



Summer fun in the Czech Republic by Sara & Jarda Tusek

When it gets hot in Prague, people act like they do in any large, car-filled city: they leave. Where are the summer retreats for the city-weary Czech? Over the past 17 years, we've had time to visit some of the traditional Czech vacation spots and to find a few new ones on our own. Here's a round-up of places for summer relaxing.

Mariánské Lázně ("Mary's spring"; Marienbad)

The origins of this spa town go back to 1197, when a monastery was founded in Tepla, nestled in the low mountains of western Bohemia. The curative properties of a nearby set of mineral springs drew the monks' attention, and in 1606 the first recorded prescription was written by a nearby doctor.

By 1779 a monastery doctor, Josef Jan Nehr, documented the chemical qualities of the water from the various springs, which were called by the name of the principal spring, "Mary's spring," and by 1818 the spa town was chartered. Luminaries



Colonnade at Mariánské Lázně, <http://members.virtualltourist.com>

Mariánské Lázně is only about 20 km from Germany (thus the German name Marienbad) and a large percentage of guests at this former state-owned, full-service health spa are German. You can stroll in the colonnade sipping mineral water, hike in the woods that surround the town, get a total health-restoring spa treatment or simply visit the lovely Baroque hotels and charming little restaurants.

who visited the springs and took the cure include Goethe, King Edward VII of England, the Emperor Franz Josef I, Chopin, Wagner, and the Russian authors Gogol and Turgenyev.

Valtice and Lednice

Located in southern Moravia near the Austrian border, Valtice's chateau, along with that of neighboring Lednice, is a UNESCO World Heritage site (there are 12 such sites in the Czech Republic, including the historic town centers of Prague, Český Krumlov, and Telč).



<http://www.radnice-valtice.cz>

Nobility of the Austro-Hungarian empire lived at the Valtice chateau, built in 1634, which includes parks, gardens, and a chapel. Nearby is a Franciscan monastery, a convent, a hospital established by the Merciful Sisters, and all the typical small-town accoutrements: a plague column, a colonnade and a belvedere.

In Lednice, the architectural expression of the European Enlightenment is seen in the Renaissance-style chateau, with its formal English gardens, and English "follies" (they include the artificial "ruins" of a medieval castle, and a minaret).

Nearby South Moravia sites include Podyji National Park, the Castle of Bitov and the Moravian Karst, a region of limestone caverns and underground rivers. The rural landscape of vineyards and small towns seems secluded, though Vienna is not far away.

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Castle of Bitov, <http://southmoraviaguide.com>





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Kutna Hora

In the late 10th century silver coins were first minted in what is now Kutna Hora. By the 13th century, silver mining had expanded and Kutna Hora became the central mint of the Czech lands. Gradually the importance of the town declined, but its glory days are still in evidence in the grand architecture of the Cathedral of St. Barbara, the mining museum, the Italianate Court (from an era



Jarda at Cathedral of St. Barbara, Kutna Hora, courtesy Dr. Z. A. Tusek

when all things Italian were the height of artistic beauty), and various convents, chapels, ossuaries (bone depositories) and the ever-present plague column: the plague columns in southern Bohemian and Moravian towns memorialize the devastating plagues that were a feature of life in Europe for many centuries, and remind the inhabitants of their own mortality.

Leaders to Follow
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Teplice

Teplice's medicinal and therapeutic hot springs were discovered in 762. Its northern Bohemia location, very close to Germany (Dresden is about 30 minutes away), led to its development as a health spa for the European elite. Like Marianske lazne, Teplice catered to the wealthy and famous, including Ludwig von Beethoven, Goethe, Chopin and Liszt. The downtown features pastel hotels, a large spa complex and leafy parks.

Teplice was home to one of the largest and most influential Jewish settlements in the Czech lands. The Jews were welcomed by the Benedictine convent in 1414, and held a protected position, at a time when all over Europe Jews were forced to convert to Christianity or be exiled. Their first synagogue was built in 1550. The Teplice Jewish presence grew to one of the largest in the Czech lands, evidenced by the splendid new synagogue built in 1881. Kristalnacht and the Nazi occupation decimated the Jewish population of Teplice, as well as in all of Bohemia and Moravia.

Teplice "New"
synagogue, begun
in 1881



Teplice architecture, courtesy Dr. Z. A. Tusek

