

Wandering 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 oh-so-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,

PRAGUE

AN EXPAT'S PORTRAIT OF A DYNAMIC CITY

ANUSHA BOROVİČKOVÁ 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



An evening in Prague



PHOTOS: FILIP ŠERŠÍK



Prague Castle

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

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

Continued to page 15

TRAVEL

AN EXPAT'S PORTRAIT OF A DYNAMIC CITY

After page 12

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

Veletržnípalác (Prague's National Gallery), Dox, Meet Factory and Vnitroblok are local favourites. Also keep a lookout for unique and quirky sculptures by Czech sculptor David Černý underlining the city's parks and public spaces.

Czechs take pride in their local brews, and rightly so for their world-famous



Restaurants with live music are common



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 the city.

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 localities.

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, Svičková, 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 Smichov, 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 cold-looking 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.

ABOUT TOWN

CYBER SECURITY AWARENESS 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 Bidiyaapeeth, Dhanmondi

JOIN US FOR OUR 4TH EDITION

2 - 10 February 2018
Opening Celebration Weekend 2-4 February
Closing Scholars' Weekend 6-10 February

DHAKA ART SUMMIT

Organizer: Samdani Art Foundation
February 2-10, 10am-8pm, Shilpakala Academy Bangladesh