TRAVEL

andering the web of cobbled streets spanning the city's old town and gazing beyond the chain of souvenir shops brimming with clichéd objects, one cannot help but encounter history in this architectural wonderland that is Prague. A scatter of well-preserved as well as restored buildings inspired by almost every era of architecture—gothic cathedrals and spires, art nouveau edifices, baroque palaces and churches dripping with lavish detail among angular modern and cubist structures—promises every traveller a profound understanding of the city's kaleidoscopic history. Generations of foreign dominance, Nazi occupation, communist rule—the city has experienced it all and emerged ohso-beautifully into the spirit-lifting metropolis it is today.

A perfect juxtaposition of the past and present, medieval and modern, positions Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic, as one of the top cities to visit in Europe. Sites of historical significance,

AN EXPAT'S PORTRAIT OF A DYNAMIC CITY

ANUSHA BOROVIČKOVÁ LEWIS

such as the Prague Castle, Charles Bridge, Astronomical Clock, the Jewish quarter, Josefov, Strahov Monastery, coupled with world-famed Czech beer, a happening nightlife, a rich music culture and Franz Kafka's literary charm, makes Prague an attractive destination.

The best way to experience Prague is by foot. However, the city also offers an excellent network of tram and metro lines, making getting-around very convenient. The standard sightseeing route is either to follow a path from the Prague Castle down to the old town square or vice-versa. With its small deviations, the route—which also requires one to cross the famous Charles Bridge that stands majestically over the picturesque Vltavariver, separating these destination points—is an ideal one to embark on in order to tick off your bucket list almost all popular points of touristic interest. This includes the Wallenstein Palace, the Church of Our Lady Victorious housing the miraculous infant Jesus of Prague, St Nicholas Church, Rudolfinum, Josefov, Clementinum (often referred to as one of the most beautiful libraries in the world), the Church of Our Lady before Tyn, and the medieval astronomical clock to name

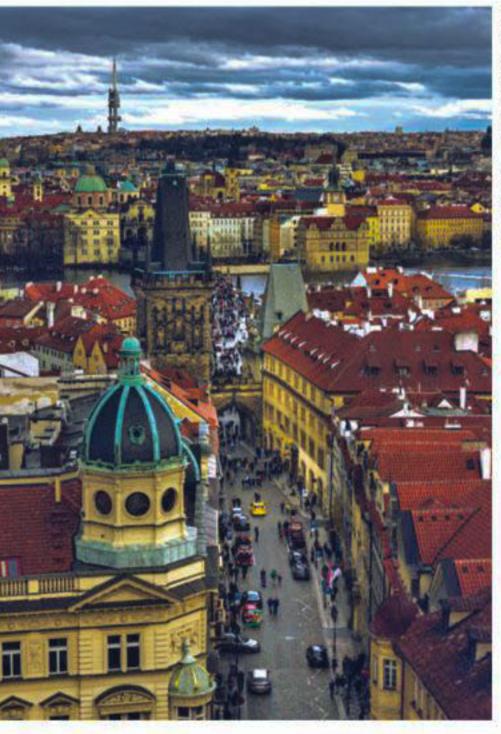
a few. (Make sure to catch the

astronomical clock at the tick of an hour; it's worth the wait!)

Needless to say, this entire route also happens to be the most crowded, especially in the warmer months of summer, when Prague seems to host almost half of humanity! But for those who intend to visit these historic gems (which you must), know that the crowd is inevitable, especially on the Charles Bridge, with its cavalcade of tourists year round. Early birds however can manage an undisturbed stroll on the bridge and bask in the majestic view of the castle in the backdrop.

Listed in the Guinness Book of Records as the largest ancient castle in the world, the Prague Castle has much to offer within its walls. Though entry to the premise is free, certain sights within the castle come with an entrance fee. A personal recommendation would be to buy the ticket including the St Vitus Cathedral—alargely gothic masterpiece, built over the span of almost 600 years and lined with tastefully designed stained glass that throws molten light on an ornate chapel with contributions from the famous Czech artist Alphonse Mucha; and the Golden Lane—with its rumours of alchemy practice, the lane is lined with tiny colourful houses now paying tribute to previous inmates, goldsmiths, castle guards, and artists of all genres, including Franz Kafka who lived on the lane for about two years (it was here that



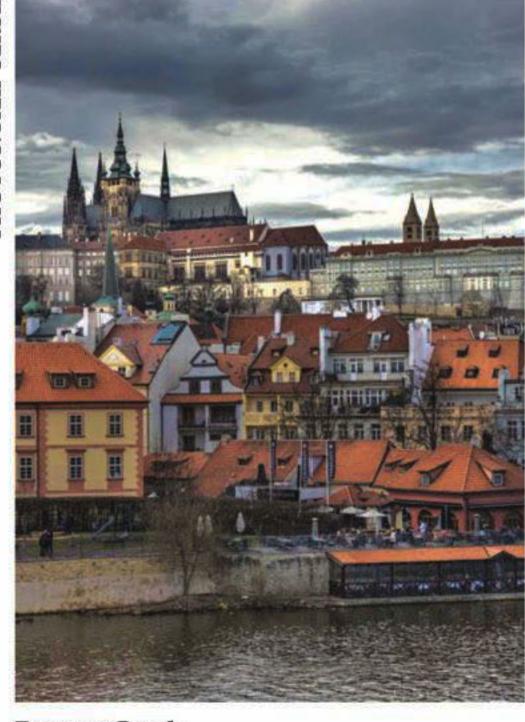


Mala strasa

he wrote the book "A Country Doctor"); which are the castle's highlights.

For those looking for a detour from the sightseeing route (this one is a personal favourite), walk the narrow path from the castle premises up to Strahov for a postcard-perfect panorama studded with gothic spires and terracotta rooftops, parted by the Vltava, with its awe-worthy stone bridges. The pinnacle of this panorama without doubt is the majestic hilltop castle. During spring, this view is highlighted by blooms of the cherry orchard in the small valley below the Strahov Monastery, and in the summer, by vineyards blanketing the hill around the castle. While in this area, certainly pay a visit to the monastery and the Theological and Philosophical halls of the Strahov Library, that is a book lover's paradise and without the slightest doubt,a worthy experience for all.

Sneak behind the monastery straight



Prague Castle

to Peklo (literally and ironically translating to "hell"), an underground restaurant, for a quick taste of some local brews. A personal recommendation would be the Monastery Beer. From here, the more adventurous can hike up to the Petrin Tower (Prague's Eiffel) for yet another breathtaking view of the city.

The Jewish quarter—Josefov, a former Jewish ghetto and now a Holocaust memorial-with its many synagogues, ceremonial hall and the old Jewish cemetery, is a must visit for every history buff and every individual seeking a glimpse into one of Europe's darkest periods. This is a highly recommended stop on the way to the old town square. There is an entrance fee for all the sites within the quarter, but the experience is heart-wrenching yet significant.

Another worthy detour to escape crowds is certainly an aimless wander

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along offbeat narrow castle paths in the Novy Svet (New World) locality; it's a fairytale-like experience. Drop by Café Novy Svet for a quick cup of tea, glass of wine or whatever your preferred drink may be, and for a quick chat with some locals. The café is rather small, so think yourselves lucky if you catch a seat on its tiny balcony.

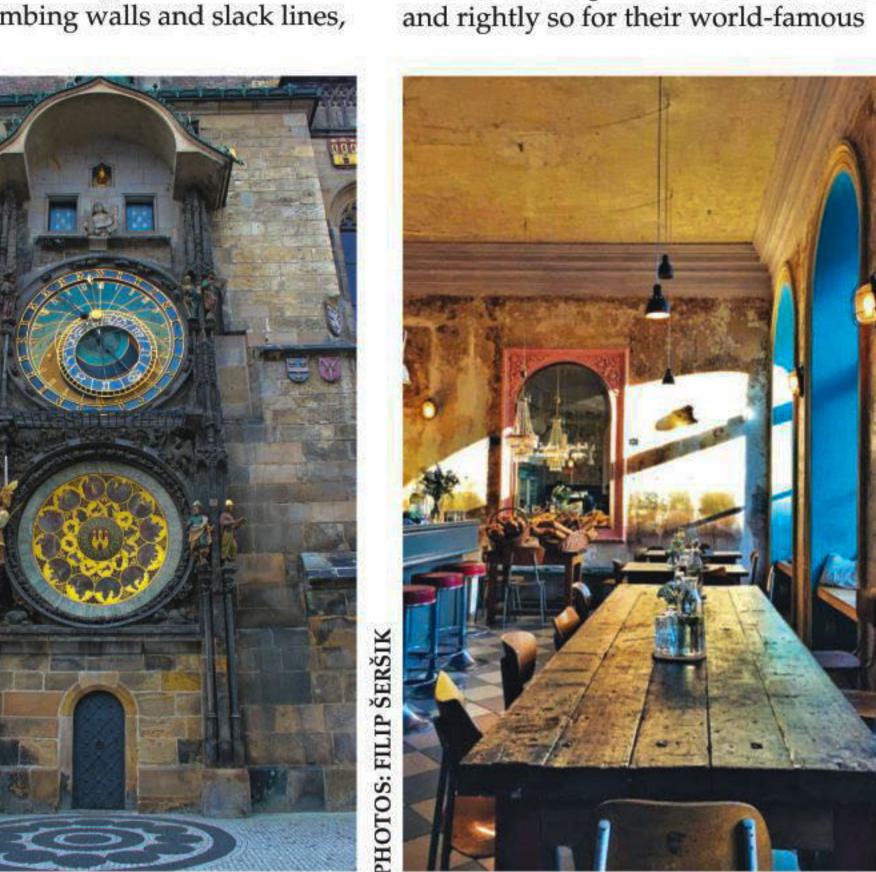
Other points of interest within Prague include the Wenceslas Square (the centre of the new town), the Municipal House, the National Museum, Vyshehrad (upper castle), Lennon Wall (paying tribute to the Beatles artist since the 80s), Prague Zoo, the Botanical Garden in Troja, Troja Castle, the Dancing House, Franz Kafka museum and the list goes on.

Prague's many squares bustle with seasonal markets year-round and are a must visit for a truly local experience. The farmers' markets in the spring/summer offer a palate of farm-fresh vegetables along with local baked sweets and savouries, and accompanied by the echo of jazz instruments coming alive. This is replaced by autumn markets and then Christmas markets in December, with mulled wine spreading warmth while one munches on some delicious gingerbread cookies, shops for Christmas knick-knacks or just sings along with the delightful carol group, admiring the city's tasteful Christmas decor glittering on and within almost every building and household. This festive mood is often accentuated with snow. Perhaps it is this very magical feeling that puts Prague on the list of top cities around the world to visit during Christmas.

The culture-hungry can feed on a classical performance with prior bookings in the National Theatre or the State Opera. Satisfy the music-head in you with a concert in some of Prague's best halls; at a concert in one of the many jazz clubs around town; or with a philharmonic orchestra at Rudolfinum.

During spring and summer, most of Prague's parks such as Letna, Riegrovy Sady and Stromovka, to name a few, come to life with beer gardens and live concerts and attract Prague's local and expat communities for some pivo (beer) after a long day of work. The parks are great for an evening family stroll.

Over weekends and evenings these very parks thrive with local crowds hosting picnics or engaging in outdoor sports. Czechs in general are activity seekers and Prague offers a plethora of sport options for its residents. Feel some adrenaline rush alongside locals on boulders, climbing walls and slack lines,



Prague astronomical clock

Restaurants with live music are commo

Veletržnípalác (Prague's National Gallery),

Dox, Meet Factory and Vnitroblok are

local favourites. Also keep a lookout for

unique and quirky sculptures by Czech

Czechs take pride in their local brews,

sculptor David Černý underlining the

city's parks and public spaces.



Prague as a whole has a little something for everyone of all ages

in the indoor surf arena and wind tunnel, or just biking, skating and jogging on wonderfully laid tracks in parks around

Art and design lovers can choose from Prague's wonderfully curated studios and galleries or café-galleries ranging from classic to contemporary displays;

Pilsner Urquell. However, the country has much more to offer beyond the Pilsner. To taste some of the finest local brews, pop into small pub-breweries around the Holesovice and Vinohrady

Naplavka—a pavement along the banks of the Vltava—with its live music,

pop-up bars, stationary boat pubs and restaurants, and recurring beer and food festivals, is also one such place and a perfect hangout on a warm evening, mostly attracting a rather young hipster crowd. For its party-enthusiastic visitors, apart from popular clubs like Roxy, Cross Club, Chapeau Rouge and the four-storeyed Karlovy Lazně, the city also offers club-hopping packages that

capture touristic attention. For a more rustic experience, grab a tuplák (a one-litre beer glass) in one of the many medieval taverns around the old town; U Pavouka is one such tavern also offering medieval shows.

Foodies on the other hand must try the local delicacies such as Goulash, Svíčkova, fruit-filled dumplings and many more among a variety of delicious soups. Most of the traditional cuisine is meat-based. Hence it is a challenge for vegetarians to eat in common restaurants beyond a bowl of salad, but there are really good vegetarian and vegan restaurants around that one could easily find on foursquare.

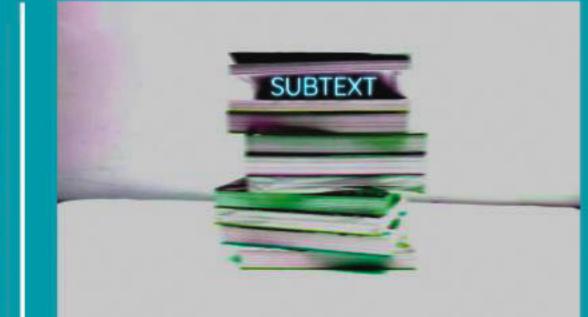
Now for the shopaholics! A number of modern shopping malls (Palladium, Nový Smíchov, Narodni Trida and more) are scattered around the city, all of them pretty much housing the same chain of stores; visit one of these and you've seen them all. However, around the city, shops with products by local designers have begun to pop up too, so make sure you explore beyond the malls. Seasonal design markets gathering local designers on some of the town squares and exhibition halls are a must-see; look around or on the Internet for poster. If you're looking for luxurious brands, though, Pařížská Street is the place for you!

Prague as a whole has a little something for everyone of all ages and areas of interest; and a little more for those ready to embark on offbeat paths and explore. To experience Prague in all its glory, give it more than a weekend, wander those hidden courtyards, unwind at those cosy cafes, get lost in its cobbled streets (there's always a tram/metro stop round the corner) and try seeking guidance from that coldlooking disinterested local (Czechs can often come off as unfriendly) passing by. You might just find yourself a true guide or a new friend or an adventure!

Anusha Borovičková Lewis is a content manager, living in Prague.



WORKSHOP **Organiser: Cyber Crime Awareness** Foundation February 10, 10am-2pm, Bangladesh National Museum



BOOK SALE: SUBTEXT

Organiser: Bengal Foundation Arts Programme February 4-24, 11 am- 7 pm, Gyantapas Abdur Razzaq Bidyapeeth, Dhanmondi



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