding forests when you cannot really see them. Here, they are at your fingertips. The biggest attractions for many years have been our grizzly bears – Siegfried and Helga. These two thirty-somethings are the only grizzly bears in the entire former Czechoslovakia! Other major attractions are Malaysian bears, Amur leopards (did you know that only thirty five leopards live in the wild?), spotted sambar, North Sulawesi babirusa, Citron-crested cockatoo, North American Porcupine, etc. But let us return back to our game. We promised that you will experience these animals through all your senses – at every step you will encounter stations and signs with “touch windows”, where you may touch for example a snake skin that has been shed, or “sniffing window” where you can soak up the smell of the animal. Use your eyes to watch not only the animals, but also what they eat. You may also read verse riddles. Also your hearing will get its share because some of our boards talk to you, or you may use a phone booth and call one of the ten Indonesian animals – and you will hear the sound the animal uses. And your sense of taste? Just sample some of the goodies available at various events. For example carnival donuts. Another attractions are the so-called zoo sport record stations, where you can try for example, whether you can beat a flea or an armadillo in a high jump. Still not enough? Then go to the children's area with a rope climbing track, climbing frames and many other fun features. On your way home, stop below the hill to see an exhibition called Rájské ostrovy (Paradise Island). You will sail through four floors and a coral reef, around a mangrove coast, rainforest, desert and semi-desert. And you can still use your ticket from the zoo!



ÚSTÍ NAD LABEM – EXOTICA WHEREVER YOU LOOK

The zoo in Ústí is situated on a steep slope. It starts on the level of the Elbe River and ends high above the Elbe valley, offering beautiful views of the surrounding countryside. This ZOO is the steepest in the country. Good thing that from April to October you can take a ride on a little train – otherwise, it would be almost like a mountain climbing tour. You will see animals at every step, mainly tropical and exotic types. Do not worry, they also have giraffes and elephants. Speaking of elephants, do not get scared when an elephant suddenly appears in front of you. They are used to walking the garden paths every day. But you will have a chance to look at many different animals. Our sea lion show is already legendary and many visitors come here just to see this show. Or for example, a honey tree where Malaysian bears look for goodies, elephant washing and caring which you can observe in a new and beautiful elephant barn where these huge trunk-equipped animals are separated from visitors only by a trench. And what about orangutan feeding? If you have not seen this, you have not seen anything yet. Orangutans are the pride of

the local zoo keepers. Imagine, they have already bred four young Borneo Orangutans. The youngest was born at the end of 2011 and it is simply adorable. Next to the orangutan family of Ňuňák, a doyen of the garden has its residence. The orangutan Ferda, date of birth 1969. Stop for a while and have a conversation with this unique personality. Look into his thoughtful eyes and you may find out something about yourself. The zoo is very proud of its keepers and their successes. For example, to breed an Amur leopard (do you remember how rare this animal is?), cannot be done successfully just by anyone. Just in 2011 alone, 411 young animals of different kinds were born here! It is clear that animals feel at home here.



CHOMUTOV – SAFARI, OPEN-AIR MUSEUM, ROYAL PADDOCKS

The largest zoo in the country is in Chomutov. And make no mistake, this huge area has been used very effectively and with animals in mind. Paddocks and free run spaces built by the zoo management are really huge. So you may feel like you are actually observing these animals in the wild, even though you are in the middle of the ZOO. And what about when you board the Safari Express and go through the Eurosafari gate and right through a herd of bison for example. This zoo is dedicated to animals of Eurasia. You will be surprised how different and colourful the fauna here is. The largest animal breeding successes of the Chomutov Zoo include the rare arkal steppe sheep, Indian takins – these animals can not be bred just anywhere either. For example, the already mentioned European bison represent literally heraldic animals, as well as the Carpathian lynx, seals or amazing brown bears playing hilarious games around carefully dug burrows near a lake – which they have all for themselves, and that you just cannot stop watching... The Safari Express also goes into the open-air museum, which is very rare, because other zoos in the country do not operate open-air museums. This open air-museum shows villages situated at the foothills of the Krušné Mountains and you will certainly find many interesting things here. Right next door you will find an equestrian centre with stables. Then we take a long turn and go back to the classical exhibition, perhaps all the way to a petting zoo, where your children may pet animals, or to a rope climbing centre whose popularity is constantly rising, or finally, to one of the many interactive computer terminals. And if we are in luck we may encounter an enchanting Fairytale Safari and it just may happen that you will not be able to decide what to see first – the freely running animals or fairytale figures peeping from behind every tree or window of wooden houses. Add to all this narrated animal feeding sessions, weekend pony rides – and you have two more reasons to go there.

We have all been told that hops are our gold

HISTORY TIGHTLY CONNECTED TO HOPS GROWING

It is difficult to write about Žatec. You have to experience this city yourself. But nevertheless – let us try. And where should we begin? Of course in the City Hall tower. Because from the tower you will see the entire pleasant city. But before you do, it is good idea to visit the information centre down in the City Hall building, where they get you ready to climb 140 steps to reach the gallery of the tower and on the top of that, they will give you several tips on where to go and where to see the most beautiful sections of the Urban Reservation area. When you are standing 47m above the ground you do not know where to look first. Here is one secret tip: Focus on the Czech Central Mountains and try to see the stone towers of Hazmburk. Why? If you do, your wish will come true but you cannot say a single word before you reach the town square again.

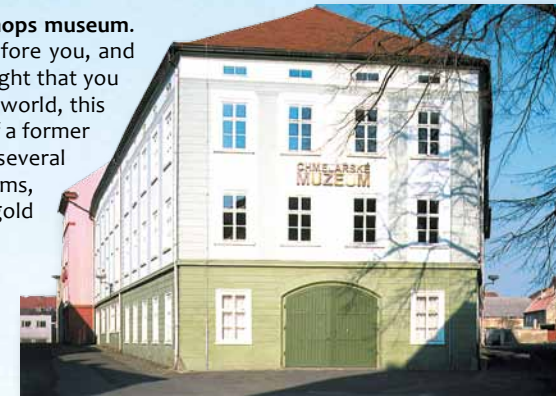


A TOWN WHERE BEER IS AT HOME

You are sure to have a map recommending one of the several walking trips. If you do, just follow one of them and enjoy the magic. You will not be the first one – Žatec is so magical that movie makers from all over the world come here. During the last 30 years one hundred films have been shot here. Žatec has often played cities such as Berlin, Paris, Prague, and even Moscow. For example, Oliver Twist, Doctor Zhivago, Les Misérables, Edith Piaf, but also Náměstíčko (Little Square), Nemocnice na kraji města (Hospital at the edge of the city) or Holky z porcelánu (Girls from porcelain) were all shot here..... You may learn about this rich movie-making history in the newly open exhibition located in the saved Renaissance building where malt used to be produced. Movies in a malt shop? Well, you had better get used to it. In Žatec everything is more or less connected with beer. Hops are the pride of the city and ensures the worldwide recognition of the city, because hops from Žatec are simply the best in the world and breweries all over the world demand them. Regardless of where you go you will always encounter hops. Near the town square for example, we will see the smallest hops field in the world and will recall what you saw from the tower – a skyline of slender brick chimneys, which have been guarding the local hops production history for more than 120 years. Before you even notice, your steps will take you to the Prague suburb. This zone offering many technical monuments closely related to hops growing is currently waiting to be included in the UNESCO World Heritage Site.



While your mind is still fresh and able to absorb information, go and visit the unique **hops museum**. An architecturally interesting and modernist facade hides a gate that will open wide before you, and you will see a giant hops harvesting machine. Behind the machine you are awaited by a sight that you cannot see anywhere else in the world. Even though there are six hops museums in the world, this one is the largest. Here, on an area of 4000 square metres in spacious and bright rooms of a former warehouse and hops packaging halls you will pass through several floors and through several grades installed in sulphur chambers and you will be in constant contact with historical items, tools and machines and learn all about the history of hops growing and processing – the gold of Žatec.



And then we shall head to the **temple of hops and beer**. Interactive activities unprecedented in our country. You will find it easily. A 42 metre tall hops lighthouse will show the way. It is lit at night and it illuminates the sky. When you have finally seen enough of the hops astronomical clock, you may enter and you will be taken care of. The interest is huge but no one is bored while waiting – we have an info centre, mini-cinema, children's corner, souvenirs, etc..... If you came here by bike you may park it at "hops stands". Then you shall select your route – I personally recommend the trail including beer tasting. When you enter the elevator inside the lighthouse you may be surprised by large glass sections on the floor but before you can figure it out they will give you 3-D glasses and you are flying up.



Seriously.

Accompanied by sounds further enhanced by smooth vibrations, you are suddenly flying in a balloon over Žatec or in a spaceship through the universe. It is the only elevator in the world with 3-D projection. The adrenalin rush experienced in the elevator is now replaced by a narrow walkway which will take you to a tangled maze, where you will struggle to push through huge bales of hops and take in their unmistakable aroma. You will probably be shocked when you look at yourself in many crooked mirrors. You will also walk through an alchemist's workshop surrounded by darkness and fog, where you will finally find – following the hops aroma and squelching in virtual beer – our treasure. What is it? Oh no we cannot tell you. It is a very intense experience. You are still awaited at the Knights' Hall and if you are an adventure seeker, you can try on the harness and climb through a chimney. If you have taken your children with you, you may show them a paradise – children's garden, playrooms, children's cafe and horseback riding centre, perfectly created and modelled on a map of the town of Žatec. In the restaurant with a small brewery next door you can enjoy a good meal and taste one of the three types of local beers and then you may relax at a breathtaking monastery garden surrounded by walls, or in an oasis in the city centre with a mini zoo and fountain of the Order of the Knights, historical hops garden and, finally, in another children's playground. Žatec will simply take you by surprise. One day, I am afraid, will not be enough for you to see it all.



A fortress of human resilience and strength

Terezín. One of the most bizarre places in the world. A place where despite the presence of thousands of graves you will feel hope, and when facing the horrors written within these walls you will still believe in humanity. A place where you cannot just walk through without actually living and experiencing this place on your own. A place that will calm you down and give you strength at the same time.

Built to protect but ended up as a prison

The view from high above is breathtaking – A perfect symmetry, walls following precise angles, geometrically perfect network of streets and identical houses. You will have a strange feeling when walking the ground between these houses and on inappropriately wide streets, until you reach the huge town square. And then it will happen. The current time will fade away and you will become a part of history, because Terezín, even though people of today leave here, is mainly a huge memorial. Originally, it was built to become a proud and impregnable fortress surrounded by walls and protected by a sophisticated system of flood trenches. People were able to build all this during 11 years, but this fortress whose first cornerstone was laid by the Emperor Josef II and the city carrying the name of his mother the Empress Maria Theresa, never protected anything from anyone. And if cities have their fates, then Terezín and its city fortress were predicted a very dark future – a future as a horrible and dark prison. Terezín became a prison for the first time in the first half of the 19th century. In 1914 Terezín got its most famous prisoner. Gavrilo Princip, the man whose bullet fired in Sarajevo, triggered the First World War. At that time no one guessed what would happen less than 30 years later.



When you stand near a typical model of living quarters, you will not believe that musical composers such as Viktor Ullman, Pavel Haas or Hans Krása, the pianist Gideon Klein, conductor Karel Ančerl, painter Karel Fleischmann or writer Karel Poláček were suffering here, and that they were able to rise up and fight with their art every day against the tyranny and resurrect fading hopes of others. You will not believe that theatrical performances such as Carmen, Tosca, Rigoletto, Hubička (The Kiss), or the Marriage of Figaro and of course Brundibár composed by Krása and performed by many children were watches here, and these performances were high-quality events performed by top virtuosos... Not far from here, you can look into a praying room situated in the former coal store, or even at a typical garret. These are only small fragments which give you a clear mosaic of something that you can hardly imagine. However, it will strengthen your spirit. If you imagine that people were able to live and not to give up on life in such a horrible environment, it makes you think that we are not that bad as a species.



The energy of those longing for life still remains

When you walk through the infamous black and white gate to the Small Fortress, which is visible from the city, you will experience a strange feeling. Something still lingers behind the gate. Something untouchable that forces you to slow down and to remain quiet and carefully look around. Regardless of whether you walk in with a guide or alone, when you start to wander through these streets you will experience a strange mixture of feelings and you will not know what to think about it. The energy of those people who were imprisoned here since 1940 by the Prague gestapo still remains here. Brief signs on walls say more than thousand words. For example this saying – “Those who walk further will be shot dead”. Can we at least try to imagine such a horrible reality today? Or signs telling us where the SS barracks are located or where the gate of death or solitary confinement cells are located. You do not need to close your eyes to see what cannot be seen. The Gestapo imprisoned here those who had not been killed yet in the infamous Pečákarna or those who were already sentenced. During the forties people such as Otakar Batlička, caricaturist František Bidlo, E. F. Burian, Milada Horáková or the actors Věra Tichánková and Josef Větrovec stood here in line... In the documentary exposition or in the museum cinema you will see all the horrible details.



And yet another experience is waiting for you in the Main Fortress – that is in the town itself. Traces of borders of the former Jewish ghetto and the collection and transition camp, which was established here in 1941, are barely seen today. But if you go to the ghetto museum you will be overwhelmed with unpretentious testimonies demonstrated on children's pictures, posters, facts and details. Suddenly the ghetto is alive again. A place where you wait for death, but still so full of life and even happiness and laughter. And in the nearby Magdeburg Barracks you will understand that people here were singing, dancing, playing theatre and publishing and reading newspapers...



A town where the present is built on history

But we are not finished yet. There is much more to see in Terezín. The day will fly by without you noticing. And as you slowly start to forget these extraordinary historical experiences, you will realize that Terezín lives on. A city killed in 1942, when the number of transported Jews increased so rapidly that all local people had to move from the city during a very short time, and resurrected after the war thanks to newly arriving settlers, today offers new culture, sports and celebrations. Come when the Josefinské festivities are held here offering spectacular reconstructions of historical battles and parades of carriages pulled by white horses from Kladruhy. You will also see the imperial Majesties Joseph II and Maria Theresa! Or you may be invited to see a narrated tour through a spectacular and intricate network of underground corridors, including mine and eavesdropping corridors (more information at www.terezin.cz). Make no mistake; whatever you see in Terezín will make you a better human being. There is no other city like this in the world.



A hunter among us

“It is the year 1976 and at one of the Děčín dwellings you see a party of the “Gottwald” type. An old B-100 plays Far Far Away from Slade and a bunch of teenagers are passing around a bottle of hunter's liquor procured from God knows where. We are arguing fiercely about whether it tastes more like whiskey or cognac, not because we know how these imperialist drinks actually taste, but simply because with a shot of hunter's liquor we feel adult, free and mature. As if the process of “normalisation” was not happening out there and as if the world belonged to us. And then the first kisses in the shadows of the hall tasted slightly like nuts. And at the same time, in other cities and houses, restaurants and parks, thousands of strangers are bound together thanks to a dark green bottle with a hunter with a mustache on the label. If these days had some freeway out, the good old hunter's liquor was one of them. But at that time not many people knew that it is a famous label connected forever with the town of Ústí nad Labem. 35 years later Czech parties do not look much different. The good old hunter's liquor is back. Or rather it is not back, it has always been here but people need it a lot more now. But was the liquor always here?”



FROM RYE TO WINE

When in 1847 brothers Louis and Hermann Eckelmann together with Ludwig Bramsch founded their factory in old wine cellars in Březno and called it Bramsch and Eckelmann – Manufacture of Spirits, Pressed Yeast and Liquors, one of their first products was named Alter Korn – Stará žitná in Czech. Already at that time, a good old hunter was on the label. It took almost a hundred years before this hunter was included in the name of the ever popular spirit, which was sold after the war under the name Good Old Hunter's Liquor. At the beginning – as the name said, the base of the drink was a spirit distilled from rye. But slowly they began to use a spirit distilled from wine imported from France and this recipe has remained unchanged until today. Of course, the composition of the recipe is a big secret and it is stored in a safe box that only two people have access to. We only know that the original taste comes from raisins, prunes, apples, apricots, pears, nuts – and secret herbs and exotic spices. All these goodies age for several months in oak barrels and then are bottled into bottles carrying a label showing a guy dressed in a hunting outfit, which amazingly enough, started to look younger, had a less dense mustache and due to the ongoing anti-smoking movement – he even quit smoking! – but the drink he is protecting with a gun in his hand is still as great as ever!



IRREPLACEABLE, TRADITIONAL AND DISTINCTIVE

Our former yapping about whiskey and cognac was not so far-fetched after all. Let us pour a shot of the Good Old Hunter's Liquor and taste it. First, a smooth aroma comes out. It is so smooth thanks to the distilled wine and fruits. OK and now, let us leave the spirit alone to get warmer until it reaches the room temperature – and we have a cognac! A glass with ice cubes – a Good Old Hunter's Liquor on ice – and we have whiskey! Make no mistake, Good Old Hunter's Liquor will always be very special and distinctive. No wonder! It is the second oldest spirit produced in the Bohemian lands. But that does not mean that it always had it easy. It almost disappeared. Mostly at the beginning of the nineties when Czechs wanted to taste everything that they could not get their hands on before, and now stores were full of these goods. That was not surprising – if you consider music or movies, but the same happened with other commodities as well. There were times no one wanted to listen to Czech music and Czech beverages were losing their popularity. But we tried everything, tasted everything, travelled around the world and suddenly when everything was available and we came back home, we dusted off what was waiting for us patiently in our cabinets. Well it was not so easy – but for example, the Good Old Hunter's Liquor was lucky because the new owners of the company (Drinks Union) trusted the name and decided to carry on. They began a new marketing campaign and suddenly the Good Old Hunter's Spirit was looking at us from every TV screen. And people remembered and the young ones were tempted to try it.

So, the drink which during the seventies and even during the eighties flew off the store shelves and was a national treasure that everyone held dear and had the image of as a “better society drink”, and was connected with our everyday lives long before we discovered the term “product placement” was seen in many Czech movies. Let us remind you of Jan Hartl who use it to numb a painful eye in the movie Vesničko má středisková, Zdeněk Svěrák and Jan Tříska who enjoyed the spirit in the movie Na samotě u lesa, or scenes from Slavnosti sněženek, Hoří má panenko or even the children's movie At' žijí duchové. This legendary drink finally got a second wind and is back on its horse or rather on the shelf where it belongs. David Ogilvy, the world famous marketing and advertisement guru says: “When your factory burns down, the only thing you are left with is your brand.” However, there are brands to which this may not apply, because they are not strong enough to be resurrected. The Good Old Hunter's Liquor is a strong brand and it is also a famous, original and traditional brand – after all, this year it will celebrate 165 years of existence – and we must admit that is beautiful. Just try to stare in the waggish eyes of the old hunter. As someone in the last century would have said. What other drink (if we omit another famous brand from the Gate to Bohemia – Březňák beer) has a more friendly and kind face?



A lake such that cannot be found anywhere else

Who does not love unique mysteries? It is so exciting to see something that is unique and unparalleled on the entire planet, and that cannot be found anywhere else. And if such a unique site is right at our backdoor it is even more tempting to see it. The Kamencové Lake situated on the outskirts of the town of Chomutov, is one of its kind. All right, another one used to be in Canada but it has dried out and was erased from the map. So here the experience is even more intense because you can look at it but you can jump also into it, swim or dive, and as we shall explain later, you can spend a very nice weekend or even an entire holiday here.



OUR SMALL CZECH DEAD SEA

The lake was first mentioned in 1466. At that time it was only a small water body that people were already talking about as a "miraculous dead lake". So what happened that this lake is one of the largest lakes in the Czech Republic covering an area of almost 16 ha? It is due to the mining of alum (kamenec in Czech), potassium alum to be more precise. Maybe we will never find out exactly why, but water that the mine workers were fighting in the Kamencový mine every day finally took over the entire mine and also flooded the surrounding meadows. The water took everything it could. So, now we may read in the land registry books about a huge lake that existed as early as in 1841. Some 50 years later people built a spa around it and soon after a medical facility which thanks to the mineral water successfully cured upper respiratory diseases, gout, anaemia, rheumatism, gynaecological diseases, kidney disease and even acne. By the way, alum – do you remember the small shiny stone that our grandfathers used to have in their bathrooms right next to the razor and shaving brushes? If you cut yourself while shaving, you just rubbed the alum stone on it and the cut closed itself from the inside and the bleeding stopped.



But this is only one good property of many magical properties of this mysterious stone diluted in the water of the lake – the alum contents in the lake amount to an entire one percent! Another feature earned the lake its name the "dead lake". Alum allows almost no life to live in the lake, except protozoa. Other than that, nothing appears to be able to live here. And that applies to fish, plants and also to cyanobacteria and algae – a nightmare of all lakes and water bodies. Therefore, the water in the lake is crystal-clear from spring to spring. And if you add to all this the fact that swimming in this lake is very beneficial for your health and that thanks to its slightly astringent effect it reduces sweating in very hot weather (alum is added to antiperspirants), you already have several reasons to visit the suburbs of Chomutov. Plus more benefits await you!

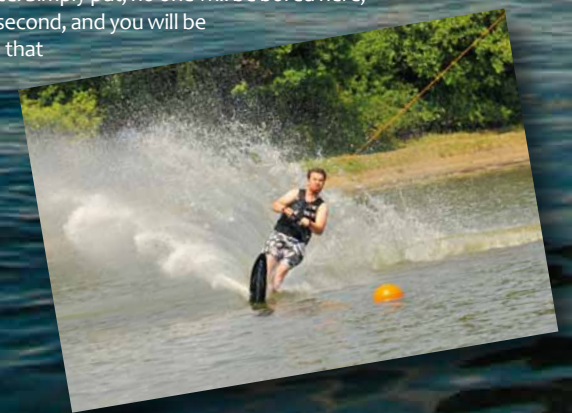


ENTERTAINMENT AND FUN ANYWHERE YOU LOOK

A comfortable sporting and relaxation centre was built here during the last few years. The lake offers sand and grass beaches, and even one nudist beach, children's pool and two playgrounds – one built in a pirate theme, a good old water monster (don't worry, it is made of wood), jungle gym, water trampolines and inflatable hills that you can climb and dive into the water (the maximum depth is three metres, so just right for skilful jumpers), and at the central pier you will find a hundred-metre long swimming track. The water surface is riddled with boats and pedal boats, and for those truly passionate sportsmen who hate lying down on the beach we offer football, beach volleyball, a miniature golf course with twenty seven tracks and skittles (not to be confused with bowling, which is easy!) played on a four-lane track with European parameters, or you may rent a bike.

Those who love an adrenaline rush may try the longest water-ski tow lift in the country available at the neighbouring Banda – a slang name for Velký Otavský rybník (Great Pond). Fans of water skiing simply hold the lift handle and without any towing boat they are pulled on the water surface for 760 metres – that is, if they manage to stay on their feet...

And if I add that just a few steps away you will find a new multi-cinema and ice rink and that a new aqua park will open this summer, in-line skating tracks and that in the near vicinity of the lake you may visit the largest zoo in this country, then you will understand why the Kamencové Lake won a competition run by CzechTourism and was declared the most attractive tourist destination of northwest Bohemia and that it is considered one of the best summer destinations in the country. And we are not finished yet because the fun does not end with the summer. In winter, they mill a four-kilometre long trail through the snow – tracks for cross-country skiing and a skating track, and if Jack Frost gives us enough cold weather, they may stretch the track across the water surface. Simply put, no one will be bored here, not for a single second, and you will be happy to know that swimming in this water is beneficial for your health too.



Stone fairy on the Ohře River



“Louny. A city dedicated to the Moon. A pale Moon which may have given the city its name. The settlement called Luna near a ford across the Ohře River has been providing people with a living space since the year 1000. Since that time, important historical events have been happening here in abundance and they make it worth a visit. The city of Louny is mostly regarded as a city of calm walks taking you back in time.”

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF BENEDIKT REJT – LOUNY IN MEDIEVAL TIMES

The Royal architect Benedikt Rejt, and the author of Vladislav's Hall, was associated with Louny so much that people called him Beneš of Louny. Thanks to him the city of Louny still has its dominating feature today – the late Gothic Church of St. Mikuláš (Nicholas). The three-aisle church with its revolutionary, unique and a beautiful arched roof made up of sharp pyramids, which perfectly correspond with the picturesque shapes of the hills of the Czech Central Mountains, was built thanks to Benedict Rejt and according to his design, at the location of a former parish church, which burned down in 1517. Only the church tower survived. To walk through its noble and always calm interiors and to admire three monumental carved altars made by Jeroným Kohl, or to sit in its benches and be captivated by an austere Gothic pulpit – that is an experience that will change you. And when you finally climb to the tower gallery you will be rewarded with views of perfect panoramas of the Czech Central Mountains and the royal city itself. You will see the entire medieval centre of the city as if it is right in front of your nose and you will be tempted to walk through the narrow streets below. Let us succumb to the temptation and walk through the proud Žatecká Gate, around perfectly preserved city walls rising above the riverbed of the Ohře River, and through Hilbertova Street and around the significant synagogue and a medieval house called Daliborka with a well preserved timbered room on its first floor. We may end our trip in the gallery of Benedict Rejt located in the former brewery near the town square. The master of late Gothic is looking down at his successors – because the exhibition offers jewels of the Czech abstract art of the second half of the 20th century.

THE CITY CHOSEN BY GOD – LOUNY DURING THE HUSSITE PERIOD

At the beginning of the Hussite movement, a tale spread among Hus' followers saying that there are five chosen towns and these will be saved at the end of the world. One of them was the town of Louny. During the Hussite wars Louny together with Žatec and Slaný joined the Hussite movement. It is possible that this decision was largely affected by a letter written by Master Jan Hus and addressed to the people of Louny. Today, you may read a part of this letter on the tombstone on the Memorial to Jan Hus, created by Jan Kvasnička. However, a much more intensive Hussite experience awaits us in the local museum whose permanent exposition is dedicated to everyday lives of people living in the Hussite period.



UNFINISHED UTOPIA – MODERNIST AND POSTMODERN LOUNY

When we walk through the city we will often encounter bizarre buildings of the 20th century. At the town square you cannot miss the palace-like building of the city savings bank built during the late 1920s with statues created by Otakar Švec (author of memorials to Franz Joseph Masaryk and Stalin – yes, the Stalin in Letná. Neither of these statues are there any more), beautiful houses in Poděbradova třída (street) belonging to Kamil Hilbert – a native from Louny, etc., but mostly we will be tempted to see Kotěra's Colony for railway employees. Near the main railway station in Louny, our famous Czech architect Jan Kotěra designed and partially completed (until the money ran out), his Utopia – an ideal garden town linking urban and rural life together. Besides family houses, he managed to finish only two laundromats, but there was no money for a school, pub, barber shop and church. Regardless of that, it is the most significant artwork of Czech humanist architecture.



EPICENTRE OF MANY TRIPS – LOUNY OF TODAY

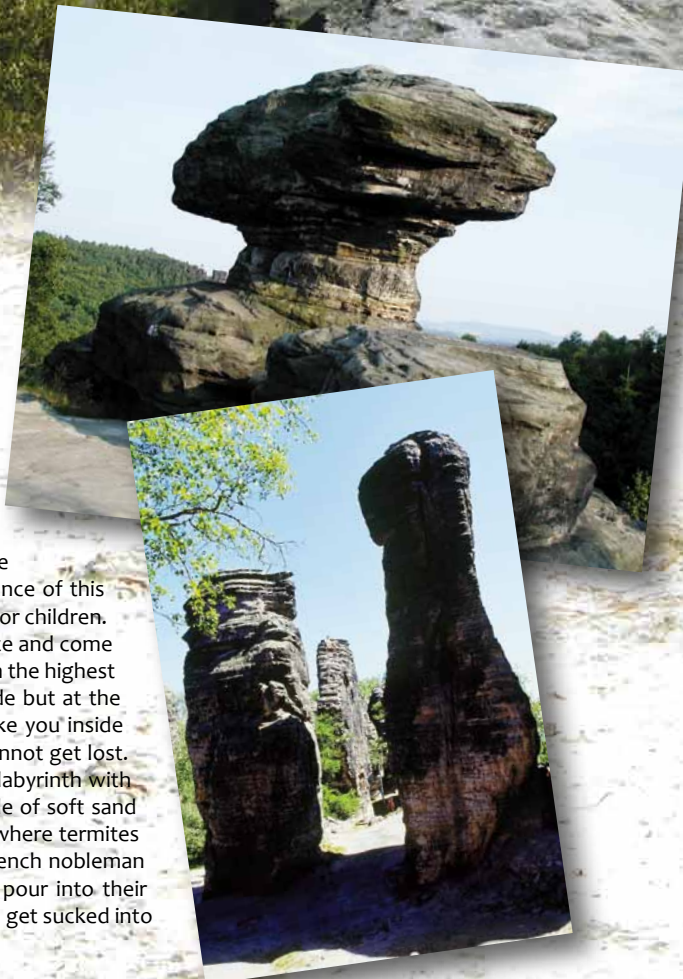
Walks through the city enhanced for example by a visit to a unique museum of Araukarities – fossilized trees, which is hidden in one of the bastions in Louny, are only the beginning of many trips. The best thing to do, is to go to the local information centre, where they will give you lots of destinations and routes, and also interesting literature, including a charming and playful guide for children who has many fun tasks, or they may even send you to the inundation bridge with forty arches, which has been protecting the city against floods since the 1820s, or they may recommend one of the many nature trails around the city, or maybe to the New Castle only 7 km away – a Gothic mansion rebuilt in Baroque style, which is now finally open to the public.

Labyrinth of sculptures created by nature

“If someone invites you to visit a magical and fantastic world, a wonderful city full of crooked and narrow streets, deserted town squares, passages, manholes and tunnels dwarfed by towers, citadels, walls, full of waterfalls, ravens' nests and pulpits, and where you may meet a gigantic bear, turtle, elephant, crocodile, whale, or vulture, and where you can wander among Hercules' columns or walk through the gate of victory straight to the hall of Knights, and where you can take the “skinny” test and also where you can walk around a borderline resembling Africa, or where you can reach Napoleon's shoe... and if that someone would tell you that you may pass this unbelievable labyrinth walking on a trail only four kilometres long while being accompanied by a drunken major, skinny doctor and the city mayor, you would certainly think that this person had lost his mind. The opposite is true. All of this is offered by the incredible Tiské Walls, one of the most beautiful rocky towns in the country.”

THE KINGDOM OF CHILDREN'S GAMES

Above the village of Tisá you will find a massive and seemingly impermeable wall. This scary sandstone massif really looks like a giant castle battlements. But when you manage to push through the rocks you will suddenly find yourself in a spacious square, which separates two areas – on the right side the Tiské Walls begin and on the left, the two-faced God Janus is watching the entrance to the Tiské Walls. It is important to know whether you have children with you and not. For children this represents the entrance to the magical world of fairytales or the entrance to an unbelievably real computer game but also to the world of Narnia, because the first part of the movie was shot here in this labyrinth. If your expedition is made up of adults only it is okay too. The incredible and bizarre shapes of rocky monuments will soon entrance you and the empowering romance of this place will force you to play and dream. The Tiské Walls represent a real Eldorado for children. However, it is possible to follow a certain trail, which means you start at one place and come back to the same place. But you will not be able to do that. When you finally reach the highest top you will be overwhelmed by the infinite view of the surrounding countryside but at the same time you simply cannot wait to walk down the stone stairs which will take you inside the rocky walls where a perfect maze awaits you, but fortunately, where you cannot get lost. The most charming thing is that you can feel completely safe here – the rocky labyrinth with countless streets and climbing frames, returns and shortcuts has a bottom made of soft sand layers and you cannot fall anywhere, because you feel as if you are inside a pot where termites have built their entire city. And when your children learn that a treasure of a French nobleman is hidden somewhere here guarded by goblins who lure treasure seekers and pour into their pockets magical and delusional herbs, you do not need to worry and just let them get sucked into the world of games for hours on end. They will not be bored there.



AN EXPEDITION TO THE OLDEST CITY

An expedition to the Velké (Large) Tiské Walls is rather a big trip. First, you must undergo a dignified walk along a path winding around the edge of rocky walls offering views far into the Bohemian countryside all the way to Hazmburk and Milešovka, and even farther if the weather permits, and then walk down into the labyrinth of fantastic rock formations with bizarre names. Rocks have their numbers and because you received a map at the box office showing you all the names of all rock formations, you will see names such as Pašerácké batohy (Smuggling bags), Zavalené rokle (Collapsed ravines), Úly (Beehives), Mummy, Seals and Hřiby (Mushrooms) and soon you will let your own imagination go and create new names for these giant sandstone sculptures carved by nature from these massive stones sometime in the Mesozoic Era, and of course, these natural elements still keep carving these stones even today. It is simply a breathtaking environment here. And you do not need to worry about the weather. In the sunlight these rocky contours look sharp and you feel like you are wading through gold. If the fog and bad weather settles in, you will have a movie-like and eerie experience, because you have no idea what will emerge in front of you within a few moments. In winter your trip resembles a black and white journey through a rich pastry shop full of frosted cakes of unexpected shapes... The Tiské Walls are different every time. To return here is a delight for connoisseurs as well as exciting for an expert.

FROM ISLAND TO A LIGHTHOUSE

You do not need to stay only inside the enclosed world of the Tiské Walls. Those who long for other adventures may take a calm forest trail to the nearby Island – a beautiful place situated at the bottom of a stone pot lined with rocks and decorated like filigree, or have a swim in one of the many ponds here, and then try a wonderful lunch served at the Ostrov (Island) Hotel, and wander through the local rock town admired by passionate mountain climbers. Then you may follow the state borderline where you can walk with one leg in the Czech Republic and the other one in Germany, and follow the Rajčské Walls, all the way back to Tisá. Or another way – just a few kilometres from here you can find a wind-battered šachová (chess) tower. A viewing tower on Děčínský Sněžník, a lighthouse above forests, fields, meadows and towns, or above a misty ocean, from which you will see emerging peaks of the Czech Central Mountains and the fronts of mesas of the Bohemian Switzerland and finally, the cone of the local Mount Fuji – the granite Růžák... The Tiské Walls are one of the biggest tourist attractions in the Gate to Bohemia – and offer this breathtaking countryside.

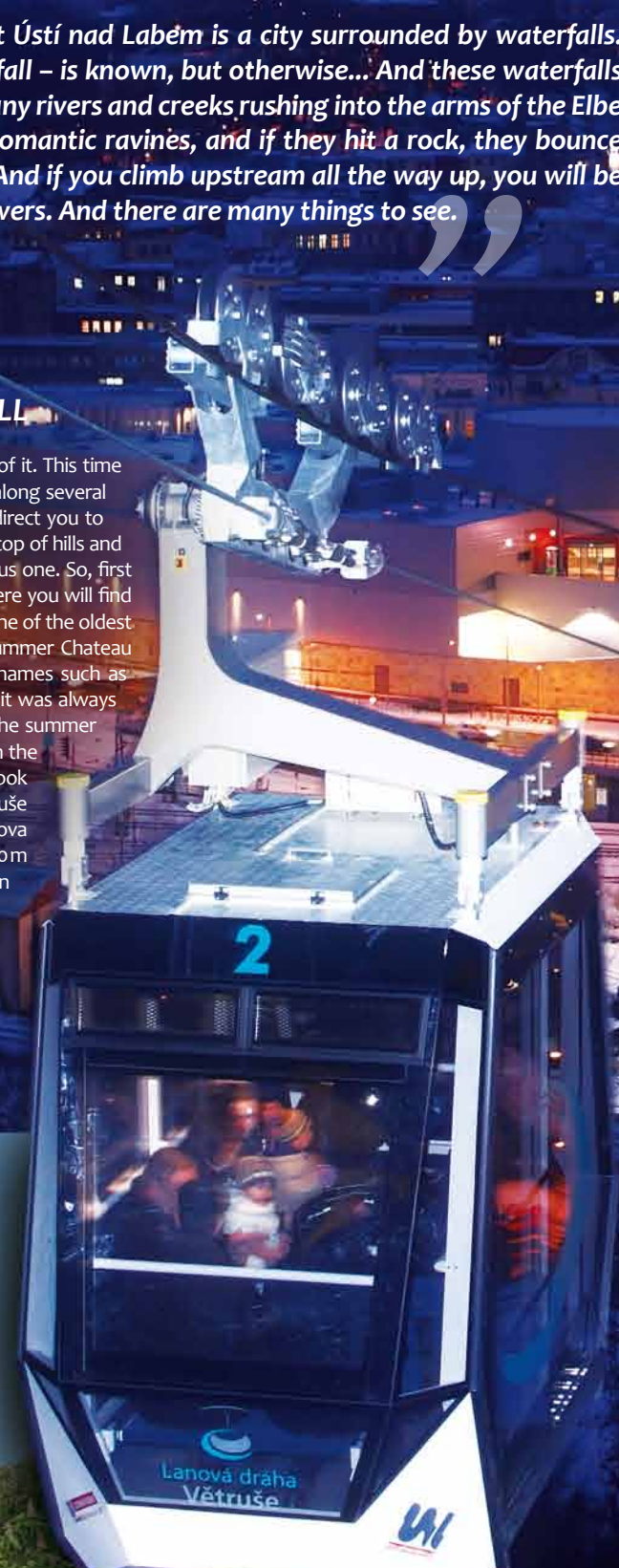


A city of vistas and waterfalls

Only a few people know – not even the locals here – that Ústí nad Labem is a city surrounded by waterfalls. Maybe the most famous and tallest – the Vaňovský waterfall – is known, but otherwise... And these waterfalls are truly unique sites. These slopes around Ústí harbour many rivers and creeks rushing into the arms of the Elbe River, trying to find the shortest possible route, eroding romantic ravines, and if they hit a rock, they bounce off and fall straight down, sometimes from huge heights. And if you climb upstream all the way up, you will be rewarded with beautiful viewing points or observation towers. And there are many things to see.

TO VĚTRUŠ AND TOWARDS THE VAŇOVSKÝ WATERFALL

Ústí nad Labem is a very interesting tourist town but only few people are fully aware of it. This time we follow its water jewels and panoramas, but of course you may walk through Ústí along several different routes. The best idea is to visit the local information centre and have them direct you to places exactly according to your mood and imagination. But today we will climb to the top of hills and walk through splashing waters. Probably the best thing is to start with the most famous one. So, first you go to the shopping centre called Forum. Do not worry; I have not lost my mind. Here you will find a cable car station. The cable car will elegantly take you (even your bicycles) up to the one of the oldest and legendary tourist buildings in the region, the symbol of Ústí nad Labem – the summer Chateau with the Větruše restaurant. Over the course of time the building has used several names such as the Ferdinandova viewing tower, Kašpárkův Castle or Petřín in Ústí, but nevertheless, it was always one of the most attractive destinations. Today you may enjoy pleasant dining in the summer restaurant, view the unusual panorama of the Elbe canyon from the viewing terrace on the tower gallery and you may let your children go crazy in a mirror maze, or you may take a look at a medieval place where people were executed almost daily – in the old days. From Větruše you will take a small nature trail but do not forget to make a turn to the famous Humboltova viewing tower. Then you may go to see the famous Vaňovský Waterfall. This waterfall is 20 m tall (it is a two-stage waterfall and from the bottom you may see a 12 m tall wall and an additional 8 m tall steep slope above it). The same rules apply to the Vaňovský Waterfall, as to the other waterfalls. It is breathtaking during the spring, it somehow lacks water during the summer, it is colourful during the autumn, and it turns into an ice fall during the winter. Near a dignified and proud rocky wall where the Podlešínský brook falls down, you would find a restaurant – about 100 years ago. Today you cannot have a meal here, but you will enjoy a unique and romantic atmosphere and breathtaking views. The trail will take you to another unique geological site – a basalt rock called Vrkoč. But we shall talk about it next time, because today we are tracing waterfalls.



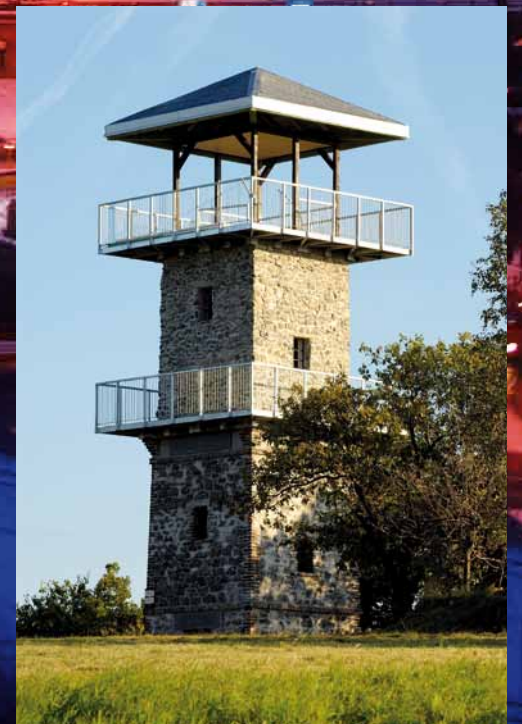
TO HAVE WINGS AND FLY...

From ravines and gorges we shall climb up a steep slope so we can feed our insatiable eyes with views of this magical countryside. That is maybe what the first tourists who discovered the beauties of Ústí nad Labem had in mind in the first place. Maybe these were the same tourists who in 1891 built the first viewing tower on top of Varhošť near Sebužín. Today you will find here a 12 m tall metal viewing tower offering one of the most beautiful views of the Czech Central Mountains. Let me tell you, it is also well worth climbing up the 18 m tall viewing tower near Dubice or to the Střekovská peak with 8 m tall viewing tower, or taking a trip to the Mlýnský (Miller) stone near Dolní Zálezla or to the Kozí peak near Mojžíř. Here you will not find any viewing tower, but you can still enjoy an unusual feast for your eyes.



SEARCHING FOR WATERFALLS

If you want to see as many waterfalls as possible, you should walk downstream on the left riverbank of the Elbe River. For example follow the Bertino Valley (where at the end of the 19th century the central tourist promenade in Ústí built an artificial waterfall to please the lords in hats and ladies in crinolines), all the way to the top of the Erben observation point with a stone viewing tower. The tower has been reconstructed and its height was increased by 8 m so you should be able to clearly see Milešovka, Bořeň, the Krušné Mountains and Nakléřov... Our next journey will be rather adventurous. Not all waterfalls are accessible easily. You may search for some of them. Therefore, it is even more beautiful when you simply stand in an opalescent misty rainbow. If you have already received a brochure at the information centre called Waterfalls in the Ústí Region, you have a greater chance of discovering the Dobětický waterfall (3 m), the waterfalls at Pekelský brook (7 m) and Blanský brook (5 m), and the waterfall in the ravine of Kamenný brook (5 m). If you are determined tourists then you may also find waterfalls above the Petrův mlýn (mill). If you like the Ústí Region then you have a new and interesting task – to find and to experience all of the waterfalls in the Ústí Region. Because there are more than 20.



Beer with a human face or how to cook

BŘEZŇÁK

Without any doubts one of the most popular brands in the Gate to Bohemia is the beer called Březňák – beer, which is brewed in a brewery in Velké Březno. A happy good old boy is smiling at us from the label, smoking his cigar and holding a beer mug in his right hand with beautiful foam on top. He obviously enjoys the beer and presents a good and honest, almost idyllic picture of a beer drinker. Every year bottles with labels showing his face represent a total amount of a quarter million hectolitres of light 10°, dark 10° and several other special beers. Over the face was illegally taken by almost all breweries from around the world. However, gentleman willingly lent his only one thing, Březňák.

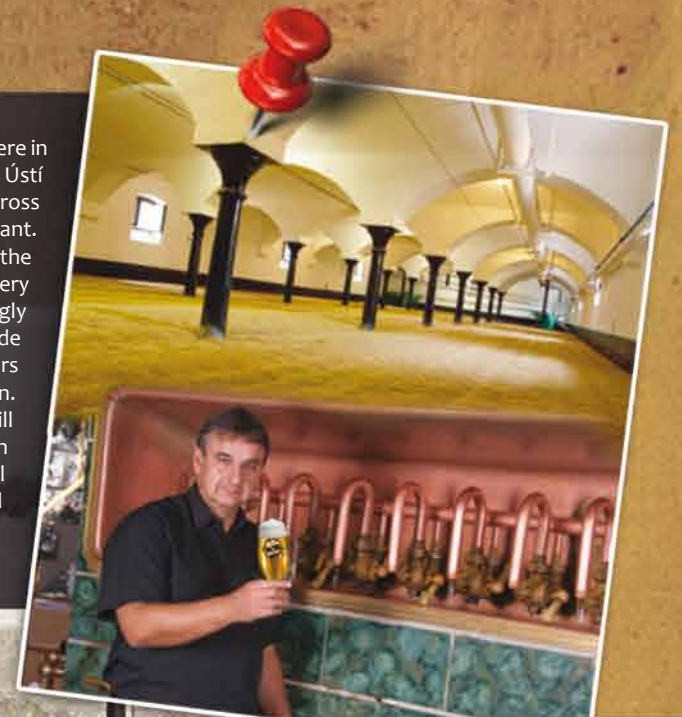


LIFETIME ROYALTY FOR LORD CIBICH

For a long time we did not know what name and what life story to assign to this kind face. Finally, we managed to learn that this face belongs to Mr. Victor Cibich, the head manager of the railway station in Velké Březno and a famous lover of the local beer, who was approached by the Board of the brewery in 1906 and asked if he could loan his face to Březňák beer. The head of the railway station happily agreed and received a life annuity of thirty beers a week, which he used up willingly at a brand new restaurant called Tivoli near the brewery and which was established in a pavilion transferred here from the Děčín exhibition facility. At that time, the fame of the Březňák beer was at its peak. The brewery had representation in Berlin, Vienna, London, Hamburg, Cape Town, Lagos and Dar es Salaam. Eighteen types of beers were brewed... Unfortunately, the brewery was nationalized in 1945 which put an end to the "bourgeois individualism" that the face of Mr. Cibich symbolized. To make things worse, his face resembled a powerful government figure, the face of old Comrade Lenin and therefore, all labels were banned. For a brief moment Victor Cibich appeared on bottles of Březňák in 1968, only to be peeled off again. Full recognition came in 1990.

LOOK! BEER IS BEING BORN!

It is a great idea to visit the brewery in Velké Březno today. You may get here in several ways. The most charming and romantic way is to take a train from Ústí to Neštédice. Below the small railway station you will take a ferry and cross over the huge stream of the Elbe River to the legendary Tivoli restaurant. Then you take the brand-new bike trail, and go around the restaurant all the way to the tall chimney and to the brewery gate. Tours through the brewery start every Saturday at half past two. You will receive a helmet and glaringly bright orange vest and you are ready to go. If you are lucky your guide will be Mrs. Jana Rostová, who worked here for 25 years of which 14 years as the Master brewer, which is very rare in an exclusively male position. Simply put, you could not find a more qualified guide. First of all she will take you to beautiful rooms of the former malt house and give you an excellent explanation of how the famous Březňák is brewed. You will walk through the brewing room, spilka (malt room), lager cellar, and finally, you will taste the product whose production process you have been monitoring so closely.



FROM THE YARD TO THE FOREST, OR THE POETRY OF BEER

Narration provided by Mrs. Rostová is so precise and excellent that it would make no sense to reveal it to you. The only thing we will tell you is that you will be in a very special place on this planet where people even use their own special language. And a very poetic one too. You don't believe it? So listen to this. You will learn words such as NÁDOBNICE, from which the malt goes to the HUMNA then to the HVOZD, and you will discover the malt ORÁ, and that it is collected using special MALMOBILES, and that it goes through an ODKLIČOVAČKA. As far as hops are concerned you will learn that hops VYSTÍRÁ and then RMUTUJE, you will learn what JALOVÉ DNO means, what MLÁTO is used for, what is the difference between SLADINA and MLADINA, and also that the word SPÍLAT does not mean cursing. But mostly if someone tells you a story that he got drunk in the brewing room with warm beer that he is lying because MLADINA, the final product of the brewing room is a hot sugary mixture with no alcohol at all, because alcohol is produced inside the beer when yeast is added using SPILKA... Yes it does sounds like poetry but it also smells great and tastes even better. So, cheers Mr. Cibich! To your health!

Restaurace Tivoli 1914



1753

A rope above the water or, the Ohře River – a fly-fishing icon

“If, sometimes in the future you happen to publish a magazine and you will need an interview with a fishermen and expert in fly-fishing and if you want to do the interview before the end of April, you may forget about it. You will find no one. The fly-fishing season begins in the middle of April and everybody is at the river, or rather at secret places that they will not reveal to you even if you torture them. Maybe, just maybe you might find a fly-fishing fisherman who would like to be at the river because he loves fly-fishing, but unfortunately he has so much work that he simply cannot. For example Radek Vonka, the head of the Ústecký Region for tourism who actually came up with the idea to publish this magazine. So he had no choice but to make time for me and instead of being at the river and whipping the water with the fishing line, and to tell me how he would like to be somewhere half submerged in the river and see all these hungry fish ready to gulp anything, instead of wasting his time with me.”

FISHERMEN CRAZY ABOUT FLY-FISHING SAY THAT THEY LOVE THE OHŘE RIVER

The Ohře is one of the best rivers in the country for fly-fishing. It is at least as good as the Vltava or Otava, or maybe even better in some ways. For a true fly-fishing connoisseur the Ohře is an icon. Firstly, it is a river surrounded by beautiful nature and you can catch really big fish here – some over 60 cm long.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE OHŘE? DOES THE RIVER LIKE FLY-FISHERMEN?

Absolutely. Fly fishing is the king of sport fishing. Many fishermen in the country use the “catch and release” method. We do not kill the fish. We let them go and try not to touch them with dry hands so we will not damage their protective layer. Myself for example, besides Ohře and Vltava, I also frequently go to Slovenia to the Soča River which is rather deep at some places with crystal-clear waters so the fish sees you and therefore, the fish can also see your bait. So to catch something there is really difficult. But there is something special about the Ohře...

WHY IS FLY FISHING SO ATTRACTIVE?

Well, the idea is that you cannot throw a fly / bait light as paper 20m away from you. The fishing line is no help so you need some heavier element and that is a special fly fishing line made of plastic with various thickness and weight based on the selected fishing rod. At the end of the special line you have the fishing line and then you have the fly with a hook. The fisherman is actually half-submerged in water – and that is great, and then, with a strike of his hand he unpacks the line and throws the bait which falls down at the right distance. This is dry fly fishing. On the other hand, when wet fly-fishing, the fisherman tries to throw the bait/fly and lets it fall down as deep as possible so it looks like insect larvae – mostly like mayflies, caddis and stoneflies. You are using a special fly during this technique, which is called the Czech nymph – a term known and used all over the world. Fly fishing simply imitates what the fish know naturally – different insect development stages. And to make things more difficult, there are also abstract flies and they do not imitate anything but are so obvious and so colourful that they stimulate the natural aggressiveness in fish, so the fish should just jump on the bait without thinking twice.



IS THIS TECHNIQUE DIFFICULT?

I would say so. Good fly fishermen must be able to read the water because you must use one method to find fish in 30 cm deep water and a different one to find fish in 2 m deep water. Without experience you will not catch anything. Basically, it is a combination of personal experience, seasons, weather, water temperature, and time of day. To go fly-fishing during a hot noon is possible but your chances of success are minimal – you must have certain knowledge about insects and of course, as I said earlier, you have to be able to “read” the water. It is also important to be humble. If I am somewhere for the first time – and also because I am getting older, I welcome any advice I can get. I may even take a guide who will show me where the fish are, and tell me what is the best fly I should use. It usually pays off.

THE POPULARITY OF THE OHŘE IS RISING AMONG RAFTERS EVERY YEAR. HOW DO YOU GET ALONG?

Rafters and fly fishermen do not get along well. In other countries – like Slovenia for example – you have to pay to put a boat on the water. Here it is an absolutely free and uncontrolled hobby, which damages rivers to a certain extent. If rafters – and I am one of them – had to pay for example a hundred crowns per boat per day, they would immediately start behaving differently. Plus some countries have established certain hours when you can put boats on water and when you cannot. For example, after 6pm the river belongs to fishermen only. On the other hand, fish in the Ohře are used to boats so you may actually catch a fish even below a sailing boat. But I am on favour of rafting and boating licences, even though many people will hate me for this.

ARE THERE ANY RITUALS TO FLY-FISHING?

Of course. Many fly fishermen do their own preparation. They make their own flies from natural materials – e.g. feathers, animal hair, various threads, etc., and they have their secret tricks, tweaks and techniques they hold dear and would not reveal to any one. I am no exception.

ARE YOU SERIOUS? WOULD YOU NOT REVEAL AT LEAST A LITTLE BIT OF YOUR SECRET? NOT EVEN TO GATE / PYLON?

Okay, anyone else I would tell to take a hike, but I cannot do that to Gate / Pylon. Okay observe ...



Saxon Renaissance phenomenon

BENEŠOV NAD PLOUČNICÍ

Mostly two Chateaus in Benešov nad Ploučnicí which are called the pearls of the Saxon Renaissance. The upper Chateau, which was opened to the general public after reconstruction in 1999 is now used as a gallery and you may admire absolutely beautiful original wooden ceilings with paintings which survived from the time when the Chateau was actually built. Below the ceiling you may examine Gothic sculptures and tapestries. The lower Chateau offers a very rich exhibition of the lives of the nobility plus a very interesting exposition of a Chateau kitchen and valuable collections of weapons from the Thirty Years War and also hunting weapons. But most importantly, the lower Chateau is unique thanks to its remarkable architecture including all the elements of the Saxon Renaissance – richly ornamented portals and decorative columns between windows – also with many Gothic elements – for example, typical castle-like entrance hall with a ribbed late Gothic vault. But what we consider the most pleasant fact is that both these Chateaus are “alive” and many events are preserved here. This season there will be 30 various events. Visitors may look forward to very attractive and popular night exhibitions or to the traditional Benešovský slunovrat (solstice). Simply put, those who want to discover the charm of Saxon Renaissance must go to Benešov.

LIBOUCHEC

The Chateau in Libouchec near Děčín offers a completely different experience. Originally, it was a fortress built at the end of the sixteenth century. Günter of Bünau, one of the ten richest people in the Bohemian Kingdom, had it built. The emphasis was on representation and sumptuousness. However, Libouchec was never his permanent residence. Not even those who later bought the Chateau used it very often. The advantage of such development was the fact that the Chateau was never really rebuilt. On the other hand, in the nineteenth century a distillery and yeast factory were already established here. But the Chateau received a crucial blow from the “responsible” care provided by a state farm, which let the Chateau deteriorate from 1948.

“Just a few pages farther down you will learn about a unique phenomenon of folk architecture – the half timbered house. North of Bohemia also has its architectural phenomena. In general it is called the Saxon Renaissance, typical for Děčín, Benešov, Českokamenicko and the Ústí regions. An interesting fact is that this architectural style was developed thanks to one family. At the beginning of the 16th century a clan called Salhausen came to Northern Bohemia. They came here from Míšná together with their architects. They settled down here and were even accepted by the Czech nobility and they became very active. Under their influence new buildings began to appear. These buildings were not really built in the Renaissance style as they actually represented a transfer from Vladislav Gothic to Renaissance. Saxon Renaissance is oriented towards France, it does not use sgraffiti, and often uses architectural elements, carved from stone. In layman's terms, it still uses some Gothic elements. To go back in time and follow this unique architectural style in Bohemia is an exciting and beautiful adventure. The Gate to Bohemia boasts many churches, palaces and town houses built in the Saxon Renaissance style. However, three of them deserve closer attention.”

ŠLUKNOV

The second unique representative of the Saxon Renaissance is Šluknovský Chateau. When you are in Šluknov, you will be certainly surprised to hear that the Chateau burned down in 1986. The fire completely destroyed the roof, attic, third floor and part of the second floor. It took long 19 years to accomplish what patriots always dreamed about. The Chateau was resurrected and those visiting the Chateau now cannot understand how is it possible that all these beautiful floors, coffered ceilings and doors were manufactured by people living today. So while walking through the Chateau, visitors can enjoy the beauty of a brand-new parquet floor. The Šluknovský Chateau does not live on only regular tours and exhibitions. To experience the Chateau festival, which fills up the entire Chateau and the adjacent park, or Chateau evenings with costumed tours, or to climb up to the spacious Chateau attic and listen to a concert or to see a theatrical performance are events that you will want to see over and over again.

An expedition to Bohemian roots within us

“Imagine a man completely unaffected by Czech history and by the context of Czech geography and put him somewhere between the Elbe and Ohře rivers. And now let this man walk through this region and let us ask him to scream every time when he feels a strange and seductive power of the place, the mysterious genius loci. He would scream three times at least. These are the places connected to the beginning of the Bohemian (Czech) statehood. Only those of us who take the fact that we are Czechs for granted, or even as a little bit of a burden, regard Říp, Peruc and Stadice as props from legends and poems. I suggest a trip as therapy. Let us visit these places. Maybe this will evoke unexpected feelings within us.”

RIB AND BREAST OF THE MOTHER COUNTRY

You cannot miss this mountain. It is said that dragons used to fly above this mountain in the old days. From a distance you will see a beautiful, soothing shape, as if a gigantic mushroom suddenly grew out of nowhere. But come closer or climb up the slope of this long dead volcano, and you will be entranced by its restlessness and a strange inner strength. Imagine how many hopeful prayers, desires and thanks this Czech mountain heard in the course of time. Jan Hus screamed here against the injustice of the world order, crowds of people sought solace and courage here, and once perhaps, the mythical ancestor of Bohemia, our forefather, climbed on the top of this mountain. All right. You may say all tales, myths and unscientific stories – but you are wrong. Myths are not fairytales. Each nation has its mythology based on which the nation grows and is linked to, and on which people build their moral status. Go ahead and try it. Grab a stick and go. Whether you like it or not you will be walking in the footsteps of myths and history. And you can be sure that the energy left here by our ancestors is still here. When you are standing at the stark, yet intoxicating and beautiful Romanesque rotunda and your eyes are wandering around the countryside – while slightly regretting that Říp is no longer barren, as it used to be for most of its days until the 19th century, you will feel a strong sense of belonging. You will feel that you belong to this valley surrounded by mountains. And while you are walking down you can wonder whether the name Říp comes from an old Germanic word “rip” – a mountain, or from an old Indo-European word “rib”. Once I was driving by this mountain with a five-year-old boy who just said: “Look! The Řím (Rome) mountain.” Maybe he was right because all roads lead to Říp.



A FIELD THAT CREATED A KING

If we sail with the ashes of the first Slavs down the Elbe River, we would get to the second place surrounded by a myth about a strong Czech ruler, who can rule with an iron hand, but who was also gifted with some supernatural powers, without which – as we see even today, no one can rule this land. Here, in Stadice near Ústí nad Labem, a delegation was sent to bring Přemysl the Ploughman to Vyšehrad Castle. This king was destined to create a nation that would rule this land forever. Whether it happened we do not know, because the first historically documented king from the Přemysl clan was Bořivoj I, but we know that he ruled until the assassination of Wenceslas III in 1306, that is at least 434 years – and that is a very long time, viewed through human eyes. The place where according to the legend he interrupted plowing, pushed “otka” into the soil and it began to sprout, and let his spotted oxen free so he could invite messengers for lunch on an iron blade, is still today surrounded by a field. Or to be precise, on that site you will find a dignified memorial enclosed by trees resembling a horseshoe, which from high above look like a keyhole with fields all around, which are still harvested today. Czechs have always been more gatherers than hunters and the field always played a key role in Bohemian history – as a battlefield or arable field. So, perhaps a more powerful experience than standing still before the monument is to go a few steps farther to the open field and feel the power of the earth – the calm, strong and life-giving element – the Czech land.



OAK OF THE MOST FAMOUS BOHEMIAN LOVE

A long way to the southwest you will find the village of Peruc. Here we shall stand with one foot on the myth path and with the other one on the path of solid history. Prince Oldřich, when he still did not know that he would become a king one day, was trying to solve a problem of how to save himself from the rampage and arrogance of his ruling brother Boleslav III, and when he could not get into his head that his wife simply would not give him a child. Well, sometime in the early years of the second millennium, he went out hunting to the kingdom of Žatec. Close to the village of Opučná, near a well, he spotted a beautiful woman called Božena Křesinová with a gifted body, who could probably give birth to his heirs, year after year. He saw her while she was washing clothes. “Washing” in old Czech is spelled “Peruc”, which may explain how the village got its name – Peruc... Božena proved to be a good choice, because she gave birth to our Czech Achilles – a hero, fighter and a strong ruler – Břetislav I. When we stand under the huge oak of Oldřich, which is today protected by UNESCO and all of us are trying to embrace its trunk (its circumference is 760 centimetres), or when we are getting water from a well covered by a neo-Gothic roofed gazebo, we subconsciously feel the importance of this legend, which is so embedded into our reality. Suddenly we have another desire and hope for the Czech nation – that is, a fair king, who makes no distinction between social statuses and therefore, even an ordinary farmer's wife can give birth to a king. Has anything changed since then?



Heading for an unusual experience to the city of “DROMS”

IF YOU WANT TO BE IN A HORSE SADDLE

It all began during the 1950s. At that time the so-called Czech re-cultivation school began to emerge. A unique system and strategy for turning a sad surface mine into a beautiful, useful and even fertile land. A certain time ago we were the best in the world at re-cultivation activities. And you can definitely see the results. Most could be used as an encyclopedia of re-cultivation. For example, the former mine of Jan Šverma. Today you will find here in a beautiful HIPODROM, or an A class horse racing track complying with world parameters. An excellent drainage system ensures that mud almost does not exist here, so jockeys really love it here. But not only jockeys – the spectators love it here too, as people come here to see the steeplechase and showjumping events. And the audience does not need to be cheering only (or actively betting) – the hippodrome is an ideal place for a horseback riding school and horseback trips – for those who already know “how to sit in the saddle.” Other events are also held here such as very popular farmers' markets, rock festivals, etc. But most of all the hippodrome is loved by – you will be amazed – by skaters – inline skaters and scooter riders. The entire track is lined with a specially installed asphalt, which creates an almost 3 km long track from three to five metres wide. You may also use safety boxes for shoes and personal belongings, rent a bicycle or scooter, or you may recharge your batteries in our Koňobar (Horse bar). But beware – pedestrians and bicycle riders are not allowed! If you are a fan of in-line skating and we have your attention, then stay focused because Most appears to be a true paradise for people like you. You have three additional tracks here – and one is even roofed!

TO FOLLOW THE SMELL OF PETROL

The second “drom”, probably the most famous one, was also built at a former mine called the Vrbenský mine. Mostecký AUTODROM – it is a legend. The most prestigious international competitions and races are held here, of which, probably the most popular are those where heavy trucks speed around the racing track over four kilometres long. Sitting in the audience is definitely a huge experience, but gripping a steering wheel of a race truck would give you a slightly stronger adrenaline rush. Anyone can try it. Just come with your car. In the nearby polygon you do not even need to have a car. They will lend you a car here, and even teach you how to drive safely at all times and on all types of surfaces.

UP TO THE SKY AND STRAIGHT DOWN

However, if you consider any speed on the ground a little unexciting and need to break away from the earth's gravity, you need to visit AERODROM. Looking at the aerial figures performed by pilots of acrobatic aircrafts or gliders or the perfectionism and elegance of paratroopers, is an experience for everyone. However, not everyone is willing to try it. So let us start with an observation flight – at least you will see all the droms, lakes in Most, Hněvín, the city itself and the surrounding countryside will be at your fingertips. Or you can try a tandem jump, but this takes a lot more courage. Still not enough? Then you have to put your trust in our master pilots, get a pilot licence and then you may try some of these aerial acrobatic figures or spins yourself.

WILD AND SMOOTH WATER SPORTS

The last of our droms is the AQUADROM. Here you may start your trip (they open at 9:00 AM) and finish late in the evening. Here you can swim in the pool and relax from all the drom-like experiences, indulge your body in a sauna and then surrender to a skilled masseur, lie down in a whirlpool bed or bath, get a tan in the solarium, and those who cannot resist can let go and go crazy in the water with children who really enjoy this Eldorado. Then you may jump down a water-side which will spit you out on the other side, or try aqua spinning or aqua zumba and if the weather permits, you may enjoy the outdoor pool and let the sun caress your body, or play a game or two of mini-golf and suddenly you have a feeling that this is what life should be like... the Most droms will simply overwhelm you.



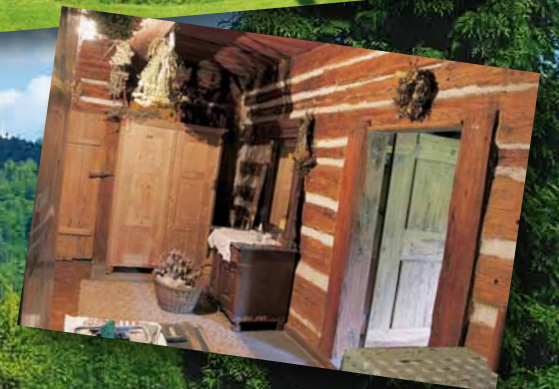
Beautiful traces of human lives

“Bohemian Switzerland is a fascinating realm of forests full of rocks, stone towers, massive walls and arched gateways, mysterious valleys, quiet streams and brooks hidden in the shadows of ravines and blooming meadows. It is a lavish feast of Mother Nature. But when a man satisfies his hungry eyes with these incredible views, he also notices that the same picturesque, luscious and soul satisfying traces were left here by many generations. Fragments and remnants of people's lives. If you walk down a sloped meadow towards the forest and catch a glimpse of an apple tree alley, you suddenly see a welcoming trace of human presence. If you encounter in the woods a moss-covered barrier, stone stairs or a carved pathway, or if you see a simple picture embedded in a rock wall, rock relief, calvary or a small chapel – you are touching the lives of people who lived here before you. But of course, the most visible proof includes human houses.”

RESCUED WITH ENTHUSIASM AND DESIRE

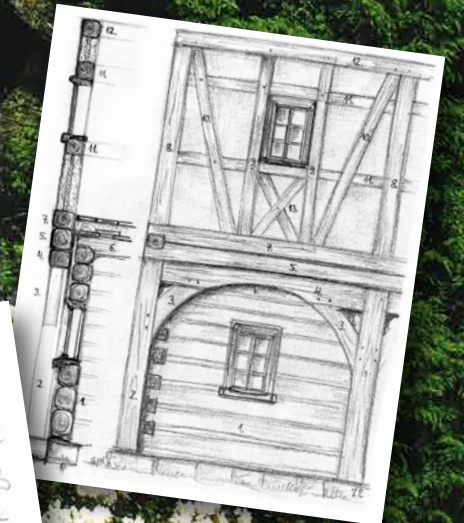
of cottage goers which you will not find anywhere else in Europe. Not to such an extent. Already since the early 1970s, people who sought romantic asylum and escape from the grey reality were arriving to little towns, villages and forest huts in Bohemian Switzerland with the intention of finding a place where they could build something that would be only theirs and that would flourish before their eyes. Cottage colonies began to appear, and what people could not experience officially, was experienced and lived in the alternative world of cottages. Most of these people did not desire anything new, modern or experimental – they all gravitated towards the original, what was done by dozens of generations, and towards their passion to preserve the genius loci of their cottages. Sometimes this passion became an obsession. So with a great deal of enthusiasm, trial and error, these people began every weekend painting, restoring, dusting and rescuing – searching attics, investigating and researching – and so they managed to save their treasures, which we admire today. And they did so in times which were not friendly to fragile beauties. I do not know any place in the world where something similar occurred. So, do not be satisfied by village and preservation zones only. Walk around and observe. You may take a trip to Doubice (perhaps the brightest example of the cottage goers miracle), Krásná Lípa, Oleška, Chřibská, Brtníky, Jetřichovice, Česká Kamenice, Lipová, Růžová..., we could go on forever. Go and look around. And if you are struck by the beauty of a particular half-timbered house do not hesitate to knock on the door. I do not know any owner of a half-timbered house – regardless of whether protected by the city preservation zones or not, who would not be proud of his castle and who would not want to show you what he rescued and built.

The fact that half-timbered houses remained a living part of the landscape happened mostly thanks to cottage goers. A unique phenomenon



THE HALF-TIMBERED HOUSE PHENOMENA

A folk architecture using German and Czech elements has added the last touch to the appearance of the land. As if these small cottages, houses, mills and schools deeply rooted into valleys, slopes, hills and meadows were the last pearls completing the final necklace. The most precious elements of the local folk architecture are clearly the architecturally unique half-timbered houses. First let me tell you where you can find them. So, where are they? Well, actually everywhere. In every village and town. But if you want to walk only between half-timbered houses, then you must visit Vysoká Lípa, or Kamenická Stráň or Dlouhý Důl, where these houses are nicely gathered together in village preservation zones. Here you will understand what this refined technology is based on and that it was designed by commoners, carpenters and farmers and not by sophisticated institutions. They simply perfected the trial and error method. For almost four hundred years these people were developing, observing, learning and trying. The unobtrusive and slowly progressing blend between Slavic timbered structures and German bricked houses created a unique architectural system. A layman primarily sees wooden columns which surround the ground floor and which create beautiful arches and are decorated with various details and elements. But in reality, it is not just a decoration but a real support system. These wooden columns support the entire weight of the second floor, significantly relieving the load on the first floor walls. It is simply beautiful and useful at the same time. When you add unique doors, skylight windows, gables, door knobs, windows, window shutters and metal works and the striped structure of black and brown or white, you have a remarkable style, which one would expect to see in an open-air museum or in a world exhibition event. Except that most of these are not exhibits, but real houses where people still live today! Once a year on the Czech and German side, people open the doors of selected half-timbered houses and visitors can enter and compare how people once lived here and how they live in these houses today.



A hill that will give you wings “

This hill is simply beautiful. If you leave the Louny planes starting at the Ohře River bed, you will be fascinated with two dominant features seemingly appearing out of nowhere. On your right side you will see Oblík (Oval), which got its name due to its

shape and on your left side you will see Raná with three wide peaks. Two imaginary columns of a gate leading to a land of volcanic beauties. To climb up the hillside of Raná, and to observe an old road lined with half-uprooted stone bollards and to enjoy a unique steppe-like character of this place is almost a miraculous experience. The soft fronds of feather grass tremble in the wind, which is in love with Raná. We know that because the wind is constantly caressing and hugging the hill. The views from here are beautiful, but to run, bounce and fly away a few hundred kilometres, or only a little bit and circle above the peaks of Raná, it is a breathtaking experience – without any exaggeration.”

80 YEARS OF GLIDING

People here have been flying gliders since 1932, when a group of students of the German University of Technology in Prague appeared here and discovered that this terrain is ideal for gliders. On September 2nd of the same year, the first several minute long flight took place here and only two months later all of Bohemia learned about the excellent achievement of a flight instructor Erwin Primavesi who managed to stay in the air for almost two and half hours. Since that time gliding has become a regular event here. You may see gliders from the local aeroclub located in the Raná airport almost every day.

RUN AND FLY OFF!

The Raná Hill is most loved by paragliders. These people love mechanical and thermal air streams and, equipped with their colourful parachutes or hang gliders, hanging from a cord under the wind-bloated canopies, enjoy for hours the feeling that people were not given – of flying freely high above the ground. Conditions for air gliding at Raná are traditionally excellent. For example, in June the most elegant wind stream called pasat visits this land during a late afternoon, and when the sun paints the bare slopes of Raná in golden colours, eager and trembling people with flares, sleeves and rucksacks are close to nirvana. At some moments you may even see dozens of gliders in the air. And if you are sitting on a grassy meadow you may be lucky and see ground squirrels jumping out of their burrows – although critically endangered, these animals are found here in large numbers. And both of you may stare in disbelief at these colourful oranges while the wind is blowing strange words towards you such as variable winds, cauliflower-shaped clouds, gradual descending, rushing-up, ripping-off, spiral diving, etc. Maybe this would be the moment when you realize your desire to understand these secret codes and to fly together with the others. Well, the choice is yours. You can visit the local school where they will teach you the basics. The minimum is 10 days and then you can study further and learn for example, tandem or engine-powered paragliding. After all to have wings and fly is a dream.

At the dragon's lake “

If you have read about the Nechranice Dam, you probably learned that it covers an area of thirteen hundred hectares, that it has a 3280 m long (in Central Europe the longest) poured embankment and that it is widely used for sports, fishing and swimming. Maybe also that the dam was built during the 1960s on the Ohře river, and that a bird preservation area was announced here and, finally, that you may see two historic towns from here. The towns of Kadaň and Žatec – and that is usually all. But in reality..... Stop reading or browsing through the Internet and go see for yourself because this place is a magical and attractive site. So let me explain on the next two pages what natural element we are talking about. When the wind is done with Raná, it flies to have a swim in the Nechranice Dam, and when it does, it creates unbelievable tricks above the water surface.

WINDY HARMONY

Sit on the bank. It does not matter if it is a beach, meadow or the place where the forest trees soak their roots in water, or if you are surrounded by water-eroded rocky cliffs. Just sit, watch, listen and feel. The silver water surface riddled almost for the entire year with foamy wave heads is never still. The wind is pushing seemingly fragile waves, which in reality are strong as a hundred men. Whenever you are there you will soon find out that the lake is always alive. Dozens of people are cutting through the water surface on windsurfing boards, yachts or kites. Have you ever seen a flock of trembling kites which jauntily pull ropes with a man who is standing on a board and speeding across the water surface so fast that you can barely believe it unless you try it. The speed is overwhelming. And suddenly, out of nowhere the rhythm changes. The kite rider miraculously jumps out of the water flies up in the air turns around and falls back down to the water but runs in a completely different direction. Kites are trembling above the water surface like huge butterflies, yachts are cutting through the wind with their brightly white sails and surfers turn their sails back and forth like artists – and all together they gently whisper towards the forgotten shallow valley – Nechra, our Nechra. And they hold their lake dear because Nechranice offers the best conditions for water sports in the country. So if you have fed your insatiable eyes, get up and either take out your fishing rod and start fishing and wait for the catch of your life – because we have tons of fish in here, or simply dive in and swim, or find any board and start speeding across the fluffy lake surrounded by calm and beautiful nature. Now you understand why it is so hard to write about Nechranice.



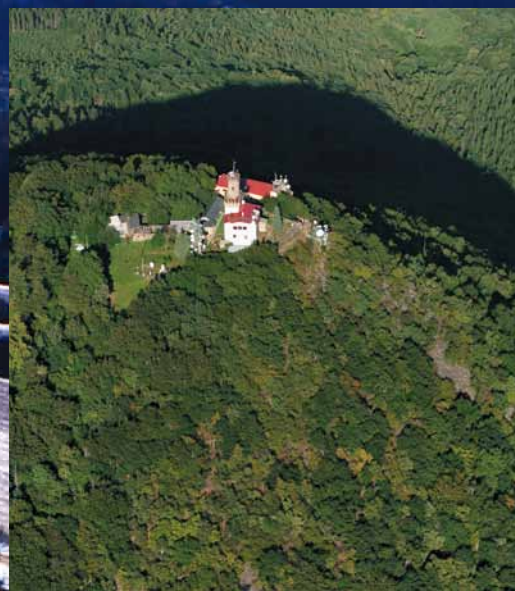
A royal couple of the Czech Central Mountains

Imagine a man naked down to his waist, with a wonderful two-spike crown and a woman dressed in an elegant Persian cloth decorated with curly trees and a lady's crown. A royal ruling couple, which decently looks down from the height on their dominion, and on the wonderfully mysterious landscape of the Bohemian Central Mountains.

Their Majesties Hazmburk and Milešovka. You may think that you know the wonderful scenery and picturesque highland well. But not until you climb up and bow before its rulers. Until then you really do not know this land. Let us head for the royal audience. First of course for the Queen.

THUNDER QUEEN

Firstly, it is Milešovka – the Queen of the Czech Central Mountains, which attracts our attention. Alone from all sides, it rises up to 835 metres. The view from this height is truly delightful – especially during clear autumn days. Our pen cannot capture the beauty, in which we dip our astonished eyes. And how small and trivial seems all the work of human hands from up here and next to almighty nature. Thanks to the naturalist lord Alexander of Humboldt who spent much of his time here, this site has become famous all over the world. He also assigned a third place to Milešovka, from among all the sites he experienced and visited in the entire world.

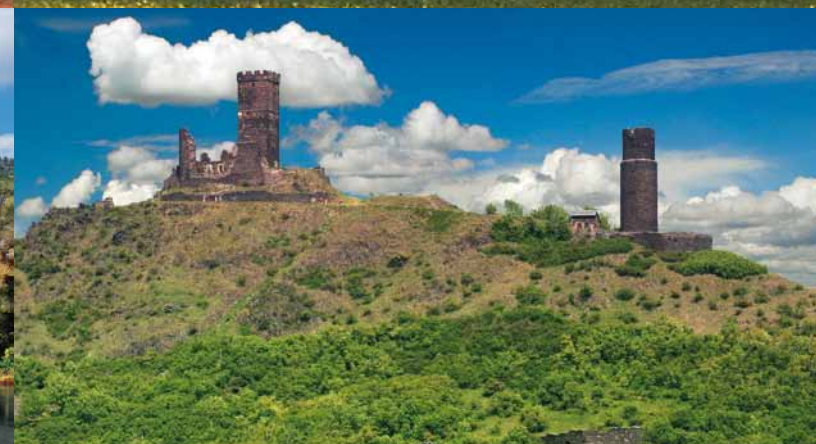


In 1892, Bedřich Bernau, a sugar plant clerk and passionate amateur historian and contributor to the Otto's comprehensive guide to Bohemia, confessed his admiration of the Queen. Besides Alexander von Humboldt, another famous admirer appeared in the early nineteenth century – the painter Caspar David Friedrich, who painted her Majesty so truly and vividly that his painting depicting a Czech landscape with Milešovka is perhaps the most famous painting of a Czech landscape. Since then, long and indeed endless crowds of tourists have been humbly climbing up – either from Bílka or Černčice, sometimes almost crawling on their knees because the paths here are really rocky and steep – and they are still coming today. Milešovka is as moody as any true Queen. If she is in a good mood, then she lets her visitors see the third most beautiful view in the world, but if she slept badly, she may get so mad that she shakes with wind and lightning storms. That is why her German name is Donnersberg, – Thunder Mountain. You will not find a place in the entire Czech Republic with more frequent storms. Calm and windless weather can be expected just eight days a year here. But to climb up all the way to the top of the Queen's crown – the observatory built on the site of a former stone tower – which was built exactly one hundred years ago, and to take a look in all directions, is a real privilege. A privilege well worth letting the wind drag and shake you a little bit. Well as the sugar plant clerk wrote. Our pen cannot describe the beauty. And now let us head for the King.

RABBIT KING

“And indeed, you could hardly find a better place from which you would see so beautiful, so breathtaking and powerful a view of the impressive facade of the main group of the Czech Central Mountains. This place is called the Klapská Mountain, a black basalt rock with its dark torture room on its side and with a white stone castle on top. This is a dignified and serious rival of the sacred Říp Mountain. It is seen from afar and often visited. On its steep ridge you would still find today remnants of the former and proud residence of the Zajíc clan of Buzov, Klapý Castle – in German Hasenburg, but called “Hanžburek” by the locals and the already mentioned and well known Bernau.

A king should be visible and Hazmburk is well seen. It has been mentioned in the oldest Czech Chronicles such as the Dalimilova and Hájková Chronicles, but above all it is seen from far away and nobody would mistake it for some plebeian hill. Its two quite distinctive towers on the top make it a unique landmark. Sometime in the middle of the 13th century the Lichtenburg family began to build a military castle here. However, its greatest glory and its new name (Klapý) was enjoyed by the castle during the reign of the Zajíc family (the Rabbit family). The greatest royal waiter Vilém Zajíc of Valdek added to the already existing white square tower a black tower and surrounded them with castle walls and gave the king's crown the shape that we know today. Hazmburk was famous for being an impermeable fortress. The Hussites could not conquer the castle, and that is why the last treasures from Prague Castle were hidden here. When we walk down on the hillside today to warm up at least a bit in the arms of the King of the Czech Central Mountains, we must go first to the Black tower made of dark basalt rock, which was often used as a prison (hence the name Bernau's torture room). But our trip ends one step further or rather higher – first we are at the bottom and then climb up stairs to the top of the White tower – made of white sandstone. The top is 26 m above the hill and we are sailing through the air and above the surrounding landscape, and suddenly it seems to be clear why Milešovka choose Hazmburk to rule their kingdom together. Just take a look to the northwest and see how the proud the Queen with its head in the fog is slowly melting and how much she would like to run right back to us, if only the crowd of her conical subordinates – who are also nicely seen from here, let her.



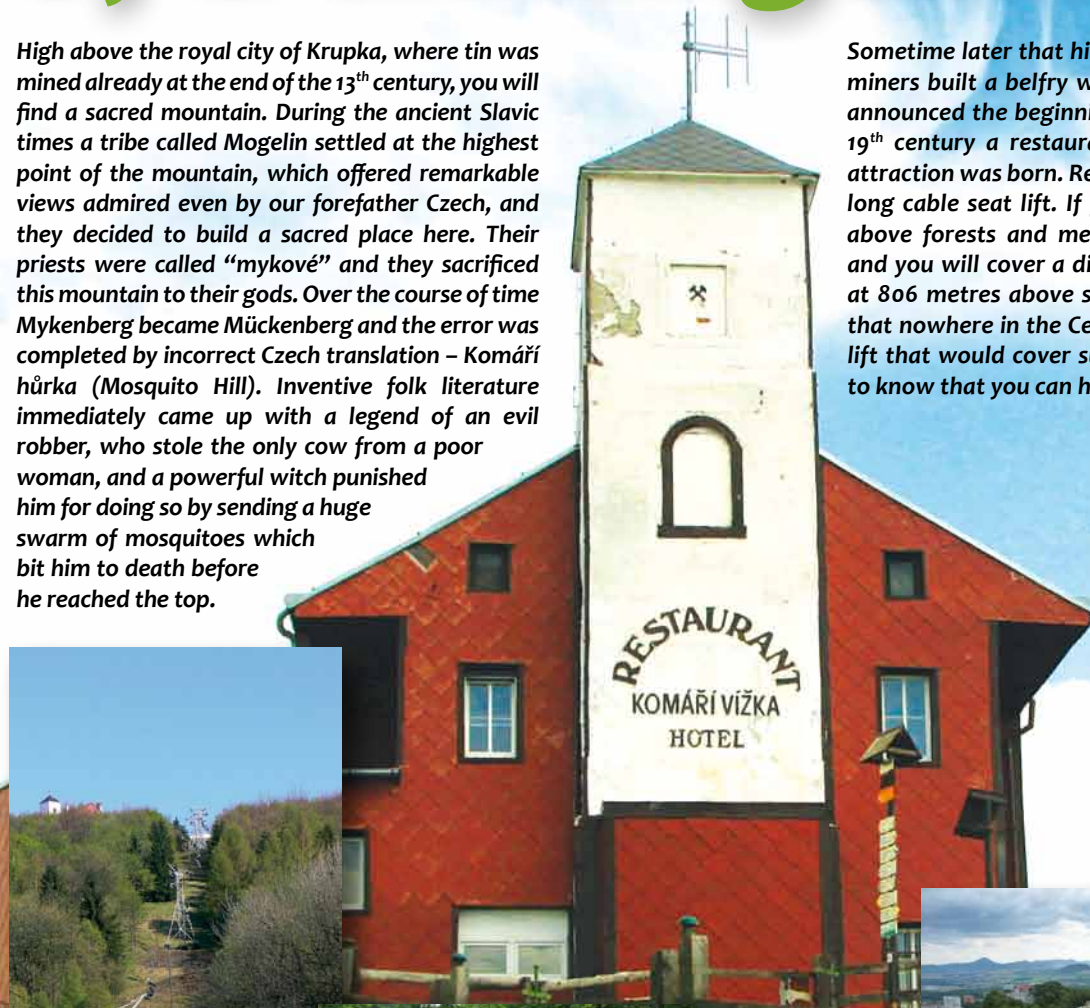
A sacred hill of a tin kingdom

High above the royal city of Krupka, where tin was mined already at the end of the 13th century, you will find a sacred mountain. During the ancient Slavic times a tribe called Mogelin settled at the highest point of the mountain, which offered remarkable views admired even by our forefather Czech, and they decided to build a sacred place here. Their priests were called "mykové" and they sacrificed this mountain to their gods. Over the course of time Mykenberg became Mückenberg and the error was completed by incorrect Czech translation – Komáří hůrka (Mosquito Hill). Inventive folk literature immediately came up with a legend of an evil robber, who stole the only cow from a poor woman, and a powerful witch punished him for doing so by sending a huge swarm of mosquitoes which bit him to death before he reached the top.



A BICYCLIST'S DREAM

If you are a passionate bike rider, Komáří vížka is exactly what you dream about. The cable lift will take you and your bike up and then you just ride down freely. You can ride your bike for tens or even hundreds of kilometres along the Krušné Mountains ridges. For example you can take the famous Krušnohorská bike trail and pass by the Flájská dam and you will reach places where villages full of life used to be, but unfortunately, almost nothing is left of them now. Or you may reach a fantastic rocky town rising above Tisa or may take any direction based on how you feel. You may even go to Měděnec, Boží Dar or Bublava. This tourist trail is 240 km long and Komáří vížka is an ideal starting point. And if that is not enough and you need to be competitive, you may compare your strength with others in traditional rides up to Komárka, or down from the hill.



Sometime later that hill was turned into a tower – when miners built a belfry with its legendary bell here, which announced the beginning and end of mining. During the 19th century a restaurant was built here and a tourist attraction was born. Recently, people added an unusually long cable seat lift. If you take a ride you will be flying above forests and meadows growing on Komáří vížka and you will cover a distance of 2342 metres and get off at 806 metres above sea level, happy in the knowledge that nowhere in the Central Europe can you take a cable lift that would cover such a long distance. It is also nice to know that you can hang your bicycle right next to you.



ON THE WINGS OF A KITE OR JUST WALKING ALONG

Well that being said, it does not mean that you have to have a bike. If you like paragliding or kite boarding, you will be thrilled as well. And what about hikers? If you feel like it, you may explore the glorious pilgrimage site called Baroque Basilica of Our Lady of Sorrows in Bohosudov, or the oldest parts in the town of Krupka – a unique preservation area with a "street-like" town square, or you may take a look at the reconstructed Krupka Castle and then you may go underground to see the old mining gallery called Starý Martin (Old Martin), where tin mining began in the fourteenth century. Then you may decide to take a cable car ride and have a meal at a restaurant in Komáří vížka and then inspect the remnants of various mining activities – for example of the Big Pink – an elliptical valley, and you cannot forget the Baroque Chapel of St. Wolfgang – the saint patron of all miners, with a charming old cemetery. In short, you may take any of the marked trails, because all of them will show you something wonderful. (If you go through the forest do not forget to look for blueberries – they are really big because they were blessed by the great Wolfgang himself and since then they have been growing in sacred sizes).



Dresden International Airport – your gateway to Northern Bohemia

DRESDEN INTERNATIONAL
MITTELDEUTSCHE AIRPORT HOLDING

Flughafen Dresden GmbH is a subsidiary of Mitteldeutsche Airport Holding. In 2011 Dresden Airport registered 1,921,633 passengers and 35,087 aircraft movements. The catchment area of Dresden International, the airport with the "short paths", covers the German regions Saxony and Southern Brandenburg, as well as Northern Bohemia in the Czech Republic and Lower Silesia in Poland. New in the current timetable are direct flights with OLT Express to the Swiss hub airport **Zurich** and Dresden's twin city, **Hamburg**. The airline flies up to three times daily to each of these cities. Other hub airports with worldwide onward connections served with non-stop flights from Dresden are **Düsseldorf** (Lufthansa, Air Berlin), **Frankfurt** (Lufthansa), **Cologne Bonn** (Germanwings), **Moscow Sheremetyevo** (Aeroflot), **Munich** (Lufthansa), **Palma de Mallorca** (Air Berlin) and **Stuttgart** (Germanwings). In addition, easyJet flies between **Basel Mulhouse Freiburg** and Dresden up to four times per week. In the charter sector, there are daily non-stop flights from and to the **Mediterranean**, the **Atlantic**, the **Red Sea** and the **Black Sea**. Since German reunification the airport infrastructure has been completely modernised and now features everything a modern, efficient airport needs: a high-capacity runway, a multifunctional terminal in which everything is within easy reach, and excellent links to the trunk road and rail networks. The direct connection to the A4 motorway, approximately 3,000 parking spaces close to the terminal and the compact terminal with its underground station and conference centre form a coherent overall concept for arrivals, departures, meetings and conferences. The A4 and A17/D8 motorways take you to Northern Bohemia in around 45 minutes. At Dresden's central station, passengers can change from the airport S-Bahn (line S2) to trains to the Czech Republic. The journey between the airport and Dresden's central station takes as

little as 20 minutes. As surveys show, the airport also rates highly for its tidy appearance and the friendliness and competence of its staff.



Timetable, online travel agency, booking parking:

www.dresden-airport.de
www.letiste-drazdany.cz

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01109 Dresden, Germany
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The winter kingdom of the Ice Queen of Pravčice

“The times when the Homolkova family wanted to go skiing and see “panoramas” are long gone. Naturally, they went to Špindl. However, today, fans of all snow and winter activities starting with ordinary walks through a sleeping landscape devoid of all colours and ending with various and sophisticated downhill rides, are trying to find new slopes and unusual opportunities, new ski resorts and new and unparalleled opportunities to enjoy the winter and the snow – before the spring melts it all away. Bohemian Switzerland is a paradise for adventure and opportunity seekers.”

DOWN THE HILL

For example Jedlová. Many verified downhill slopes from easy blue class slopes to killer slaloms begin at a picturesque viewing tower and they follow the slopes of the Jedlová Mountain above Jiřetín. Try them and you will enjoy views of Bohemian Switzerland while you are riding down the hill. A gradually modernized facility may still remind you of the near past, when a term such as “carving” sounded a little bit like a curse word to us. By the way for all those hard-core summer vacationers – Jedlová is also an excellent place in the winter and even during a full season. Those slopes you ride down in the winter may also be ridden down in the summer using scooters, which you can rent here. Or you may test your climbing skills in the rope climbing centre and have a nice meal right at the bottom of the viewing tower.

And only several hundred metres from here you will find another slope. This one is comfortable, smooth and wide. Simply put Horní Podluží is an ideal place for families and skiers or snowboarders who do not want to go crazy or get killed on almost vertical slopes, but for those who prefer perfectly carved turns. But make no mistake – Horní Podluží is a modern facility with everything included – artificial snow, night skiing, ski school, ski and snowboard rentals, etc. And of course, you can have a nice meal here too right in the restaurant called U vleku (At the ski lift). (By the way you have to try the local soup served as a snack.)

THROUGH THE CALM COUNTRY

And what about if you belong to a group of hikers and summer walkers? Then you will think that you are in paradise. During the winter, Bohemian Switzerland turns into a winter kingdom belonging to the Ice Queen who is very particular and picky about decorations and design. Walks through the strangely silent Kyjovské Valley and around the lazy Křínice River enclosed with snow collars along its river banks, or the dignified pilgrimage trip following the Gabriela trail and around glistening, frozen and snow decorated Křídelní walls, all the way to the Queen – the Pravčická Gate wrapped in a brilliant ermine coat or, finally, an adrenaline trip to Jetřichovické viewing points offering views of the landscape, which suddenly has all clear and perfect contours and demonstrates itself in chalky white and raven black colours – these are moments so beautiful that they feel out of this world and you have them as a winter bonus for showing a sense of beauty.



THROUGH SNOW WHITE PLAINS

If you prefer cutting through the bright snow with cross-country skis you will not be disappointed. There are beautiful tracks on the already mentioned Jedlová Mountain, but for true cross-country skiing connoisseurs we have prepared a skiing facility in Polevsko nad Kytlicí. Perfectly milled tracks ranging from 3 to 9 km, romantic forest sceneries or distant views and panoramas (there you go! Panoramas!) offered by the Luživké and Jizerské Mountains. And again just between me and you. You can downhill ski here as well. Use the 400 m long POMA lift to go up and then you are on your own. Another excellent cross-country skiing terrains may be found at the top of Děčínský Sněžník. Strangely intoxicating but simple and straight at the same time, this hilly landscape offers views of the German side and of the Czech valley – a tantalising event. Excuse me? Do you want an adrenaline rush? As you wish. At the edge of the village of Rybníště and close to Krásná Lípa, you will find a ranch on a hilly meadow, called JV Ranch Bohemian Switzerland. Here you may stand on your skis and harness yourself to one of those beautiful horses they have here and enjoy a devilish ride – skijoring. Just imagine being pulled by a beautiful horse through a pristine and snow white meadow making deep cuts in the snowy cover, wind screaming in your ears and your eyes feasting on all the beauty around you – Out of this world!



TO THE GALLERY OF ICEFALLS

The biggest attraction? There is no reason to hide it. These are called the Brtnické icefalls. You will encounter Brtnické ... icefalls everywhere around you as long as you find a stream and brook or steep hill or a ravine. But Brtnické icefalls are simply the most famous and most fantastic. Plus they are very easily accessible and the trail that will lead you to them is very well marked. So you can take a trip to see Opona (Curtain), and be amazed by the sound of Organs, go through Christmas Bethlehem (Nativity) or stand humbly under the Ice column ... These ice formations, which may surprise you, glitter with all colours from pale yellow to brownish and bluish colours as well as rusty and ochre tones, but most importantly – they are a little different year after year. They are so amazing that our Ice Queen usually extends this exhibition into late spring. During the winter, Bohemian Switzerland does not sleep under the snow cover. It just kindly waits for those who want to discover its beauty.

The Salon of Europe in a “little Paris”

“A fairy had been standing at the birth of Teplice who largely determined what the fate of the city would be for many centuries – the town would be a meeting place for important and famous people and royalty and Kings of Europe will meet here. And why not, when even the fairy was a queen – the second Czech Queen who married Vladislav II. Her name was Judith (yes, the one who had the first stone bridge in Prague built) and who during the second half of the 12th century initiated the establishment of a women's Benedictine cloister near warm waters (“ad aquas calidas”), and around which the city began slowly growing and was later called Teplice.”

PLOTS AND AGREEMENTS

And which kings and rulers met here? For example, the Tsar Peter I the Great, Austrian Emperor Josef II, Francis I and Ferdinand V, the Prussian King Frederick William III, Swedish King Gustav IV, and another Russian Tsar Alexander I, Charles X, – the King of France ... in their reception rooms all Czech and European aristocracy was waiting, politicians, archdukes, princes as well as artists of all kinds and importance. They came here to make use of the hot mineral springs, but also – and often just because of the fact that Teplice was regarded as the Salon of Europe in a “little Paris”, because you could meet anyone here, discuss anything, meet someone important and seek help or gossip about someone. Beautiful spa parks and gardens, vibrant and colourful promenades, and whoever meant something wanted to be seen here. And make no mistake, meetings that took place here, often had a direct impact on the history of Europe – for example, when the Prussian King Frederick William II – a stable customer who stayed here almost every season for twenty-seven years, met with two other important heads. The Russian Tsar Alexander I and the Emperor of Austria Francis I, and together with representatives of England agreed on a mutual advancement against the Napoleon. Some twenty two years later, you could witness a Congress of rulers held here on the occasion of the first foundation of a cornerstone for the monument commemorating the Russian battle at Chlumec. Metternich used to invite and meet diplomats from all over Europe here, and he did so to prevent changes in the division of the continent. The Clary-Aldringen family invited almost anyone here – for example, their neighbour from Duchcov Giacomo Casanova, Frederick Chopin who honoured them by playing a stunning improvised concert, or the famous Czech violin virtuoso Josef Slavik. A man who changed opera forever, Richard Wagner was treated here, as well as other composers – Robert Schumann, Ferenc Liszt and Carl Maria von Weber. It is really a futile exercise trying to squeeze all the names and personas of those times into one page.

THEY MET HERE – AND THEN NEVER AGAIN

But one meeting of artists is especially famous. Ludwig van Beethoven who was losing his hearing was treated twice here. During his second visit in 1812, he complained about being here alone, because nobody here reached the level of his genius, but then he changed his mind and went to see another regular spa guest, the writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. That was when he already composed music for Egmont written by Goethe and maybe around this time he began to compose music for another of Goethe's poem – The Calm Sea and Happy Voyage, which he dedicated to the poet. They kept meeting for a few days and talked, and Goethe wrote home that he had never met a more focused, energetic and kind artist, but also a more frightening and untamed personality. It is strange but such meetings tend to be a subject for a novel or film script. One can hardly imagine that such meeting actually took place. But remember. That was the city of Teplice. In Teplice you could meet anyone.

A castle full of memories of love



“A white-haired man is walking in a garden with perfectly cut bushes shaped like cones. He is walking on white sand that crunches under his feet like snow. His lips under a distinctive eagle-like nose are pressed tightly together, he is wearing a long open coat which flutters in a gentle wind and the coat tails seem to sweep footprints behind the old man, who is slowly disappearing around the corner. He is gone, as if he was never here. But he was here. His life was so colourful and unusual, riddled with prisons, exiles, escapes, but mostly with countless love affairs. It would be a shame to forget this man. And so the man who went inside the castle, is now sitting down at a table in a library and begins to write his memoirs. This will make people remember him for hundreds of years. His name is Giacomo Casanova.”

IF IT WAS NOT FOR DUCHCOV, THE WORLD WOULD HAVE FORGOTTEN HIM

If Casanova did not end his life in Duchcov, his book called History of my Life consisting of several volumes would not have seen the light of day and maybe not even the bestseller of that time called My escape from the lead chambers of Venice. When he accepted an offer given to him by the Count Josef Karl Emanuel of Valdštejn, to move to the Duchcov Chateau and care for the castle library, which consisted of more than four thousand volumes, he had already lived through hundreds of escapades and adventures. He should have been a priest, but was everything else – treasury manager, secretary, soldier, actor, violinist, sailor, gambler, mining engineer, lottery provider, secret agent of the inquisition – and also a free bricklayer, for which the Church imprisoned him in the horrible lead dungeons in the attic of Venetian Doge Palace, agricultural reformer, but also a journalist, poet, philosopher, writer... and no matter where he was he loved women and conquered hearts (and not just their hearts). He was expelled, removed and kicked out of many places due to his love affairs. In Duchcov he should have been out of sight and should have settled and calmed down. He did not. He felt isolated here but he was passionately writing. A witty and funny companion turned into an irritable and grumpy old man, who was bullied by the rest of the staff at the castle; he was laughed at and even beaten with his own stick. But the books he wrote here made him famous and his glory still lives today. If nothing, his name is a synonym for a seducer and lover. Jakub Casanova, as they called him in Bohemia, died in Duchcov in 1798 and is buried somewhere near the cemetery chapel of St. Barbara. The Duchcov Chateau and its garden still offer many famous memories about its most famous member, including a nature trail which follows in his footsteps. Casanova was not the only famous man who lived in these rooms and chambers and walked through the adjacent garden. Schiller, Goethe, Beethoven, Chopin and Tsar Alexander I also stayed in the Chateau. When you visit the Chateau, you will be able to follow in the footsteps of these famous men and experience what remained here from these old times and turbulent lives.

Climbing the Holy Steps to the Black Madonna

Once on a hot and cloudless day in 1291, angels suddenly came from the heavens above Nazareth. They took the Holy House – a house where the Virgin Mary once lived with Joseph and the infant Jesus – and miraculously lifted the house up and carried it to the Italy to the laurel forest of Mrs. Laureta. Therefore, the house of the Holy Family was rescued from the hands of the infidels... That is all for this beautiful Christian legend. According to another legend this chapel with a decorative mantle and even more – by a gun – a medieval terrorist inside a Black Madonna statue. However, people began to imitate this chapel (even which only Marian models and copies of this chapel all over the Christian world. There are many more, but the most northern one of the most beautiful by beautiful cloisters, has been standing here since 1707 near the Capuchin monastery in

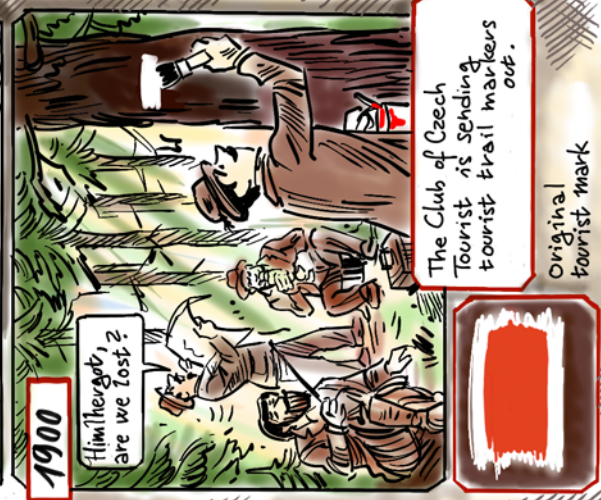
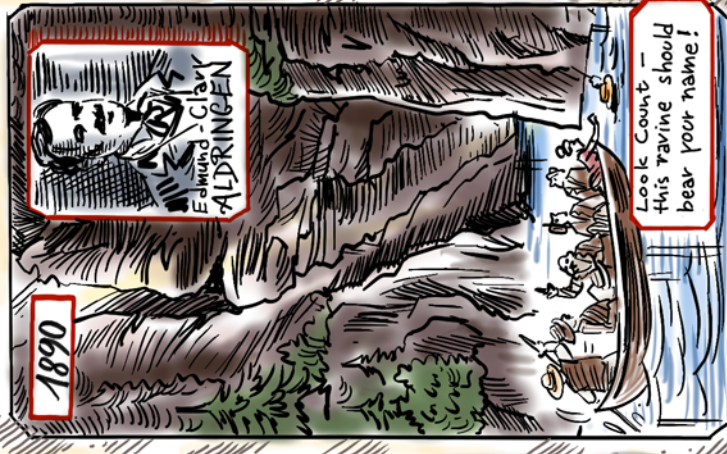
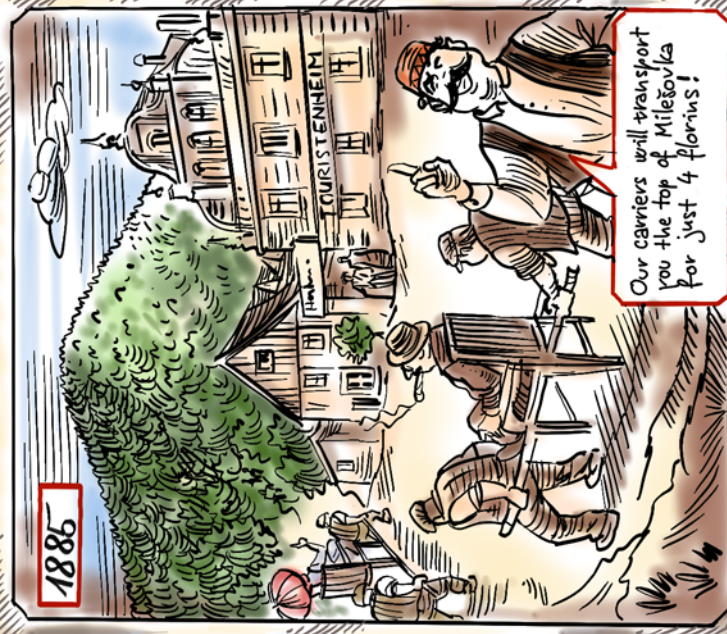
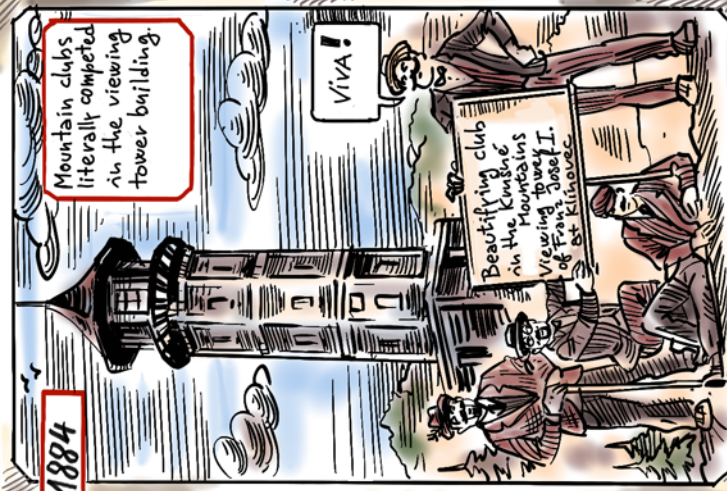
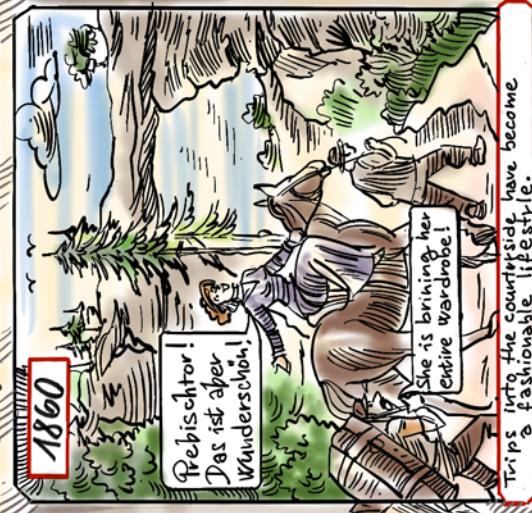
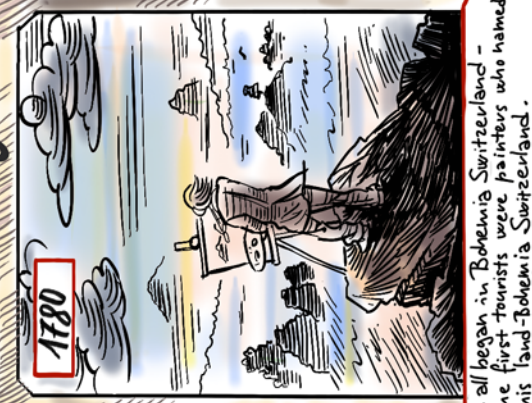
WITH PEACE OF MIND AND A HUMBLE HEART

The Church of St. Lawrence and the adjacent cloisters hiding the Loreto chapel are gradually being restored and you may see them all year round here with the help of a guide or you may come here to see one of the many exhibitions, concerts or festivals. Immediately when you pass the threshold, you will feel the atmosphere of another world, a world of peace and contemplation. Suddenly you are somewhere else. To walk underneath these cloisters and listen to the educational but mostly very passionate narrations provided by the guide (the reconstruction of the chapel back to its former shine was arranged for by a few fans and not by a huge team), or to see the church and discover behind the presbytery a mysterious Capuchin choir room with a revolving stand for prayer books, and to follow Mary's life journey depicted on reconstructed ceiling paintings and reach all the way up to the twelfth stop of the Cross – the Holy stairs with Calvary chapel, all this is beautiful, mysterious and a bit eerie. The Holy Steps are one of the many prides of Rumburk Loreto. They consist of 28 steps, because that is the number of steps found in the house of Pontius Pilate, and which may only be climbed on ones knees and with a prayer on your lips and in your heart. Baroque paintings remind you of a theatre a little bit, but in reality it is a theatre in some ways. – Above the staircase all the way at the top on a ceiling painting, you will see an open vault of the Heavens. Stairs are lined with niches where you see frowning and laughing sculptures of Jewish merchants and Roman soldiers – an exceptional set of wooden sculptures made by painter and sculptor Eliáš Dollhopf (1703–1773).

GENIUS LOCI

Loreto Chapel, Holy House The finest Baroque ornamentations outside – but inside, austerity and modesty. Baroque opulence is suppressed here in order to feel humility and reverence. Everything is dominated by the Black Loreto Mother of God – a copy of the Italian original from 1694, which was also sanctified by the Pope Innocent XII. When Anthony Florian Lichtenstein brought it from Loreto, he also had in his travel chest plans created by the famous architect Johann Lucas von Hildebrandt depicting the construction of the Loreto chapel. In September 1704, the construction began and three years and six days later the chapel was ready for consecration. From the first moment reports of miraculous healings spread around and were contributed to the Black Madonna in Rumburk. The local Loreto chapel became a popular place of pilgrimage. Regardless of what you believe, to stand here is a reverend and chilling feeling. The walls contain centuries of human belief, respect, love and desire.

The beginning of tourism in the Gate to Bohemia



Wandering around in the name of wine

The Bohemian wine growing region is divided into two sub-regions: Litoměřice and Mělník. The Gate / Pylon magazine will regularly bring you interesting wine events and winemaking points of pride from the Litoměřice sub-region, which extends from Kadaň to Roudnice and from Střekov to Blšany near Louny. This region has thirty winemaking villages and fifty-one wine growers. Wandering around the countryside in the footsteps of winemakers and wine is wonderful. It is like touching ancient history, while tasting wines born today. The historic wine line which connects the Middle Ages with the third millennium is here and it is worth exploring.



GOTHIC RIDDLED WITH THE PRESENT

There is no better start for such journey than in the Gothic castle in Litoměřice. Why? Mainly because here you will find a sanctuary of Czech winemaking – a remarkable interactive exhibition focusing on the Czech wine region and winemaking. But this is not the only reason – the castle was built by Přemysl Otakar II in the second half of the 13th century and from the outside it looks ancient and serious, but if you enter inside, you will find yourself in a strange world of a unique combination of Gothic and contemporary architecture. In 2011, the former fruit and vegetable warehouse and adventurous playground for children who got here through many holes in the crumbling walls, got its new life. A modern interior, dominated by a stunning, yet somewhat intimate congress hall built into the castle literally from the floor to the peak of the roof will entice you to visit its uppermost floor. Here you will find the winemaking exhibition. Based on the narration provided by your guide, you will soon understand that this is not a museum, but an interactive and playful place which may be enjoyed by children and adults alike. It all starts when (thanks to the magic of projection technology), Charles IV himself appears in front of you in a semitransparent mirror and will kindly explain to you how he gave the Radobýl Hill to the people of Litoměřice so they could built their vineyards here.



Then you can ring a virtual bell to drive away a flock of starlings which strike you with their noisy chirping, and walk through the part of the exhibition which has been designed as a wine cellar including simulated echoes (only the cold is missing), or play various quizzes and games, shape glasses, crawl through tunnels made of barrels and let your children go crazy in the barrel corner. You will also learn things that a layman often has no idea about. For example, that black grapes really do not produce red juice or that a rose wine is really not made by mixing white and red wines and you may also see historical wine tools and learn how wines are divided in the Czech Republic. In short, you will start at the beginning of winemaking and continue until today. At the end of the big hall you will peek into special booths and see the life and production process of individual wineries. Shortly before the end you will be tasting wines because, as you know – wine reveals itself in a glass and man reveals himself while drinking wine. And if you are hard-core wine tourists, you may walk from the castle to the Monastery wine cellars, where the historical wine trail begins and it is about 20 kilometres long. It will take you along the Elbe River to Velké Žernoseky, where you take a ferryboat to cross the river. Then you walk through the Oparenské valley all the way to Lovosice. Along the trail you will encounter wine kiosks, tasting sessions and exhibitions. But make sure you do not skip one place. Velké Žernoseky.

AN HEIR TO ANCIENT WINEMAKING TRADITIONS

The late Baroque Chateau in Žernoseky certainly does not seem to be hiding extensive cellars. But when you walk through them you are amazed. These cellars extend deep into the hillside where the Chateau is built. To reach the oldest ones you must even climb up stairs, which is very rare. Vaulted cellars offer a mysterious atmosphere, special climate and if you walk through them, you are passing by gigantic barrels, some of which are almost seventy years old. Knowing that in these barrels the fabulous wine made in Žernoseky matures, and that the wine was harvested from the same vineyards that were here already at the turn of the millennium, is a magical feeling. These cellars were built by Cistercian monks in the 13th century and they have been serving their divine purpose until today. The glorious tradition has continued here since the mid-1950s, when a wine Cultivation Station was established here, and where the founder of European winemaking professor William Kraus worked. The current heir to these traditions is Mr. František Kupsa, a winemaker known by everyone in the Czech Republic who understands wine. He has been caring for wines in Žernoseky since 1976. On an area covering twenty-seven and a half hectares you would find more than 110,000 grape vines – mostly Müller-Thurgau variety, which enjoys the climate here, but also Pinot Blanc and Gris, Riesling, Gewurztraminer and Moppr, and this year also new and resistant varieties Johanniter, Solaris and Savilon – planted at the vineyard in Žalhostice. White varieties grow on 80% of vineyards, blue grapes such as Saint Laurent, Blue Portugal, Dornfelder and Pinot Noir on the rest. Some vineyards are also located to the west of Lovosice, on the slopes of the Lovoš hill. The local production is in great demand and most large customers and people come to buy their wine right here at the Chateau. Wine tourists are well catered for here. Anybody may order a small reception, and even stay overnight in the comfortable Chateau rooms.

I could not resist and asked the Director of the Žernoseky Winery what wine he likes best.

“If the wine is strong, healthy and well-made, the variety it is not so important. Sometimes I prefer simple and lighter wine. In this case I go for Müller Thurgau; sometimes I feel more like white Pinot or Riesling. What you want to eat with the wine is important too. Also, each year a different wine stands out – that is the magic of wine. It is different every year. Everything plays a role here – the weather, soil, wine grower's care, processing in the cellar... You cannot say at Christmas for example – the wine is finished and will stay that way, because wine is constantly evolving and maturing. Biochemistry never stops working and so the flavour and aroma change too. And that is the most beautiful thing about wine”.



Finicky tomcat from Varnsdorf



“The Kocour brewery at the edge of the city of Varnsdorf lives up to its name. Beer connoisseurs can let themselves go here like nowhere else. They brew 30 types of beers here and in their own pub in the building of the brewery they have 14 beer specialties on tab. Besides the usual 10° beer they also serve light and dark lager and beers made according to their own recipes, or recipes from all over the world.”

WHEN BEER GOES WELL WITH YOUR FOOD...

It is kind of strange. It has only been five years since the brewery in the former ceramics factory building opened. It began in one room only and today we have a comfortable pub with a small but beautiful brewery – by the way, the brewery itself comes from the Research Beer Institute and it is a real but smaller version in which the Institute brewed test batches. When the tomcat people got it they had no idea how hard it would be to put it back into operation. For example, they had to buy rivets in Holland. Finally, they managed to find a man who worked on it as an apprentice, and today the copper jewel is shining like new and brews beers right in the interior of the pub. The pub together with its adjacent halls hold many events. Fairs offering local cheeses and sausages, fights between beer and wine sommeliers, the famous Tomcat smoke and smoked beers and all kinds of meats... The Brewery gradually expands into more and more rooms and the former workshops are being transformed into cellars where beer matures – some a few weeks, but others the entire year. Plus they serve excellent meals here too. And you will not find here only typical cold snacks which go well with beer, but also an excellent brewer's goulash, smoked knees, ribs, schnitzels, and also an excellent duck with red sauerkraut and dumplings... One piece of advice for you – when you get to Varnsdorf and to the Tomcats, let them advise you what beer you should have with different meals. You will be surprised that like wine, beer may be very different and may enhance the flavours of different foods.

BEER SPECIALTIES FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD

You may taste a top fermented special beer with hints of coffee flavour – so-called stout, wheat beer, top fermented Bavarian beer Weizen style, top fermented Pale Ale with English hops from its homeland – the British Isles, or the reincarnation of this type of beer imported from America with American hops and significant citrus tones. And beers originally from Belgium, but also from New Zealand or Japan are brewed here. Beer connoisseurs come here from ever greater distances, even though the Kocour brewery delivers to twenty-seven pubs around the country. Due to the rapidly developing beer tourism more and more people are interested in local specialties which are brewed either during a certain period – mostly around Christmas, or which are so popular that they are on the daily menu – such as the very bitter 16° Kubík or the similarly bitter 11° Sumeček, and the almost legendary Samurai, started by Japanese brewer Toshi Ishii, or for example cherry lager, Kocour (Tomcat) with Tokaj wine, and so on.



An affectionate pet from Ústí nad Labem



“The Na Rychtě restaurant in Ústí has been serving its customers for one hundred and fifty years. But in October 2011 it began to please the taste buds of guests in a newly renovated building, in the only microbrewery in Ústí nad Labem, which beautifully blends together with the restaurant where all 1,200 hectolitres of annual production is easily sold. Within a single year the restaurant managed to build up a great culinary reputation, so sometimes a customer intoxicated by a great beer and full of wonderful food gets tired and certainly welcomes the fact that Rychta also offers hotel services.”

WALK THROUGH THE CELLAR

They have three fixed stars on tab here – the traditional 12° – lager called Mazel – by the way the best beer of 2011 produced by small breweries, the semi-dark amber beer Bavarian type – 12° Vojtěch beer and finally, Brusinka (Cranberry) beer flavoured with cranberry aroma which they started to brew here as a speciality based on customer request and after huge success they included it among beers served regularly. Additional special beers are added occasionally – such as semi-dark 14° Ústečan, light 16° Ústecký lev (Lion) and light 11° Ústecká rychtářka (Reeve). But the clear winner is Mazel (Cuddly pet). People from huge distances come to taste this beer with a cute name and unique flavour. The quality is guaranteed by the master brewer, Mr. Jaroslav Rottenborn, and you can see his kingdom for yourself. Just make an arrangement in advance and let the expert take you through the cellar. In addition to the copper brewery, which is part of the restaurant interior, all other beer magic is happening right under your feet.

MEALS SERVED HERE ARE AS GOOD AS THE BEERS

If you are in Ústí, it is natural to visit Rychta and have a beer and also because the kitchen is really famous here. Most guests come here for beef ribs, which will never disappear from the menu, because customers would not let that happen. Other hits are for example, traditional španělský maxiptáček “Spanish meat roll” made from bull meat stuffed with bacon, sausage, eggs and onions and served with homemade bacon dumplings, grilled pork steak with a long bone, North American steak cooked to medium, or grilled chicken breast on a bed of spinach with cheese sauce and buttered mashed potatoes. Excellent, but still not fully appreciated, is the local delicacy – veal cheeks served with delicious celery-potato puree. And if you have a sweet tooth you will not be able to resist cottage dumplings filled with nougat, and rolled in gingerbread crumbs served with sour cream and mint leaves... The perfect pub experiences are enhanced by Rychtářské listy (newspapers), which are not limited only to events happening at the Na Rychtě restaurant but also bring you cultural events occurring in the capital city of this region, and provide interesting reading about nature, travel and sport. Basically, visiting the Na Rychtě restaurant is very tempting. You will not want to leave.



The Gate to Bohemia and to my inner self...

Elbe fisherman Tomáš Töpfer

Tomáš, your passion for fishing is generally known. But your favourite river is the Elbe River, which may not be widely known.

The Elbe is amazing and I love it. She is beautiful, alive and clean. During the last twenty years the river has completely changed. All major polluters must use water processing plants, and therefore the Elbe has plenty of fish, basically all river fish. Apparently even the salmon have come back. It is funny though. It is not so long ago when workers had a clause in their employment contracts that they are entitled to have meat twice a week and that it cannot be salmon all the time. It is great that this beautiful fish is coming back again. The Elbe is simply an excellent river. I love it.

I would not ask a mushroom picker where he goes for mushrooms. – May I ask a fisherman where he goes fishing?

I have a friend who once taught me how to fish. That was back when I played in the Ústí Drama Studio. And we have been going fishing ever since. He lives in Ústí, and I near Prague. He starts going in his direction and I in my and we meet between Prackovice and Žernoseky. We are sport fishermen and everything we catch we return back to the river. Once the local fishermen called the police on us because at that time we were pulling out one fish after another. The police officers came and wanted to see our licence. And we did not have any. After a while, all was explained, the police left, and the locals were mad as hell.

Every fisherman has a favourite fish he likes to catch. – What is yours?

Carp, carp for sure. Twice a year I make an exception and bring home my catch – obviously, one exception is before Christmas. My wife says that Elbe carp is the most delicious – and most beautiful too. It is not a lazy fish from still lake waters which lies in mud all the time. In the Elbe, these fish must face strong currents. If you could see it... Beautifully coloured fish. Just great.

OK that is the Elbe River around Žernoseky. Do you like any other regions around Ústí?

Right here in Ústí. I have spent six years of my life here, and in that time I have made a lot of good friends, like Radek Vonka. My daughters have learned to ride a bike here, we used to swim in Brná in the thermal spa – you see, I do not even know if the spa is still there, we used to walk around the town and along the river... Today, when I see how the natural urban character is coming back to Ústí, how the city is freeing itself from the grip of concrete rectangular buildings again and that it has its dominating sights and squares where people meet, you know, it makes me happy.

Drama Studio – a very famous part of the history of Ústí nad Labem...

You see, when we built it long time ago, we fought for every customer. We started at the facility of a chemical plant, and later we were given a cinema, which we turned into a theatre with our own hands. When I walked around the Fidlavačka construction site my experiences came in handy. I already knew how to use a brush and a bucket with black Balakryl paint, and we magically created a stage at a place where there was none before... I used to have an old Trabant car and any time I could I took my family and we

set off on a trip – to pollute the countryside with fumes from a two-stroke engine. We often went to Úštěcko. I love this countryside. But I do not want to speak about Ústí only. I come from Prague and grew up around the Vltava River but water from the Elbe runs in my veins. My family including the generation of my grandfather lived in Roudnice. Recently, at the cemetery, I have found graves of the Töpfer family dating back to the end of the 18th century and beginning of the 19th century. To this day, we often go on a trip to Roudnice – just to have a meal at our favourite pub, walk along the river... I love this flat landscape. And what I like most about it is how it gradually and unobtrusively descends down to the river from both sides. The Elbe is a fully grown and adult river, but when you follow its stream you will be amazed behind every curve and gulf all the way to Porta Bohemica (the Gate to Bohemia) and beyond until you reach the breathtaking Elbe canyon in Děčín... or Terezín. My parents were interred there involuntarily for some time. Our family cannot forget those hard times. Simply put, I am very closely connected with the Gate to Bohemia.

You learned about the entire countryside from stages of theatres, is that not true?

Of course. I drove back and forth through the entire Ústí region with my drama club. Whether it was with the drama studio or later with Fidlavačka. We played in all the theatres in the region. Each theatre has its own atmosphere and unique audience. There are some cities where you are always successful. There are theatres that seem to be destined for success. For example the Děčín theatre is like that. It is only a stage without permanent actors but success is embedded in these walls. But not only in the walls; it is also rooted in people.

Roudnice, Ústí, Prague – you must be a strong urban type. Are you not?

Yes I am. Absolutely. But you see, for some time now I have been living outside of Prague surrounded by nature. My life has changed completely. The life of a city boy who still remembers milk carriages pulled by horses. Me and my friend used to jump on the rear support steps and shouted out: “Behind the truck! Behind the truck!” And the driver always struck us with his whip, and we used to go to school with swollen whip marks on our bodies. And now this city boy is taking trips to Prague. Against all Prague's traffic. When the weekend comes everybody runs away from Prague. You can see endless lines of cars heading out. And my wife and myself are driving “in the wrong direction” against them. And we enjoy walking on Prague's pavements. Man should turn his life around once in a while. It is refreshing.

Sometimes it is hard to understand how many events you are able to manage – Now for example, you are also in Divadlo (theatre) na Vinohradech. Will you still find the time for fishing?

If you are not making excuses you can manage a lot. And you do not need to be burdened with it. It is just a matter of approach. What about fishing? No one can take that away from me. And when I am retired and want to relax I will go fishing more often. Since those days when I was standing on the banks of the Elbe River and showed my friend how to throw the line, I have developed my own style and I have many fishing rods, each rod for different types of fish. When someone is making fun of me for having so many fishing rods I tell him – It is like golf. Would you take only one club when playing golf? I use feeder for fishing a lot now. It is a fashionable style now. Very interesting. No float at all. You have to watch the end of your fishing rod to see if the fish is biting. I am a fisherman – and that is not just a hobby. It is a certain lifestyle that you have to stick with.

In the arms of the tender Elbe River “

People have been sailing on the Elbe River for ages. Rather than struggling through dense forests and killing your draft animals in muddy meadows, it has always been easier to use the strength of the river. Each river is created

by the surrounding countryside. In this sense, the Elbe is more than gifted. A wide channel meanders winding through the countryside of the Czech Central Mountains in the beautiful valley called Porta Bohemica, historic towns, slopes covered with ancient vineyards, rock walls covered during the spring with yellow Basket of Gold plants, dignified Střekov, the technical wonder of Masaryk water locks, undulating hills and meadows and a spectacular canyon behind the Děčín Castle with rocky statues and cliffs, sandstone buns or needles and finally, the Saxon mesas ... – you cannot see a similar view from the deck of a ship anywhere else in the world.”



ON POSEIDON OR PORTA BOHEMICA

Whether you choose Poseidon and will depart on a voyage to Hřensko to see the famous gorges of the Kamenice River and the Pravčická Gate, or if you decide to take the largest tourist boat in the Czech Republic called Porta Bohemica, which offers three hundred seats and a renowned restaurant called “Flying Fish” making your trip also a dining experience and sail with her upstream from Ústí nad Labem to Litoměřice Roudnice, Štětí and possibly all the way up to Horní Počapely, or if you choose its smaller sister focusing on fine wines and cold dishes, you can always count on one thing and that is that your experience will be an extraordinary and comforting because the movement of a massive ships in the river current is an indescribably noble experience and there will always be something to admire at its banks because, the banks of the Elbe River offer many beauties and charms of the Gate to Bohemia. Therefore, do not hesitate and take a trip across the water – perhaps for the entire day or just as one stop during your bike trip, because these vessels are “bike friendly” and welcome bikes on board with open arms. You will get a pass from everyday rush and stress, you will clear your head and feast your eyes. Anywhere you get off, you will be awaited by remarkable things and experiences. Probably the best choice is to go to the local museum in Děčín and see an exhibition called the Development of Shipping on the Elbe where you may verify that all those beauties you saw from the ship deck are historically correct and true.



AGAINST THE STREAM OF TIME

Following in the ancient footsteps of old sailors is not hard. Tourists boats are browsing the Elbe River everywhere, starting in Roudnice all the way to Hřensko and beyond to Dresden and Saxony's Florence. Just board the ship, lean against the handrail and dream. The calm sounds of keel strokes in the water work like a time machine, so do not be surprised that you may suddenly see salt traders, as they struggle against the stream in a pointy dugout tree trunk or on a raft made of animal skin. Be careful you must steer carefully to avoid endless raft convoys collecting wood from the nearby forests, but also from distant South Bohemia, you may catch a glimpse of a broad-cargo sailboat and maybe a group of Děčín fishermen harnessed in ropes and pulling upstream their boat with empty wine barrels all the way to Žernoseky ... In short, you may feel all the echoes and voices of those who were sailing the river before us. You will hear wheezing and chugging of the first steamboats loaded with timber, grain, fruit or sugar, but also with iron ore, coal, malt and hops, and even with Czech beer. Time goes fast and it will take you to the times of our first steamship companies equipped with brand new iron ships, which were not sold for wood when they reach their destination, but repeated their journey many times over and over again. You may even hear the sound of a clanking chain and watch in disbelief as these boats swallow the chain at the front and spit it out at the rear. A huge pull chain lying at the bottom of the Elbe starting in Mělník and ending in distant Hamburg. You will be amazed by the pompous look of the first tourist side-wheel steamers, you may even see the first one that ever came to Bohemia called Königin, Maria, or shortly after, the famous Czech steamer Bohemia. You may observe the selected society of counts and princes and rich merchants, and even high Church dignitaries how they enjoy the luxury provided by these ships and how chefs and stewards run among them, as ladies ostentatiously promenade on the deck dressed in the latest fashions... Suddenly a cormorant flies above us and the whiz of its wings takes us back to the rush of the third millennium, and we rest our eyes on the beauty around once again, and are grateful for the idea to embark this boat and set sail.



Listen world – you should see this!

Or, lets head for UNESCO

“Being part of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage Organisation UNESCO is prestigious, and it demonstrates that the entire world has recognized the importance and uniqueness of a place or area unit. It is also a report saying to people around and to the world – come here, and see the amazing and unprecedented beauties – and we even have a stamp to prove it. Make no mistake – this certificate plays a very crucial role, because tourists use a set of criteria to determine their priorities – and this guide works perfectly and globally. And the influx of tourists means more money, jobs, recovery of the region, etc...”

TEREZÍN, ŽATEC, KRUPKA, MĚDĚNEC AND SAXON-BOHEMIAN SWITZERLAND

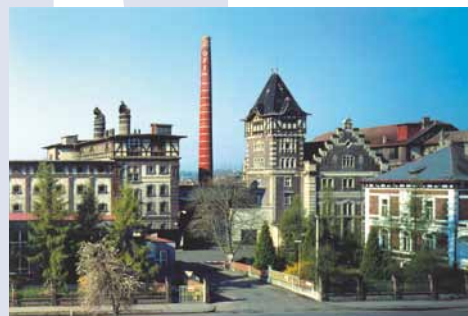
No wonder that notable places in the Gate to Bohemia strive to be included in the UNESCO list. If we go by a time line, Terezín formulated its request first – as a unique and fortified town with a Baroque fortification system. Žatec, for example, – bets on its unique complex of historical hops buildings. Mutual cross-border cooperation is the result of ambitions of people of Měděnec and Krupka to be included on a list of old mining works – the whole city as well as the system of historic trails. The only “aspirant” in the field of natural heritage is the region of Saxon-Bohemian Switzerland, which wants to sign up both national parks – Saxony and Bohemia. It is again a joint application of two countries – and therefore, has a better chance of success. If all the necessary particulars are in order and the application is submitted, Saxon-Bohemian Switzerland would be the first world natural heritage in our country included in UNESCO. Why?

IT IS A POEM WRITTEN IN TWO WORLD LANGUAGES

Let us try to explain it laconically: It is a unique land area with fantastically eroded sandstone cliffs crowned by one of the wonders of the world – the Pravčická gate, and a land of deep gorges with a unique climate, beautiful territory with creeks and rivers enveloped by wild gorges and rocky massifs offering remarkable flora and fauna with numerous endemic species, a class A bio-corridor, an indivisible territorial unit which cannot be separated by borderlines. Simply put, it is a wonderful place on Earth, which deserves to be protected. Joint efforts to submit the application to include this region on the UNESCO list have their special history. The cross-border cooperation at the ministerial level started after the establishment of the Saxon Switzerland National Park in 1990. Immediately after the establishment of the national park on the Czech side, the cooperation increased and peaked seven years ago when the cooperation focused on the protection of nature and tourism and on destination management activities. The positive outcome is an ever-expanding quality of tourist services focusing on sustainable tourism as a single unit, which was awarded by the European Commission as an excellent European destination. Further, the unified cross-border logo created by a merger between the two destination agencies serves as proof.

A HOUSE FULL OF SECRETS AND FUN

When you take a trip to Saxon Bad Schandau or to Bohemian Krásná Lípa, go to see and literally live through an interactive exposition which will show you the entire region. On the Saxony side this house of magic is called Nationalpark Zentrum and on the Krásná Lípa square it is called the House of Bohemian Switzerland. If you take your children here you will score high with them. The exhibition is called **Bohemian Switzerland – life, mystery, inspiration**. It is two-sided interactive fun for the whole family – no exaggeration! Through a wooden model of Pravčická Gate you will enter a world that will absorb you instantly, and you will need all your senses to explore it well. You will hear sounds from all sides, which illustrate what you currently looking at or what you are touching. Exhibition panels are more for reading than for playing. Here you can shoot ants from a **Dendroleon hole**, try to guess what pollen grain belongs to what tree, take a look into an **ice cave**, you can climb the **mini viewing tower**, climb up a small **climbing wall**, sit in a rocky chapel, take a look inside an endless rocky flue, walk carefully on soft ground and follow imprints made by wheels of merchant carriages... Around the stairs leading to the lower floor you will find a **real gurgling stream** with wooden split for salmon – through which these fish overcome obstacles when they swim against the current. You will find here a **naturalist table** with microscope, reach into mysterious drawers and touch and guess which animal fur belongs to which animal. You may test your smell when you will be guessing herbs, and at the musician corner you can try to play the xylophone and finally, in the **archaeological exhibition** you can discover and brush off fragments of prehistoric vessels... The biggest attraction is a **badger burrow**. You can climb inside and search until you reach an old badger. And when you have had enough of playing and running, you may visit a movie theatre offering a wonderful short documentary called the **Land of Mysteries** or you may go right next door to see a **combined projection** show where you sit on the ground and the film describing the power of natural elements is shown on three screens with a light which suddenly illuminates exhibits that are being talked about. Like everything in this wonderful exhibition, you can reach, explore and even touch anything you please.



Do you know what a wonderful feeling it is to bring someone back to life over the phone?

“Frankly, I admit that originally I was going to do an interview with Jan Bubla, the Head of Air Rescue Service for the Ústí Region, about a helicopter and how macho and adventurous is to fly over forests and villages. After two minutes I was deeply ashamed. It is completely different...”

“The Air Rescue Service is kind of a showcase of ambulance rescue services. It is attractive, but its value and functionality depends on the quality of the control and dispatch centre”, he says.

AND WHO WORKS AT THE DISPATCH AS THE OPERATOR?

Basically, we are all the dispatch. We take turns. We drive, fly or sit by the phone. In this way the cooperation between all sections works much better. Of course, a perfect technology and software background is necessary – it allows us to be most efficient. The most important thing is to decide whether to send the so-called RZP – that is a team with a rescuer, or RLP with a physician.

AND WHEN YOU USE THE HELICOPTER?

Helicopter deployment is mainly based on the time factor – if it is serious and the helicopter will arrive much sooner – then we use the helicopter. We are capable of landing almost anywhere – terrain, villages but also in a city centre. The helicopter is specially modified; it has a higher landing gear so we can sit in bushes and the rear propeller is hidden inside the tail to avoid injury or incidents... However, sometimes we simply cannot land – there are times when the rescue and doctor must be lowered down on a rope, and lift the injured or carry the injured on the rope to a place where we can land. The saying come quickly and leave quickly is not true anymore. The most important and life-saving activities are often done right on the spot – we also have a small hospital in the helicopter, which is able to function as a regular receiving room in a real hospital.



AND WHAT DOES THE DISPATCH OR OPERATOR DO?

The work of an operator is by far the hardest on the ambulance team. Everyone will tell you that, including doctors, who will also tell you that they would not sit in this hot chair. An operator is the person who picks up the phone when you dial 155 – wherever you are. Within a few seconds he must assess how serious the call is, and must quickly decide what to do next. For example, when a tourist calls that he has hurt his leg, and has no idea where he is, the operator is the one who must ask the right questions to help him locate the tourist and assess how to help him. Whether we fly or drive to him. Every year we make ten thousand of those trips, of which six hundred are with a helicopter. But not every call means a trip out. If it is a less serious matter, first the operator tries to help the person – for example how to stop a bleeding nose, or what medication a child can and cannot take, how to fix incorrectly given first aid and how to give the correct first aid. Often the patient calls back saying that everything is fine now – and we are not going anywhere. But the hardest work of the operator is a phone-assisted emergency resuscitation. Imagine you are walking down the street and someone next to you collapses. You call 155 and the operator immediately begins to navigate you through the procedure so you can give the correct first aid, even though you have never done it or seen it, not even on television. He must first verify through you whether it is really a circulation collapse, and if so, he will lead you through the procedure, and suddenly you are doing an indirect heart massage, for example. Basically you become extended hands of the rescuers. Meanwhile, of course, an ambulance with a physician is rushing to you, but before it arrives, this phone call may save the life of that person. The chance of survival rises exponentially.

I am saying goodbye to Mr. Bubla and have a strong feeling of seriousness and importance. All thirty people at the rescue service department in Ústí work very hard, and yet they keep quiet about it. I am leaving and saying to myself. Oh boy, you would not be able to handle this. I bow before them.

On a wheelchair through the Gate to Bohemia

“I do not know if you ever tried to borrow a wheelchair and tried to ride it at least for a few metres. I did it and let me tell you – it is hard work, and most importantly, you will very quickly notice your limits – where you can and where you cannot go by yourself. First sidewalk and you are done. First stump and you go back... But despite that, wheelchair tourism is increasing every day. Ales Černohous from Děčín already

went with his wheelchair to many places and decided to share his experience – recently he published through a public benefit corporation in Bohemian Switzerland a groundbreaking booklet called Bohemian-Saxon Switzerland without barriers. You will find here a list of wheelchair-friendly restaurants and accommodation services, information centres, transportation and travel tips for trips, ideas where to spend your free time and when to do some sports.”

ALEŠ, YOU HAVE MAPPED SAXON-BOHEMIAN SWITZERLAND IN DETAIL. – WHAT WOULD YOU RECOMMEND THE MOST?

First, I would recommend the Elbe bike trail. You can ride comfortably through the Elbe canyon all the way to Bad Schandau. Then the Kyjovské valley, a trip to Tokáň near Doubice, a part of the trail goes through the rocky town in the Tisa walls, and in Saxony through wheelchair accessible Königstein or the viewing tower in Rathmansdorf. Also trips along the ridge of the Děčínský Sněžník are beautiful and if you have some assistance, then also the Edmund gorge in Hřensko.

AND IF WE WOULD LIKE TO GO TO THE OTHER THREE PARTS OF THE GATE TO BOHEMIA?

I personally love the Krušné Mountains. I would certainly recommend riding up to the ridge of the Krušnohorská Trail and taking trips using this trail. For example around Komář vížka (Mosquito tower), Cínovec – here you can take a nice swim in the Dlouhý (Long) pond because there is an access all the way to the water, or you may enjoy rides on the top of the Fláje dam wall. The trail has a good surface and it is not very busy and has no major elevations, so you can take quite long rides. But what is important – it is beautiful there and you will not see too many tourists. At some places the land is pristine and untouched. If you are in Poohří I would suggest the countryside around Budyně and Libochovice. Here you can take trips on a “hand bike”. I took a trip to Hazmburk – you need some help from your friends, but you can reach the lower Black Tower by yourself and the view is really worth it. In the Czech Central Mountains you will find a wonderful sand pit in Žemoseky, correctly called the Píšťanské Lake. Here you can do a circuit on a concrete paved road. It is very different and very interesting environment. Or the Ústí region – a trip around the pond in Ústí is also nice.

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING FOR WHEELCHAIR USERS WHEN THEY PLAN THEIR TRIP?

You may be surprised but where to find a restroom. You plan your trip around the fact of whether a place has access to a restroom. And if not, you do not go there – it is a really fundamental and limiting thing.

WHAT ABOUT CASTLES, CHATEAUS AND TOWNS?

Well, that is a bit problematic. A man in a wheelchair does not get to see many exhibitions in castles, but you may see beautiful parks here – for example the park in Libochovice, in Duchcov or Ploskovice. Cobblestones in towns are the worst. You may find a smooth section here and there – where you can ride, but as far as barrier free access is concerned, I must say that north Bohemian cities have a lot of catching up to do. I try to be involved in these issues in Děčín as much as possible and must say that there is some improvement.





Gate to Bohemia
www.gatetobohemia.com



CONGRESS HOTEL ÚSTÍ NAD LABEM

Comfort may be friendly too

When someone has been hiking for three months back and forth in Porta Bohemica as I did when was writing this magazine you are holding in your hands now, you certainly appreciate comfortable and pleasant accommodation services. I found all that in the Clarion hotel. Just imagine – comfortable, modern and still brand new four star congress hotel with seventy nine rooms and three suites, set in the heart of Ústí nad Labem – and yet you feel here like in a cosy guest house. Why is that? I wonder myself – probably thanks to the friendliness of people working here who will ask for your room number during breakfast and call you by your name – and they will remember your name from then on. Or maybe thanks to the informal and friendly atmosphere in the hotel lobby, and quite possibly, thanks to remarkable gastronomic experiences at the dinner table while chatting with the Chef Ivan Hromádka who will explain to you that Ossobuco is a delicacy that unfortunately, not many people order here and that Czechs are little bit afraid of fish, maybe salmon is an exception, but not perch... and his culinary team offers an excellent perch – well, you would have to taste it yourself.



President and bicyclist

The Clarion hotel built its philosophy on friendliness and an individual approach to clients. It is not a “human collector” – each guest is equally important here. The hotel staff provides equal care to a presidential couple, guests of the congress, or to families riding bicycles. Let me explain a little bit. The Clarion hotel offers a well equipped congress center with 480 seats, and a large hall for up to 370 people – all fully equipped with audiovisual equipment. And bikers or bicyclists? They just love them here and are well prepared for them. Judge for yourself – the hotel offers a room to store bikes, special menus and special drinks, packages for the road, a bicycle repair shop right next door where you can have your bike repaired or adjusted – and those who do not know their way around, may either asks the staff – made up of locals who are happy to advise you where to go. Or you may use your laptop in the lobby and connect to the Gate to Bohemia portal and find the route that best suits you. There is a large underground parking lot, so even though you are in the city centre, parking is not a problem. But wait to see their rooms! First of all, they are much bigger than required by standards and you will find unexpected things inside – coffee or ironing set, free high speed internet (try to find that in a similar hotel abroad), and everything is all shiny, modern and cosy.



Benada is a kingdom of good food

Oh well, the Czechs have always evaluated and compared everything to food. The Benada restaurant is not only a hotel restaurant. People from all over the city come here, because the kitchen is great and they use only the freshest local ingredients. Business breakfast is served at half past six, during lunch you may choose from convenient menus and dinner... well, dinner is so worth it... Just take a look at www.benadarestaurant.cz and see their menu. I fell in love with their goat cheese baked in a puff pastry on a bed of crisp lettuce, with the local risotto, with chicken stuffed with tiger shrimps, with veal tenderloin, with incomprehensibly good marinated rabbit leg... and of course their homemade pear strudel. It would be sin to pass on that one. In short, I was lucky during these few days that I found a place where I will be happy to come back. Clarion Hotel.



What will be in the next issue?



Kadaň

Exploring the royal city with the famous Maxipes Fík.



Small breweries

“U Orloje” Mini-brewery, Žatec. Mostecký Kahan (Most Lamp).



Teplice spa

Relaxation at the Gate to Bohemia.



Winemaking

Roudnice nad Labem and Třebívlice.



The Elbe bike trail

Across the region via the newest bike trail.



Děčín

Renaissance pearl of the north.

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Bohemian Switzerland



Czech Central Highlands



Ore Mountains



Lower Poohří



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Gate to Bohemia